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What is Local Resilience Against Radicalization and How can it be Promoted? A Multidisciplinary Literature Review

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ABSTRACT

In this research note, we present results from a review of research on local resilience in relation to radicalization in public health, social work, crisis management, and community policing using terrorism studies as a point of departure. In order to identify agreements between literatures, we focus on how local resilience is understood, how it is said to be promoted, and how this knowledge could be synthesized. We show that resilience by and large is understood as both a process and a capacity underpinned by cooperation, social networks, and community resources and that an initial mapping of existing strengths and resources is pivotal for local resilience-building.

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In 2016, the Swedish Security Service (Säkerhetspolisen, Säpo) estimated that about 300 people had left Sweden to join and fight for various violent Islamist groups abroad, notably the Islamic State. The majority of these 300 people were men in their late twenties. The Security Service also noted that about 115 individuals had returned to Sweden, having spent time with these groups, and warned that they constituted potential threats.¹ Partly as a response to this development, many policy initiatives aimed to increase preparedness for attacks and to prevent radicalization have been taken in Sweden over the last couple of years.² The debate about prevention became even more salient after the terrorist attack on Drottninggatan in Stockholm on 7 April 2017. In Sweden, as in many other countries and in the European Union, the local level has been emphasized as pivotal when it comes to detecting and preventing radicalization.³ Municipal authorities have therefore been under pressure, from both the central government and the national coordinator against violent extremism, to develop action plans against radicalization and violent extremism.⁴ In this work, resilience has unsurprisingly emerged as a key concept and Swedish municipalities are expected to draw up plans that include measures to increase

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resilience at the local and community level. However, for some municipalities this has been and still is quite a challenging task for (at least) two reasons. First, since radicalization is defined, understood and approached in many different ways, some local policymakers have found it difficult to decide where their focus should be. Second, as a logic consequence, the meaning of “community” or “local resilience” has been somewhat difficult to interpret and make sense of; what does it really mean—from a municipal perspective—to promote local resilience against radicalization?

Outside (although linked to) policy circles, much has been written on radicalization in several different strands of research over the past decade. Attempts have been made to identify explanations, describe processes of radicalization, and identify ways in which it can be prevented. In relation to the latter, resilience has indeed become something of a buzzword.⁵ However, it features prominently in a number of academic disciplines: in social work and psychology to understand how individuals and communities bounce back and manage adversities; in crisis management in relation to critical infrastructures but also to the ability of a society to return to normal after a crisis, and in community policing to (among other things) signify the ability of a community to stick together when challenged. Despite being in frequent use among policymakers as well as practitioners and scholars, the two concepts—radicalization and resilience—are hence notoriously difficult to define. Differences aside though, researchers, from various disciplines, seem united in the belief that “the local context matters”⁶ and it has been argued that an increased emphasis on resilience opens up for a “local turn” in the literature. In relation to resilience, “local” is consequently not only on the policy agenda, but the object of growing interest in various research communities. Although there is no shortage of studies linking resilience to the local level and asking how communities can withstand radicalization, we have noted that theoretical sophistication varies between literatures and that they rarely inform each other. This observation, made in an ongoing research project⁷ that explores local resilience against radicalization in a Swedish context, prompted the question of what could be gained if insights from different literatures were reviewed and synthesized?

The authors of this article come from political science (specializing in crisis management and terrorism-related issues), social work (specializing in social capital, community policing and individual resilience), and public health. We bring together our different perspectives on resilience in this article, focusing on what *local* resilience means and how it is said to be promoted in our disciplines and fields of specialization. We make terrorism studies, a key research field, both a point of departure for a multi-disciplinary literature review on local (referring both to community and municipal levels) resilience and a platform for synthesis.

Within the field of terrorism studies, we consider that resilience is often, but not always, presented as a normative concept, as something to strive for; signaling that radicalization can be countered if a country’s resilience is enhanced and further developed.⁸ Importantly, a focus on resilience in terrorism studies implies a growing interest in protective factors as opposed to a more exclusive focus on risks and risk factors. This interest in protective factors is a strong feature in some of the other literature and further underpins a need to work out how knowledge, definitions, and factors identified as promoting local resilience from several different disciplines can be brought together for

advancing our understanding of what it is and how it can be promoted. Our aim is twofold; first to review research on local resilience in the literatures of public health, social work, crisis management, and community policing, focusing on the following questions:

- How is local resilience defined and understood in these literatures?
- What factors are identified as promoting local resilience in relation to radicalization?

