Sport and deradicalization: a proposal for an analysis and prevention model

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ABSTRACT: Based on Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological model, this article focuses on the multidimensionality of radicalization and its relationship with community culture by observing the problem of social isolation. In this framework, sports provide contexts in which forms of social collaboration are necessary, the "rules of the game" must be embraced, and there is close interaction among fellow players. These characteristics can turn organized sports into observatories on (potential) juvenile radicalization through identifying "early warning signals" that are mainly detected by observing those conducts that may reveal a potential risk. In the provided extensive literature review, it comes that these signs can be traced, for instance, in the lack of self-esteem, in the absence of significant bonds, in the intolerance towards values, as well as in extreme introverted behaviour of the young subjects. Alongside such premises, this paper aims to understand whether and to what extent it is possible to hypothesize the shaping of strategies able to prevent radicalization in various contexts. Alongside such premises, this paper is aimed at understanding whether, and to what extent, it is possible to hypothesize the shaping of strategies able to avert radicalisation in various contexts, prevention based on the idea that the interaction between the individual and the environment—in the sense provided by the Chicago School—is heavily influenced by the progressive adaptation of human organism to its surrounding environment.

KEYWORDS: sport, deradicalization, prevention policies, community, individual environment

1. INTRODUCTION

The realm of sport has a unique ability to foster integration, especially in terms of values and symbolic references. Huizinga's concept of "magic circle" (2016, orig. ed. 1938) introduces phenomenological elements and the idea of game as a suspension from reality, with well-defined boundaries in time and space, justifying a behaviour that would be otherwise incomprehensible in the context of everyday life.

In his contribution, Huizinga takes a long look at verbal battles, "bragging and scoffing matches", that can be found historically in Arab, Greek and medieval societies. These moments of impulse sublimation had the precise task of distancing elements of truth that could be plausible from the sphere of reality. In medieval society in particular, the popularity of court jesters emerged, which institutionalized the "other" dimension of verbal games and of presumed or imagined situations. These were safe areas where it was possible to express or attempt combinations of values that would be unthinkable in the ordinary course of events.

Based on this concept, sport is a link between the described dimension—which is strictly phenomenological—and what occurs during the interactions envisaged within a game. These interactions are regulated by shared and accepted elements that constitute the cognitive reference framework during the period in which the social actor is engaged in the competition or game.

Specific reference can be found in the definition of sport by Antonio Roversi:

[...] all those activities involving physical exercise which: 1) require a minimum level of skill or intellectual ability to be practiced. This ability is expressed through the knowledge and assimilation of some relevant techniques; 2) are carried out in ways that are independent from the participants' will and therefore cannot be modified as the players wish, quite the contrary, they are carried out according to a strictly embedded system of rules; 3) have a purpose that lies in achieving a final outcome of a formal nature: victory or defeat; 4) are an integral part of specific social institutions that have included them in their structures of production and consumption. (Roversi, 1998, p. 305)

In our vision, this definition is relevant because it is transversal and provides a useful compass to navigate the complex, typically sociological issue of radicalization within extremist groups.

The knowledge of the techniques and the rules of the game, the acceptance of the outcome, the inclusion in a social dimension linked to consumption (symbolically as well as literally) and to the social actor's perception of the world-system, all together they are central elements which serve to outline the limits and potential of using sport in the fight against radicalization.

In the early 2000 sport sociology has come to focus more on the connections between sports and systems of power. In that sense was used an alternative approach to defining sports that revolved around two questions: *What gets to count as a sport in a group or society?* and *Whose sports count the most?*

These questions forced to focus more directly on the social and cultural contexts

in which ideas are formed about physical activities and the social processes that privilege some forms of physical activities. In cultures underlining cooperative relationships, the idea that people should compete for rewards may be defined as disruptive, if not immoral, and for people in cultures that emphasize competition, physical activities and games that have no winners may seem pointless. These cultural differences are important because there is no universal agreement about the meaning, purpose, and organization of sports. Similarly, there is no general agreement about who will participate in sports, the circumstances in which participation will occur, or who will sponsor sports or the reasons for sponsorship (Coakley & Lever, 2000)

Ekholm (2013) underlines that using sport to achieve social objectives is essentially a Western phenomenon. It is NGOs from countries with a Western culture that use sport as a means of establishing dialogue and interaction, and to promote personal and community capacity building. This clarification helps to comprehend the potential limits, in cultural terms at least, of sport as a model. Sport holds a place in the collective imagination of the first world, above all; it is an image which is constantly broadcast and is shaped by events that receive worldwide coverage, one which it is difficult to escape or ignore (Martelli, 2010). It is here that we can find the key to unlock different contexts culturally: sport as a vehicle for the individual assertion, an opportunity to act within a framework of accepted common purpose.

