

14/12/2020

## CONCLUSION PAPER

RAN event – RAN FC&S in collaboration with RAN LOCAL, RAN C&N, RAN Y&E  
10 and 13 November 2020 - Digital meeting

# Preventing Polarisation and Building Resilience by Creating a Shared Identity Dos and Don'ts

## Key outcomes

In a fast-moving, increasingly complex and polarised world, it can be difficult to find common grounds amongst cities' residents and different communities on a local level. In order to develop a stronger identification and sense of belonging with a city or community for all individuals, it can help to create a 'collective' or 'shared' identity. This paper focuses on the outcomes of the joint RAN FC&S meeting (with RAN LOCAL, RAN C&N and RAN Y&E) on this topic. During this meeting, participants discussed how the building of a shared identity can be integrated into a local campaign (by practitioners, communities, authorities, etc.) or city strategy (by local authorities) and contribute to building resilience and the prevention of polarisation.

All outcomes of this meeting are captured in a **list of dos and don'ts** for people who want to create city strategy and/or incorporate a campaign that contributes to a shared identity. These are the key points to take into account:

- Possible **elements of a shared identity**, such as the celebration of common local traditions, shared values, inclusive local events, shared urban spaces or a shared history.
- It is necessary to find **the right balance between a bottom-up and a top-down approach**.
- Identity is constantly evolving, which makes a campaign or strategy a **long-term process**.
- Pay attention to **language and rhetoric** in your campaign, i.e. think of the importance of inclusive communication, tailoring your language to your target audience, and the use of *storytelling* with real stories and testimonials.
- A **representation of a diversity of groups and people** (ethnic, gender, age and community groups) in your city and in your team is important to make your strategy work.

This paper is meant for all individuals who want to create or strengthen a shared identity with their strategy or campaign, such as local coordinators, community representatives, communication experts and teachers. For more inspiration, a list of existing examples is available on the last page of this paper.

# CREATING A SHARED IDENTITY IN A LOCAL CONTEXT



Especially in times of globalisation and polarisation, a shared identity promoted in a local campaign or city strategy, could underline the commonalities of a city's residents and communities, can strengthen a sense of belonging and 'togetherness', and build resilience on a local level.

STARTING POINTS AND INSPIRATION



<p><b>Local traditions</b>                  What unifying traditions does the target group have in common? (such as the local cuisine, sports, art, music, events, etc.)</p>	<p><b>Urban spaces</b>                  Is identity reflected in urban spaces, do you use the stories and emotions connected to them? (i.e. monuments, parks, buildings, etc.)</p>
<p><b>Common values</b>                  What are the typical common values? (General, such as democratic or anti-discrimination, or more local)</p>	<p><b>Gender, age, geography</b>                  What are the specifics of your target group? (i.e. when your target group is youth, use popular youth culture)</p>
<p><b>A shared history</b>                  What are the stories that people share? (such as: local heroes, stories, places, etc.)</p>	<p><b>Big local or national events</b>                  Do you organise unique national or local festivities where everyone is welcome? Use them.</p>

## ✓ Dos

**Strike the right balance between top-down and bottom-up:** use top-down approaches (mayor, the city strategy) to actively promote and/or protect common democratic values and involve communities and city citizens in creating the specific stories behind the shared narrative and in opposing divisive threats. Top-down and bottom-up should get backing from one another.

**Accept that one way to create a sense of belonging is for citizens to voice their legitimate grievances and criticise their local authorities.**

**Focus on involving citizens in your strategy who are already motivated and active in building resilience locally.**

**Ensure that the communications team understands the view of communities on the ground.**



## Striking the right balance

## ✗ Don'ts

**Don't start a campaign or city strategy with preconceptions** about very specific stories and narratives you want to portray.

**Don't impose a campaign on the citizens and communities.**

**Don't ignore legitimate social grievances or conflicts by portraying the situation top-down as better than it actually is.**

Understand that the identity-building process is never finished and is constantly evolving. The campaign needs to be able to include and react to new or local developments.

