Radicalization and Extremism

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Abstract

This article is focused on course 8 of the VirtuEU internationally funded Erasmus project. The topic is radicalization (and extremism). One has to understand where radicalization comes from to then be able to prevent it. When feeling distrust in national governments and when feeling excluded from decision-making processes (marginalized) violent and extremist groups may appear. Deradicalization is an objective, especially of youths in higher education. The process will hence involve educating for critical thinking, for deradicalization to occur. Certain political groups are gaining traction by appealing to woes felt by discontent groups in the EU democratic system. Increasing crime rates in Europe are being attributed to increasing migration levels in the EU and populist politicians are taking advantage of this to gain votes. Climate change, the energy crisis, and wars further undermine social stability in free democratic countries. VOSviewer analyses are performed in this article to increase awareness of certain keywords in the Scopus database literature. Radicalization AND "European Union"; and Deradicalization AND process; were the basis of two Scopus searches and subsequent bibliometric analyses undertaken. Exercises are also given herein for VirtuEU (or other) students to do and hence reflect on their daily lives and realities.

Keywords: Violence; deradicalization; democracy; European Union; prevention.

1. INTRODUCTION – RADICALIZATION AND EXTREMISM

"Radicalization has become an important part of the twenty-first-century security and political landscape. It is a seemingly ubiquitous term, employed by academics, policymakers, civil society actors, practitioners, and media alike, in ever-expanding ways - describing everything from changing domestic social movements to the growth of international terrorism... "Radicalization": the *processes* during which individuals or groups adopt increasingly extreme political, social, or religious beliefs, positions, or aspirations, particularly in cases associated with the use of violence." (Awan & Lewis, 2024).

When democracy goes wrong, and groups feel excluded from decision-making processes, radicalization and extremism may occur.

Co-governance, participatory governance, or participatory democracy is the first choice. Gaventa (2006) argues that this surpasses conventional notions of representative democracy by establishing and promoting participatory methods of citizen involvement, which are based on and reinforce more comprehensive notions of the rights and duties of democratic citizenship. The risk of this strategy is reducing representative democracy. While strong citizen participation can benefit those involved, it may also result in delayed decision-making, increased policy implementation costs, and limited benefits for non-participating citizens. When public engagement is low, participants may feel that their efforts are ineffective, which can lead to increased pessimism, cynicism, and demoralization, further eroding representative democracy's legitimacy. Participation can have negative effects on the demos in a representative democracy, whether strong or weak (Somerville, 2011).

Figure 1 is a VOSviewer depiction – first a search was done in the Scopus database using the terms Radicalization AND "European Union" - on 29-03-2024 (92 documents found); then a Co-occurrence analysis of Author keywords (Full-counting method) was done and portrayed in the Overlay Visualisation perspective on VOSviewer.
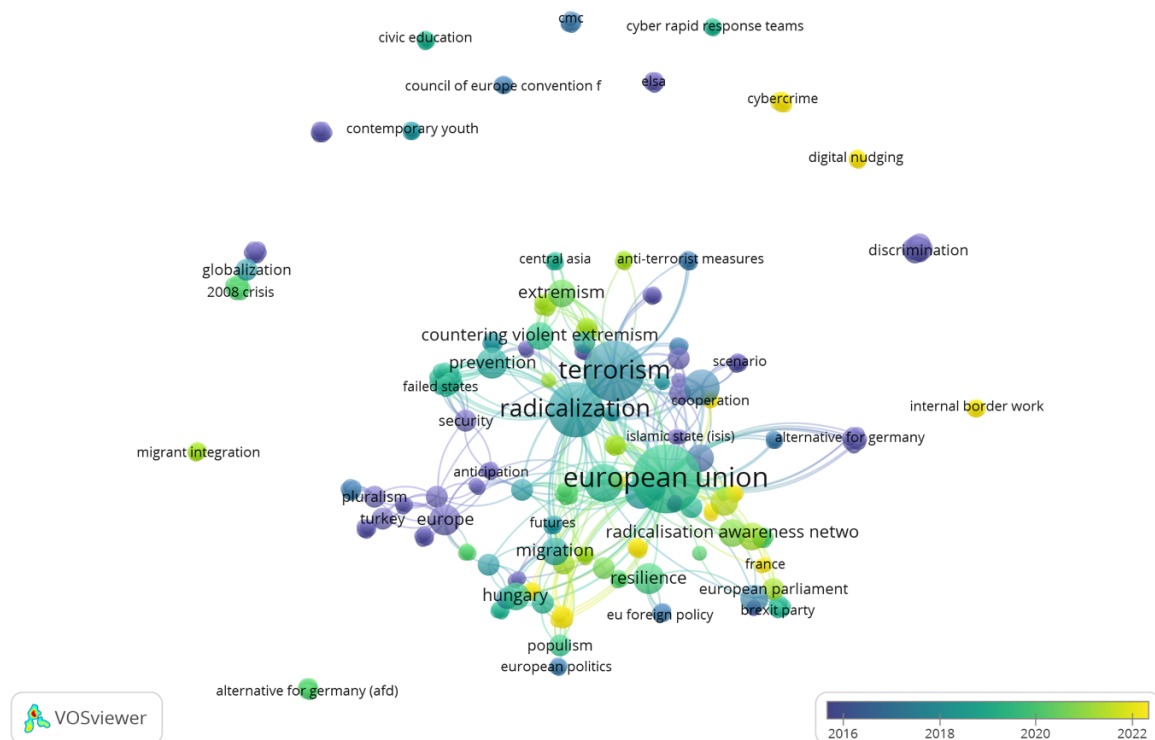