Second, to bring these definitions and factors back to terrorism studies and discuss the gains of drawing on them to help develop a synthesized understanding of local resilience in relation to radicalization.

The research note is organized as follows: In the next section, we discuss radicalization in order to clarify what it is that local communities and societies should be resilient to. We build on a previously conducted literature review of how the concept of radicalization is described, understood and approached within different disciplines,⁹ especially addressing complexities and controversies. Following this is a section on resilience in terrorism studies. We then give a more detailed account of how articles were searched for, included in the review, and analyzed. Thereafter we present the results of the literature review on local resilience in two sub-sections: First, the definitions and understandings of local resilience are presented, and second, the factors that may promote local resilience are identified. This is followed by a discussion, in which we return to terrorism studies, on the gains of drawing on them to help develop a synthesized understanding of what local resilience is in relation to radicalization and how it can be promoted.

Resilient to what? What is radicalization?

The literature on radicalization is huge but fragmented, with different research groups and disciplines taking a range of sometimes conflicting perspectives on the issue. As noted by PISOIU,¹⁰ there is no consensus on what radicalization means, and researchers tend to develop their own definitions. This, of course, implies that they arrive at different conclusions on what it is that causes radicalization, and what resilience-building on the local level should look like. There is, however, some agreement across disciplines:

Social scientists are inclined rather to the view that radicalization is the result of a process of increasing commitments, and that it can take years to become a violent extremist capable of carrying out a deadly attack.¹¹

This process is argued to be triggered by events or circumstances on an individual or societal level,¹² but there is no consensus on its components or on the particular events or circumstances that are key to understanding how it unfolds. However, it is quite clear from the literature that “one size does not fit all when it comes to creating a violent extremist.”¹³ Rather than being a single process, radicalization should instead be seen as a set of diverse processes, a fact that makes it even harder to understand how it can be prevented, as well as what being resilient against radicalization really means. One of the assumptions that needs to be problematized and questioned is that violent acts are always a result of radical beliefs. As Borum puts it:

A focus on radicalization, however, risks implying that radical beliefs are a proxy—or at least a necessary precursor—for terrorism. We know this not to be true. Most people who hold radical ideas do not engage in terrorism, and many terrorists—even those who lay claim to a "cause"—are not deeply ideological and may not "radicalize" in any traditional sense. Different pathways and mechanisms operate in different ways for different people at different points in time and perhaps in different contexts.¹⁴

Many would thus agree that radicalization must be kept analytically distinct from violent extremism and terrorism. Radicalization involves a cognitive *and* a behavioral component, and there can be violence if these components are combined.¹⁵

When it comes to explaining root causes of or contributing factors to radicalization, we earlier reviewed publications in terrorism studies, crisis management, social work, public health and community policing, and identified explanations in these literatures at both individual and structural levels.¹⁶ At the individual level, reasons given for people becoming radicalized include psychosocial problems, mental health issues, social isolation, identity issues, and grievances.¹⁷ Structurally, the focus is on ideology, religious ideas, marginalization, discrimination, poverty, segregation, problems to do with a lack of democratic participation, and equality.¹⁸ During these reviews, we observed a limit to the number and quality of empirical studies that have been conducted. The evidence for effective interventions at either the individual or community level is therefore extremely limited, to the point where preventive programs tend to be driven by political and ideological agendas, and based on assumptions that may, in fact, very well be unfounded. These risk creating "suspect communities" that may be stigmatized, thereby potentially increasing community members' feelings of alienation and undermining the very objectives of the programs.¹⁹

Another important debate that appears in these literatures (albeit to a varying extent), concerns the focus of research on risk factors for radicalization as opposed to the protective factors that can work against it. Terrorism studies, for example, include a plethora of models identifying mechanisms, staircases, and pathways toward radicalization, but these tend not to take into account the vast majority of people who are "exposed" but who do *not* become radicalized. Concerns have also been raised in the public health and social work literature about the "securitization" of the caring professions, whereby social workers, medical professionals, and teachers may feel pressure to identify people they think may be at risk of radicalization—notwithstanding the acknowledged and enormous challenges inherent in correctly identifying such people—and report them to the authorities. Such actions would be counter to the firm ethical principles on which these professions are based.²⁰ While a range of protective factors must therefore also be at play, there is unfortunately no agreement on what these include or how they work. However, protective factors are increasingly connected to local resilience.²¹ We return to this link as we discuss the results of the review.