In this introduction, it is also appropriate to define the semantic basis underpinning the idea of radicalization. Radicalization is a polysemic concept, difficult to define univocally as it ranges from a micro social dimension to a macro one. The micro one has to do with the adoption of a personal "attitude", intransigence, with potentially extreme consequences (Sallé & Bréhon, 2020), whilst the macro social dimension includes political, religious, or national movements which break violently with pre-existing values, introducing new ethical elements according to belief systems that are not compatible with the "hated" reality.

Other authors define radicalization more precisely by talking about "a deep desire for fundamental socio-political change, as well as an increasing willingness to pursue and support far-reaching changes in society that conflict with or pose a direct threat to the existing order" (Dalgaard & Nielsen, 2010, p. 798).

Moreover, the inner definition of the phenomenon is considered intrinsically fluid, since it is essentially contextualized in spatial, temporal, and social terms[1]. However, as with any other form of violent action, be it physical or just ideological or verbal, it is the State, from the Weberian perspective, that determines its legitimacy and monopoly.

The emergence of the infosphere (Floridi, 2014) also establishes new elements in the development of extremism and in the definition of the concept of violence. The so-called "keyboard warriors" are often socially insignificant figures, a simple evolution of the (now) ancient Trolls—which for the sake of convenience we could call

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[1] The devastation of the Bamiyan Buddhas in 2001, the destruction of the archaeological site of Nineveh in 2015 or the bombing of Dubrovnik in 1991—just to mention some of the patterns of state violence against persons or symbols—were clear examples of strict contextualisation: what appeared to most people to be the actions of terrorists, were encouraged, and applauded in those contexts.

agitators, troublemakers—who operated on the network Usenet before the advent of the World Wide Web[2] playing the same role that the social deviant has in shaping public discourse in a bar. Unfortunately, however, due in part to profound social and communicative incompetence, it is increasingly the case that these "haters" target weaker groups, are the less able to understand the futility of their reasoning: children, adolescents, people with limited knowledge and awareness. Measures to combat verbal violence are particularly difficult to achieve and even more difficult to enforce[3], and this poses a fundamentally interdisciplinary problem, whose solutions (or simple approaches) should be sought more in terms of processes (social, group, individual) than in terms of law and order.

Based on Bronfenbrenner's ecological model (1994), the process we put forward in this essay, will initially offer an ecological reading of the system which generates extremism—in whatever way this is defined, but with particular emphasis on adolescence and pre-adolescence. Subsequently, through a literature review, some critical elements will be examined. A brief appraisal of the warning signs which may be taken into consideration by adults with a view to prevention is proposed as conclusions.

2. BRONFENBRENNER'S ECOLOGICAL MODEL

2.1. HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

The Russian American psychologist Urie Bronfenbrenner is almost unanimously considered one of the greatest authorities in the field of developmental psychology; his (bio)ecological systems theory portrays the development of the human being using four concentric circles defining the environmental structures around the child. Topologically, development advances through a process of progressively more complex and distant interactions with social and ecological systems, supplemented (in one of his last texts) with a fifth dimension related to time, transversal to the others.

This theory continues to be a relevant and widely used heuristic tool, due to the high degree of generalization.

According to Bronfenbrenner the concept of human development can be usefully summarised as follows:

> [...] Human development is the process through which the growing person acquires a more extended differentiated, and valid conception of the ecological environment, and becomes motivated and able to engage in activities that reveal the properties of, sustain, or restructure that environment at levels of similar or greater complexity in form and content. (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 27)

The psychologist drew heavily on Lewin's field theory, which he reviewed in a sig-

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[2] A very useful overview of the history of pre-internet networks can also be found in Kollok P. and Smith M., eds (1998). *Communities in cyberspace*. London: Routledge.

[3] This obviously concerns one of the pillars of modern democracy: freedom of expression and is related to the essence of Böckenförde's (1996) well-known paradox according to which "the liberal, secularized state lives on the basis of assumptions that it itself cannot guarantee".

nificant and innovative way (Lewin, 2013, orig. 1935).

This theory states that a social actor's *behaviour* is a direct function of the interaction between the individual and his/her environment [B=*f*(PE)].

While for Bronfenbrenner, the interaction between the individual and the environment [D=*f* (P, E)] produces *development*.

Subsequently, with the addition of the Chronosystem, the formula is modified, inserting time, *t*, and the period (or periods: **time-*period***), *t-p*, in which the person and the environment engage their capabilities simultaneously [Dt=*f*(t-p) (PE) (t-p)].

