

Best practices and lessons learned

How protecting and promoting human rights contribute to preventing and countering violent extremism

The Order of the Teaspoon foundation

Best regards,

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Table of contents

A short introduction..... 3

Background to the Tolerance Project 3

Aim/objective..... 4

Method 4

Effects/socioeconomic calculation on the prevention 6

 Social..... 6

 Economic 6

Conclusion 7

A short introduction

Established in August 2006, The Order of the Teaspoon is a Swedish foundation with the motto *Together for diversity and tolerance*. In keeping its motto, the foundation's projects focus on active dialogue with children and youth to promote tolerance and respect. The Order's objective is to reach young people early, encouraging them to reflect on the importance of issues such as tolerance, diversity and xenophobia by means of literature and cultural studies. Our main activities are conducted in Sweden, but we also contribute with international conferences and seminars.

The Tolerance Project, therefore, is our contribution to the best practices and lessons learned on how protecting and promoting human rights contribute to preventing and countering violent extremism.

Background to the Tolerance project

In 1995 the 14-year-old John Hron was murdered by four neo-Nazi youths in the municipality Kungälv, in southwestern Sweden. The murder of John Hron became one of the most shocking violent crimes with neo-Nazi overtones committed in Sweden in the 1990's and still receives much attention. The strong reactions to the horrific nature of the crime caused decision-makers and society at large to take immediate, forceful action.

The decision-makers in Kungälv realized early on that in order to prevent any future occurrences of tragedies such as this, an immediate commitment to long-term initiatives and coordinated efforts must be made. This insight – coupled with the courage to admit responsibility – give rise to a long-running project aimed at changing the structures that cause extremism in the local community from the very foundation on up.

The local government commissioner appointed Christer Mattsson, together with a working group, to develop a method for long-term work for students who violate societal expectations and show intolerant behavior in school. By identifying potential problems before they develop, this approach prevents the very emergence and creation of extremist movement to which white supremacist groups belong. Under the name Toleransprojektet (the Tolerance Project, nationally better known as the Kungälv Model), efforts to eliminate the conditions under which this type of phenomenon emerges have been ongoing since 1995. Apart from Kungälv, the model has been implemented in 20 municipalities across Sweden and many more are looking to get the project started up. The work is not finished, now will it ever be, but the results are readily apparent. Following the investment of an appropriate amount of both financial and temporal resources, there are no active Nazi organizations in Kungälv and no evidence of even informal gangs.

The Price of Intolerance, Commissioned by The Order of the Teaspoon and Kungälv municipality in 2013, is a socioeconomic analysis of the Kungälv Model. The purpose of the report is to describe the economic repercussions of an intolerant structure such as the white supremacy movement, which thereby also shows the benefits of reducing or preventing such movements from emerging, which in turn justifies the expenses incurred in the implementation of the Kungälv model. It is personally gratifying to be able to present that the socioeconomic benefits of this work add up to more than a quarter million kronor (SEK)

just for a municipality the size of Kungälv. In addition to this number, there are also benefits that cannot be quantified such as an increased sense of security, lessened vulnerability for youth and – perhaps most important of all – less hatred among community members. Community means fellowship and the greatest success of the Kungälv Model is its ability to get students with widely different backgrounds to sit down together, learn together and live together.

Aim/objective

The Kungälv Model was created on the assumption that intolerant ideas exist in our society and with this, conditions for racism and other intolerance. At their most extreme, these attitudes create ideal growing conditions for movements based on Nazi ideology and set in a white supremacy environment. The overarching task for the Kungälv Model has to do with the on-going and persistent job of influencing these collective attitudes. The focus for this working model has to do with challenging anti-democratic ideas and values among youths. The main operative goal is to get young people to see the value in participating in the democratic collective and to strengthen their resistance against destructive and intolerant behavioral patterns. Our purpose is to alleviate social unrest and, in the long term, keep intolerance in check as well as counteract violence, harassment and bullying.

In schools and communities where the extreme intolerance has become a part of youth culture, occasional efforts and theme days in schools are not enough. The efforts must extend over a long period of time. By working with young people's self-image, self-confidence and trust in their own ability, a more tolerant society can be achieved.

Further on, the objective of The Order of the Teaspoon is to extend its reach to many more municipalities in Sweden. Through this project, youths are given the opportunity to reflect over ethical dilemmas, personal responsibility and human dignity, and to practice their capacity for cooperation, empathy and problem solving across the nation.

In the Tolerance Project, the human rights aspect of preventing and countering violent extremism is evident in how the model works. Students are encouraged to approach their problems in the context of a discussion, not a confrontation. Confrontation has proved to be counterproductive and harmful in this context. Discussing these types of issues has proved to be more effective, as it leads to practicing one's ability for empathy and understanding of others. As a result, the students become more tolerant, and eventually ready and willing to engage in the democratic collective. To defend and promote a democratic dialogue is an important factor here as it is an essential foundation for society. To work with human rights therefore involves promoting the condition for its existence, which is democracy.

Method

The Tolerance Project is based on regular, consistent education. It is a means to develop an understanding on how to engage students, using the existing school subjects, in a discussion and a process where the world, society and the individual is allowed to be viewed from several different perspectives. The method is built on knowledge and experience from the work with the Tolerance Project in Kungälv municipality.

