

This project was funded by the European Union's Internal Security Fund — Police, under Grant Agreement No. 823683.

Addressing Societal Polarisation in Maltese Schools through Experimental Laboratories

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The context in Malta

No assault on his parents: the racist Facebook video camouflaged by ‘emotion’

A 35-year-old contractor’s outburst on Facebook went viral but it seems the alleged violent assault did not even happen as claimed originally

Riot exposes Malta’s hate speech problem

At least a fifth of comments under one news report threatened death or violence

National Migration Social media Police

October 22, 2019 | Jessica Arena

3 min read

Man Charged With Beating Up Pembroke Student ‘Pledged To Get Rid Of All Black People At The School’

Top Stories Top By Tim Diacono February 12, 2019 at 7:57 am

2 Malta soldiers charged with race crimes in migrant death



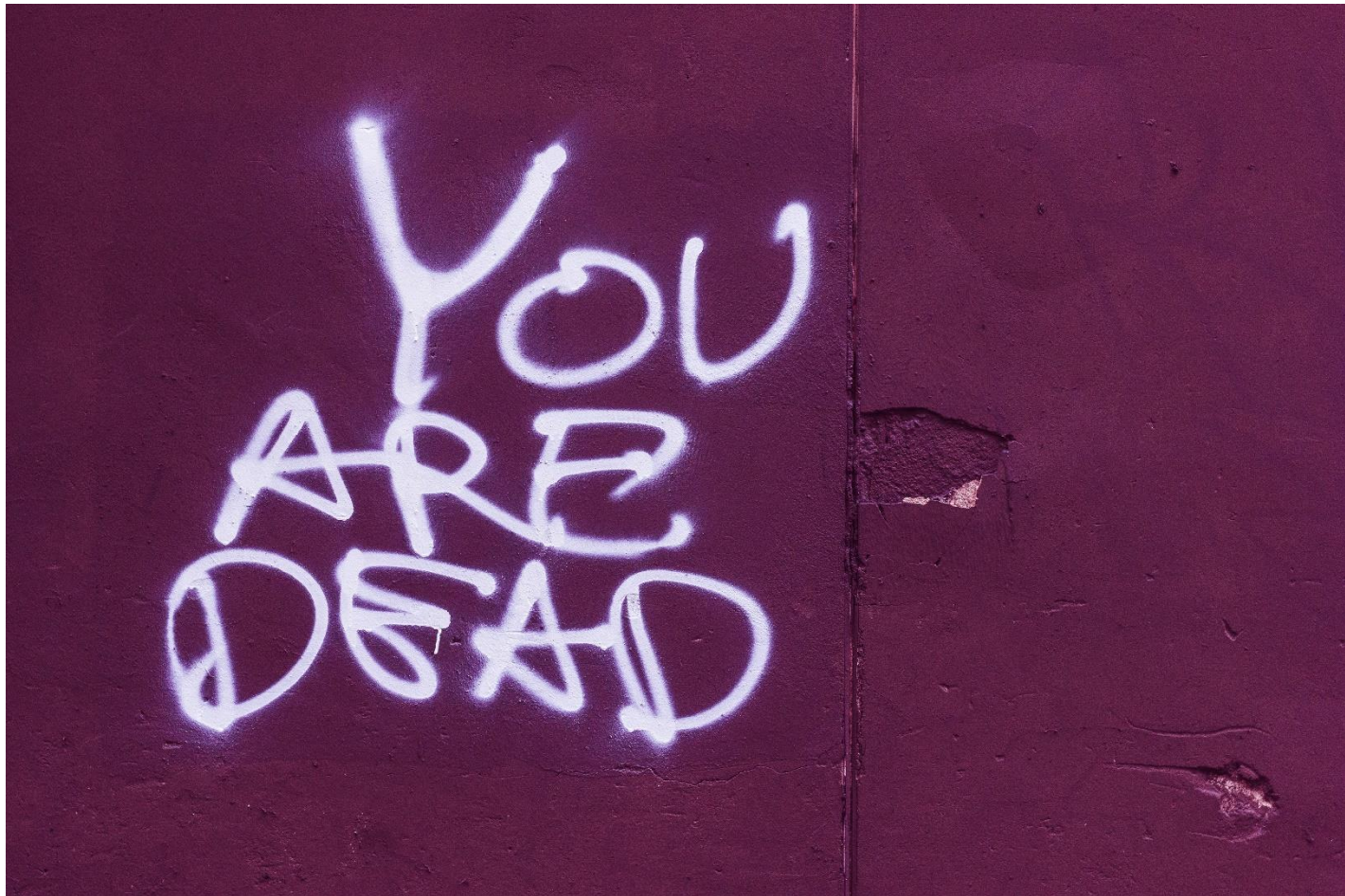
May 19, 2019



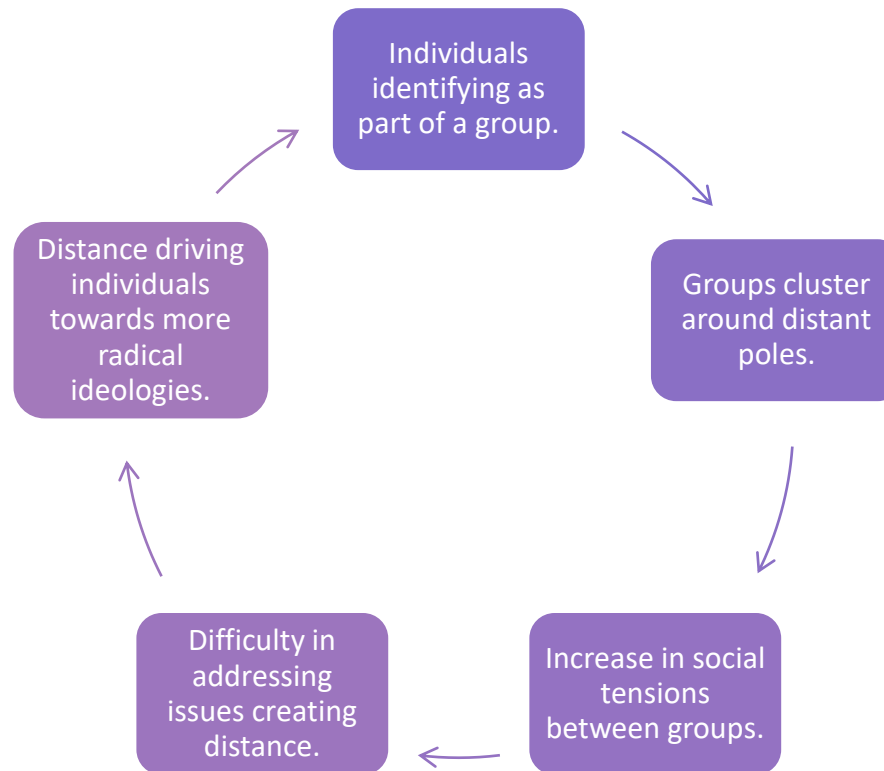
VALLETTA, Malta (AP) — Two Maltese soldiers have pleaded not guilty to



The problem



Societal Polarization





Radicalisation and Violent Extremism

- “Phenomenon of people embracing opinions, views and ideas which could lead to act of terrorism”
- Radicalisation as a process:
 - Not everyone will reach the point where they engage in violent activity, violent extremism or terrorism
- Need to identify the risk and tackle the causes and drivers to prevent it



What do Maltese practitioners say?





Where are we now?

- Radicalization is not perceived as a problem
- Migration and integration
- Right-wing polarization
- Islamic extremism
- Lack of knowledge and policies to tackle radicalization
 - *“In Malta we are still very tribal, I mean we don’t have defined structures and regulations”*

Drivers of polarization and radicalisation





One possible solution



ARMOUR



Project and aims



Countering and preventing radicalisation in young people through education and strong local partnership



Increase awareness and capacity in first-line practitioners



Building on research with first-line practitioners and best practices



Activities



Understanding
Violent
Radicalisation



Design ARMOUR
Model of
Experimental Labs



Evaluation,
Feedback and
Validation





Why schools/teachers?