In any case, the author himself eventually clarifies that the formula does not describe the concept of development itself, but its outcome (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006).

Apart from the last time factor which as shown in figure 1, conditions the entire process, the author defines four systems, four concentric circles in which the child's development can be placed.
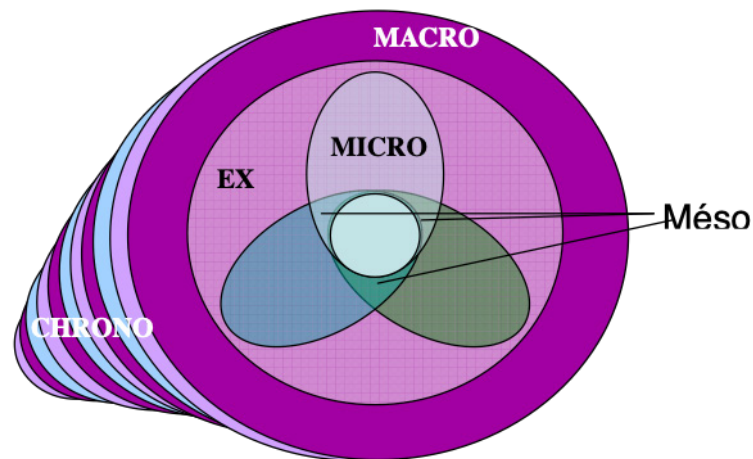

Fig. 1. A dynamic interpretation of the Bronfenbrenner schema
Source: Absil et al. (2012, p. 9)

2.2. THE SYSTEMS AND ITS RELATIONS

At the topological centre of the theoretical pattern is the *bios*, which integrates with the *cognitus* and the *emoveo*, interacting with them in terms of processing stimuli coming from higher level systems. The first of these ideal concentric systems is the *microsystem*. The microsystem is a pattern of activities, roles, and interpersonal relations experienced by the developing person in each face-to-face setting with physical and material characteristics, containing other persons with their distinct characteristics: temperament, personality and value system. In such a system, bi-directional interactions are the most frequent and their power and influence are fundamentally important. Within this framework, we could place the value system linked both to primary socialization and—at a later stage—to secondary socialization. The child moves on from dyadic relations with the parents (the mother) to situations involving

relations with third parties, whether these are peers, other adults, or structures for socialization. Taken as a whole, this system includes both pedagogical terms (cognition > behavioural output) and value systems. These value systems can also be found in the Macrosystem (the outermost circle) and will constitute, so to speak, the default programme where other subroutines will happen. As we will describe further on, these subroutines will be necessary to coordinate the various functional subsystems of a life's worlds.

At this specific level, radicalization in the strictest sense would not exist. From the writers' (scholars') point of view, it could be rather considered as a set of coercive systems linked to socializing channels that work to instruct, and to psychologically subjugate minors, steering them towards acts that are substantially incongruous for their age. Minors used as *kamikazes* by means of explosive belts detonated at a distance are not, nor could they be, consenting in terms of their sense of self.

It is more frequent at this age that children are "simply" immersed in values, making them inclined—in a subsequent phase—to choose radicalization.

The second level, the Mesosystem, includes the links and processes put in place between two or more settings in which the developing person participates (relations between school and family, school, and work, etc.). In other words, the mesosystem can be considered as a system of microsystems. It goes without saying that discordance of opposing thrusts between the microsystems at this level (differences in expectations between systems and different requirements linked to the expected models of behaviour) can generate instability in the child, who becomes vulnerable in terms of a sense of inadequacy, seeking revenge on a world-system that is perceived to be hostile. This happens regardless—in some cases—of the material resources available and even of the referring value systems.

A specific example is Anders Behring Breivik, the Norwegian terrorist who identifies himself as a Nazi and who killed 69 Norwegian Workers' Youth League members in July 2011 after murdering eight more people in a bomb attack in the centre of Oslo the same day. He had grown up in a cosmopolitan, multicultural setting (his father was an economist and an attaché at the Norwegian embassy in London for a time). An explanation based on material deprivation does not, therefore, appear relevant in this case. It would be much more appropriate to sustain a hypothesis of mesosystem pattern discordance, potentially combined with a mixed origin (genetic and cultural) predisposition towards violence.

