

# Second-Generation Muslim Youth Between Perception and Change: A Case Study on the Prevention of Radicalization

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The following article presents the results of a research-action and an online communication campaign on the prevention of radicalization of second-generation young Italian Muslims as a part of a project called “Oltre” (the Italian acronym means “Beyond”) financed by European Union. After a short presentation of the four steps of the prevention communication model PKIC, a deepening on the radicalization factors, and a focus on the research-action methodology, the results of the research on some fundamental issues like the relationship with family and the relation with media and social media of the young interviewees, are shown. Finally, in the last part of the article, the interventions carried out by the second-generation young moderators of the social media campaign carried on Facebook and Instagram, are presented in the framework of the online communication campaign born out of the research-action to discuss if and how a prevention process and consequent change with regard to the radicalization factors took place.

*Keywords:* prevention, radicalization, second generation, identity, family, media, social media

## The PKIC Model in the Prevention of Radicalization

Preventing the radicalization of second-generation Muslim youth is not a simple nor a foregone conclusion. The reasons are manifold but fundamentally can be traced back to the PKIC scheme on the communication of social problems summarized in Figure 1.

The Oltre project, which will be described in the next paragraph, has adopted the model of communication of social problems (Volterrani, 2019) as a guide for the structuring of preventive communication processes.

In summary, the model consists of four phases, each of which problematizes the communication processes by placing them in relation to the specific social, perceptual, cultural, and economic situations of those involved. The perception of a certain theme by an individual is the first necessary step. However, finding that particular communication process which will “turn on” my eye and allow me to perceive is not easy. In fact, we tend to leave in the background what we are not interested in. But on what basis do we build our selection? There are

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many aspects that intervene in selective perception (Bentivegna & Boccia Artieri, 2019) and which are inherent to our occupation, our daily lifestyle, our aspirations, our dreams and desires, our problems and opportunities, our relationships, the groups and associations to which we belong, the places and spaces of our lives, and our previous experiences. From this point of view, cultural and social inequalities are extremely relevant to the differentiation of perceptions, to which must also be added digital inequalities that go beyond the purely technical digital divide, thereby becoming a cultural digital divide that does not allow full accessibility to the completeness of perception (Bentivegna, 2009).

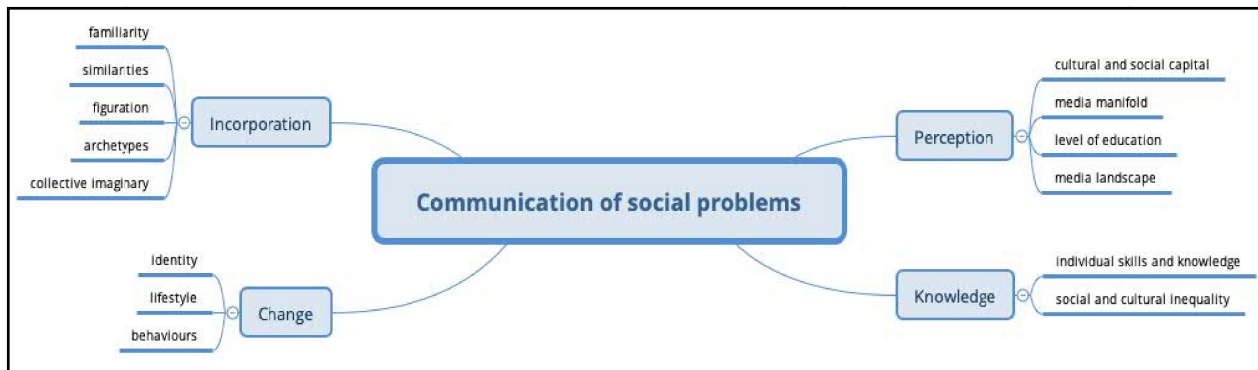


Figure 1. PKIC model of communication of social problems (Volterrani, 2019, p. 100).

These two aspects in our project were tackled by adopting the research-action scheme where second-generation young people were involved in the first person to reflect on themselves, on the perception that others might have had of them, on their knowledge about radicalization, and, more generally, on the identity they bring into play in their daily lives. Furthermore, we have highlighted that the role of the media becomes central in the construction of framing and agenda-setting processes with respect to social issues and problems as well as identity problems.

Change in the perception and knowledge of the social imaginary is in most situations a long process. So, are perceptions and knowledge difficult to change? If we want constant changes over time and lasting effects, we cannot ignore that the processes must involve a large number of people and, above all, that they must take into account the individual and social characteristics of each of these people. The processes of interpretation and selection of media content are very complex (Couldry, Livingstone, & Markham, 2010). This aspect is closely linked to the second phase of the change process, knowledge. The transition from the perception of the relevance of the topic to knowledge is, first of all, a growth of awareness of the need to deepen, individually or collectively, a certain aspect in which I am interested. The implications with respect to knowledge are even more profound if we consider that the production of knowledge today no longer passes only through face-to-face interactions, but also through digital platforms and, more generally, through data processing (Couldry & Hepp, 2017, pp. 122-142). The consequence as far as the communication of social problems is concerned is particularly important because the data processing is also accompanied by a profound acceleration of social life (Rosa, 2013) and by a superficiality and speed in the circumstantial interpretation of what surrounds us. Such a profound change cannot be avoided if we want to try to develop a more in-depth reasoning on the possibilities of change. Knowledge alone, however, is not enough to induce possible action. The next step is incorporation. Some scholars of cognitive psychology (Hofstadter & Sander, 2011) have highlighted the way in which human beings expand their wealth of concepts and terms into their world of thought. The tool we

use to classify the external world is analogy, i.e. the reading of the external environment with the categories that already exist in our minds and in our daily life experience.

The incorporation of new concepts and new experiences happens through comparisons with what we have in our heads and what we think comes closest to the new concept we are facing. It is clear that absolute novelty will have more difficulty being incorporated than new minor variations or simple variations on already known themes and problems. We tend to consolidate what we know well and be wary of what we do not know. The archetype of fear of the new and the different is rooted in our collective imagination and is an integral part of human history (Durand, 1960). This does not mean that we do not have the cultural means to overcome this archetype, but, returning to reflections on cultural inequalities, it is unthinkable that we all possess the same means. Moreover, it is fundamental to stress that the social construction of today's reality, deeply influenced by the media, also changes the processes of incorporation. Couldry and Hepp (2017) used the concept of figuration by Norbert Elias (1978) to describe the forms that interdependence and interactions between individuals take as meaning and interpretation are produced in a context of deep digitization and mediatization. Incorporation, therefore, also changes through analogies that are produced individually and collectively within figurations. In the case of social problems, this aspect is particularly relevant because the themes are deeply immersed in the figurations constructed both in digital media and in everyday social life, with continuous feedback of reciprocity full of contradictions and different interpretations that make the shared incorporation of concepts even more difficult.

