

Social Labs and Interreligious Dynamics: A Methodological Breakthrough in Understanding and Countering Extremism*

Augusto Gamuzza^a, Giorgia Mavica^a, Alessandra Scieri^a

Abstract

Against the backdrop of escalating extremism and radicalisation across Europe, traditional methodologies for strengthening counterterrorism and fostering social integration are increasingly limited in addressing the intricacies of these phenomena. This paper focuses on the groundbreaking methodological innovation of Social Labs, conducted with interreligious dialogue networks, as a means of grappling with the multi-dimensional socio-economic and religious factors contributing to radicalisation. Within the sociological paradigm, Social Labs emerge as participatory spaces that facilitate the engagement of religious communities, leaders and interfaith networks in collaborative problem-solving and policy formulation.

Drawing on empirical research in Italy, Belgium and the Netherlands, the paper explores the groups working with interreligious dialogue networks within the framework of Social Labs. These tools not only provide an enriched contextual understanding of religious extremism but also foster an environment where localised, community-based solutions can emerge. The Social Lab framework, rooted in participatory action-research, facilitates dynamic exchanges among stakeholders, thereby enhancing the contextualisation of extremism, while also promoting interreligious dialogue.

The paper critically evaluates the outcomes of the Social Labs for interreligious dialogue networks, analysing how this methodological innovation yields detailed insights into the socioeconomic and religious underpinnings of radicalisation. More significantly, the paper aims at addressing the efficacy of

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Social Labs in eliciting local, context-specific strategies in terms of counterterrorism and social cohesion strategies, providing a methodologically innovative pathway for addressing extremism and fostering social integration in a multi-religious society in dialogue.

Keywords: Social Labs, interreligious dialogue networks, Participatory Action-Research, policy recommendations.

1. Introduction and background

The recent attack in Moscow, claimed by the Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISIS-K), marks one of the deadliest terror incidents in the city for decades. On March 23, 2024, gunmen launched a brutal attack on Moscow's Crocus City Hall, leading to at least 133 fatalities and injuring over 100 individuals. The attackers, all foreign citizens, were among 11 people arrested in connection with this violent act. This case is only the most recent manifestation of a dynamic that has involved the European continent over the past two decades; European societies have faced evolving and multifaceted manifestations of radicalisation, violent extremism and terrorism. As highlighted in the literature (Della Porta, 2018), the relational approach to radicalisation suggests looking at it as an escalation process through a complex set of interactions over time; by examining political opportunities, organisational resources, and framing, we can connect explanations rooted in structure and agency to understand different types of actions. A recurring strategy across EU member states involves the implementation of targeted measures aimed primarily at preventing terrorist activities (RAN, 2020), and the resurgence of violent religious extremism on a global scale has, paradoxically, provided fertile soil for the growth of xenophobic and populist sentiments across various European nations (Marone & Vidino, 2019).

Consequently, the occurrence of terrorist acts on European territory catalysed the formulation of comprehensive policies and strategies geared towards the prevention of violent extremist radicalisation at its inception. Given the character of these terrorist acts, European Preventing/Countering Violent Extremism (P/CVE) initiatives have predominantly focused on violent Islamic radicalisation and jihadist terrorism, perceived as the most significant extremist threat by several European countries. Notably, countries such as France, Italy and the UK have largely centred their P/CVE efforts on addressing Islamist extremism, reflecting a specific emphasis on religious extremism within their policy frameworks. As a consequence of this, the current landscape of

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radicalisation is marked by its fluid and hybridised nature, suggesting that research methodologies must be agile and responsive to this ever-changing phenomenon.

Following these premises, the main aim of this work is oriented to critically reflect on incorporating participatory research (PR) frameworks into the study and prevention of violent extremism, offering a rich, collaborative approach that prioritises the lived experiences and knowledge of community members. As pointed out by Cornwall and Jewkes (1995), PR breaks from conventional linear research models, emphasising a process of reflection and action with local people, and placing power within the research process in the hands of research participants who become co-creators of the research outputs. This approach acknowledges local knowledge and perspectives as the basis for research and planning, and challenges traditional power dynamics in research. PR has been advocated as a process and a goal, where participation, social action and knowledge generation are linked to promote social change through organisational learning (Greenwood et al., 1993) which underscores the value of engaging non-academic experts in the research process and leveraging their practical knowledge to co-construct new insights and strategies.

From a methodological point of view, our study can be framed in the participatory action-research paradigm. This methodological approach emphasises the active involvement of social units – encompassing religious leaders, representatives of religious communities, and members of interreligious networks across three partnering countries – in crafting original, research-driven strategies. These strategies are aimed at both raising awareness and understanding, as well as preventing the risk of radicalisation. Our research path focuses on devising a relational process that utilises co-created, innovative tools to avert radicalisation. These tools are forged through dialogue between local community figures and religious stakeholders, proposing a collaborative framework for intervention.

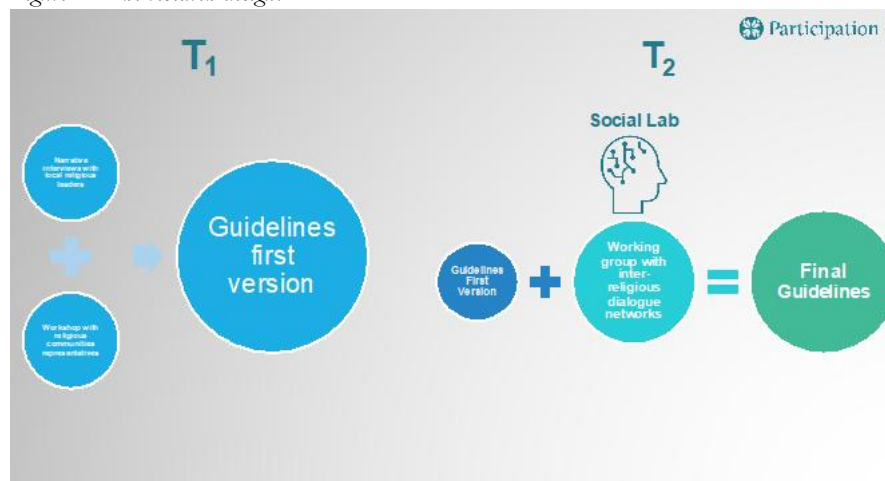
The need to offer actionable insights for policy recommendations prompted us to merge contributions from a diverse array of actors and research streams. This integrated approach enables a holistic understanding of radicalisation, blending qualitative data to paint a comprehensive picture of the phenomenon in question. Drawing from these qualitative insights, our work aims to shed light on the mechanisms through which religious communities foster dialogue at the grassroots level. It presents an initial set of recommendations that stem from the participatory process, underlining it as an effective mechanism for generating dialogic, evidence-based strategies against radicalisation. The foundation of this approach is the social lab methodology, which encourages stakeholders directly involved in the phenomena to interact

and collaborate on finding peaceful solutions to polarisation and radicalisation, with the support of scientific evidence.

