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CONCLUSION PAPER
Youth Review Panel
22-23 March 2022, Online

RAN Young: Youth Review Panel

Key outcomes

On 22-23 March 2022, the RAN Young Platform (RAN YOUNG) organised its third RAN YOUNG Review Panel. Through an online workshop, 16 young people reviewed three projects from RAN's Collection of Inspiring Practices. RAN Young's participating members were split into small groups of reviewers and assigned to a practice. Over two days, they participated in four sessions: first, practitioners presented their practice to a group of reviewers, explaining the project's goals, strategy, outputs, and outcomes. Second, the reviewers interviewed the practitioner to make sure they understood the practice clearly. Third, the practitioners left for the day while the reviewers performed a SWOT analysis to identify each practice's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. Finally, the reviewers presented their findings and recommendations to the whole group, including all three practitioners and the other review groups to create an opportunity for wider discussion. The main takeaways are summarised below:

- **Get creative.** The three practices demonstrated that creative content, like games or videos, can make complex topics more approachable. They offer the chance to immerse viewers into information through narratives and can help retain their interest by combining learning with entertainment.

- **Update your platforms.** Social media continues to be an effective way to reach young people; however, practitioners should keep up with changing trends. As the reviewers warned, young people are leaving Facebook in favour of Instagram, YouTube, Discord, Telegram and TikTok. Social media campaigners will have to learn to navigate new platforms to retain their audience.

- **Encourage critical thinking.** All three practices developed content that incorporated critical thinking to their audience's experience. In addition to presenting viewers with new information, they immersed viewers in the topic through experiential learning.

- **Balance online with offline.** Online platforms are a great way to reach a large number of people but, as the reviewers noted, they offer limited opportunities to engage with an audience. Incorporating online content into offline activities like workshops or school-based meetings can enhance a practice's impact.

- **Youth practices must be dynamic.** Youthful language and references help engage young audiences, but they need to be updated frequently to avoid becoming outdated. The participants observed places in all three practices where outdated graphics, (youth) language or references could hurt its appeal.

- **Capitalise on existing models for expansion.** The reviewers noted that all three practices had many opportunities to expand their work by employing their existing content and models in new ways. This could mean adapting an existing model for a new context or finding additional applications for content.

The Practices

The Review Panel included three projects from RAN's Collection of Inspiring Practices.

1. **Concordia Bloggers: I Survived Terrorism**
A video game series based on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; the game presents a series of scenarios related to different human rights articles that a player must navigate using critical thinking. The final chapter, called 'I Survived Terrorism' that challenges the normalisation of radical violence in the Basque Country, is based on the testimony of a young boy, Iker, who survived a terrorist attack.

2. **DECOUNT: The Game**
A video game designed to promote democracy and fight extremism through interactive counter narratives that recreate the radicalisation processes of four protagonists. Developed through a collaboration between the Austrian Institute for International Affairs, Bloodirony Games, and SUBOTRON, the game has been used in schools and workshops in Austria.

3. **Dare to be Grey: Project Grey**
Dare to be Grey challenges polarisation by empowering the moderate middle ground and breaking down the 'black-and-white' dichotomy in favour of more nuanced 'grey' thinking. Project Grey used social media to unite online activists, data analysts and social workers in strengthening a 'grey narrative' through online content and a handbook on polarisation.

Highlights of the discussion

The RAN YOUNG Review Panel created space for youth and practitioners to exchange ideas and perspectives about the specific practices and P/CVE programming more broadly. One result of these discussions was the identification of several **good practices** for youth-oriented P/CVE projects.

- All three of the practices utilised creative, youth-oriented content. Project Grey utilises a variety of digital content, while Concordia Bloggers and DECOUNT both created immersive video games. Creative content can make challenging and taboo topics more approachable, especially for younger audiences, and the reviewers noted that visual content that was clear, concise, and easily sharable was more effective on digital platforms. Video games especially are a good medium for getting young people interested in these issues. They not only made learning more fun, but their interactive nature also invites players to become immersed with the topics and allows them to make decisions that employ and reinforce critical thinking.