The *Exosystem*, the next circle, includes the linkages and processes between two or more settings, at least one of which is usually foreign to the child. For example, the relationship between the home setting and the parent's work setting. In this case too, there is usually a redundancy effect between different microsystems that create mesosystems, which in turn define the relationships with the exosystems. In the exosystems, a continuous exchange of information can be observed between the social structures that shape the life of the reference community (society, culture, the anthropic environment itself) and the mesosystem (school, family, the religion experienced). At this level, in terms of threats linked to radicalization, possible vulnerabilities are typically associated with communities or societies with weak regulatory systems, leading

to corruption, anomie, substantial loss of trust in the wider community. It goes without saying that, in such cases, the offer of a strong, guiding ideology, using redemption and the social value of the ideas proposed as leverage, can potentially gain a foothold in young adults who are still developing.

The *Macrosystem* is the outermost level and represents all the other levels as it is characteristic of a given culture, subculture, and the wider social setting. The macrosystem therefore consists of the general pattern of micro-, meso- and exo-systems, that characterize a given social context, with reference to the belief systems, resources, restrictions or threats, lifestyles, opportunity structures, life-course options and patterns of social exchange that are embedded in each of these systems. The macrosystem can be thought of as a kind of societal blueprint for a particular culture, subculture, or other broader social context (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006).

The effect of the macrosystem can be clearly seen in the cultural growth differential between children and young people from different cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds. The geopolitical and sub-cultural variables that often trigger the culture at the base of an inclination towards ideas of radicalization are to be found within this framework.

At a later stage in the development of his theory, Bronfenbrenner introduces the concept of the Chronosystem, the purpose being to describe the evolution and development of external systems in a given time frame. This time frame can be limited or extended, and it becomes a function of the other systems development. For this reason, the author makes an appropriate distinction between the time that is within the individual and the time that is external to it. In relative terms, external time is the easiest dimension to understand: the death of relatives, a change in the form of the State, a reduction in certain types of time (e.g., instruction) due to technological changes: the individual is drawn into, influenced, and controlled in some way by this. Internal time, on the other hand, refers to time to achieve maturity, the time required for perception and processing (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). It can almost be viewed as a genetic time (in Piaget's meaning) where knowledge is based above all on development.

2.3. HUMAN ECOLOGY: FROM BRONFENBRENNER TO ROBERT PARK MODEL

Consider the frame adopted by "Human developmental ecology" model of Urie Bronfenbrenner. This approach uses naturalistic observation and field research as tools of study. In that way, Bronfenbrenner's work can be read as a stimulus for scholars of human development to design and implement transformational experiments aimed not only at hypotheses testing, but rather at discovering the environment opportunities and the remarkable capacity of human beings to react constructively and often progressively to the changes externally introduced.

Like Bronfenbrenner, also Robert E. Park, one of the most representative sociologists of the Chicago School[4], commits the question of (social) development to the

[4] Chicago School is a label identifying a particular group of sociologists who worked at the University of Chicago during the first half of the last century. The city was their social laboratory, and their social

approach of "Human Ecology". «Human ecology is an attempt to apply to the inter-relations of human beings a type of analysis previously applied to the interrelations of plants and animals. The term "symbiosis" describes a type of social relationship that is biotic rather than cultural. This biotic social order comes into existence and is maintained by competition. In plant and animal societies competition is unlimited by an institutional or moral order. Human society is a consequence and effect of this limitation of the symbiotic social order by culture [...]». The community, thus conceived, is "(1) territorially organized, (2) more or less completely rooted in the soil it occupies, (3) its individual units living in a relationship of mutual independence that is symbiotic rather than societal, in the sense in which that term applies to human beings" (Park, 2005, p. 85). So, in this way, the human community is shaped by the interaction of four factors which shape changes, including "(1) population, (2) artifact (culture), (3) custom and beliefs (non-material culture) [and] (4) the natural resources that maintain at once the biotic balance and the social equilibrium" (Park, 1936, p. 9).

People's behaviours, therefore, are influenced by factors at multiple level and ecological models have been developed to understand and influence human behaviour at individual, social and environmental levels.

This micro-macro linkage between individual and social structure, the perspective (evolutionary) and methods of social research (qualitative ones), highlights an important area of overlap between the Chicago sociologists and Bronfenbrenner model that confirms the usefulness the topicality of certain indicators elaborated by the Chicago School, those relating to land values, mobility, and spatial concentration on an ethnic-national, racial, or social basis. The community role in forecasting possible deviant behaviours is still in the research agenda of most human-ecological investigation (i.e., Fleury & Lee, 2006). The juxtaposition of those two approaches could conveniently show the micro-macro path to the construction of a deviant reality, construction useful for planning and developing sociological and pedagogical instruments of counter-radicalization, as we will try to show in the next sections.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study came up against the obvious issue of access to primary data linked to the type of the considered phenomenon. There is, therefore, a twofold methodological problem. The first relates to the social invisibility of the actors that need to be involved. The second is linked to the actual predictability of radicalized behaviour, as highlighted in the development model outlined above. Paradoxically, this second factor represents the *rationale* of this work and constitutes an element that is difficult to understand, as we will attempt to demonstrate.