Figure 1 – VOSviewer depiction - Radicalization AND "European Union" search on Scopus on 29-03-2024 – Co-occurrence of Author keywords, Overlay Visualisation on VOSviewer

Note how the term populism is to be found in figure 1. Certain politicians and political parties have become popular due to their rhetoric and to their appealing to the general public's discontent regarding certain matters – for example, increasing crime rates – often seen to be linked to the increase in immigration levels (migration is a key word in figure 1). The terms EU foreign policy, European politics, pluralism, prevention, anticipation, awareness, security and antiterrorist measures are all to be found in figure 1.

Table 1 shows the most important keywords in the figure 1 search. One such word is terrorism. Others are counterterrorism, security, and resilience, which give us hope.

Table 1 - Showing the most important keywords in the figure 1 search using VOSviewer

Selected	Keyword	Occurrences	Total link strength
✓	european union	19	106
✓	terrorism	15	85
✓	radicalization	12	78
✓	prevention	4	30
✓	radicalisation	6	28
✓	counterterrorism	4	27
✓	jihadism	5	25
✓	extremism	3	21
✓	security	2	21
✓	europe	4	20
✓	resilience	4	20
✓	european security	2	19
✓	migration	3	17
✓	radicalisation awareness network	3	17
✓	breeding grounds	1	16
✓	countering violent extremism	3	16
✓	counterinsurgency	1	16
✓	demography	2	16
✓	european cities	1	16
✓	european forum for urban security	1	16
✓	failed states	1	16
✓	globalization	2	16

The issue of preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE) has received significant attention from international, national, and local governments for the last two decades. In the past decade, a comprehensive framework for prevention has been developed, which includes initiatives like the Radicalization Awareness Network by the European Commission and organizations like the Hedayah Centre. However, for the most part, the responsibility of prevention falls on the practitioners and professionals who are actively involved in the daily frontline work of education, youth work, social care, and health services. Incorporating this preventive work into existing roles has posed challenges, leading to a growing body of critical scholarship. It raises concerns about security-related tasks encroaching upon the responsibilities of social and educational professionals. Specifically, it highlights the importance for frontline practitioners to identify and report signs of extremism (Stanley et al., 2017).

To move away from "security-focused methods," there is an increasing trend in P/CVE strategies to portray the involvement of social and educational professionals as resilience builders against radicalization (Stephens and Sieckelinck, 2020). Bevir and Brown (2023) utilize decentred theory in their analysis of counter-terrorism governance to highlight the significance of policy actor viewpoints. According to their argument, a variety of governance practices arise when policies are challenged and changed by individuals who resist the intentions and policies of the elite by incorporating their local traditions and reasoning.

Coaffee (2023) expands its scope beyond practitioners to analyze how local communities contribute to or resist the enforcement of counter-terrorism policies and local governance structures.

Radicalism is a prevalent indicator that can manifest in a society driven by diverse motives, such as social, political, cultural, or religious factors. It is characterized by extreme, violent, and anarchistic actions as a means of rejecting the prevailing symptoms. Radicalism is a perspective that seeks significant changes based on its understanding of social reality or the ideology it adopts (Karell & Freedman, 2019). In 2016, a study was conducted by Zainiyati that revealed that the spread of radical ideologies in educational institutions can be attributed to certain teachers who interpret themes within the Islamic Education Curriculum using a radical mindset. These teachers then proceed to present and teach these interpretations to their students. Additionally, reading materials can be distributed to students, either focusing on specific themes to promote deeper understanding or incorporated into exam questions.

Radicalization typically refers to a progression where individuals or groups become more inclined to adopt extremist ideologies or resort to violent actions. The simplicity of this statement is complicated by the disagreement over the definition of radicalization, the factors that contribute to it, and the criteria for identifying extremism. The controversy surrounding the definition of extremism is exemplified by the uproar over classifying Extinction Rebellion, a climate change organization, as an extremist group (Dodd and Grierson, 2020). The definition of radicalization differs significantly based on whether it focuses on cognitive or behavioral outcomes (Neumann, 2013).