The use of qualitative methods such as the Social Lab methodology, as advocated by Sordé Martí et al. (2020), highlights the benefits of engaging social units in research that is conducted with, rather than on, religious communities. This methodological choice reflects our commitment to inclusive, co-creative research practices that position community stakeholders as active participants in the research process.

As will be discussed in subsequent sections, our research started with a comparative desk study aimed at identifying two strategic focal points: the presence and influence of religious groups in the three partner countries, and the legal frameworks governing religious practices and policies for preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE). This preparatory phase laid the groundwork for a tripartite qualitative research design encompassing narrative interviews with local religious leaders, focus groups with representatives of religious communities, and working groups with interreligious dialogue networks across Italy, Belgium, and the Netherlands.

Figure 1 - The research design.



The sequential scheme of our research design is illustrated in Figure 1, segmented into two phases (T1 and T2). The initial phase involved developing and administering a narrative interview protocol for religious leaders to explore their perspectives on polarisation and radicalisation. Concurrently, focus groups were conducted to amplify the voices of religious communities, facilitating a co-investigative process with active community members. These narrative

contributions were then analysed through thematic content analysis, employing a framework developed from a literature review, in order to draft preliminary guidelines. This analysis sought to triangulate the insights garnered from the interviews and focus groups. The majority of focus groups and interviews were conducted in-person, though some were held online to accommodate the preferences and availability of participants across different countries. Following the Social Labs manual, each research partner appointed a Facilitator responsible for orchestrating the Social Lab sessions. These Facilitators, equipped with co-creation expertise, played a pivotal role in managing the Social Labs, fostering a conducive environment for dialogue, and steering the collaborative process toward constructive outcomes.

The PR approach within our research reflects this ethos of collaboration and co-learning, aiming to empower communities to contribute to the research process, from problem identification to action strategies, in a manner that enhances their self-awareness and agency (Probst & Hagmann, 2003). It moves beyond a mere methodological tool to become an orientation to inquiry that embraces the co-researcher's experience and insights.

Social Labs represent an innovative and inclusive participatory approach to the sociological study of radicalisation, underpinned by the rich traditions of PR, which serves as a transformative tool in empowering communities and fostering social resilience.

2. Social Labs as a tool for interreligious dialogue on radicalisation

During the second phase (T2) of our research, the first version of the guidelines – implementing the Social Lab methodology – was further elaborated through the working group with the interreligious dialogue networks in the three countries under investigation.

The working group with interreligious dialogue networks aimed to provide the recommendations gathered in the previous stages and receive feedback in order to modify or reword these guidelines to be sent to policymakers and practitioners. From a scientific perspective, this means not only reconstructing what is heterogeneous in Latourian terms, but also gathering and rearranging elements that have been dispersed. This reassembly takes place in a common elaboration space, where the social dimension acquires a specific form and meaning. This process is significant as it frames scientific inquiry and practice in terms of mobilising and activating various elements, emphasising the dynamic interplay between scientific activities and the social contexts in which they occur.

The purpose is then to identify appropriate strategies for the purpose of countering extremism, radicalisation and polarisation through the involvement of social actors. The final phase of the research aimed to develop a set of guidelines on how to prevent (religious) polarisation and radicalisation and to promote (interreligious) dialogue at the local and national level.

The recommendations were sent to the participants before being finalised. It was decided not to give further guidance to help the participants to reflect critically and leave them completely free to express their opinion.

The recommendations were drafted from the sessions held with religious leaders and religious community members interviewed. These recommendations were compared with recommendations which derived from meetings conducted by co-researchers from research team in the Netherlands and Belgium, and these same general recommendations were discussed with members of interreligious dialogue networks in Italy, Belgium and the Netherlands. Regarding the case of Netherlands, the local research team also discussed the issue of recommendations to discuss polarisation and radicalisation in Dutch society from a broader perspective, beyond focusing only on religiously motivated polarisation and radicalisation. The same dynamic happened in Italy when one of the first pieces of feedback received concerned the fact that the radicalisation in our workshop was considered as a multifaceted and broader phenomenon not only limited to specific religious groups.

The multifaceted nature of contemporary radicalisation processes shows its ability to constantly adapt to social change and different contextual conditions. From the angle of drivers, radicalisation processes can be triggered by a variety of ideologies that may be cultural, religious and/or political. Intolerance to diversity and the desire for domination/affirmation are the breeding grounds of new hybridised forms of violent extremism. These forms are more institutionally disengaged than in the past, as in the case of the homegrown extremists without organisational structures and direct links with extremist organisations (Vidino et al., 2017) but localised in their operative scopes and targets (Khosrokhavar, 2017).

The heuristic value of this work lies in the desire to find a bottom-up approach, through participatory research, that works as a catalyst for social elaboration and tailoring of operative actions. Keeping this in mind, the interpretive key proposed in this work lies, as already pointed out above, in considering radicalisation as a complex system of daily-life interactions and social relationships (McDonald, 2018) that connect subject and agency. Against this backdrop, counteracting radicalisation processes can be done through socially constructed processes through which active actors – such as religious stakeholders, public institutions and civil society – must co-develop integrated strategies to counterbalance these disruptive tendencies (Ragazzi et al., 2019).

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In this light, members and representatives of religious associations or religious movements – that act in the framework of the interreligious dialogue and intercultural integration – were invited to actively take part in the research project involving them in a reflection table (Workshop), starting from a discussion on some suggestions and quotations from the interculture dialogue meeting. This final phase was used to consolidate the final version of the recommendatory guidelines suitable to be addressed to the administration of the region. Following a participatory methodology, the aim of the document is to optimise strategies and interventions against extremism, hate cultures and violent radicalisation. From an operational point of view, each workshop proceeded as follows:

- 1) Sending the authorisation and research description documents.
- 2) Sending the first draft document of the recommendations.
- 3) Sharing and review of the recommendations document in the network of religions (8-15 days).
- 4) Organisation of the workshop where all participants discussed their considerations regarding the shared document.
- 5) The workshop was moderated by a facilitator and supported by the help of two observers.

In the following pages we will present the three cases conducted by the research teams.

Social Labs offer spaces for carrying out social experiments in a practical context where experts and stakeholders join together to initiate actions focused on tackling challenges without being constrained by predetermined project plans and lists of deliverables; in this way, Social Labs provide the ability to proactively experiment with circularity (Hassan, 2014).