Resilience in terrorism studies

An increasing amount of attention is being paid to resilience in terrorism studies. In contrast to what appears to be a tradition of focusing on risk factors, current research also examines protective resources and factors. Against that backdrop, our reading of the literature suggests that it consists of two different but related components. One

focuses on individuals, groups, or communities that appear vulnerable, perhaps identified as being at risk for radicalization by local authorities; while the other part is interested in how resilient communities can be built. The latter implies an approach that is concerned with identifying and understanding the protective resources and mechanisms that underpin resilience. In this process, many studies draw on conceptual developments in other literatures such as engineering, disaster management, and psychology, but definitions of resilience in general and local or community resilience in particular nonetheless often remain diffuse.

We have observed that scholars who conduct research on terrorism tend to use the concept of resilience as a description of how well societies navigate through adversity. According to Malkki and Sinkkonen, the resilience (to terrorism) of political life is “the way that continuity and transformation take place in the face of specific endogenous or exogenous shocks in all aspects of political life.”²² Other terrorism researchers argue that resilience manifests itself before, during, and after an adversity or shock occurs, and in that context, resilience is often discussed from the perspective of community collaboration and capacity-building. Resilience is thus understood as a capacity for addressing the challenges that face different communities.²³ Social ties and social networks are identified as crucial components in this regard. However, the quality and contents of collaboration, capacity-building, and community protective resources that can be key assets in constructing these social ties and networks remain poorly understood. Aly, Taylor, and Karnovsky²⁴ also note this and conclude that many studies continue to be driven by a single focus on “vulnerable groups” and presumed risk factors even if they explicitly aim to better understand community resilience. Dalgaard-Nielsen and Schack recognize this too, and propose—as far as definitions are concerned—that resilience should be understood and defined as:

a community’s ability to leverage social capital understood as the existence of stable trust-based relationships and networks among the actors (civil society, local government, local businesses) to detect radicalization risks, prevent the recruitment of community members into violent extremism, and bounce back after instances of recruitment via learning and adaptability that permits the community to better limit future recruitment.²⁵

They also stress the need for more empirical studies. With regard to the latter, Weine²⁶ has explored the process of building resilience against violent extremism in diaspora communities. Taking Muslim Diasporas in the United States as an empirical focus, he argues that building community resilience in Diasporas should be approached as a public health prevention strategy. He argues that many protective resources exist in the community, and that resilience-building interventions must be able to help young people at risk by enhancing these protective resources at multiple levels. In concrete terms this means:

(1) moving away from a heavy focus on risk factors to an equal focus on protective factors and mechanisms; (2) integrating knowledge and practice concerning psychosocial factors with that of security; and (3) working collaboratively with families and communities to design programs and policies that work in real-world settings.²⁷

Other suggested practical steps include increasing families’ awareness of recruitment techniques, developing strategies for speaking with young people about violent

extremism, cooperating with nongovernmental organizations and civil society, and conducting activities throughout the community (i.e., not only at the town hall or at the local mosque). There seems, in other words, to be an interest in exploring protective resources and factors at the local and community level as well as an interest in how research on resilience in different literatures could be combined and synthesized for the purpose of advancing our understanding of what local resilience is and how it can be promoted. What then, do public health, social work, crisis management, and community policing tell us about local resilience?

Methodological approach

As already indicated, this study includes scholars from political science, community policing, social work, and public health. Our overall strategy was to conduct an examination of the literature from these different disciplines in order to map out and summarize how local resilience is defined and understood and what factors are identified as promoting local resilience in relation to radicalization. We therefore chose to conduct a scoping review (as opposed, for example, to a highly focused systematic review), which would facilitate the capture of material from this broad range of disciplines, while also allowing the particular expertise from each contributing discipline to shape the analysis of their own material.²⁸ After the review had been conducted independently within each discipline, an attempt was then made to summarize and synthesize all the main findings.

Identification of articles for inclusion

Relevant articles from the years 2001 to 2016 were identified from two databases: Web of Science and Academic Search Elite. Keywords for the search included *resilience*, *local resilience*, *community resilience*, along with the particular area of specialization or discipline (i.e., *crisis management*, *community policing*, *social work*, and *public health*). “Resilience” was the primary search term for each discipline, with all articles identified through that term then searched further for “local resilience” and “community resilience.” This initial process resulted in nearly 3,000 papers (see Table 1). These articles were then screened by reviewing the title and in most cases, the abstract, in order to assess their relevance for the research questions. Through this process, 137 articles were judged as providing relevant material for the study, and these were then included in the analysis.