The fourth and final phase is the action of change which can be linked to the communication of social problems and, therefore, is complex and articulated. If we add to this the difficulties of interpersonal and media communication processes that are now an integral part of public studies (Murray, Schröder, Drotner, & Kline, 2003), we understand that the challenge is difficult but very attractive for those who care about improving the quality of life in our communities.

Within the communication campaign, we tried to follow the various steps of the model, starting with the perception and knowledge of second-generation youth and radicalization processes through in-depth interviews and then continuing, at the level of incorporation, by experimenting with the analogy between old and new concepts in the discussion with young moderators of second-generation youth and not on the media productions for Facebook and Instagram accounts.

### **Preventing Radicalization Engaging Second-Generation Migrants in Italy: The Field Research**

The European Union developed a holistic Counter-Terrorism Strategy, adopted by the European Council in 2005, in order to combat terrorism. Following the Charlie Hebdo attack, the "European Agenda on Security" (European Commission, 2015) aimed to define and criminalize terrorist offenses, prevent radicalization and the spreading of terrorist propaganda, and to cut off terrorists' access to the means to perpetrate attacks. "The jihadist actions carried out in Europe in 2019, slightly increasing compared to the previous 12 months, confirm the insidiousness of a threat that remains predominantly endogenous. [...] Also significant is the diversification of individual routes"<sup>1</sup>. Since 2009, the Italian intelligence community has been reporting to Parliament the presence in the country of a "new generation" of Islamic extremists not belonging to a structured organization,

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<sup>1</sup> 2019 Annual Report to the Italian Parliament (Relazione sulla politica dell'informazione per la sicurezza), p. 81, <https://www.sicurezza.gov.it/sisr.nsf/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/RELAZIONE-ANNUALE-2019-4.pdf>.

but noting the propaganda of Italian-speaking subjects and Italians converted to radical Islamism who interacted in online micro-communities<sup>2</sup>. The second-generation Muslim youth and young Europeans who have converted to Islam are considered categories that are potentially vulnerable to radicalization; their condition, in fact, would make them more sensitive to the attractiveness of extremist propaganda. The delegates attending the International Conference “BRIDG & tackling violent radicalization” (Rome 2019) suggested: (1) to use a gender perspective in the fight against violent extremism in relation to the role that women can play in de-radicalization; (2) to fight against online radicalization “where the network represents at the same time an instrument of propaganda and recruitment as well as an opportunity for [...] the promotion of alternative narratives”; and (3) to adopt a multi-agency preventive approach “aimed at reducing risks and promoting disengagement pathways”<sup>3</sup>. The scientific literature attempts to highlight some of the complex factors that can gradually contribute to a path of radicalization at the individual level, not necessarily as violent forms of action, but as a general tendency to welcome and spread radical ideas of change. In some cases, radicalization leads to violent extremism and terrorism, and this phenomenon concerns many European States. The European Commission has driven action to counter radicalization, both off- and on-line, and it has also founded the Radicalization Awareness Network (RAN), which brings together practitioners from all Member States to develop practices and skills to address violent extremism<sup>4</sup>.

In this context, the European project Oltre aims to prevent the radicalization of the second generation of migrants in Italy and intends to intervene with an interdisciplinary approach to mobilize CSOs (civil society organizations), academia, companies, and direct target groups in a co-designed communication campaign. In particular, the Oltre project aims to reduce the risk of radicalization of second-generation Muslim youth who were born (or raised from an early age) and live in Italy through empowerment and online communication actions. The actions have been built to propose alternative counter-narratives to those coming from the radicalized Islamic world and to the narratives used by Islamic terrorists.

In order to achieve this general objective, three specific objectives have been identified:

(1) To prevent second-generation young Muslims at risk of marginalization/social exclusion (the primary target group of the campaign) from engaging in violent and radical fundamentalist movements; (2) raise awareness of the risks of radicalization among young second-generation Muslims involved in the co-design of the online communication campaign; and (3) reduce misunderstandings, ignorance, existing stereotypes, and stigmatizing representations of Islam and its followers among young Italians.

Empirical studies show that participative collaborative campaigns involving mixed target groups (young people with Muslim and non-Muslim backgrounds, second-/“new” generations) allow for the limiting of stigmatization and related backlashes. The action considers the relational context-specific nature of the radicalization of Muslim youth, adopting multi-situated approaches, and co-designed and participatory practices.

Preliminary research and analysis aimed at clarifying the conceptual references, defining the state-of-the-art findings, and identifying the toolset are to be used in the online communication campaign.

The ex-ante classification of the project’s target groups was made as follows:

(1) Direct target group: second-generation Muslim youth.

<sup>2</sup> 2009 Annual Report to the Italian Parliament (Relazione sulla politica dell’informazione per la sicurezza), p. 19.

<sup>3</sup> 2019 Annual Report to the Italian Parliament, p. 82.

<sup>4</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/counter-terrorism\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/counter-terrorism_en).

(2) Secondary target group: youth (18-30 years old) living in urban areas in Italy.

The engagement of the primary and secondary target groups in the participatory processes to co-design the online communication campaign shifted their role from being “users” to “prosumers” of content focusing on issues, practices, and messages that are tailor-made and not mass-produced, deconstructing stereotypes and misrepresentations of Islam and its followers. Encouraging young people to share their opinions is the best way to understand how they could radicalize as well as how to avoid it.