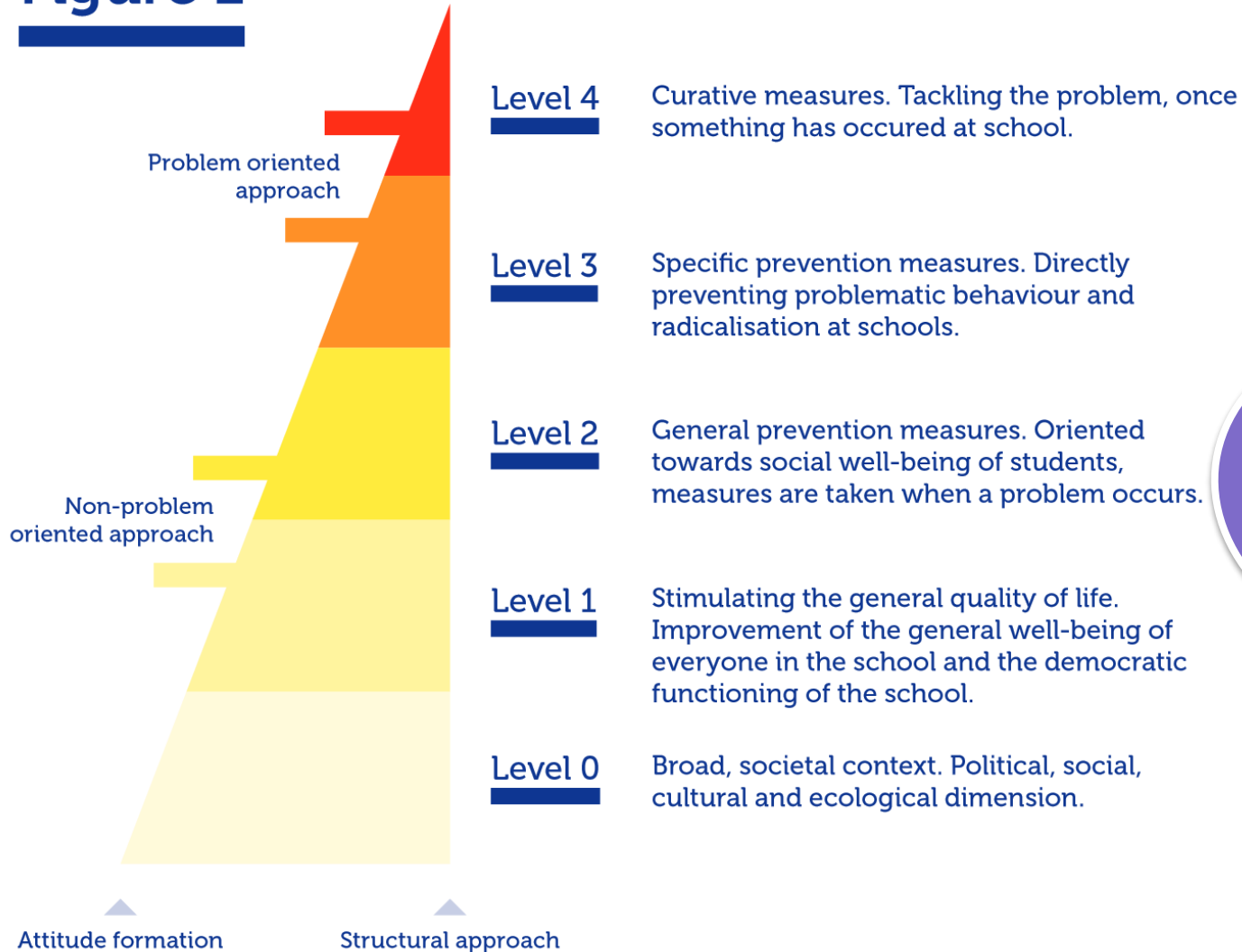
Schools are '*labs for democracy*' that would provide sustainable responses to societal polarization