Table 1. Number of articles identified for each discipline, both initially and after screening.

	Number of articles initially identified	Number of articles remaining after screening
Public health	1,707	29
Social work	703	43
Crisis management	429	27
Community policing	104	38
Total	2,943	137

Analysis of included articles

The 137 articles selected from each of the four disciplines were first individually and then collectively summarized under the following two headings—(i) *Definitions and understandings of the concept of resilience*; and (ii) *Factors associated with promoting local resilience*. The core issues that emerged from each are presented in Table 2, and they are discussed in the text below. Identification of core issues and themes also means that not all of the 137 included articles are referred to in this research note. Through this process, we were also able to identify areas of agreement and disagreement between the different literatures. The main points were then brought back to terrorism studies and analyzed with the aim of discussing the possible gains of drawing on them to help develop a synthesized understanding of local resilience in relation to radicalization.

Results

This section presents some of the main concepts and findings from the literature reviewed from the different disciplines. It is divided into two sections, the first focusing on the definitions of “resilience” that are presented, and the second focusing on suggested means of promoting local resilience. The text supports Table 2, which provides a summary of the main points (see below).

How is local resilience defined and understood in the literature of different disciplines?

Much of the public health literature on resilience refers one way or another to a community’s capacity to “bounce back” from a disaster or trauma, or to recover, rather than its ability to prepare for or prevent something from happening in the first place.²⁹ This largely reflects the types of issues that are covered in the public health literature, such as the responses of health systems to an epidemic or a natural disaster. Another potentially useful definition from the field describes community resilience as the “sustained ability of a community to withstand and recover from adversity (e.g., economic stress, pandemic influenza, man-made or natural disasters).”³⁰ While this frames the term at least partly in relation to recovery, it also importantly and specifically seeks to emphasize the need to assess community strengths as well as simply describing vulnerabilities. This has been described as an asset-based or “glass-half-full” approach, which focuses on what already exists in the community in terms of its capacities, with an intention to mobilize these when required. Importantly, the development of asset-based community resilience should be seen as a *process* rather than as an outcome.

Many studies within social work treat and define resilience primarily as an individual attribute, outcome, or process (either intrapersonal or in interaction with the surrounding environment), while fewer studies have focused on resilience as a collective feature, by including discussion of resources and/or processes at the community level. The concept of resilience is used mainly as a theoretical tool and framework for guiding programs and interventions for resilience building at both the individual and community levels. As such, it is utilized as a “strengths-based approach,” as opposed to focusing solely on social problems and risks.³¹ Thus a resilience framework in social work



Table 2. Summary of how “resilience” is presented within different disciplines, and areas of agreement and divergence between the disciplines.

	Understandings and use of resilience concept	Promotion of local community resilience
Public health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The capacity of a system to return to equilibrium after a displacement To “bounce back” from a disaster or trauma. To recover, rather than the ability to prepare for or prevent something from happening Seen as a <i>process</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strength-based community approaches build on what already exists in a community with regard to capacities and assets, and mobilize these further. Collective identity and social support networks Four functions necessary: Determine risks; Build community partnerships; Engage with community organizations; and Coordinate training or guidance Emotional orientations, such as building collective senses of hope, agency, altruism, trust and security. Community characteristics influence the potential for community resilience; for example, collective identity, community cohesion, and hardiness, borne out of previous experiences of war (or other traumas). Resources within the community such as social capital and physical and organizational infrastructure, as well as how these resources integrate as networks.
Social work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Theoretical tool and framework for guiding programs and intervention. Utilized as a “strengths based approach” in social work. Understanding how and under what conditions protective processes work. An iterative process wherein communities become <i>aware</i> of an unsatisfying state and develop an <i>intention</i> and a <i>goal</i> to handle this state. Is about <i>adaptation</i>, <i>withstanding</i>, and <i>resisting</i>. Function within a context where the risk is always present 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local civil society actors can have a significant influence on the success and progress of building community resilience. Resilience cannot be approached using a one-size-fits most strategy.
Crisis management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Different actors’ disaster management capacity and resources; 4 Rs: <i>Robustness; Redundancy; Resourcefulness; Rapidity</i> Mainly conceptualized as “<i>bouncing back</i>” after a disruptive event, thus linked to the <i>recovery</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local civil society actors can have a significant influence on the success and progress of building community resilience. Resilience cannot be approached using a one-size-fits most strategy.