We started our field research with non-standard action research<sup>5</sup>. We collected the life stories of 42 second-generation youth (18-30 years old), carrying out in-depth interviews in seven Italian towns (located from the north to the south of the peninsula and on the islands of Sicily and Sardinia: Turin, Milan, Padua, Bologna, Rome, Palermo, and Cagliari)<sup>6</sup>. We also interviewed several privileged testimonies. We then organized theatre performances (using the method of the Theatre of the Oppressed) and communication workshops with second-generation young people and other youth, collecting narratives, representations, stories, and emotions from their lives and representations of the radicalization risk and protection factors. These heterogeneous materials were the corpus for imagining a social communication campaign to prevent radicalization, engaging the research participants as key players of communication campaigns, co-designing the counter-narrative contents and their viral dissemination on the social network in order to promote cultural change (see Figure 1). In order to accomplish this task, we selected 20 moderators from among young second-generation Italians and Italian peers who produced the content (images, posts, and discussions) of the online communication campaign on the social networks (Facebook and Instagram). Furthermore, we planned a model for impact evaluation involving multiple sources (e.g. the direct target groups, other beneficiaries, stakeholders, web analytics, feeds, etc.), using indicators and indexes that could be transferred to other projects and different contexts in Europe and beyond.

The phase of the action research began by creating a topic guide for the interviews. We made a reworking of the kaleidoscopic overview of risk, protective, and promotive factors (see Figure 2) (Sieckelinck & Gielen, 2018; Ranstorp, 2016), highlighting the intersection between the online and offline dimensions of everyday relationships.

Sieckelinck and Gielen in order to describe it:

The core of the figure (in grey) is formed by the individual. Personal risk factors are victimhood, anger, and feelings of humiliation. The individual is surrounded by the remaining risk factors, as described by Ranstorp (2016): social factors (exclusion, social immobility, crime), political factors (foreign policy, islamophobia), ideological/religious factors, cultural/identity factors (lack of belonging, identity crisis, marginalisation), recruiting factors, group dynamics. In the intermediate layer of factors, the main protective factors are represented. These factors maintain a distance between the individual and deviancy or harm. Each one mitigates risk and promotes individual resilience in relation to a particular risk factor. (Sieckelinck & Gielen, 2018, pp. 5-6)

<sup>5</sup> “Action research is a method used for improving practice. It involves action, evaluation, and critical reflection and—based on the evidence gathered—changes in practice are then implemented. Action research is participative and collaborative; it is undertaken by individuals with a common purpose. It is situation-based and context specific. It develops reflection based on interpretations made by the participants. Knowledge is created through action and at the point of application. Action research can involve problem solving, if the solution to the problem leads to the improvement of practice. In action research findings will emerge as action develops, but these are not conclusive or absolute.” (Koshy, 2010, p. 1).

<sup>6</sup> The selection criteria used to identify the participants took into account: (a) territorial criteria (choosing seven cities located throughout the country and the islands); and (b) a gender balance (selecting young men and women in each city). We interviewed young people whose families came from different predominantly Muslim countries, along with young people born to mixed couples. In the workshops, the same selection criteria were adopted, extending the participation also to Italian peers and young foreigners temporarily in Italy.

For instance, they suggest to protect against apocalyptic ideology offering religious knowledge or to protect against the pull of the extremist milieu, providing a warm and/or supported family environment. Finally, the third layer (in the external side of the circle, see Figure 2) illustrates the key factors for promoting societal resilience: care, inclusion, dialogue, education, safety, and vigilance.

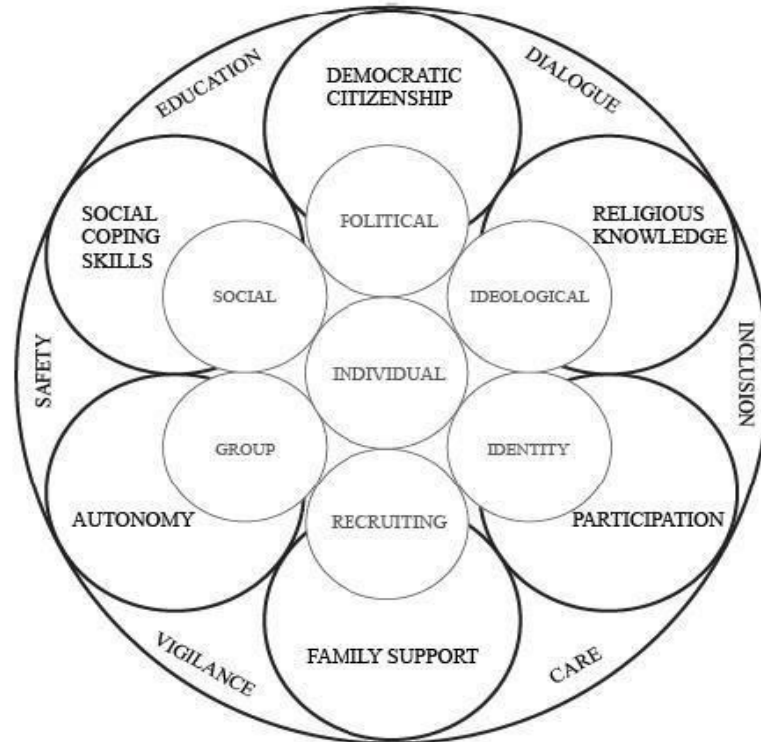


Figure 2. A kaleidoscope of risk, protective, and promotive factors. Source: Sieckelincx & Gielen, 2018, p. 5.

The topic guide has 15 analytical dimensions:

- (1) Identity;
- (2) Family;
- (3) Education;
- (4) Ideology;
- (5) Relationship with peers;
- (6) Off-line networks and Internet usage;
- (7) Relationship with society;
- (8) Relationship with politics;
- (9) Participation;
- (10) Citizenship;
- (11) Religious knowledge;
- (12) Autonomy/capacity for conflict resolution/coping skills;
- (13) Dialogue;
- (14) Inclusion;
- (15) Control and security.

These 15 dimensions were expanded upon in further solicitations in the interviews in order to reflect on the dominant representations of those potentially vulnerable to the issue, on the stereotypes present in common sense, the stigmatization of the community, and those positive elements of one's own group to be used as a keystone for constructing new narratives in communication campaigns and programs of prevention and intervention against radicalization. On this juncture, for example, the scientific literature considers, on the one hand, hedonistic behavior, such as the use of alcohol/drugs or sexual behavior a risk, which increases vulnerability; on the other hand, guilt which thereby increases vulnerability to the influence of violent extremists and their ideology. The isolation of the peer group and the use of hate rhetoric are potential elements of risk of radicalization. The family dimension includes socio-economic vulnerability vs. a good or high economic status, isolation from family vs. family cohesion, agreement vs. conflict, roles, gender differences, etc. The relationship with society dimension (and possible reactions) includes stimuli on opportunities for social mobility, and the perception of segregation in deprived and marginal social contexts, considered risk factors in the literature. The political perspective includes elements related to policy information and their assessment of specific policy and policy actors; however, we also investigated political participation, observing different formal and informal ways of participation and democratic citizenship. The religious knowledge dimension observes the faith and practices directly implemented or present in their family or community. Cultural and religious isolation is a risk factor. Low tolerance for other communities and for different religious beliefs, separate education, and isolation in ethnic or religious groups are also considered risk factors. Respondents were free to dwell on the topics and other themes relevant to them.