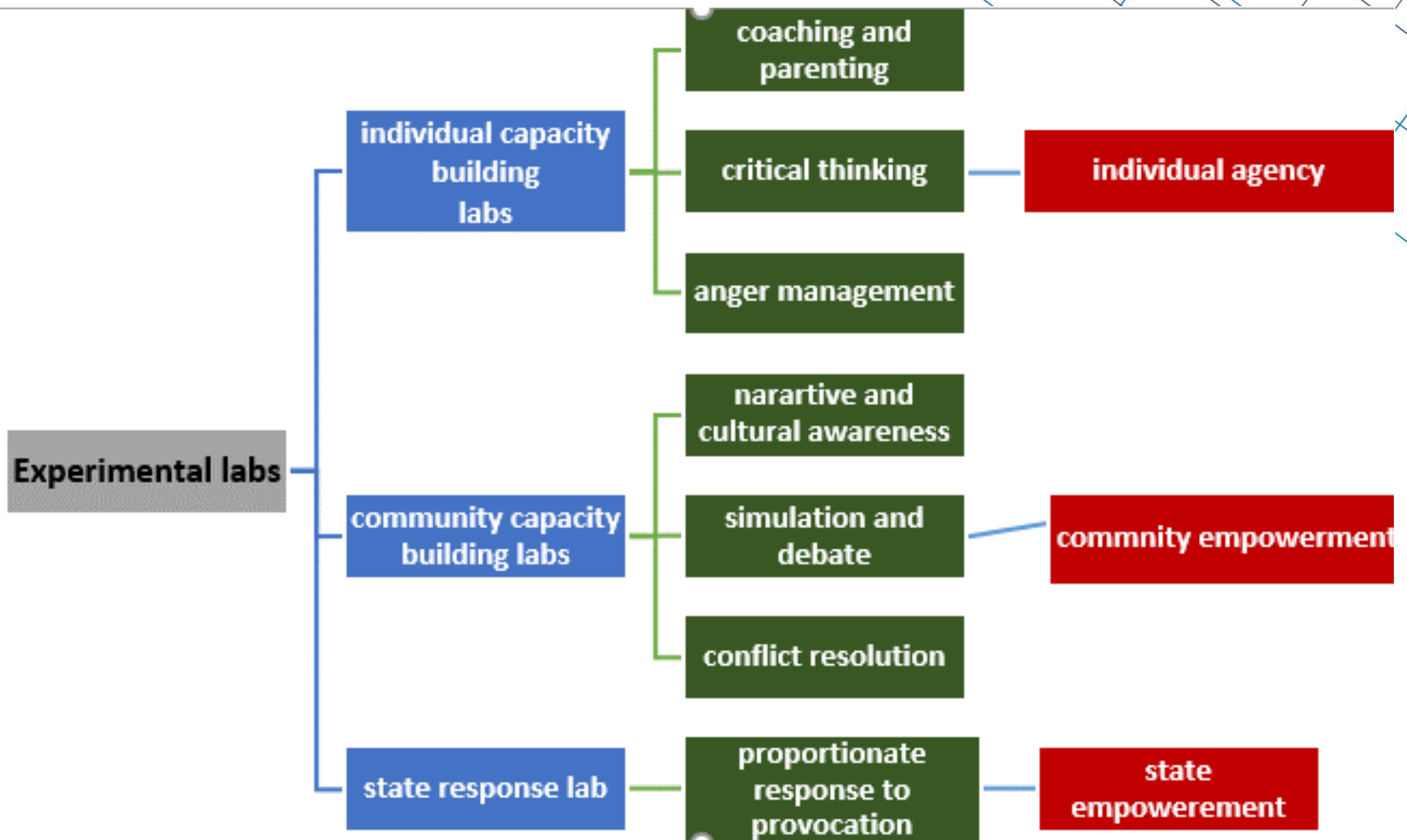
Extremism exploits social-emotional needs and challenges linked to broader questions of identity, belonging and lack of prospects.

→ become particularly attractive to youngsters and young adults in the process of defining themselves.



Figure 1





Experimental laboratories design

Types of psycho-educational interventions



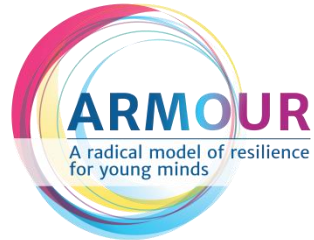
Methodology

- Each laboratory combines several exercises aimed at:
 - A. teaching how to map problems
 - B. teaching various strategies on solving the problem



What have we done so far?

- Identifying relevant stakeholders in Malta (national authorities, NGOs, academic entities) – **create a pool of human resources and expertise**
- Collecting practitioners' insights (e.g. interviews/focus groups) – **identify problems and best practices**
- Engaging with practitioners in designing the content for the Els (e.g. pre-testing training sessions) – **setting up a multi-stakeholder working group**
- Working on national guidelines for addressing the issue of societal polarization in schools – **designing and implementing national solutions**



Thank you!

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