(continued)

Table 2. Continued.

	Understandings and use of resilience concept	Promotion of local community resilience
Community policing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>phase in disaster management (i.e., after a crisis takes place).</i> • The ability of a community to stick together and to help itself as a group. • Communication, Cooperation, Cohesion. • Resilience is a process; a capacity; cooperation and social networks are central; community resources are key; focus on strengths rather than problems and risks; normative concept, something to strive for; a framework for guiding interventions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can be strengthened by the police and other authorities through interventions for ensuring community safety. • Local resilience may be promoted by: strengthening social support networks; collaboration with community organization; enhancing community resources; increasing community safety; building collective identity based on hope, agency, altruism, cohesion, trust, and security; training and education in how to handle uncertainty and risks.
Agreements between disciplines		
Useful insights for terrorism studies focusing on local resilience in relation to radicalization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protective factors that may promote local resilience need to be mapped out in each target community—there are no universal protective factors that are valid and available in all places. • Available protective factors and resources need to be integrated within local community networks in order to be able to utilize. • Building local community partnership and networks is crucial but cultural competence is needed in order to succeed in this. • Social networks may promote local resilience through collective actions and building a collective identity. • Social networks may also promote local resilience by facilitating training activities for crisis preparedness. 	

implies emphasizing protective factors rather than risk factors, and trying to mobilize these on both the individual and community levels.³² This approach can then be used for tailoring interventions to foster resilience by nurturing clients' or communities' potential strengths, goals, and desires.³³ With regard to community resilience, the concept somewhat reflects the public health perspective on strengths-based values, which can be used to recognize, respect, and promote local capacity and positive outcomes.³⁴ As such, it is “a mechanism through which interventions might support marginalized and underserved communities.”³⁵

While resilience has gained prominence in recent years in the crisis management literature, only a few studies deal specifically with resilience to radicalization. The concept is instead discussed and understood more broadly, often in relation to natural disasters. Furthermore, and as described in the public health and social work literature, it has been argued that resilience should be seen not only as an outcome or a state of stability, but rather as a dynamic process.³⁶ A frequently used definition of resilience in this field originates from Bruneau and Reinhorn,³⁷ who refer to what they describe as “the four Rs” of resilience: *Robustness*, meaning the ability to withstand a given level of stress or demand without losing function; *Redundancy*, which is the ability to retain functional requirements in the event of disruption; *Resourcefulness*, or the ability to supply material and human resources necessary to achieve established priorities; and *Rapidity*, which refers to containing losses and avoiding further disruption.³⁸

Within community policing studies, community resilience is often understood as the ability of a community to stick together, to stand up to extremism, and to help itself as a group, as well as the families and individuals in its midst. Community resilience is argued to include several key components such as communication, cohesion, and cooperation and is seen as a process shaped by resources.³⁹ Studies also emphasize that local resilience, from a community policing perspective, involves building trust and confidence and engaging in dialogue and partnership with local communities.⁴⁰

Several common themes emerge through these diverse literatures. Key among these is the fact that local resilience is widely seen as a process, and also as a capacity—with a focus on strengths rather than on problems and risks—that can be nurtured and drawn on in times of need. Cooperation and social networks are widely seen as central to its development. Importantly, however, resilience is also often presented as a normative concept, and that it is something that should be uncritically striven toward as a legitimate framework for guiding interventions. Further, there is remarkably little attention paid to prevention in the definitions: rather, the focus is almost entirely on the incident and post-incident phases.

What factors may promote local resilience, and what is their relevance for prevention of radicalization?

A public health perspective on factors that can promote local resilience is provided by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's “Community Resilience Capabilities” document, which highlights four functions necessary for optimizing a community's ability to prepare for a public health incident.⁴¹ These rather general

points can be adapted and used as a framework for engaging with communities and individuals during efforts that aim to promote community resilience:

1. Determine risks to the health of the jurisdiction (i.e., identify the factors that could undermine community resilience);
2. Build community partnerships to support health preparedness/community resilience;
3. Engage with community organizations to foster social networks;
4. Coordinate training or guidance to ensure community engagement in preparedness/community resilience efforts.