Try to reach out to the silent majority to have support in the longer term.



### A long-term process

**Avoid short-term campaigns.**

Often the failure of these initiatives is that they are used as a "plaster" and often have no sustainable, long-lasting impact (unless it is incorporated in a long-term strategy).

Do make sure that the language is inclusive, tailored to the community and adapted to the local context.

Be prepared for anti-shared identity rhetorics.

Narratives and stories should reflect citizens' everyday lives.

Employ testimonials and role models.

Use visuals and videos and make sure all citizens feel represented.



### Campaign, rhetoric and language

**Don't ignore or focus too much on differences:** if you forget to normalise diversity, not all people will feel represented.

**Don't focus too much on the simplicity of stories:** allow for complexity, nuances and multi-faced identities.

Ensure a varied representation of different religious and ethnic groups, gender and culture respective to your city.

Try to ensure that the diversity of the community is mirrored in the team that carries out the campaign.



### Diversity

**Don't focus only on the biggest community or on specific minorities only.** For example when you focus on a religious identity, other groups without this identity do not identify with your narrative.



### Quote

"Commonalities are characteristic for residents in the same community or city: We all use the city, we use the urban spaces, and for everyone, specific anecdotes, stories and emotions are linked to these places. Use them."\*

## List of inspiring practices

The meeting brought a variety of different projects together, which all aim at creating a shared identity, that shared interesting insights and experiences.

- Members of RAN YOUNG searched for their common ground, even though they are from different European countries. By focusing on common traditions (such as music, food, art, sports and many more examples), they created their own shared identity. See: [RAN YOUNG #SoMuchInCommon](#).
- The City of Mechelen (**Belgium**): After having been plagued by its reputation of being an unsafe city with Belgium's highest crime rate, Mechelen and Mayor Bart Somers were able to successfully foster a climate of trust by investing in the creation of safe urban neighbourhoods while also battling segregation and bringing the city's residents together. In their campaign [People Make The City](#) and in the creation of the magazine [Living in Mechelen](#), they used storytelling to give different residents a face.
- The media campaign [Dare to be Grey](#) aims especially at reaching out to the movable middle that can be caught between black-and-white world views and is sometimes overlooked. The campaign provides a platform for sharing inspiring stories and unpacking polarised world views by focusing on the room for discussion and finding out what we have in common (the 'grey' identity).
- [Odd Arts UK](#) is an innovative charity from Manchester targeting polarised and vulnerable communities. Including restorative approaches, non-violent communication and trauma-informed approaches, Odd Arts uses wider arts and theatre to build bridges.
- [RadicalisatiOFF](#): Turn off the hate in the city was a structured dialogue event with young people and local policymakers that aimed to develop the local youth policy to prevent violent extremism based on the needs and interests of the citizens. More than 400 young people took part in the event.
- In the participatory video project ["Flying Roots"](#) in a multicultural district of Rome, participants were encouraged to reflect on their own identity as a citizen and concepts such as "foreigners" and "the other".

## Follow-up

On 15 December 2020, RAN will organise a webinar as a follow-up to this meeting, presenting the main outcomes and inspiring examples from several initiatives.

## Further relevant reading

1. Haanstra, W. (2018). [Engaging with communities. Collaboration between local authorities and communities in PVE](#), RAN LOCAL & RAN YF&C Ex Post Paper. Prague: RAN Centre of Excellence.
2. Russell, J. (2018). [Developing counter- and alternative narratives together with local communities](#), RAN C&N Issue Paper. RAN Centre of Excellence.
3. Radicalisation Awareness Network. (2017). [Strengthening community resilience to polarisation and radicalisation](#), RAN YF&C Ex Post Paper. London: Radicalisation Awareness Network.
4. RAN Centre of Excellence. (2016). [How to cooperate with religious organisations and communities within the local approach to radicalisation?](#), RAN LOCAL Ex Post Paper. Brussels: RAN Centre of Excellence.