As Marieke Kieboom describes in 'Lab Matters', Social Labs are more than just a two-day event, or a week-long residential course. They can be better viewed as 'containers' within which social experimentation is conceived, nurtured and developed. In the most elementary sense, Social Labs take a complex societal problem (like radicalisation), connect people who are affected by this problem in various ways (i.e. adults, children, religious leaders, community leaders, policy makers, etc.), and do so in a safe, experimental learning space. Within Social Labs, participants co-create pilot actions (i.e. a dialogue, exhibition, tour or game) which they then try out within their relevant contexts (i.e. a school, church or community centre). The Social Lab then reflects on what they have learned from the process, with as much emphasis (if not more) being placed on the learning process, as on the efficacy of the pilot actions carried out within the lab.

In this case Social Labs present an efficient mechanism for uncovering the underlying reasons behind right-wing extremism (Hassan, 2014; Timmermans

et al., 2020). Specifically, the main aim of this part of the investigation is to emphasise the importance of religious communities in thwarting polarisation and radicalisation processes, as well as the crucial role of their concerted engagement in addressing these concerns. The approach of Social Labs in preventing extremism holds great promise both for studying the underlying causes that drive individuals toward radicalisation and for formulating actionable recommendations to mitigate various forms of violent extremism. This methodology offers a valuable means to examine diverse manifestations of violent extremism and devise strategies to counter them effectively. In particular, Social Labs facilitated the development of innovative solutions to address forms of right-wing extremism that have yet to be adequately tackled by European institutions. Given that the core objective of right-wing extremism is to instil fear and division among individuals who are perceived as different, whether due to nationality, race, or religious belief, the involvement of social groups in Social Labs, including religious leaders, representatives of religious communities, and members of interfaith networks, would be particularly beneficial (Timmermans et al., 2020).

3. Social Labs with interreligious dialogue networks

A Social Lab was conducted with interreligious dialogue networks in the three countries under investigation – Italy, Belgium and the Netherlands – in order to provide the recommendations gathered in previous phases and receive feedback. This step was important for modifying or reformulating the guidelines to be sent to policymakers and practitioners.

Members of the interreligious dialogue networks made their main recommendations on how to deal with the challenges and conflicting issues in daily life based on the proposed research areas: 1) Relational network; 2) Actions and strategies; 3) Interreligious dialogue practices; 4) Religious identity and religious community; 5) Socio-economic conditions; 6) Polarisation; and 7) Counter-narratives.

This step was useful to create the final version of the recommendations.

3.1. Working group with interreligious dialogue networks in Italy, Belgium and the Netherlands

The terrorist attacks that have shocked the entire European Union in recent years were carried out by youths raised and educated in European societies. Violent radicalisation, its most recent manifestations, its scale and the

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use of virtual (and real) communication tools have created new challenges that must be considered through a joint effort of all relevant stakeholders across society.

The Italian case is useful because of the strategic presence of the Catholic church and the related multi-religious milieu of the country. Moreover, even if Italy was not directly involved in the terrorist attacks in Europe, this country is a strategic “passage context” for radicalisation networks (Groppi, 2017; Rink & Sharma, 2018).

In Catania, Italy, the *Coordinamento delle religioni in dialogo* (Coordination of Religions in Dialogue) (RiD) network was set up in response to the growing needs of an increasingly multicultural and multireligious society. The Coordination arose from the commitment of various communities and representatives of religious faiths present in the Catania area: the Baha'i Community, *la Comunità del Dialogo* (the Dialogue Community), *la Comunità Induista* (the Hindu Community), *la Comunità Islamica di Sicilia* (the Islamic Community of Sicily), *la Comunità di S. Egidio* (the S. Egidio Community), *l'Istituto Buddista Italiano Soka Gakkai* (the Italian Soka Gakkai Buddhist Institute), *il Movimento dei Focalari*, and *il Movimento Rinascita Cristiana* (the Christian Rebirth Movement). These communities, inspired by their faith, have decided to base their activities on dialogue, understood as a positive attitude based on mutual listening and acceptance of diversity, considered to be a valuable asset and an enriching resource.

The Coordination also promotes reciprocal recognition of citizenship, hence the right to the free expression of one's faith, in which each person finds his or her own identity. This concept is encapsulated in unifying pluralism, an idea of uniting diverse elements to achieve a common project of inclusivity in an increasingly complex society in which such intervention is necessary. Furthermore, they are aware that interreligious dialogue is the foundation of a genuinely open attitude towards others.

In Belgium, the domestic threat level increased after the 9/11 attacks and the US-led war in Afghanistan and Iraq. During this time, the Islamist extremist groups were better able to recruit new followers and combatants, while also improving their operational capabilities. As a result of polarising and extremist narratives linked to these events that flourished in the country, issues related to anti-Muslim hatred in Belgium increased and have become significant concerns in society.

Also in Belgium, the purpose of the working group with interreligious dialogue networks was to present the collected recommendations from previous steps and receive feedback in order to modify, substitute or reformulate these guidelines to send to policymakers and practitioners.

The recommendations covered the following key aspects:

- how to promote participative practices about intercultural and interreligious dialogue;
- how to raise awareness about radicalisation in religious groups through the active involvement of religious leaders;
- suitable counter-narratives against radicalisation in collaboration with families;
- the role of local communities in de-radicalisation processes;
- models and inspiration for members of faith communities.

Polarisation is on the rise in the Netherlands. There are deep tensions around themes related to identity and culture such as racism, anti-immigration and anti-Islamic sentiments, nativism, antisemitism, and gender and sexual diversity. In particular, anti-Islamic sentiments should also be seen in light of the fact that the overwhelming focus in Dutch policies dealing with polarisation and radicalisation is on Islamist extremism (Groothuis, 2022; 2025). Recently however, there has been a growing, if uneasy, recognition of the problem of right-wing extremism in Dutch society: *At present, the security forces are focusing more on the far right. This is where the threat of attacks lies today. However, this has not yet translated into policy. Therefore, greater attention should be paid to the breadth of violence threats.*

The impact of tensions around gender and sexual diversity can also be felt in religious communities (Pentaris, Freund-Williams & Kapoor, 2025). For example, within the Christian community a significant split on LGBT issues is expected, with a contrast between a more inclusive and a more conservative view: *I believe there will be an important fracture, and the battle will be on the LGBT front. On one side, [...] Christianity with greater openness, inclusivity, and gay acceptance, attention to justice and the environment. On the other, conservative Christianity and increasingly radical Christianity from the South: Asia, Africa, and Latin America. The two close ranks and are anti-gay, pro-abortion, pro-Islam, and pro-Israel.*

In the Netherlands, apart from the general recommendations, the research group also discussed more specific recommendations (most of which are oriented towards policy recommendations) with members of religious communities, taking note of the insistence of many interviewees to discuss polarisation and radicalisation in Dutch society in a broader perspective rather than focusing merely on religiously motivated polarisation and radicalisation.