In the following paragraphs (see par. #3, #4, #5), we show some results of the analysis of the interviews. In particular, we focus on the perception of the identity of the second-generation people interviewed and on their media consumption practices.

We have consider these elements because they have been key factors in understanding our target and their vulnerable points, and they have been useful as starting points for our moderators to create a counter-narrative communication campaign (see par. #6).

### **Second-Generation Youth: Identity and Family**

The term "second generation" is the most used in international literature and highlights the differences between those who arrived in a new country, "first generation", and children of migrants who were largely socialized in destination societies, generally including those who migrated as infants, toddlers, and young children. The use of the term also allows a distinction to be made with the following generations, such as the "third generation", which are already present in Italy. However, the term is complicated because it suggests different situations, e.g. minors born in Italy, minors born in the parents' countries, unaccompanied foreign minors, etc. For this reason, researchers use "persons with a migration background". In this case, too, there is a definition problem. In fact, it is possible that people categorized under this label did not experience migration because they were born in the new country. Other issues are connected to the expectations between immigrant children and their parents.

The second-generation youth attend schools in the new country, developing interests, desires, and lifestyles similar to their native peers. There is the risk of moving away from the modalities of subalternate integration experienced by their parents. Failure to integrate could lead to forms of social exclusion and dissonance between cultural socialization and socio-economic exclusion, but also discrimination becoming a student or being employed.

In Italy, another issue for second-generation youth is the acquisition of citizenship and the recognition of political rights. Here, the term “second-generation” is used with a broad meaning, including both young people of immigrant origin born in the new country to at least one foreign parent and young people born in another country regardless of their age at migration. The expression used indicates “an entirety of second generations” (Demarie & Molina, 2004), young people facing a complex process of socialization, even without having experienced migration, and the youth experiencing conflicts with their parents’ generation or difficulties with peers.

Part of the research was carried out by asking the respondents what they thought of some topics; in other cases, sensitive topics emerged independently from the story.

The following are some results of the research connected to identity and family.

In Italy, the last few years have been marked by a substantial increase in the number of second-generation youth. Sayad (2002, p. 382) described the children of migrants as a sort of hybrid, “immigrants” who have not emigrated from anywhere. Some are Italian citizens by birth, others have acquired citizenship, and yet others only possess a residence permit.

The same term, “hybrid”, was used by some interviewees during the meeting.

Yes, both (cultures) Morocco...eh...I can say a *hybrid* because ... if you asked me what is my favorite dish, I would say a nice plate of lasagna (Italian food), definitely, so it’s not a Moroccan dish. If you asked me what is my favorite football team, I’d tell you I am a Juventus fan ... If you asked me what is my ideal country or where would I like to live, I’d tell you Italy ... but if you asked me which group of friends am I going to go out with, I’d tell you Moroccans instead of Italians. I am a *hybrid*... (Turin, 06, m)<sup>7</sup>

All the young people were born or raised in Italy, speak multiple languages, and maintain relationships with relatives from their countries of origin. School is important and education is considered an element that can facilitate social mobility. The respondents are almost all engaged in employment activities to support their studies, in social activities, and in projects supporting migrants or spreading intercultural dialogue.

Among the interviewed, it is possible to identify three main positions:

- (1) Those who define themselves as open and not bound to the country in which they live;
- (2) Those who feel Italian and maintain relations with their parents’ country of origin;
- (3) Those who consider advantage to be tied to both cultures.

When we talked about identity, the interviewed considered the country of origin. Identity and a sense of belonging were born from interactions within the context and from social and cultural interconnections. However, identifying the boundaries of a culture is very difficult as is identifying with a group. Young people move through practices, different traditions, and search for a balance between self-assertion and conforming to the group in order to be accepted.

I feel like a *foreigner* in my home country! But lately I feel like a *foreigner* in my country... (Cagliari, 01, f)

Culture is the complex theme because it presupposes a clear definition of culture and a knowledge of both cultures. Which of the two cultures? Most of young people interviewed feel Italian because they grew up in Italy and because they attended Italian schools.

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<sup>7</sup> To protect the privacy of the interviewees, we will omit their names and we will refer to each interview indicating the city of origin of the interviewees, a number that identifies them, and their gender.



The processes of identity construction of the second-generation youth are multiform and complex. Multi-membership and the right to autonomy of choices are the main features demanded by the respondents.

In general, second-generation young people feel Italian, but they have a clear perception of the double culture (they often describe it as a situation in which they are 50% Italian and 50% Moroccan/Tunisian/Malay/etc.).

Guys like me are guys who all grew up ... they grew up with other Italian guys. So I thought their identity was like that of my parents who are Somalis. Instead I am both Somali and Italian. I learned Islam from them, so in the beginning it was more of a cultural thing for me. Islam is what I am...because it was given to me by my parents. (Milan, 06, m)

Family, friendship, respect, and honesty are values referring to the relational sphere. Values are perceived as central elements in order to be able to feel a sense of belonging to a culture; however, in the case of migrants, the values can be different, such as the value of gender. For example, the choice to wear the veil or not is experienced individually and differently. For some, the choice to wear the veil is linked to individual choice; for others, to a family female tradition; and yet for others, it is considered a decision taken to claim the group. The veil is a religious, cultural, and political symbol. It makes the young women visible and manifests their “other belonging”. The choice to wear the veil is always autonomous or personal, but it is a practice that is constantly subjected to judgments and comments.

Ever since I put on the veil, I have always received looks or jokes. Hmm ... a joke about religion or “ISIS has arrived” or maybe having “Allah Akbar” shouted at me, just because I’m passing... but the bad thing was hearing it from people our age. They should have a greater open mind ... so (laughs), however, many ladies smiled or complimented me, so it was also a bit strange in the end to notice this difference. (Bologna, 01, f)

The veil is an expression of identity. The veil becomes a medium to establish self. But the decision to wear the veil clashes with daily discrimination. In different contexts, this generates suspicion.