From a social work perspective, Sousa and colleagues⁴² argue that emotional orientations—such as collective senses of hope, agency, altruism, trust, and security—appear to help promote resilience at the community level. A collective sense of hope motivates community action, as does a sense of collective security, whereby there is a general sense within the population that they are free from danger or that dangers are manageable. The authors also raise the potential importance of collective identity, community cohesions, and hardiness as means of promoting resilience, although since these may be developed through previous experiences of war or other collective traumas, they are not applicable in all settings. It is important to note that community resilience does not depend only on the number and strengths of the various resources within a community, but also on how these resources integrate within the community networks.⁴³ These interactions can become a “positive circle” for community resilience, since networks of resources may both facilitate actions while also promoting the building of a sense of collective identity and steadiness. The authors also conclude that resilience is a product of dynamic and reciprocal relations between individuals and communities, and they are so closely related that it is unrealistic to seek to disentangle them.⁴⁴

Schools have been cited as channels for challenging narratives of violent extremism as morally just, and for providing students with skills and tools to critically analyze such notions. This could be achieved by fostering an inclusive culture with its base in human rights, and by using humor and satire.⁴⁵ However, it has also been pointed out that there are potential risks to using educational, health, or social service providers as what may be perceived as “instruments” of the security services.⁴⁶ The principle of confidentiality takes precedent in many aspects of these professions, and it may ultimately be counterproductive as well as unethical if confidentiality is breached by professionals who are providing a caring service informing the security services of any suspicions they may have about people in their care. A delicate balance between protecting public and individual rights may need to be preserved under such circumstances.

Irrespective of the approach taken in any efforts to build community resilience, a high degree of cultural competence by any implementing agencies, organizations, and individuals is a necessary ingredient for success. Cultural competence is defined as an attitude or a willingness to understand that each individual brings his or her own explanatory model of the world to a relationship or interaction, and that this explanatory model has been shaped by the particular culture from which they come.⁴⁷ By recognizing and internalizing this, people engaged in developing and implementing

community resilience programs may be able to minimize their preconceptions about the people they are working with, avoid stereotypes, and recognize that their own primary concerns (in this case, radicalization and/or violent extremism) may not be shared by the group or individuals they are working with. As an illustration, a study of the Somali community in Boston, Massachusetts in the United States found that the most frequently cited problem by both young people and adults was financial difficulties, and the second most frequently cited problem was “children losing their religious or moral education.”⁴⁸ Concerns about radicalization or violent extremism did not even appear on the list. Understanding such fundamental components of people’s perspectives by working to attain a high degree of cultural competence in the population of interest is a prerequisite for any kind of successful research or intervention into community resilience.

In the crisis management literature, there has been a shift from an interest in risk factors to protective ones. Resilience, as described earlier, is increasingly seen as a process and something that can be promoted and built in local societies before natural disasters strike. Several factors are identified as important in this respect: trust in institutions, the existence and strength of social networks as well as a sense of belonging. The importance of civil society is consequently stressed, as are community physical and human resources and social assets.⁴⁹

Studies within community policing tend to emphasize police interventions (or interventions by other authorities) for strengthening community safety, as ways to promote local resilience. A focus on safety and the quality of life for community members rather than an exclusive focus on crime prevention are key to such resilience promoting interventions.⁵⁰ Building resilience is also said to involve close communication with communities and help provide the resources they need to uphold local safety and to increase their own ability to respond to challenges.⁵¹

As observed earlier, local resilience is often seen as both a process and a capacity. At its core is a focus on strengths rather than on problems and risks. These strengths can be nurtured and drawn on in times of need. Cooperation and social networks are widely seen as central to its development. This indicates that local resilience may be promoted through broad, culturally competent community interventions that strengthen social support networks; that collaborate with community organizations; that enhance community resources; that build collective identity; and that provide training in how to handle uncertainty and risks.

In the concluding section, we use terrorism studies as a platform and discuss the gains of combining and synthesizing insights and knowledge in the reviewed literatures for the purpose of advancing our understanding of what local resilience is and how it can be promoted.