3.2. Relational networks

In Italy, the first recommendation in the ‘Relational networks’ section emphasises the importance of improving collaboration with local authorities, for example, in organising public religious events, promoting openness to all

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diverse religious communities, and sharing these celebrations or events with other members of the community. This recommendation received broad consensus from participants.

Another point of unanimous agreement is the strengthening of collaboration with civil society to enhance the relational network of groups and address common challenges. This can be achieved by actively involving civil society actors operating in the area.

All participating members fully support promoting interaction between religious communities and educational institutions as an active response to the widespread lack of suitable facilities for religious guidance, especially in adolescence. A Hindu member states: “Through dialogue, one can reach the heart of another person who holds a mistaken belief and does not respect the opinions of others.”

In this regard, all participants stress the need to disseminate information on the issue of radicalisation in schools and empower teachers to address these issues in the classroom.

Moreover, in Belgium the qualitative data suggest that establishing consistent and formal spaces for interreligious dialogue in urban areas can activate inclusive grassroots processes. In fact, the first recommendation in the ‘Relational Networks’ section suggests an improvement to the collaboration with municipalities and local authorities, for example, in organising public religious events, opening them up to all different religious communities, and sharing these celebrations or events with other community members.

All the members involved in the interreligious dialogue network evaluated this recommendation positively. For example, during the ‘Te Deum’ celebration in Belgium, all the religious leaders are invited. These initiatives can be a way for Jews, Muslims, Anglicans, etc., “to do something and build it together”.

However, some of them highlighted the fact that it must be a stable, continuous and formalised practice to ensure that it can be inclusive for all religious communities.

Another important aspect that emerges is that the Belgian government gives funds to all recognised religious communities so they can invest resources in interesting activities with other segments of society. However, members involved in the interreligious dialogue network emphasise that currently there is no public fund specifically oriented towards implementing projects aimed at preventing radicalisation, which could be extremely useful.

Regarding collaboration between religious communities and educational institutions, the interviewed experts emphasised the importance of education as a key to preventing politically and religiously inspired extremism. In this regard, according to religious leaders, an educational programme based on the interfaith

dialogue should be planned and implemented in each school at every level and be available to people of all ages.

Furthermore, a member of the interreligious network suggested adding an additional recommendation in this section: *promoting and sustaining intra-religious and intercultural dialogue within the same faith community, as many internal differences and sensitive matters arise when the communities engage in interreligious dialogue.*

Moreover, in the Netherlands the section focused on relational networks emphasises the importance of collaboration between local authorities and various religious communities in organising inclusive and shared public events. This approach aims to counter intolerance and promote respect for diverse religious traditions. Furthermore, it highlights the effectiveness of involving people in common activities, such as singing, to foster deeper and more inclusive dialogue.

Table 1 - Relational networks guidelines: comparison between first and final version.

First Version	Final Version
RELATIONAL NETWORKS	RELATIONAL NETWORKS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Improve collaboration with municipalities and local authorities. ❖ Improve collaboration with civil society stakeholders. ❖ Promote the interaction between religious communities and educational institutions. ❖ Build a diversified network within your religious community. ❖ Build networks on three levels: interreligious dialogue, intercultural dialogue and institutional dialogue (politics, media and society). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Build active networks at three levels: interreligious dialogue, intercultural dialogue and institutional dialogue. ❖ Improve collaboration between local authorities, civil society stakeholders and religious environment representatives (holistic approach). ❖ Build a diversified network within your religious community seeking cooperation with non-religious networks. ❖ Promote a stable (structured upon previous experiences and routines) interaction between religious communities and educational institutions in the public space. ❖ Promote and sustain intra-religious and intercultural dialogue within the same faith community. ❖ Disseminate information in schools about radicalization risk to empower teachers to address these issues in the class.

Another crucial point is the improvement of collaboration with civil society to address common issues, such as women's and LGBT rights, through the direct involvement of civil society actors.

A more specific recommendation was discussed: *Build a diverse network within your religious community, involving people who are outside your immediate circle.* Members of interreligious networks emphasised the importance of this recommendation: it facilitates internal and external dialogue, especially with members of the community who are more sceptical towards dialogue.

3.3 Action and strategies

Drawing on collected data, the need emerged for a multi-layered perspective able to connect participatory social practices, such as interreligious dialogue, as a counter-narrative ingredient for preventing radicalisation dynamics within the social environment, as a bottom-up approach that can be mixed with a top-down one (Ferrara & Petito, 2016). In this sense, the relevance of a structural cooperation between different social organisations in the triangle formed by religion, education and institutions became clear (Duyvesteyn & Schuurman, 2019).

The data from the three countries highlighted the role of the social environment of families that are at the same time the incubators and accelerators of the radicalisation paths (Ferret & Khosrokhavar, 2022).

In Italy, the second section of the research focuses on actions in the local context, particularly on establishing structured interaction spaces in urban areas and promoting collaboration among diverse religious communities for specific religious events. The fact that positive communication, based on shared principles, fosters peaceful integration is widely shared among our members. “Our task is to work on ourselves even when there are moments of conflict among us,” and we must “pause and change our perspective so we can benefit the community,” says a Buddhist member.

Furthermore, there is a highlighted need to carefully consider national integration processes and adopt action-based strategies. Specifically, this section discusses the gravity of the Palestinian issue. A Christian member encourages everyone to reflect on the importance of academic reflection, which could be one of the tools for addressing these issues.

In Belgium, in the section on ‘Action and Strategies’, the focus is on the importance of encouraging collaboration between different religious communities for a specific religious event, such as inviting members of other religions to their own religious celebrations.

It emerges that only open-minded religious individuals joined shared and common initiatives with other religious communities. However, there are also progressive members; for example, various Jewish associations invite Muslims and members of other faiths to their synagogues. According to the findings of the discussion with the interreligious network, the first step is to involve the more sceptical believers in these kinds of interreligious celebrations, starting with accepting the fact that there are conservative communities within their religious families.