In a bid to establish a methodological framework for this study, the only plausible solution is a review of the existing literature, using and highlighting the available literature. This literature is not particularly extensive; there is obviously a significant amount of work dedicated to religious radicalization, mostly Islam related. The

research method were amazingly ethnographic and greatly anticipatory of methods that are still relevant today.

problem of political radicalization is not secondary to this (also in anomic terms[5]) which, especially in countries where firearms are widely available, is often much more alarming than the religious radicalization, the latter being, to a certain extent, easier to trace.

After illustrating the cases retrieved, this paper describes the approaches to prevention and alleviation suggested by the United Nations (UNODC) and other agencies, by way of example. In this case too, the purpose is to formulate conclusions that can be translated into operational indications for researchers and decision-makers, where it is possible to implement or modify the socio-pedagogical approach.

This study therefore substantially follows a document-based method, using literature and manuals, and this will be validated by means of triangulation of the methodologies proposed and the results obtained.

4. SPORT AND DERADICALIZATION: A BRIEF SURVEY OF LITERATURE AND CASE REVIEW

As already mentioned, literature on sport and radicalization is quite poor in Italy and not particularly extensive in an international context. In our opinion, this is mainly a matter of definition. If on one side radicalization becomes self-evident in case of explicit violence, on the other it is less clear when it represents a "simple" support for the values inherent a certain world vision, or in episodes of out-and-out criminal violence. In fact, it is no accident that some authors (see Richardson, Cameron & Berlouis, 2017; Johns, Grossman, & McDonald, 2014; Clarke & Newman, 2006) assume that the *criminal* aspect of the radicalized violent act must be considered as the focus for the purpose to be carried out—according to the above classification—at meso- and exo-system level.

Johns, Grossman & McDonald (2014) provide the case study of the Australian Football League starting in the city of Melbourne. Their work highlights how difficult it can be to implement measures capable of combining the social desirability of a given research-intervention programme and the possibility to assess the outcome of these actions in a reliable way. Apart from the methodological problems, the authors underline that the project showed clear evidence of how participation in research-intervention programmes can have a highly significant impact on participants' self-esteem and interpersonal skills.

Chermak and Gruenewald (2015) carried out a useful survey of the criminological databases of the USA to compare the different characteristics of the various kinds of extremism detected (extreme right, extreme left, jihadist) that led to actual violent

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[5] Reference is made, by way of example, to the Columbine High School massacre of April 1999, 13 dead and 24 wounded. Other massacres follow this form of extreme anomic violence: the Virginia Tech. Inst. (2007), Sandy Hook Elementary School (2012) and Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School (2018), as well as numerous other "minor" episodes, at least in terms of loss of life. In Europe too, even without firearms being essentially freely available as in the United States, in the last decade there have been numerous deaths in attacks on schools: Erfurt (D) 2002, Jokela and Kauhajoki (FIN) 2007, 2008, Winnender (D) 2009, with a total of 53 people killed in the first decade of the 2000s. A useful and updated source of mass shooting could be found at: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mass_shooting

crimes. This survey confirmed some elements that were already known (right-wing extremism tends to feature low educational achievement and unemployment; left-wing extremism tends to feature a critical view of society, even though the level of personal integration is significantly higher than that of right-wing extremists) and revealed others that are less familiar (religious extremism for the purpose, above all, of personal integration in the reference communities). In any case, the discordance between the material state of the individual (and sometimes of the community) and the possibility of emancipation (of the person and/or the community) have always been considered as elements that may favour criminal behaviour (Cloward & Ohlin, 1960).

Essentially, from the *Rational Choice* theory point of view, there is little difference between those who engage in violent behaviour in anticipation of reward in an afterlife—typically the terrorists boosted by a religious aim—and those who pursue a (relatively) more immediate self-improvement goals by attempting to subvert a given system of government. In both cases, the outlook which is embraced originates in the individual's micro- and meso-system, mistaking dysfunctional relationships and concepts for the truth, pushing the individual to search for ways out through a conduct which pursues redemption at personal and community levels (Perry & Hasisi, 2015). Redemption in this sense is perceived in the microsystem, where the biological, cognitive, and emotional spheres of the individual are measured against the inputs from the mesosystem, a balance is sought that is perceived as satisfactory between stimuli, thoughts, and conduct (Tudge et al., 2009). In this regard, it is no coincidence that literature increasingly advocates soft approaches to countering radicalization, based on a pedagogical rather than a repressive strategy. The pedagogical approach works by changing the individuals' mind-set by modifying (or attempting to modify) their values, attitudes, and beliefs. Much of the existing work comes from researchers who have studied individuals in prison, almost always identifying young males with a limited education as the segment most at risk of radicalization. The "Prevent" programme in the United Kingdom targets a multidimensional series of areas (employment, housing, retraining, sport, etc.) requiring non-conventional partnerships within civil society (the police force, sports clubs, local businesses, not-for-profit organizations). With reference to this programme, Douglas Weeks (2018) has reported almost 800 successful interventions since 2007.