From what I remember there has always been the funny guy, “Do you have hair under there? Are you bald? Do you shower with a veil? When you make love, do you do it with a veil?” “Don’t you feel hot?” people ask out of curiosity, and so on... (Bologna, 06, f)

Another point for interviewees is “discrimination”, which is linked to stereotypes fueled by the language of the media and which contributes to reinforcing negative perceptions of the immigrant and the foreigner.

The young people interviewed highlighted the topic of their discrimination together with episodes of marginalization and stereotyping related to religion and gender.

Many respondents reported traumatic experiences linked to a school context:

- Racist schoolmates and teachers;
- Jokes about their name;
- Strong verbal offenses;
- Repeated bullying, such as having trousers pulled down;
- Indirect jokes about foreigners.

A Muslim girl also has difficulty looking for work. When she has a veil ... If they see you with a veil, sometimes they just don’t hire you. (Cagliari, 01, f)

Discrimination is greater for those who do not have Italian citizenship. Citizenship is a complex matter in Italy because legislation depends on *ius sanguinis*. Furthermore, while discrimination is one of the risk factors

for radicalization processes, it is not the most important for the interviewed. From the analysis of the interviews, on the one hand, the suffering of the second-generation youth emerges because they feel observed in the street, in the disco, and on public transport or discriminated against at school or in the search for a job; whereas on the other, opposition to discrimination against foreigners is a constant action for young people.

Differences emerge with respect to the generation of parents because the second-generation youth are more integrated. However, the perception of the detachment between what they feel themselves to be and what society thinks of them remains.

I feel different from Italian boys because I have had two educations. I grew up in two different worlds, so I have something more than them. And so from that point of view I feel really different because I see things in one way and they don't! (Padua, 01, m)

Another aspect is the relationship to the family. The family remains the fundamental value to be preserved. In our interviews, the parenting models are mainly of two types: the first category includes parents defined as understanding; the second, parents who are defined as authoritarian. All family practices are negotiated continuously; however, the family remains the main support for interviewees. While second-generation young people can have multiple cultural heritages that derive from different socialization agencies, it is clear that the parents are responsible for the transmission (or non-transmission) of practices, customs, and belief systems.

I am both Somali and Italian. I learned Islam from my parents. In the beginning, Islam was more of a cultural thing for me. Now, Islam is what I am ... because it was given to me by my parents. (Milan, 06, m)

Young people are different from their parents because they have experienced greater contact with Italian society, but they are also different from their peers because they are in direct contact with the migratory experience.

The discontinuity with the first generation of migrants is often expressed through the interests, lifestyles, and desires of the second-generation youth, which are similar to those of their peers. Demarie and Molina (2004) reminded us that second-generation young people “will hardly consider the methods of subordinate integration experienced by parents to be acceptable”. An element that characterizes this concept is the specific search for identity which, while it is part of the delicate transition from the adolescent to the adult phase for each individual, has a higher complexity for second-generation young people. Many of these young people discover they are seen as different in various contexts and have to build their identity. The internal conflicts that characterize the adolescent phase take on multiple meanings for the second generation of young people. These discontinuities can be managed by every second-generation youth as part of a balanced growth path, but they can also feed crises and conflicts at the individual level (identity crisis), family (intergenerational conflicts), social and cultural (a radical reinterpretation of their own culture of origin), or religion.

In research, aspects related to inclusion in family networks were also analyzed. The network of compatriots is central to the first generation of migrants' integration into the arrival society, to their finding work and having support with their children. Instead, for the second generation, networks are a link to their parents' countries of origin and an opportunity to remember the culture of origin, but they do not perform the same functions. The networks of the second-generation youth are heterogeneous in age, economic condition, and origin. The networks include the networks built by their parents and the networks built in Italy.

Another focus is the relationship between the family of origin and radicalization. The literature on the phenomena of radicalization hesitates to link the extremism of ideas to the role of the family (as well as

determining the effectiveness of the involvement of families in the processes of de-radicalization) (Tumminelli, 2020).

It is easier for second-generation children, ..., most have a link with Islam and parents manage to say something, to make them understand something about their religion, and therefore, are protected by extremist thoughts that push radicalization. (Turin, 05, m)

The family can be a network of protection or risk (through the lens of traditional authoritarianism in parenting models, or through a forced isolation that prevents external relationships). The radicalization of young people can therefore be influenced by parental reactions. Sikkens, Sieckelinck, van San, and de Winter (2017),

focused on the reactions of parents when they were confronted with radicalization. They found that parents' reactions to extreme ideology often changed as their children became radical. At first, parents were pleased by their child's new or renewed interest in religion or politics; however, when they noticed their child's fanaticism, they would reject or ignore his or her beliefs. Also, parents' response to radicalization was sometimes different from what one would expect from their general parenting style. This is probably because parents do not know how to cope with a child's endorsement of extreme ideas or the creeping process of radicalization; thus, it seems that there is a degree of parental uncertainty about how to handle the (potential) radicalization of a child (Pels & De Ruyter, 2011; Slooman & Tillie, 2006; van San et al., 2010, 2013). (Sikkens, van San, Sieckelinck, & de Winter, 2018, p. 2277)

In the pilot study, Sikkens et al. identified four parental reactions to radicalization: reject, ignore, applaud, and discuss.

Parents who rejected their child's extremist ideals were unsupportive of his or her ideological position and tried to control it. Parents who ignored their child's ideology did not support their child in his or her beliefs nor did they impose limits on their child's behavior. Parents applaud in cases where the parent supported the child's extreme ideas and did not enforce any limits. Parents' reactions were scored as discuss when parents reacted in a supportive yet controlling way. (2018, pp. 2279-2280)

Fear is an instrument; feeding fear is a tool. So as long as there are messages of hate and the other is inferior or dangerous. This puts people in a bad light and they feel inferior, they feel marginalized, they feel like enemies, they create hatred in them, anger and this triggers many other mechanisms that can lead to radicalization. (Turin, 05, m)

### **Use of Social Media and Media Consumption of 2G**

The analysis of the interviews carried out in the first research phase of the Oltre project shows that second-generation young people (2G) in Italy share the same amount of media consumption as people of the same age but of Italian origin. The similarity of media consumption between Italian 2Gs and native Italian (people born in Italy from Italian parents) results in a sort of leveling within the social construction of taste (Bourdieu, 1983) which makes young people who belong to the two categories indistinct from one another. This cannot be considered as evidence of ongoing integration processes, but seems instead to be the result of homologation deriving from the invasive presence of contemporary cultural markets. In this regard, one of the interviewees declares:

Eventually Italians, second generation, first generation, even foreigners, frequent the same places, the same social networks, the same things. (Turin, 01, m)

As for accessibility, interviews show that the most frequently used device for Internet access is the smartphone, and that online platforms, deeply tangled with social structures, in the sense that they produce the

social structures in which we live, are the places where we tend to focus attention, relationships, and knowledge (Van Dijck, Poell, & De Waal, 2018).