Furthermore, the network involved suggested adding two more new recommendations to this section:

- *Invest in short-term and long-term goals and aim to ensure the sustainability and continuity of the organisational development.*
- *Encourage positive role modelling: religious leaders joining together for a common action, worship or a joined plan serves as a good example and an aspiration for the members of faith communities.*

In the Netherlands, regarding the actions promoted in the local context to encourage religious dialogue among various communities, a key recommendation was discussed: *Encourage collaboration between different religious communities for specific religious events: for example, inviting members of other religions to their own religious celebrations or supporting them in their own.* In this regard, members of interreligious dialogue networks emphasised that focusing on interreligious dialogue is effective only if it is embedded in the context of current social issues, where non-religion and all other life philosophies also play a significant role. It was stressed that interreligious dialogue is not an end in itself but is essential for building a more humane society.

Table 2 - Action and strategies guidelines: comparison between the first and final versions.

First Version	Final Version (after Social Lab)
ACTIONS AND STRATEGIES	ACTIONS AND STRATEGIES
❖ Create places of structured interaction in the urban space.	❖ Create places of structured interaction in the urban space.
❖ Encourage collaborations between different religious communities for a specific religious events.	❖ Foster religious dialogue in a practical perspective: the common values implemented in educational processes and social behavior.
❖ Promote positive communication, focused on shared principles, would help peaceful integration.	❖ Promote positive communication, focused on shared principles, would help peaceful integration.
❖ Imagine the next future as a “togetherness” letting your actions define the future.	❖ Make any effort to avoid the isolation and marginalization of any religious convictions.
❖ Invest in general or specific religious knowledge among policymakers to be able to interpret processes of radicalisation.	❖ Invest in general or specific religious knowledge among policymakers and opinion leaders/influencers to be able to interpret processes of radicalization.
❖ Invest in ambitious young people fostering their divergent and critical thinking.	❖ Invest in ambitious young people fostering their divergent and critical thinking.
	❖ Design role-play situations for better comprehend historical traumas between different religions, finding shared paths to overcome old hostilities and wrongs.
	❖ Invest in short- and long-term goals, and aims to ensure sustainability and continuity of the organisational development.
	❖ Encourage positive role modelling: religious leaders joining together for a common action, worship or a joined project.

Another specific recommendation discussed was: *Invest in ambitious young (religious) people by fostering their divergent and critical thinking.*

In this case, emphasis was placed on (religious) youth who are sceptical of authority due to their lived experiences of institutional exclusion. The advice given was for professionals to be prepared to listen to and accept differences rather than convince them to accept certain values.

3.4 Interreligious dialogue practices

Interreligious dialogue is an area of reflection that required specific analysis, considering that it is part of the action strategies envisaged by the European Union with regard to the objectives of social cohesion and the prevention of emphasized and violent extremism. Religious communities place substantial emphasis on these objectives as interreligious dialogue is considered to be a pivotal reflexive practice through which the differences between different actors of the religious landscape can be reconfigured. This process must take place within the context of everyday life and focus on unresolved historical issues in order to establish dialogue in diversity. Drawing on collected data, the structural relationships among macro, meso and micro factors should be placed at the very core of any effort to create a positive dialogue mechanism to counterbalance emphasized processes as an identity formation process.

In Italy, from the feedback of the interviewed religious leaders, it clearly emerges that interreligious dialogue is considered crucial in combatting the growing emphasized in society. One participant emphasized that such dialogue is based on a common identity, emphasized one's humanity regardless of religion. Diversity is not seen as a problem but as an opportunity that becomes enriching when shared. In this regard, a participant whose religion is based on singing shared their experience: "Every Sunday we gather to sing with my friends on the terrace for our Sunday meeting. One day I invited someone from the same apartment building who complained about our gathering. He joined us while remaining true to his religious faith". This gesture demonstrated that sharing spaces and activities with individuals from diverse religious and cultural backgrounds does not create divisions but instead fosters encounters and openness towards others.

In Belgium, promoting authentic, interfaith dialogue is a shared strategy to counterbalance polarisation and radicalisation. The third section contains all recommendations regarding the interreligious dialogue in terms of routines, practices, events, etc. The Belgian limitation of emphasized only six religions in the country has been considered as an obstacle to an efficient and stable interreligious dialogue.

Some experts propose to implement a top-down approach. Specifically, annually scheduled interfaith dialogues, at all levels, could oblige conservative

communities to accept a specific agenda, based on discussions about the risks of radicalisation.

Regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, a good solution could be to involve people with a mixed Israeli-Palestinian background to play a key role in deconstructing this specific form of polarisation. However, this compromise is very difficult to achieve, because these people may have several issues in communicating with both sides, due to their mixed backgrounds or personal beliefs.

In the Netherlands, members of interreligious dialogue networks agreed that a mere focus on interreligious dialogue without placing it in a social context is not effective and the main focus on bringing people together – also secularists and humanists – should be on creating a humane society. Regarding the recommendation *Promote the establishment of a stable interreligious network in order to organise interreligious events throughout the year*, a Jewish member emphasized that this dialogue should connect to social issues in order to be successful, going beyond mutual understanding on purely religious grounds.

Table 3 - Interreligious dialogue guidelines: comparison between the first and final versions.

First Version	Final Version (after Social Lab)
INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE (routines, practices and events)	INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE (routines, practices and events)
❖ Promote the establishment of a stable interreligious network.	❖ Create occasions for a confrontation about concrete daily life issues and challenges (religious, scientific, civic).
❖ Create occasions for a confrontation about concrete daily life issues and challenges.	❖ Overcome through dialogic practices historical traumas between different religions.
❖ Overcome through dialogic practices historical traumas between different religions.	❖ Focus on interreligious dialogue is only effective if it is placed in the context of current social questions.
❖ Focus on interreligious dialogue is only effective if it is placed in the context of current social questions.	❖ Promote the awareness of streams of intolerance and closed-mindedness inside its own religious group.
	❖ Recognize human rights as a founding principle of human being regardless the religious affiliation.

3.5 Religious identity and religious community

As highlighted in the different countries under analysis, people's identity is the key to understanding several forms of radicalisation but it cannot be limited to religious identity. Identity formation and consolidation is a critical battleground, due to the overload of information (for example, in social media). It is necessary to improve the basic knowledge of the founding principles of different religions in the local community. It is important to consider the

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generational differentiation of this process, especially for the youth because they are less religious than the previous younger generations or more used to searching for religious leaders in the online dimension than in physical places, at least at the beginning.

In Italy, regarding the section ‘Religious Identity and Religious Community’, all participants in the interreligious dialogue network endorsed the formulated recommendations. Some highlighted the importance of actively engaging young people, recognising them as the future of society, while also emphasising the crucial role of the family.

A Christian member emphasised the significance of identity construction within the context of interreligious dialogue, stressing that this process begins with individual and collective identity, which can become a source of richness when shared.