Conclusions: Toward a synthesized understanding of local resilience in relation to radicalization

As stated earlier, competing explanations of what it is that causes radicalization will produce different recommendations on what resilience-building on the local level should look like. In policy terms, it is clear that this has led to some confusion. As described in

the introduction, Swedish local authorities have been under pressure to develop action plans against radicalization and violent extremism. In interviews we have conducted with representatives for local authorities, they have raised the issue of whether there really should be a separate action plan against violent extremism or if preventive and resilience-building work is best done within the context of broad democracy-promoting activities, in general crime prevention work, in schools, by the social services, or by local police? Other issues they struggle with concern whether public and civil society actors should look for risk signs or engage in identifying protective factors and mechanisms?⁵² Research on local action plans also shows that they contain an in-built tension between risk and protection, and a confusion as to for whom and on what level radicalization is a problem.⁵³ In other words, taken together, these local experiences well reflect the huge but fragmented literature on radicalization. However, we would argue that an interest in protective factors and local resilience makes it possible to move beyond fragmentation, both in research and policy terms. There are no catch-all explanations and no quick-fix solutions, but the review presented in this research note does show, which is a major gain, that there is substantial agreement between literatures.

To begin with, it is clear that resilience in public health, social work, crisis management, and community policing is largely understood as a process that involves community networks and resources that collectively facilitate recovery, adaptation, and flexibility but also an ability to stick together and a sense of belonging on the part of community members. We argued earlier that the growing interest for protective factors within terrorism studies provides a good opportunity to draw on other literatures in which this interest has been a long-standing feature. We also observed that when it comes to *what protective factors are involved in local resilience and how these may work* in relation to radicalization, terrorism studies emphasize collaboration, capacity-building, social ties, and social networks as crucial resources. When knowledge from the other literatures on *what is needed in terms of quality and content of local collaboration, capacity-building, social ties, and social networks* is added, the following observations can be made: First, there are no “universal protective factors” that are valid in all places. Instead, the asset-based approach in public health and the similar strength-based approach in social work underline the need for an *initial mapping of the existing strengths and resources in a specific community*, in order to promote local resilience. Understood this way, local resilience is about nurturing strengths rather than listing problems and risks. Second, the reviewed resilience literature emphasizes that in order to promote local resilience, it is not sufficient to mobilize community resources; these need to be *integrated within (already existing or new) community networks*. Therefore, promoting local resilience requires building partnerships with a diversity of local actors. However, in order to succeed in building collaborative partnerships and networks, *cultural competence is crucial*, which implies a willingness and capacity by the authorities to understand a (local) situation or a problem from the cultural viewpoints of the community concerned. Dialogue is therefore pivotal. Resources, strengths, and assets cannot be mapped or mobilized if people are not given the space or opportunity to articulate them and to be listened to. In this context, we think that successful dialogue could help avoid constructing “suspect communities,” something that has been identified as a major flaw in programs aimed at preventing radicalization. When collaborative

networks of resources are established, they may facilitate collective actions as well as a collective identity—both of which are important for promoting local resilience. This approach to local resilience also requires taking into account that resources, strengths, and assets vary between communities, and that this variation has implications for what building resilience will mean in practice. The latter is important from both a research and a policy perspective. When it comes to policy, central governments might be well advised to pay attention to local variations and allow for differences. Perhaps (as in the Swedish case) local action plans against radicalization are not called for or necessary everywhere and perhaps it is better to include resilience-building in broad participatory and democracy-promoting initiatives in some communities.

The debate on radicalization easily ends up in a clash between risk and protection, or security and social perspectives. This also shows in the ongoing debate on the lack of progress in research on radicalization. Despite an increasing number of studies, some scholars think that answers to questions of what it is that leads to political violence, and what it is that leads away from such violence, still are too far off.⁵⁴ Others paint a less bleak picture and stress that systematic knowledge has indeed increased.⁵⁵ Our intention is not to contribute to a continuing clash of perspectives. Although our focus here has been protection and resilience, we acknowledge the need also for research on risks and the need to combine security and social perspectives rather than perceive them as mutually exclusive. With regard to systematic knowledge on what local resilience to radicalization is and how it can be promoted, the literature review presented in this research note and the steps taken toward a synthesis tell us that there is considerable common ground from which policy-relevant research can continue to develop.

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Notes

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8. There is, however, also a more critical approach as compared to this normative one: "Some researchers simply accept that resilience is something positive, while others find such a value-loaded term more problematic. Bourbeau, who represents the latter point of view, has pointed out that, in societal terms, resilience can also have its dark side: sometimes it can stand in the way of positive changes. Therefore, Bourbeau proposes that the understanding of resilience should be left normatively open and the research should explore cases in which resilience can be seen as negative or positive."
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