Figure 2 shows another VOSviewer depiction. Note how "political violence" and "climate crisis" are present in the figure. On the other hand, counter-radicalization, "deradicalization of students", "civic values" and awareness all seem to be positive aspects leading to deradicalization.
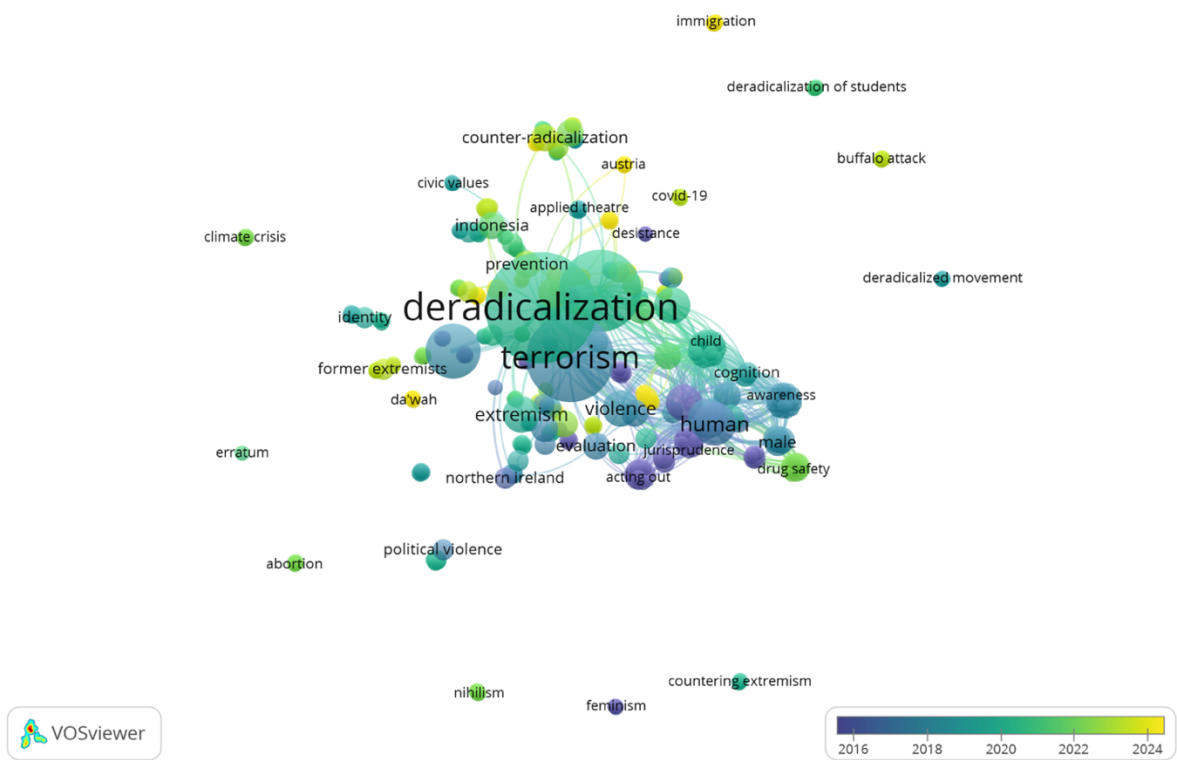

Figure 2 – VOSviewer depiction - Deradicalization AND process search on Scopus on 19-08-2024 – Co-occurrence of Author keywords, Overlay Visualisation on VOSviewer

Table 2 shows the main keywords involved in this second Scopus search (Deradicalization AND process search on Scopus on 19-08-2024). Human, psychology, ideology, fanaticism and trauma are all strong words in table 2.

Table 2 - Showing the most important keywords in the figure 2 search using VOSviewer

The article proceeds with a methodology section, followed by a course description section. Models of radicalization and deradicalization are set forth. Exercises are given for students to do.

2. METHODOLOGY

The Literature Review incorporated on Radicalization was derived from the Web of Science, Scopus, and Science Direct databases. A search by topics for the Literature Review was conducted based on the criteria established using the query "Radicalization". The aim was to highlight the importance of fighting against Radicalization for a safer, and additionally a more cohesive society and democracy. Articles (including early access) and review articles in the English language with no time restriction were additional filters adopted in the search. VOSviewer depictions were also created, from Scopus database searches - using the terms Radicalization AND "European Union" - on 29-03-2024 (92 documents were found); and deradicalization and process – on 19-08-2024 (108 documents were found).

3. COURSE DESCRIPTION

Objective - Develop a one-hour online course on radicalisation and two hours offline.