In Belgium, all the members of the interreligious dialogue network agreed with the collected recommendations and, like in Italy, the crucial role of the family was also emphasised here. Some of the experts stressed the importance of reaching out to young people and parents in general, since sometimes the first step towards radicalisation “happens at home, within the family”.

Also in the Netherlands, the importance emerged of involving young people in their local religious community and associations to prevent the risk that they might encounter radicalising and extremist speeches and polarising rhetoric online. In this regard, a Muslim member suggests the importance of establishing a dialogue with several religious interlocutors considering the internal differentiation of religious groups.

Table 4 - Religious Identity and Religious Community guidelines: comparison between the first and final versions.

First Version	Final Version (after Social Lab)
RELIGIOUS IDENTITY AND RELIGIOUS COMMUNITY	RELIGIOUS IDENTITY AND RELIGIOUS COMMUNITY
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Exploiting religious values that are reasonable and common to support the development of a common belonging, elaborating the differences between different religious groups. ❖ Promote the dissemination of reliable information on the founding values of different religions. ❖ Reaching out to young people. ❖ It is important that the political institutions are aware of internal diversity within faith communities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Exploiting religious values that are reasonable and common to support the development of a common belonging, elaborating the differences between different religious groups. ❖ Promote the dissemination of reliable information on the founding values of different religions. ❖ Reaching out to young people. ❖ The political institutions must be aware of the internal diversity within religious communities avoiding limiting the dialogue only with a few known interlocutors.

Another aspect that is highlighted is the importance for political institutions to understand the diversity within religious communities and to

avoid appointing a single representative as a spokesperson for an entire group, but rather to involve individuals with a wide network as discussion partners.

3.6 Socio-economic conditions

Socio-economic conditions shed light on the need to consider economic marginalisation as one of the triggers for contemporary radicalisation processes. A low social and economic condition of the individual can be seen as a macro radicalisation factor even if the effective push factor to radicalisation is not the social and economic status itself but the perception that the individual has of his/her social position, perceived as being linked to injustice and marginalisation, that must be considered at a micro level. In this direction, the religious communities emphasised the need to put themselves forward as significant actors in the integration process of vulnerable populations and to disconnect it from the migration issue, offering them plans and tools to improve language and cultural skills through free services.

In Italy, emphasis was placed on the reception of migrants, a widespread issue as they often live on the margins of society in the host country. This vulnerability is attributed to the ineffectiveness of political institutions in meeting their basic needs, such as housing and employment. The lengthy procedure for obtaining residency permits, which migrants need to be able to work legally, contributes to this situation, pushing some migrants towards criminal networks and increasing the risk of radicalisation. A religious leader proposes the intervention of religious associations, especially those within the Refugee Network, to provide immediate assistance such as housing, food and Italian language courses, in order to prevent foreigners from entering criminal networks.

In Belgium, not everyone in the interreligious network agreed that socio-economic conditions can be a triggering factor for radicalisation, polarisation and violent extremism. Specifically, those who disagreed provided the example of extreme right-wing Catholic supporters from the upper class who join extremist groups and promote their propaganda.

A distinction was made between real socio-economic exclusion and the perception of social exclusion. Regarding the first one, some interviewees highlighted how extremist groups can influence young people by promising them an improvement in material conditions, especially young Muslims from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. These young people, disillusioned by their current living conditions, are drawn to promises of a better and more meaningful future.

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Therefore, concrete or perceived, social (and/or economic) exclusion can be a trigger for politico-religiously inspired extremism.

In the Netherlands, all the members of the interreligious dialogue networks agreed regarding the recommendation: *Focus on socio-economic issues (such as affordable housing, good healthcare, living standards) and do not let ‘cultural conflict’ narratives pushed by politicians (such as the polarisation of minorities, Muslims, refugees) be a distraction.*

A Muslim member of an interreligious dialogue network emphasised how “Radicalisation has become synonymous with Muslim extremism in the public consciousness. The benefits scandal points out that the government itself has also been radicalised”.

Table 5 - Socio-economic conditions guidelines: comparison between the first and final versions.

First Version	Final Version (after Social Lab)
SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONDITIONS	SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONDITIONS
❖ Religious communities must play a key role in the integration of vulnerable communities (such as refugees from various religious faiths) into society.	❖ Religious communities must play a key role in the integration of vulnerable communities into society.
❖ Keep focus on the socio-economic issues that characterize your context (such as affordable housing, good care, standard of living) but take into account that a reductive vision of radicalisation processes cannot be sufficient.	❖ Improve synergies with actors involved in the care and reception of migrant people.
❖ Be aware of generalizations about economic condition of different religious actors leading to exclusion in the public debate.	❖ Keep focus on the socio-economic issues that characterize your context but take into account that a reductive vision of radicalisation processes cannot be sufficient.
	❖ Be aware of generalizations about economic condition of different religious/ethnic groups can lead to stigmatization in the public sphere.

3.7 Polarisation

In the analytical section on polarization, the interviewees acknowledged that the contexts in which they live their daily experience consist of an increasing polarization and presence of opposing and irreconcilable opinions. Some of the dimensions of action come from everyday life experiences through proven strategies ‘within’ religious groups. The need to combat stereotypes (and the media mechanisms that support them) and automatic associations between extreme ideologies and precise religious affiliations was emphasised.

Therefore, the following points become paramount: at the individual level, we should work on trying to understand ‘other people’s point of view’; and at the social level, when we speak of interreligious dialogue, we should speak not of a strategy, but of a process which will advance us all in mutual knowledge and mutual acceptance.

In Italy, migrants often face discrimination not only due to inadequate reception policies but also because of racist and xenophobic acts by citizens. This creates polarization phenomena. Some religious leaders have emphasised that the government should not always be blamed if society does not function well, as it is often the citizens who lean towards polarization. In this regard, religious leaders have proposed some recommendations to counter polarization, based on the importance of working on oneself during moments of conflict, adopting an open perspective towards others' viewpoints, and engaging in interreligious dialogue, as this allows for mutual understanding and acceptance.

Table 6 - Polarisation guidelines: comparison between the first and final versions.