Additionally, most of the interviewees declared that they used one or more social media platforms, especially Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, and WhatsApp. Interviews show that Twitter and Snapchat seem to be the least used social networks, while Instagram seems to be the most used, especially by females. The preference the interviewees expressed for Instagram is in line with the increase of active users on social networks at a national level (We are Social & Hootsuite, 2020), a trend that reveals a change in the panorama of the use of social networks by the younger generations. As for the activities carried out on social media, according to the interviewees' words, social platforms are used both for the publication of their own content and for consulting the content of others:

On Instagram I also publish my stories, there I publish many of my thoughts. (Milan, 01, f)

The similarity of media consumption between young Italians, second-generation and not, is also reflected in the choice of both music and TV series: only some of the interviewees said that they watch entertainment programs (cartoons, TV series, etc.) on standard television channels, whereas almost all of them stated using streaming platforms, mainly Netflix, to watch TV series and films. The respondents' statements about their favorite TV series are in line with national trends regarding the most popular series<sup>8</sup>:

I'm watching the series, the series that we all watch, "Prison Break", "Money Heist". (Turin, 03, f)

As for TV series in which the Islamic religion, and more generally Muslims, are represented conflicting opinions emerge. Some young people doubts about the representation that is shown in the TV series:

On Netflix I noticed that there is neither a film nor a TV series that treats Islam in a positive way [...] there is a film about this girl who falls in love with a Muslim boy, but then he has to abandon the relationship because he has to blow himself up, but what are we talking about? It is not so! (Padua, 03, f)

While others believe that some TV series describe 2Gs in a positive way, so much so that in watching them they can identify with the characters. In this regard, an interviewee declares to have been impressed in a positive sense by a female Muslim figure who is the protagonist of a TV series. According to what the interviewee says, this character is different from all the others as she decides not to deny her identity as a young Muslim for the love of a non-Muslim boy:

Usually, TV shows or even films tell of a veiled girl who takes off the veil because she wants to feel free. In this TV series it does not happen at all like this. There is a boy, not Muslim, Spanish, who falls in love with her and she [...] does not change for him [...] when I saw that character I said: "Ok, here I am". (Milan, 04, f)

In addition, we did not find any particular gender differences in 2G media consumption. A single differentiating element concerns the large number of female respondents who said they followed 2G influencers, often even with the veil. This interest in influencers did not emerge with male respondents. Let's examine testimony from a young person who is representative in this sense:

There are influencers that I follow, second-generation Italians. They are called "hijabists", girls who wear the veil, who are influencers [...] to give courage to the girls who wear the veil and who feel they are people who can be what they

<sup>8</sup> Statistics released by Netflix on December 30, 2019, and shared on Twitter Netflix Italia account: <https://twitter.com/NetflixIT/status/1211562944884072448/photo/1>.

want, they give courage. (Turin, 07, f)

Such choice seems to confirm what has already been said regarding the veil as an expression of identity and, consequently, an element of strong concern regarding non-social acceptance for the interviewees who refer to it: following influencers with the veil can provide 2G young women with models in whom they can recognize themselves.

### **Fake News, Discrimination and Representations**

A recurring theme that emerged in the interviews is that related to discrimination, so much so that some of the interviewees highlighted the problem of online discrimination, in particular towards migrants. The interviewees referred to different forms of discrimination, such as violent language, insults, and criticism among others.

I feel that there is a bit of racism. And I personally have never suffered racism, apart from some comments such as “Go back to your country”, things like that. (Rome, 02, m)

Some interviewees also said they felt inhibited in interactions with other users on social media, for fear of being attacked for their opinions on issues such as migration or political affairs in Middle Eastern countries:

On social media, maybe someone makes a comment or they talk about the atrocities that happen maybe in Libya, for example “Ah yes, you are with them... take them home”, understand? “Do-gooding person”. (Cagliari, 03, f)

The interviews also show that social media, in addition to being a source of entertainment, are also a widely used means of information. In this regard, two interviewees declare:

I inquire a little with Twitter. I follow both in Pakistan and here in Italy. (Bologna, 07, m)

Among the most searched topics online by many of the interviewees are food, sport, art, photography, make-up, books, cinema, and music. There is also a widespread practice of consulting online news directly from the applications of local, national, or international newspapers or press agencies, while declaring that they prefer news programs, since they consider them more genuine in regard to the news reliability. This is in line with recent international surveys relating to Italy (Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, 2020), which, in addition to confirming the widespread use of television to search for information, also highlight a growth in the use of social platforms for the same purpose.

It happens that maybe I read something on the Internet, a lot on Facebook, but I go there grounded, for the fake news stories! (Cagliari, 02, f)

I get more information on TV or on the news, even if there are the various Facebook and Instagram posts; however, since there is fake news and unreliable sites, I prefer to get informed from the newspaper or watching TV. (Cagliari, 06, m)

The issue of fake news seems to be considered relevant by the interviewees. In fact, many of them say they believe the spread of fake news is a real danger, which they have actually come across using social media:

I have been using Facebook much less for the last few months, because it is becoming a very manipulated medium [...] all the fake news that comes out [...] is no longer reliable now. (Bologna, 07, m)

The widespread feeling among young people is that, through fake news and media representations, further stereotypes and discriminating prejudices can increase, thus confirming some of the most recent analysis (Binotto, Bruno, & Lai, 2016). In fact, when interviewees, both young women and men, were asked to give

their impressions of how the media represented them, a widespread perception of discrimination emerged, along with a general opinion that the migration issue is exploited both in the political arena and in the transmission of information by the media themselves:

Racism is intensifying. [...] In my opinion also because of what is said in the newspapers, because of politics... (Cagliari, 02, f)