One of the most effective deradicalization programmes (at least according to Jessica Stern, 2010) was implemented in Saudi Arabia: more than 4000 participants completed the programme between 2004 and 2010. Great attention was paid to soft skills in this case too: art therapy, sport, religious re-education, vocational training. That path was combined with the appropriate logistical support, including accommodation, transport and even relationship support groups. This was an extremely costly programme which also received some international criticism due to a supposed indulgence—also of a formal nature—towards those included in the programme, making it difficult to be exported.

Ad hoc programmes have also been created in Nigeria (Barkindo & Bryans, 2016), Somalia (Schumiki-Logan, 2017), Sri Lanka (Webber et al., 2018), which featured soft-skills of an essentially cultural and relational nature (systematically including sports);

the programmes were mainly aimed at combatting radicalization by counteracting the isolation of the individual and the cultural indoctrination stemming from the programme participants' original environment.

To some extent, all programmes appear to have resulted in good success rates in terms of the participants not relapsing, both back into the spiral of radicalization and towards violent behaviour in general. In developing or non-western countries, the programmes' achievements are inevitably conditioned by the effective possibility of systemically contrasting the material and cultural deprivation that is quite often to be found at the root of radicalization.

A somehow different reasoning should be applied to Western societies. In addition to the programme in the United Kingdom, an interesting approach has been tested in Vienna, Austria (*Not in God's Name*). Katharina Götsch (2017) writes that, paradoxically but not infrequently, sports centres can act as aggregators and disseminators of radicalized ideas if not properly monitored. For this reason, effective pedagogical strategies aimed at creating a counter-narrative should be introduced, to expose individuals at risk to positive social models that are in contrast to the tendency to adhere to violent ideologies and behaviour. The significant feature of this programme is the involvement of coaches and athletes who are supposed to act as social facilitators within the sports facilities where these at-risk individuals are most concentrated. The theoretical assumption is based on dialogue between peers. To a closer view, this same approach is used by Jihadist recruiters who deceive by deconstructing parts of what is real and reconstructing an imaginary situation supported by values – usually using religious symbols – that ostensibly deliver personal redemption through an action that will be remembered in the shared memory of the community. In this way the young extremist is led towards martyrdom (Stern, 2010).

An interesting, though aspecific, project is reported by Meek (2012). It is an initiative aimed at fostering the transition towards rehabilitation through team sports (rugby and football) carried out among English minors at the Portland Young Offender Institution (subsequently replicated in Ashfield). The rate of return to crime after release was very low in the boys who participated (18% at 18 months), particularly impressive in comparison with the overall data from the institution (48% at 12 months). In this case too, the process of re-imagining the self through sport was more than significant. Therefore, sport is no longer viewed as a superstructural, residual element, but as part of a key strategy in the construction of individual and group relationships.

Amin, Naseer and Abro (2018) focus on the significant problem of resources lack in developing countries like Pakistan. On the one hand, this turns into a huge shortage of sports facilities and equipment, making it difficult to promote the spread of organized sport; on the other hand, a large section of the poor, rural population must educate their children in the local madrassas, and they are thus exposed to indoctrination of a radicalizing nature which becomes difficult to counteract *ex-post*. As this is clearly a country with a very specific socio-political situation, the authors note that the role of sport in combating radicalization would inevitably be considered in the long term. However, they hope that together with approaches defined as "kinetic", community and infrastructural development programmes will also be put in place. These meas-

ures would involve lower costs and, if adequately implemented, would yield an almost certain return in terms of a reduction in the number of individuals adhering to the Jihad.

Lastly, we wish to mention a singular programme which was developed by USAID (2017) in some areas of Africa (Kenya, Somalia, and East Africa in general). In this case too, as well as capacity building techniques for young people in social (relational) and economic terms, together with community repositioning, the project focuses on and provides robust support for the reintroduction of art, culture and sports in territories formerly controlled by Al-Shabaab extremists who had banned such activities, often destroying the relative infrastructure.