First Version	Final Version (after Social Lab)
POLARISATION	POLARISATION
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Teaching people in their community to listen to other positions and opinions. ❖ Countering segregation. ❖ Give to young people a place in society. ❖ Be alert that conspiracy theories (ie. surrounding Covid-19) lead to the expansion of extreme ideologies. ❖ Be aware of media mechanisms that embrace religious-critical voices, which affirm stereotyping. ❖ Avoid automatic association between religious belongings and society (ie. Judeo-Christian society) as it can be used to exclude other relevant communities in your context (ie. migrant communities). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Promote people' mutual understanding, knowledge and acceptance practices. ❖ Give to young people a place in society. ❖ Be alert of the connection between conspiracy theories and misinformation lead to the expansion of extreme ideologies. ❖ Be aware of media mechanisms that embrace religious-critical voices, which affirm stereotyping. ❖ Avoid automatic association between religious belongings and society (ie. Judeo-Christian society) as it can be used to exclude other relevant communities in your context (ie. migrant communities). ❖ Be aware of media system that embrace critical voices to religions which can widespread stereotypes. ❖ Create and/or bring forward positive narratives (i.e., best practices of fruitful coexistence of faith communities etc.) to avoid negative image-making and stereotyping. ❖ Create good safeguarding and monitoring mechanism/body/policy to help deal with sensitive and confrontational matters, when needed. It is essential that space, where dialogue is happening, is safe and secure for all parties involved.

In Belgium, the importance of paying attention to young people and countering segregation were also addressed in the 'polarisation' section. A member of the network suggested adding two new recommendations in this regard:

- *Create and/or bring forward positive narratives (i.e., best practices of fruitful coexistence of faith communities etc.) to avoid negative image-making and stereotyping.*

- *Establish effective safeguarding measures and a monitoring mechanism/body/policy to help deal with sensitive and confrontational matters, when needed. It is essential that where dialogue is happening, the space is safe and secure for all parties involved.*

In the Netherlands, a general recommendation on combatting segregation was commented on by a Christian member of an interreligious dialogue network, who remarked, “Name the common values of all religions together. No one religion alone has produced all the values we say we fight for.” It was noted that the government should avoid double standards, such as requiring loyalty only from Dutch citizens of Turkish origin, as this could potentially fuel polarization.

Regarding the recommendation *Avoid automatic association between religious belonging and society (e.g. the assumption that Dutch society is by default Judeo-Christian), as it can be used to exclude other relevant communities in your context (e.g. migrant communities)*, a Muslim member of a dialogue network confirmed this mechanism of exclusion, while a Christian member emphasised the importance of naming the common values of all religions.

Both Muslim and Christian members considered this recommendation to be very important: *Be aware of media mechanisms that embrace religious-critical voices, which affirm stereotyping.*

Radicalisation arises not from the impact of social tensions, but from the emergence of factors coming from areas of life where individuals build sense, motivation and action. Rather than seeking ‘causal factors’, the study of polarization needs to capture agency and frames in terms of traditions, convictions and stereotypes.

3.8 Counter narratives

The last section of the research presents a series of new recommendations aimed at preventing religious radicalisation and extremism in local contexts.

The counter-narratives highlight the need for a collective set of actions that allow for the expression of individuality: this collective dimension must be based on certain milestones such as education and civic engagement, and voluntary activities. Drawing on the collected data of the Social Lab with interreligious dialogue networks, what emerged was the importance of the community dimension in order to develop effective counter-narrative messages and practices. This community approach is not limited to religious stakeholders, but it is extended to educational institutions, local welfare and third sector subjects.

In Italy, a key recommendation focuses on the importance of religious awareness and education for individuals involved in working with youth, such

as social workers, in order to have a better understanding of diverse faiths. Additionally, it is suggested that dialogue and educational relationships between parents and children be improved to prevent instances of radicalisation. In Italy, a member of the Muslim dialogue network emphasises that in the face of cultural diversity within communities, it is important to build sensitivity and awareness of peaceful coexistence within organised settings.

In Belgium, the presented list of recommendations was evaluated positively by the members of the interreligious dialogue network. However, some experts in the network disagreed on the idea of showing vulnerable young people potential extremist pathways for radicalisation as a way to prevent it, due to the risk of creating the opposite result. In fact, much of the content produced by extremist groups describes an ideal environment, which influences young people who are dissatisfied with their conditions in society, so the effectiveness of this strategy depends on what will be shown and what explanations and counter-narratives will be used.

All the interviewees suggested creating the conditions for a structured and stable plan, where all Belgian religious communities can collaborate with each other, focusing specifically on preventing radicalisation and politically-religiously inspired extremism, especially for the less open-minded members of religious communities, namely those who are unwilling to share experiences and dialogue with other faiths. However, it is important to extend this dialogue to other ‘minor’ faiths that are not yet officially recognised religions in Belgium.

Table 7 - Counter-narratives guidelines: comparison between the first and final versions.

First Version	Final Version (after Social Lab)
COUNTER-NARRATIVES	COUNTER-NARRATIVES
❖ Help people to be aware that they are not alone and be part of a community.	❖ Help people to be aware that they are not alone and be part of a community.
❖ Support, educate, and empower people that work in associations that operate closely with young people, e.g. social workers.	❖ Support, educate, and empower people that work in associations that operate closely with young people, e.g. social workers.
❖ Knowing how to better approach and talk with parents, teach them to build a sane educational relationship with their children.	❖ Knowing how to better approach and talk with parents.
❖ Demonstrate with data and experiences that the extremist pathway can't be helpful. By showing people the potential dangers of their ideology, how it can be manipulated, and maybe make them come to reason.	❖ Demonstrate with data and experiences that the extremist pathway can't be helpful.
❖ Be aware there is a reluctance in society to focus on other forms of radicalisation besides radicalization within religious communities.	❖ Be aware there is a reluctance in society to focus on other forms of radicalisation besides radicalization within religious communities.
	❖ Attract people from diverse backgrounds both in policymaking and policy-oriented research representing diversity of religious and ethnic backgrounds in these fields.

In the Netherlands, the last area of research provides a set of recommendations that cover practices and tools to prevent religious

radicalisation and extremism in local contexts. One general recommendation is related to increasing awareness of religions. Regarding the recommendation *Support, educate, and empower people that work in associations that operate closely with young people, e.g. social workers. They need to be given a better understanding of different religions*, a Muslim member of a dialogue network emphasised the importance of education in countering polarisation. The strategic role of families is indispensable for dialogue to be based on mutual respect of the ‘authentic’ religious values.

Finally, all participants agreed regarding the recommendation: *Ensure research and policy funds are geared towards attracting people from diverse backgrounds so they become part of the team. It is important that a group of policymakers and researchers represents a diversity of religious and ethnic backgrounds, to ensure these experiences and knowledge are integrated into policies and research*. In this regard, a Muslim member added, “ensure that there is a match between the themes of the community and the themes of the researchers”.