The interviewees also believe that these representations are sometimes connected to involuntary errors by the media, other times as a result of an explicit desire to convey certain messages through a discriminating narrative of the news that ends up amplifying social tensions:

It is distorted [...] not always unintentionally, obviously. But perhaps approximations are made that change their meaning and that then one interprets them incorrectly by force of things. (Bologna, 04, m)

There are many male and female interviewees who emphasize the highlighting of nationality of those who commit a crime in narratives, especially when dealing with people of foreign nationality. This too, according to the interviewees, does nothing but fuel a climate of hatred against foreigners. Below is a representative testimony of the above:

You read the newspaper, you say “Ah, Moroccan killed”, one day you read the newspaper and you see “Tunisian killed”, “A Pakistani did it”. So this hatred against Moroccans, Tunisians, Pakistanis, increases a little. When, on the other hand, you read “Father kills daughter”, they can be Italian, what the hell do they care? (Bologna, 05, f)

The word “hatred” proves to be very recurrent when respondents are asked to refer to the current political debate:

The hatred that is being created, that already exists and that is developing throughout Italy, even in the South, which has often been the object of hatred by today’s political giants. (Palermo, 02, m)

The relationship between politics, migration, and the media represents for interviewees a substrate that can trigger phenomena of discrimination, hatred, and real violence, even against 2Gs.

A large number of interviewees, both male and female, declare a general distrust towards Italian politicians, while also showing little interest in political affairs. This lack of interest is probably due to a series of factors, including, as stated by the interviewees themselves, the perception of the exploitation of the immigration theme in the national political debate:

The immigration issue is totally constructed. [...] before there was the South, now there are the Africans. (Bologna, 07, m)

According to the majority of the interviewees, the most relevant political issue in Italy, seen as the main issue addressed by the media, is that relating to immigration, which the interviewees perceive as a problem not adequately dealt with by the Italian government, in particular with regard to the question of *ius soli*, birthright citizenship, and to the management of migratory flows. However, it should be emphasized that the immigration question is defined by the interviewees as relevant in the sense of “very present in the media”, and not in the sense of a “concrete problem”. In fact, many say that in their opinion there are issues that deserve more attention in the political debate and in the media, and which are minimized instead:

Increase education, inform people of what Italy’s real problems are, not trivial problems “Ah, no immigrants!” Because if we want to see the real problems of Italy, there are so many. (Palermo, 06, m)

### **Everyday's Life Between On- and Off-line**

Although, as stated earlier, most of the interviewees do not believe that there are places or on-line contexts mainly frequented by 2Gs, some interviews show that there are virtual places, in particular Facebook groups or Instagram pages, which are made up mostly of 2Gs and have become points of reference for other young people:

For example, there is a page on Instagram, it is called the "Migrant Party". It hits you hard [...] They are second-generation young men and they can understand, it is a beautiful page. (Turin, 07, m)

While for some young people, online groups made up of 2Gs is a socializing tool, for others these groups are regarded as a suffocating space. Indeed, the 2G identity issue is undoubtedly a relevant topic. There are many interviewees who highlight that, even if they find themselves sharing the same culture of origin with the participants of these 2G groups, they sometimes do not feel perfectly at ease with them:

I no longer felt comfortable, I no longer felt myself in the midst of these people, they were people from my own culture, etc.; however, I felt different from them anyway. (Padua, 02, f)

This is probably due to the fact that the desire to affirm themselves seems, as stated previously, to be deeply connected to the awareness of having a mixed identity, which sometimes fails to recognize itself either in the culture of the country from which one originates or from which one's family originates, or in that of the country where one was born and grew up. As confirmation, an interviewee gives his definition of 2G:

In my opinion, the second-generation immigrant is a separate entity, in the sense that they do not belong... they belong a bit to one culture and belong a bit to another, but in reality they are also placed in the middle. (Cagliari, 04, m)

The perception of a "mixed identity" by some of the interviewees could provide a possible interpretation regarding the difficulty of feeling part of online groups that show a stronger attachment to one of the two cultures; therefore the creation of online aggregation spaces catering to 2G people seems to be perceived spaces in which not all 2Gs are able to recognize each other:

I see that there are groups on Facebook, groups of Tunisian guys, or groups of Tunisians born in Italy, I see that there are many members, but I, to tell the truth, I never signed up because I don't like being part of a group where I would feel uncomfortable. (Turin, 02, f)

### **An Observation on the Interviews: From Perception to Change**

As we have seen, the interviews clearly show that trying to define one's identity can sometimes be complex for 2G people, both for the way they perceive themselves and for the way they are perceived.

Moreover, the perception of the foreigner as "different", further accentuated by biased representations of current events, such as placing the emphasis on certain elements, e.g. the nationality or religion of those who commit crimes, can fuel discriminatory attitudes both towards foreigners and 2Gs, in those who listen to and watch the news. Non-biased accounts in the news media could therefore be an important element for promoting accurate knowledge of both the migratory phenomena and the reality of the 2Gs, thus allowing for the incorporation of these differences and, hopefully, a change in the collective imagination on these issues.

### **Between Incorporation and Change: The Imaginary Production of the Moderators of the Campaign**

In the model for the communication of social problems, perception and knowledge have, as we have seen, a rather high articulation and complexity of analysis. When we face the node of incorporation and the possible change of attitudes and behaviors, the complexity increases because it becomes difficult both to measure and, above all, to identify the moments of a potential turning point. In spite of this, we have identified the process of building the content of the campaign as one of the moments where the incorporation process potentially started, which does not mean unconditional acceptance.

During the communication campaign, the group of moderators, consisting of 20 young people, second-generation and non-second-generation, produced about 100 posts accompanied by images, videos, and comments, the result of discussions and comparisons between couples of mixed pairs (one second-generation and one non-). All the productions were published on Facebook and Instagram as part of the communication campaign for the prevention of radicalization by the Oltre project. The method we used is the analysis of the content of the productions in relation to the comments made after their publication on the campaign profiles on Facebook and Instagram. The posts constructed in this way allowed us to bring together different identities and cultures on representation and self-representation in the collective imagination. This has helped to raise awareness of potentially radicalizing content both in second-generation youth and other young people. From this, three elements emerged. The first, in-depth discussions with very different points of view and starting identities lead to excellent results. This sets the conditions for questioning, albeit partially, perceptions and knowledge of a theme/problem straddling different cultures and religions. An example of this can be found in Figure 3, a post where a short video recounts the experience of an Italian volunteer who was kidnapped in Africa and who, following her release and return to Italy, said that she had converted to Islam. In the public sphere, the topic was particularly controversial as well as among the moderators who, following a long discussion and a heated confrontation, finally arrived at a win-win result.