The Somali Olympic Committee was reinstated and provided with strong support by USAID. A significant number of micro-facilities for sport were rebuilt to reach a user base of over 50 000 young people in these areas, who were potentially at risk of being induced into extremism. The organization also calculated the satellite activities in terms of employment, estimating the creation of 13 000 temporary and other job opportunities. Evidently this organization has unparalleled spending power and logistic capacities compared to others. The limits of the project lie in its real dimensions, as Khalil and Zeuthen (2014) note, which do not make it possible to conduct timely checks on the outcomes in terms of actual experimental evaluation of the results.

5. THE INTERVENTION STRATEGIES

5.1. COUNTERACTION MEASURES

Two main models emerge from the studies presented so far for the purpose of countering radicalization (Ekholm 2013). We could define the first as *avoidance*, the second as (social) *change*.

The first model essentially works at the level of the mesosystem, occupying, so to speak, the available time that concerned people must saturate the symbolic-communicative level with the exosystem. A classic example is represented by sports academies, in which people are constantly occupied and they socialize within a framework of values that clearly compete with those they are exposed to in the radicalizing culture. It is a costly approach in terms of human resources, which require appropriate training, and economic resources, and it is often difficult to replicate on a large scale in the vast territories where the Jihadist cultures develop. The distinguishing feature of this approach is that it also makes use of non-traditional partnerships: those with police forces, citizens' associations, associations for social advancement and local entrepreneurs. This approach would be more effective in the context of political radicalization in the West, where it is possible to involve local authorities and to count on a more robust social structure in terms of skills, in comparison with in-developing-countries.

The second model (social change) is the most widespread. It ideally includes a mechanism that acts inwardly from the exosystem, working to modify the base elements of the microsystem (the emotional system, the cognitive system, and the biology itself). It also includes a series of actions that can be carried out at community and cultural level (locally above all) to modify the consistencies of the reality that the mesosystem

sends to the microsystem as input. Essentially, the model acts on the same function as the relationship between the person and the environment, ideally modifying the previously indicated function [Dt=f(t-p) (PE) (t-p)] in a sequential manner, by acting on the time differentials.

It is precisely the temporal differential that distinguishes this family of approaches from the previous ones, while also making it less measurable in terms of the outcomes.

In less formal terms, some operational indications can be provided in relation to the two models contemplated herein. We can consider formal resource sets; informal resource sets and pedagogical and relational skills sets.

In the avoidance model, the set of formal resources can be divided into material resources and human resources. Material resources refer to the need to create the infrastructure, however minimal, that would enable sport to be practised on an ongoing basis. One of the successes of USAID in the Horn of Africa consisted in reinstating a women's basketball league by means of installing purpose-built technical areas, making them safe, and purchasing the equipment required to play. Human resources, as mentioned, are indispensable if the continuity of sports activities is to be guaranteed. Equally important are the necessary technical and interpersonal skills. In this regard, the level of organization in the national sports federations is critical, as well as the local Olympic Committee.

In the avoidance model, informal resources essentially centre on community consensus and, above all, on the ability of the peer group to transmit a shared message. The peer group always straddles the exosystem and the microsystem, at different levels and with different functions.

Lastly, the set of pedagogical skills relates to the need for the adult facilitators to be capable of creating a connection, making the exosystem—that of the "indirect" setting—communicate with the more internal systems. This can be translated into knowledge of the local culture, knowledge of value systems of the young people involved, knowledge of the underlying principles of a sport.

In the *social change* model, *material* resources have a direct impact on the individual's exosystem, seeking to modify it, as already illustrated. People's work, the level of democracy in a given community, the gender gap are all elements that can and must be at the basis of an action that sport can certainly contribute to but cannot consolidate unaided. The *human* resources required in this case are actual social facilitators rather than sports technicians tout court. The required skills include community organization and capacity building as well as social and group psychology.

The creation of consensus around sports facilities is part of the informal resources set, together with the ability to involve local people in the creation of the sports activity(s), the capacity to convince groups of young people to join in, the possibility to change an ongoing communicative activity. As in the case of *avoidance* models, informal resources are essentially based on systemic trust and dialogue, like Habermas' *Diskurs*, in a nutshell.

Lastly, there is pedagogical skills set for the *change* models. Also in this case, some elements which naturally form part of social action can be found. Their aim is to foster change in general through the development of social bonds, the improvement of

individuals' autonomy and the transformation of territorial dynamics by means of adequate models of participation, among other measures. In this case, the skills are more clearly placed at the exosystem level, being transformational with respect to the inputs received/supplied by the macrosystem.