4. Conclusions

As shown above, contemporary processes of radicalisation are multifaceted, continually adapting to societal changes and contextual conditions. Radicalisation can be driven by various ideological beliefs, whether cultural, religious or political. Intolerance towards diversity and a desire for domination or self-affirmation provide fertile ground for new hybrid forms of violent extremism. These forms often operate independently of traditional institutional structures, as can be seen by the emergence of homegrown extremists lacking direct organisational ties (Vidino et al., 2017). Despite their lack of explicit connections with extremist groups, these actors often maintain a territorial focus regarding their operational scope and targets (Khosrokhavar, 2017).

In our work, studying radicalisation is a process aimed at developing an effective bottom-up approach. This objective can be reached through participatory methodologies that foster social elaboration and tailored actions, considering radicalisation as a system of daily interactions and relationships (McDonald, 2018). This approach connects individuals and their agencies, indicating that countering radicalisation necessitates socially constructed processes. Active stakeholders – including religious leaders, public institutions and civil society – must collaboratively develop integrated strategies to counterbalance these trends (Ragazzi et al., 2019).

Along this line, the Council of Europe’s White Paper on Interreligious Dialogue (2015) emphasises the relevance of localised countermeasures and

advocates for creating multidisciplinary security partnerships at the local level, which act as early-warning mechanisms. Implementing this requires a multi-stakeholder approach, particularly at the grassroots level, as highlighted by our respondents in the final recommendations.

To counter radicalisation, it is crucial to engage stakeholders like institutional actors, civil society and religious leaders in a holistic strategy. Our research indicates that developing cultural, linguistic and religious competencies is crucial for achieving this goal. Qualitative data suggest that establishing consistent and formal spaces for interreligious dialogue in urban areas can activate inclusive grassroots processes. Such practices, grounded in young people's social representation living in European secular societies (Roy, 2004), help them view the EU's structural diversity as a value rather than a barrier to coexistence.

Triangulating data from interviews, focus groups, and Social Labs revealed the need for a multi-layered approach that links participatory practices, such as interreligious dialogue, to counter-narrative strategies essential for preventing radicalisation in social environments, especially educational institutions (Vidino, 2018). These guidelines point toward diminishing the allure of radicalisation through structural cooperation between religious, educational and institutional stakeholders (Duyvesteyn & Schuurman, 2019). Additionally, data triangulation highlighted the families' role as incubators or accelerators of radicalisation pathways (Ferret & Khosrokhavar, 2022).

The final recommendations advocate combining interreligious dialogue with bottom-up and top-down strategies (Ferrara & Petito, 2016). Religious actors must translate the desire for dialogue into active strategies that address religious diversity. Focus group narratives underscored the importance of supporting religious community initiatives and fostering collaboration with local governments (Aiello et al., 2018). Bottom-up efforts remain crucial in linking various actors within this context.

Obviously, it is necessary to recognise that data generalisability is limited by the geographic sub-areas involved in the study, which reflect the regions' contextual situations. Data collection was further influenced by the regions' religious homogeneity or socio-political conditions and by a selective ratio that favoured more research-oriented groups. Despite these constraints, the study emphasises the dual role of religious affiliation as both a driver and counter-narrative pathway to radicalisation, underscoring the need to include religious actors in counter-extremism policies.

Since 2006, the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy has promoted a culture of peace, justice and human development, fostering ethnic, national and religious tolerance through broad-based education and awareness programmes. Achieving shared development goals among diverse religious groups requires

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collaborative effort. The final recommendations from the implementation of Social Labs constitute not only practices and reflections on interreligious dialogue as a process for preventing radicalisation but also a mutual pact for active cooperation and peaceful coexistence.

Each network of religious groups and stakeholders, in their territorial contexts, can establish best practices for enhancing collective societal resilience against violent extremism. When religious communities are able to influence the public sphere by imbuing it with the cohesive principles of democratic society, they promote civic engagement and participation. This community-based dimension emphasises the balance between religious leaders, authorities and practitioners at the grassroots level, making them all partners in preventing and countering violent extremism. This process can be effective only if research and participatory practices come together to integrate knowledge and interests to uncover the new pathways of current forms of radicalisation.

Participatory methodologies, including Social Labs, are essential in the context of radicalisation studies due to their focus on collaborative, community-based approaches that emphasise inclusivity and co-creation. Social labs are experimental platforms that bring together diverse stakeholders to address complex social issues through iterative learning and adaptive strategies (Hassan, 2014). These methodologies prioritise the active involvement of community members, which is critical for addressing the nuanced and context-specific nature of radicalisation.

In the context of counter-radicalisation, Social Labs facilitate a deeper understanding of local dynamics, and they empower communities to develop tailored interventions. They enable the co-creation of knowledge and solutions, fostering trust and collaboration among stakeholders (Westley et al., 2017). By engaging directly with affected communities, Social Labs help to uncover the root causes of radicalisation and develop more effective, contextually relevant countermeasures. Moreover, Social Labs and participatory methodologies contribute to the sustainability and scalability of interventions. By involving local stakeholders in the design and implementation of solutions, these approaches ensure that interventions are more likely to be accepted and maintained by the community (Burns, 2014). This is particularly important in the context of radicalisation, where top-down approaches may be perceived as intrusive or disconnected from local realities.

Implementing participatory methodologies such as Social Labs into counter-radicalisation practices offers a promising approach to addressing the complex and multifaceted nature of radicalisation. However, it is essential to recognise the limitations and related challenges posed by these methodologies. For example, both in the Italian and Dutch cases, ensuring meaningful participation from diverse community members has been a challenging task. In

the Netherlands the research team interviewed two Pastors and one Orthodox Rabbi to discuss contentious issues and (religiously) motivated polarisation and radicalisation. All three religious leaders were active within the public domain on issues related to polarisation and discrimination in the Netherlands. The research team also reached out to Imams through trusted key persons, however at the time of approaching them, local media revealed that some Dutch municipalities had been secretly investigating mosques through private companies. The research team did not pursue further after these key persons explained the timing was delicate and therefore some scepticism. In Italy, the Orthodox community representatives and religious leaders refused to take part in our research motivating that interreligious dialogue was not a matter they can discuss participating in a scientific research but this forms of dialogue should be done involving high level religious authorities and not the believers. The Italian interreligious dialogue network members even confirmed that over the years the orthodox community representatives have never wanted to take part in their activities and meetings. In addition, the success of Social Labs depends on the availability of social and material resources and the commitment of stakeholders, which can vary significantly across different contexts. Moreover, there is always the risk of reinforcing existing power dynamics if a social laboratory is not managed carefully (Cornwall, 2008). The most promising outputs of these methodologies are the fostering of collaborative mindedness, building community resilience, and supporting the development of tailored, sustainable interventions. Future research should continue to explore and refine these approaches, ensuring that they remain adaptable and responsive to the evolving challenges of societal transformations.

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