*To Silvia Romano:*

*Dear Silvia, dear Aisha, dear you, We are writing to you because you have been an inspiration to remind us of that humanity that we sometimes forget to have. But if you think about it, the word forget ("scordare") has in it the Latin word "cor", which means heart. And we want to put this heart back together with the small means we have as peacemakers. No, we no longer want to be "forgotten", we no longer want to be "heartless". These are not us.*

Figure 3. A post on Facebook, <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=2509640342586872>.

The need to produce a result (the post) has necessarily led to an inevitable mediation with respect to previous perceptions/knowledge/incorporations. Not to an unconditional acceptance of the other's point of view, but rather to a sort of mutual recognition of the other's reasons (Sclavi, 2003).

The second element, the previous dynamic, did not happen for all the posts that were produced, but only for those that were going to affect their respective identities more, questioning them. The post in Figure 4 had as its object the different culinary traditions that, although relevant, do not affect the depth of personal identity. The result is the presentation of a positive comparison between two dishes containing the same ingredients.

The third element concerns situations where self-representation problems do not emerge because the problem area is external to the self-representation of identity, but, rather, must be traced externally through the



identification of a common enemy (trolls, nationalists, racists) that discriminates on the basis of multiple aspects (identity, religious, cultural, economic, racial). In this way, a possible path of partial integration is started, which could anticipate, however, a “us” that consolidates against someone. The post in Figure 5 is an example of where it is the others who build labels and categorizations and we, therefore, can create a unified front against the others, thus “cancelling out”, for the moment, the differences.



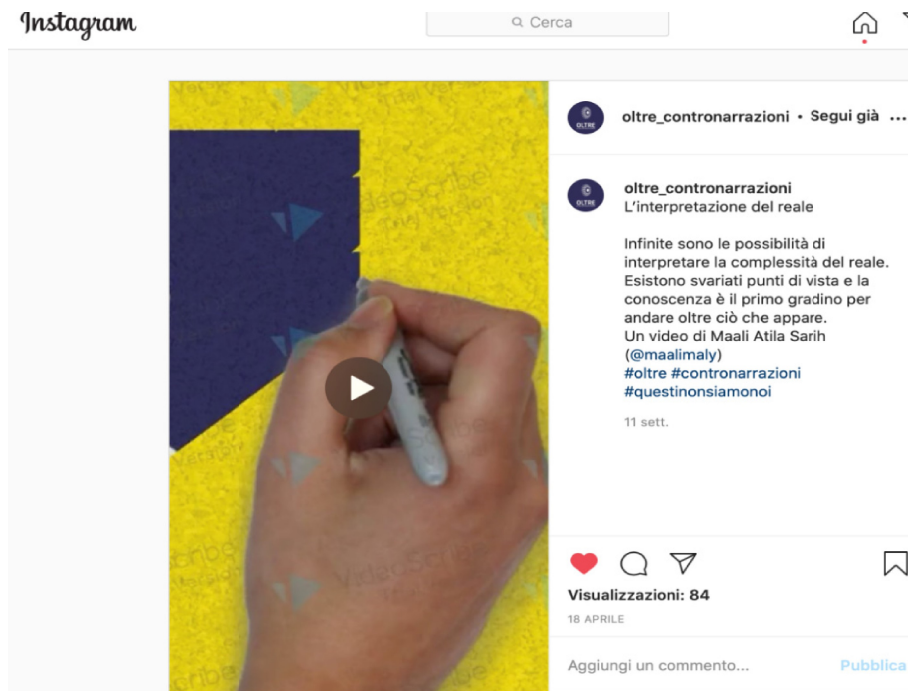
Figure 4. Two dishes, two cultures, the same ingredients, <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=522285235151784>.



*Prejudices trap us in external labels that do not reflect our individuality. We want to go further, to draw richness from our differences and to overcome our limits. To be defined with words that don't represent us and to be categorized within schemes that do not value us? No, these are not us. We are Beyond.*

Figure 5. A post on Facebook, <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=589207565312657>.

Finally, the last aspect is the personal characterization that expresses emotions with a particular strength and anger that bring out, with a cathartic effect, the possible reasons for radicalization as shown in the post in Figure 6.



*There are infinite possibilities to interpret the complexity of reality. There are various points of view and knowledge is the first step in going beyond appearance.*

Figure 6. A post on Instagram, [https://www.instagram.com/tv/B\\_H4Ub5p\\_7G/?igshid=139g53ppq7v0](https://www.instagram.com/tv/B_H4Ub5p_7G/?igshid=139g53ppq7v0).

The different processes that we have described do not denote that incorporation and/or change has taken place, but rather that the active involvement of second-generation young people as protagonists in the production of communication together with other young people has, at the same time, brought to light issues and problems that can be linked to radicalization and has initiated a detailed discussion that is the doorway to the recognition of thoughts, lifestyles, and identities other than one's own and, in some cases, the incorporation of concepts that, although not recognized as their own, are taken for granted. An important first step for mutual respect and coexistence, for positive contamination and for small integrations in daily life. In essence, a good path towards preventing radicalization.

## Conclusions

In conclusion, the purpose of this article is to illustrate the role of the PKIC model to prevent second-generation young Muslims from social exclusion and marginalization, and also the risk of their radicalization. As we tried to show, the joint action of a research-action and an online communication campaign was aimed to create a "counter narrative" of Islam and of young second generations, a different kind of representation in which second generations of Muslims felt included, to reduce misunderstandings, ignorance, existing stereotypes, and stigmatizing representations of Islamic religion. The route we have followed is not without problems and obstacles. For example, the protagonism of second-generation young people is fundamental, but sometimes there is the risk that some contents are not consistent with the objective of

preventing radicalization, because they are focused on the specific needs of those who propose them. Or that some aspects are so embedded that it is difficult to find the communicative key to be able to access and try to propose an alternative.

In spite of this, we believe that the model can work with some shrewdness and with the certainty that the expected change is not something that can be verified in the short term. Indeed, the letter “C” of the model, that matches with the last step of it, is something desirable but not always reachable, but is something to aim to for those who care about improving the quality of life in our society.

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