- The game projects made good use of narratives, demonstrating the power of storytelling in learning. The reviewers praised the projects' translation of real-life experiences and research into compelling narratives that allowed players to become invested in the lives of real people via fictional avatars.

- The reviewers praised Dare to Grey's agility and versatility in responding to current events. The project's use of social media and short, digital content meant it could continuously apply its 'grey' advocacy to a wider variety of topics and current events. They felt this kept the project relevant and enhanced understanding by showing followers how the approach could be applied in varied contexts.

- All three projects incorporated critical thinking. The reviewers praised the fact that, in addition to presenting information to enhance knowledge, the practices pushed viewers to consider difficult questions and engage with the material – either through play or discussion – to reach their own conclusions.

- The reviewers noted the practices' ability to include of a variety of themes related to P/CVE, while remaining targeted. For example, DECOUNT's game spoke to different forms of extremism, but presented everything within the context of Austria to offer a holistic yet relevant look at extremism across the spectrum. Concordia Bloggers took a focused look at terrorism in the Basque Country specifically, but incorporated

many different perspectives to show the totality of terrorism's impact. Dare to be Grey took a more indirect take on extremism, focusing on polarisation, disinformation, and the role of the media in the Dutch context as well as recent developments, such as the war in Ukraine.

- The reviewers praised DECOUNT's combination of online and offline activities. Although the game is based online, they have built workshops around the game to enhance its impact. In the wider discussion, they stressed the value this approach can add to P/CVE programmes more broadly.

The discussions also spotlighted some **challenges**.

- While the reviewers praised Dare to Grey's ability to remain agile in responding to current events and keeping up with changing trends, it was spotted as a challenge for both games. Large and costly pieces of content, like a video game, offer many advantages; however, this type of practice is also more difficult to update or adapt quickly. In the face of rapidly changing trends and technology, it is therefore important that games' graphics as well as its youthful language remain relevant.

- All the review groups mentioned evaluation. Online platforms offer detailed reach metrics, but they offer limited opportunities to evaluate for impact.

- The reviewers identified the practice's small teams as a potential threat. In particular, Dare to be Grey and Concordia Bloggers were operated with limited staff, which the reviewers noted might hinder future growth and leave the teams less nimble.

- Social media campaigns often rely on advertising to reach specific audiences and gain traction for new content. However, the restrictions on many platforms designed to limit political advertising and the promotion of extremist content can impact the P/CVE practices designed to counter this content . As platforms continue to tighten their restrictions without exceptions for counter-content, advertising may no longer be an option.

The discussions revealed **difficult considerations** that will affect many P/CVE projects, but have no single answer.

- While some practices emphasised finding the nuance in all things, other practices based their initiative on an absolute adherence to human rights and strict dichotomies with no space for middle ground. This sparked a discussion about the place for nuance in P/CVE. While many agreed that some topics like violence did not leave room for equivocating, some felt that singular interpretations could alienate people who were indecisive and might undermine critical thinking.

- The practices address a variety of themes related to extremism, but there was some discussion about which topics should be included. For example, whereas the connection between extremism and political polarisation or religion are relevant, it was also noted that speaking to politics or religion could alienate some people that are part of the target audience.

Recommendations

For practices with a young target audience

The reviewers all concluded their review with practical recommendations for the practitioners. While the practitioners had considered some of these recommendations already, some of the ideas the reviewers presented were new and they all left with things to consider for the future of their practice.

- Seek private sector partnerships. Dare to be Grey, who struggled with restrictions on the Facebook ads (see also last point of 'challenges' in the section above), would greatly benefit from closer cooperation with Facebook, while Concordia Bloggers and DECOUNT could develop the quality of their game even further by working with a game company.