5.2. THE ISSUE OF EXTERNAL EVIDENCE: WHAT ARE THE SIGNS OF EXTREMISM?

As Bronfenbrenner suggests, it is the outer belt, that is the macrosystem, which mainly represents the vector for the values and ideologies pushing an individual towards radicalization. This process begins in childhood and tends to explode during the adolescence phase, which is when individuals are required to seek an adult relational dimension, through the negation of what they have been (family, community, etc.) and what they aim to become. This relational dimension is made of values and signs. The latter is paradoxically easier to adopt and demonstrate adequately (from the group point of view) the individual's maturation-conversion to the outside world (Blos, 1979).

The gap between value (as an inner element) and sign (as an outer element) can be conspicuous and this can cause uncertainty regarding the self, which may be profound. Adopting the dress code of "extreme" Muslims (long beard, very short hair, traditional dress etc.) in the case of Jihadists, can be an indication, but it is necessary to supplement the observation system with something else. From the point of view of individual behaviour, the most obvious aspect would be an intensification of overt religious observance: prayers, dietary requirements, extremes surrounding the concept of permitted (halal) and forbidden (harem), such as, for example, simply entering places where female sports activities are practiced.

A noticeable dependence on the opinion of a leader, a charismatic guide, can often be observed in young adolescents who, especially in Western contexts, frequently find themselves confused about what it is, and what it is not, possible to do (Cole et al., 2010).

Another indication is the emergence of tensions within the family setting, because the individuals in question tend to demand that the other members of the group conform to their lifestyle. This aspect is particularly noticeable in the radicalization of young adults or quasi-adults, less so in that of adolescents and pre-adolescents, where at family level we can often observe a reinforcement of the values underlying the change that is taking place.

Adolescents can also reveal another key sign, and this is social polarisation together with a significant decrease in existing bonds: the adolescent or young adult will tend to adopt a tripartite approach to the world, dividing people into brothers (good Muslims), hypocrites (non-observant Muslims) and *kafirs*, non-believers, meaning all those who are not Muslims. In some cases, this tripartition is so pronounced that a kind of personal purification is required even after simply having contact with a *kafir*.

Lastly, there is the specific trait of (self) guidance and instruction by means of selective exposure to certain specific media sources rather than to general ones, which is often associated with a marked interest in the history of Islam and to use of naïve but nevertheless explicit political and religious rhetoric.

In many cases, from the point of view of sport, activities are to be understood in terms of more or less direct training and preparation for potential violent offence (-defence). In this regard, contact sports, as noted by several authors (Aiello, Puigvert, & Schubert, 2018; Richardson, Cameron, & Berlouis, 2017; Götsch, 2017), can convey socialization models akin to the content expected by Jihadists or other extremists.

In a final analysis, the role that adults (coaches, facilitators, chaperones, tutors) have in observing young people who practice sports is essential, as they can assess the adolescent or young adult in context, correcting and addressing trends linked to their growth which, in a given framework, could have dramatic consequences if not adequately countered.

6. CONCLUSIONS

This paper has highlighted the point that, around the world, programmes developed for the purpose of prevention, reintegration, or rehabilitation of people at risk of violent radicalization are fairly widespread. In general, most of them have long-term objectives that consist in modifying some of the socialization systems identified by Bronfenbrenner. Emphasis was placed on the role of adults in programmes which target young people—coaches, chaperones, tutors, managers of sporting services, social facilitators—who represent a vital compass to steer them. It has been observed that socialization with a view to radicalization of the individual, exploits' material deprivation, a lack of schooling, social isolation as well as community-oriented and spiritual ambitions.

Strategies to struggle this phenomenon will therefore adopt a step-by-step approach, based on the pedagogical model espoused herein. This approach involves the adoption of role-models (avoidance; change) and development of environmental opportunities, associated with the transfer of knowledge and procedures, thus enabling full exploitation of these opportunities.

Participation in prevention/rehabilitation projects in which sport consists in the involvement of team activities, ends in an increase in self-control and personal discipline, as some works here represented have stressed, reducing the possibility of conflict, including violent action, due to external influence and control (Johns, Grossman, & McDonald, 2014).

The possibility of generating bridging social capital refers to the design of new horizontal societal networks with relative standards of relationality for the community.

As we have seen throughout the paper, there are two key dimensions: one is rather more *intangible* and concerns the norms that regulate social coexistence (trust, solidarity, tolerance, civic engagement, etc.), the other is more *substantial* and considers aspects such as associations or societal networks and their respective configurations. The action of reducing or removing barriers to participation in sport by breaking down cultural stereotypes and building models for sustainable relations within communities are just some of the possible tools that can be employed to counter social isolation (the West) and/or cultural and material isolation (the developing countries) where the seed of radicalization is most likely to take root.

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