

SERA final (video)conference report. Diepenbeek (BE) 29/05/2019

The conference was organized in the research campus of UCLL on Wednesday 29th of May 2019. Twelve participants formed a small but interesting group: 1 police officer, responsible for the DERAD-team in the provincial capital; 1 magistrate of justice, 1st Deputy Attorney of the King; 2 teachers of a closed community facility, 1 researcher on the item of extremism, 1 researcher of VVSG, 1 editor VIEWZ, 2 colleagues of UCLL, and the UCLL SERA team (3pp).



The conference was held from 9h00 to 13h00.

First the SERA program (process and results) were presented.

In the videoconference, 10h00 to 11h15, for each participating country one speaker presented a topic. The Belgian speaker, Maarten De Waele, spoke about polarization in his “The good, the bad and the silent middle” presentation. He defined radicalization as unhappiness that is hijacked by ideology.

He used the polarizing scheme of Brandsma to look at the radicalization process from a sociological point of view in order to influence it. The scheme shows the pushers on the extreme sides, they have strong ideas and speak up. The followers have the same idea as the pushers and follow their way of thinking.

This concept is especially interesting because of its approach toward the silent majority. It states that if you can influence the silent majority the impact of what you do will be extended. It is this group that has the need and the possibility to look into different aspects and perspectives of both extreme points of view in order to make their own more nuanced opinion. They can influence the followers as well and give an approach that will not fuel the pushers story. If you try to reach the influencer (pusher), that has a strong opinion and no urge for change, your efforts are more likely to fail. If the silent majority gets reached they will influence others in a more nuanced way. And that is what this society needs most.

To unfuel the discussion into extremes it is important to focus on what the **subject** is that you want to discuss, if the topic is nuanced and positive the discussion will be. This is the same for the **target group**, that when chosen well leads to discussing the matter nuanced. Which will lead to a more open discussion that doesn't end in extremes. The same works for the **position** that is taken on the start and **the tone** in which it is stated.

So to unfuel it is important to:

focus	example
Change the target group	Let the voice of the silent middle speak, in order to get a nuanced discussion
Change the subject	not people who wear headcaps, but we talk about what we wear when going to work
Change your position	The major of Amsterdam stated we love freedom of speech, so that is why we also let these extreme points of view be heard
Change your tone	Don't do it defensive, be neutral, be professional in questioning instead of pointing out.

Following the coffee break, despite and thanks to the small group we had a valuable and animated discussion. Each participant reflected on the themes of extremism, radicalization and polarization. We considered their impact on persons in detention, education and general welfare. We undertook to continue this fascinating discussion at the next meeting of the radicalization platform of the province of Limburg, June the 19th. That forum gives us the opportunity to involve more people in this discourse.

One of the participants that worked with the SERA-program in the closed facility stated that the cooking exercise was very helpful, also he would like to get more into the pinto vs Maslow thinking as it would help to talk about different opinions without exclaiming the differences. It felt like sowing seeds in order to get them to take the bigger picture, another helpful issue for them was community work, were they play together with blind people, cook for a community service. For them to get a chance to give something to society was very empowering and for most of them a totally new experience.