- Practices that use social media to engage with young people should rely less on Facebook and use Instagram, YouTube, Telegram, Discord and/or TikTok more. Explore new ways of using these platforms as well to offer additional opportunities for engagement. 'Going live' for example allows a practice to address audience feedback in real time and makes the practice more accessible than only using the comment section under posts.

- Complex and costly content can create challenges staying current or responding to emerging trends. One solution is to keep this kind of content, like video games simple, favouring better graphics and cleaner game play over more complex interfaces. Practitioners may also want to consider skipping overly youthful language and references in favour of language that would not become outdated as quickly. It could be helpful to include youngsters in a 'test' round to check whether the initiative appeals to them during development and periodically throughout the project to ensure the content remains relevant.

- Explore opportunities to grow by scaling up existing content. Well-developed models, like the ones presented during this session, all showed strong potential expand into new regions. Geographic expansion does require some contextual adaptation, but practitioners can consider partnering with local organisations to create regional versions of their practices in more places in Europe.

- Likewise, practitioners can consider expanding their work by employing existing outputs in new ways. For example, the reviewers of Dare to be Grey recommended that they further develop training as part of their core outputs and identify additional uses for their data 'dashboard'. Likewise, Concordia Bloggers and DECOUNT could continue exploring additional offline applications for their games.

- While creative approaches and fictional representations can help make concepts more approachable, be sure to connect these outputs back to real life examples. For example, both game-based practices are based on real life and incorporate research and real examples into the gameplay. Reviewers suggested that they could make this link more explicit by including video testimonials in the game.

- Explore external resources to supplement small delivery teams. One example is the EU's volunteering project, a programme that offers stipends to pay volunteers.

For authorities

The Review Panel demonstrates the importance and pertinence of youth input in P/CVE outputs. Many of these lessons can also be applied to youth-oriented policy making.

- Work to ensure feedback is representative. 'Youth' is an incredibly diverse group with a variety of experiences, concerns, hopes and needs, and as such they will be affected by policy and programmes differently. It may not be possible to create outputs that suit everyone, but by ensuring feedback is representative, it may be possible to understand its full impact and tailor it to serve those most in need.

- Explore different ways of incorporating youth feedback into policies and programmes. Including formal and informal feedback mechanisms can help enrich data collection and make it more representative. Feedback mechanisms could include surveys, focus groups, workshops, and even fun activities that draw different groups and offer a variety of opportunities to contribute.

- Encourage grant recipients to include youth in their practices. Incorporating youth inclusion as a requirement for any youth-focused grants and programmes can help establish collaboration and representation as a norm among P/CVE practitioners.

- Go to young people. Whichever feedback mechanisms you choose, take them to young people where they are. Make use of community centres, youth centres, schools or other places where young people congregate. Practically, this will make it easier to include more young people, but it will also demonstrate a real desire to include them and may put participants at ease by working in comfortable and familiar environment.

- Authorities should be mindful not to segregate youth feedback. Young people are affected by all forms of policy making, not just those specifically targeted at youth. When collecting input from citizens, be sure young people are represented.

Follow up

All three of the practitioners shared plans to expand their practices, indicating more opportunities for the RAN Young members to review content, test new games or offer input on potential new themes. As RAN Young continues to grow, it will be an even greater resource for EU-based practitioners. In addition to more Review Panels, there could be prospects to follow up with specific practices directly and bridge RAN Young with the rest of the network.

Further reading

More information about previous editions of the RAN Young Review Panel

- This paper outlines the main outcomes of the RAN YOUNG Review Panel 2020 and serves as a guideline on organising youth review panels for local authorities.
- This paper from 2018 outlines the main outcomes of the RAN YOUNG Review Panel of 2018.

More information about youth participation in P/CVE

- RAN Issue Paper (2019). A Nimble (NMBL) Approach to Youth Engagement in P/CVE.
- RAN Conclusion Paper (2021). Galvanising youth in combatting online disinformation.

European Commission