In the Tolerance project students are offered to participate in a voluntary educational program over the course of two semesters, parallel to their regular education. The student groups consist of 20-25 upper school students from various schools in the same municipality who meet and integrate with each other three times per month. The group consists of both intolerant/conflict driven students with Swedish and foreign background, and more socially comfortable and high performing students. The education initiative culminates with a trip to the Holocaust memorial sites in Poland. This voluntary education is built upon traditional teaching methods that offer training in dialogue and discussions for students to practice their empathic thinking and action. The course participants' performances are subject to grading in the subjects Swedish, History, and Religion.

The working model consists of three main parts. The first part is called "splitting activities" and aims to create a distance between the youth groups by focusing on the individuals (followers) connected to the intolerant core group. The core group members have invested heavily in their social prestige and by splitting the groups, the members lose the attention that is so essential to retaining their positions in the group's hierarchy. The second part is to "focus on the future", which means to systematically lay the foundation for a positive view of the future. In short, it is to get the young individual to see his/her role in a future society – in a social context as well as on the job market. The last main part of the model is "re-socializing activities", with the purpose to help insure that the young person's professional life and leisure time becomes a natural framework for harmonious life as a citizen. One third of this model therefore has to do with offering different paths to a rich recreational life with opportunities to practice taking social responsibility – an important building block for development of social competence.

In more detail, the teachings are based on four assumptions. The first assumption is that the world is not an illusion, there is no hidden reality that suddenly reveals itself – the world exists in a readily observable state. The second one is that nothing happens by chance; everything is determined by cause and effect. This is evident in the third assumption, which is that we can learn from history and thus prevent the reoccurrence of past atrocities. By acknowledging these three assumptions we can make independent choices and positively influence our lives, which is the fourth one.

Further on, the educational sessions are based on four methodological grounds: narration, discussion exercise, teamwork exercise, plus a reflection and a presentation of today's homework. The narration is usually the starting point and the framework of today's class. The teacher tells the story of an authentic source from the Second World War. The basis for the narration describes the persecution of Jews and the holocaust in Europe. In connection with this, the students get to consider realistic dilemmas and simultaneously evaluate the importance of people's thoughts and actions throughout history and today. Consequently, this type of exercise raises a sense of identity and participation, thus laying the foundation for a genuine compassion, emphatic learning and understanding of others – leading to a higher degree of tolerance in the group and in society at large.

Effects/socioeconomic calculation on the prevention

Social

In The Order of the Teaspoon's work with the Tolerance Project the central arguments are of course moral, social and ethical. But it has also shown that the economical arguments are essential to make an impact. The social exclusion and the negative effects arising from intolerance and extremist environments have clear economic implications. These can be compared to the costs of preventing such a development.

Staff working at schools that have applied this method have experienced how nearly all students, who engaged in a destructive and intolerant activities, by own free will have left the undemocratic behavior behind. This is the result of a locally designed educational effort and has led to the model being promoted by the Swedish Ministry of Labor, the Swedish Agency for Youth and Civil Society and the United Nations as a suitable strategy to counter intolerance among youths. The Tolerance Project is so far the only method in Sweden for the prevention of xenophobia that has been evaluated and been able to demonstrate strongly quantitatively supported results. Today, 20 districts have schools that work according to the model and more are on their way.

Economic

Intolerance has a high price not just in the form of human suffering, but also in form of enormous costs for common resources. The effect of the Tolerance Project is presented in the aforementioned *The Price of Intolerance*, a socioeconomic analysis of the white supremacy-movement and the Kungälv model, authored by Eva Nilsson Lundmark and Ingvar Nilsson. As previously mentioned, the purpose of the report was to present a precise account of the scope and distribution of costs imposed on society by these extreme intolerant movements and their use of violence.

The white supremacy movement has major repercussions on society, and socioeconomic consequences are of one them. In a more detailed explanation found in the report, we can see that a white supremacy movement group in Sweden commits an average of 6,500 different crimes during a ten-year period. It is also estimated that an assault that leads to lasting but "moderate injuries" might generate societal costs of almost 5 million kronor. If the assault causes the victim to become permanently disabled, societal costs might add up close to 50 million kronor over the victim's life. Further on, a single white supremacy member with a low or average level of violence might, during a 10-15-year period, generate societal costs of approximately 6 million kronor. Lastly, one single white supremacy structure of 15-20 people might, during a 15-year period, cost society up to 290 million kronor.

In contrast, the student groups involved in the Kungälv Model usually consist of 24 individuals, and based on this estimate the cost per student adds up to about 29,500 kronor. The report then states that approximately 450 students have come through this model over the years. According to these numbers, the Tolerance Project has cost roughly 13 million kronor. As stated above, one white supremacy gang might potentially generate societal costs up to 290 million kronor, twenty times more than the preventive work of the Kungälv Model has cost until now. Consequently, the report shows that the district of Kungälv has saved around 270 million kronor by implementing the Tolerance Project.

Conclusion

The preventive perspective is important to emphasize in the Kungälv model. Initiatives against racism and intolerance can be approached from different perspectives. The reactive perspective is to deal with the problem when it arises, with the goal that it will not worsen. A proactive perspective is to remove the conditions for the problem to ever occur. It is indeed the latter that the Kungälv model is known for, using preventive initiatives against racism, intolerance and gang formations. In addition, since there are always intolerant undercuts in society that might, under the right circumstances, emerge, set root and bloom, the model stands for a long-term and consistent perspective. In practice, this means a continuous and ongoing effort to eliminate the conditions for intolerance to set root. We believe that understanding the proactive approach is essential to understanding the work that has been done with the Tolerance Project. Because of the success in Kungälv, many countries have shown interest in adopting the model and asked for our guidance, among others Norway and Germany. We believe that the work with the Tolerance Project has real potential to be successfully implemented in other countries and the world at large.