We aim for a mix of theoretical knowledge, practical examples, interactive elements, and assessments, for learners to gain a comprehensive understanding of extremism and effective strategies to prevent radicalisation in educational environments.

One-hour online course on radicalisation - the content is structured to cover key aspects of extremism and radicalisation, including recognizing warning signs, risk factors, protective factors, and practical steps to prevent radicalization. The outline follows below.

Focus on political radicalization (groups, factions, tendencies), on religious radicalization (socialization and underlying belief process), and even on sports radicalization (certain extremes reached - even in sport - sports fanatics, etc.), for example.

We shall:

- Explain the importance of understanding and preventing radicalisation.

- Give examples of radicalization.

- Discuss certain causes of radicalization and their prevention.

4. MODELS OF RADICALIZATION

The Attitudes-Behaviour Corrective (ABC) model (Khalil et al., 2022) and the Two-Pyramids Model (McCauley and Moskalenko, 2017), set themselves apart from other models by distinguishing between the radicalization of beliefs and the radicalization of actions. However, these models vary in their interpretations of what leads to radicalization.

The ABC model is based on rational choice theory, which proposes that individuals are more likely to adopt extreme positions when the benefits, whether they are psychological or otherwise, are greater than the associated costs. McCauley (2022) argues that this foundation is being challenged because it does not adequately consider the dynamics of groups and social identity. These differences highlight the broader conversation surrounding the factors behind radicalization. Although it is widely recognized that radicalization is a complex process influenced by various factors and not limited to one specific path (Dzhekova et al., 2016), there are disagreements regarding the significance and priority assigned to different factors that may contribute to radicalization.

While certain strategies prioritize extreme ideologies, alternative approaches center on grievances stemming from a feeling of being marginalized by the current political system (Doosje et al., 2016). Additionally, some individuals are drawn to groups that provide a sense of belonging and shared identity, while others seek a sense of purpose and meaning (Kruglanski et al., 2014). These differences are important once again - if we consider ideology as the main cause of radicalization, it leads to different approaches to prevention compared to when the primary focus is on radicalization as a means of satisfying the need for belonging and shared identity. Various viewpoints arise from different disciplines such as psychology, education, and public health (Stephens and Sieckelinck, 2020).

Another look at radicalization:

Phase 1 of radicalization (Doosje et al., 2016):

At the micro level, factors within the individual may affect this process of **sensitivity**. During the sensitivity phase, the quest for significance becomes an important driving factor at the micro level. A loss of status, humiliation, and poor career prospects can cause feelings of insignificance. Radical organizations have the means to cultivate or revive sentiments of importance by giving new members a sense of community, admiration, bravery, prestige, and a purpose to fight for a sacred mission (Webber et al., 2017).

Personal uncertainty is another important driving factor at the micro level. Uncertainty drives individuals to seek strong identification with a group that offers clear norms and values. This is especially possible for radical groups, as they possess a distinct profile, provide a strong organization, and adhere to a simplistic worldview. Consequently, individuals facing personal uncertainty may find orthodox groups, like Jihadi groups, appealing due to their established behavioral guidelines.

The **social environment** plays a crucial role in the radicalization process at the meso level. At the meso level, fraternal relative deprivation is a significant driving factor. It refers to the feeling of injustice when people identify with their group and perceive unequal treatment compared to another group.

Friendships and family are another crucial factor at this meso level. People's social nature makes them susceptible to influence from those they are close to and interact with often. Extremist groups fulfill the

fundamental human need for in-group belongingness and establish a distinct out-group as the embodiment of evil, resulting in a powerful inter-group dynamic.

Larger societal factors contribute to radicalization at a macro level.

Phase 2 of radicalization:

In the second phase, a person with a **"cognitive opening"** becomes part of a radical group. **Mutual commitment** plays a central role in this process. The person feels connected to the group, and the group is connected to the individual. At the micro level, people initially enter as **marginal participants and are incentivized** to display loyalty to the group. Consequently, this individual is prone to conforming to the group's norms and values, such as publicly criticizing an out-group. The meso level is crucial for reinforcing ties between individuals and groups. Initiation rituals can accomplish this.

Furthermore, being **physically and psychologically isolated** can disconnect individuals from their former social context. **Training and coaching** are crucial components of this phase. During this phase, group members are often encouraged to sever ties with friends and family who are not part of the group. The in-group becomes cohesive and strong. This is not necessary when people feel supported in their radical beliefs and actions by their social environment (Doosje et al., 2016).

Phase 3 of radicalization:

In this final phase, people resort to violence against other groups. Though it may be difficult for people to engage in violence psychologically, a common catalyst at the individual level is the experience of losing a loved one to death (Pyszczynski et al., 2006).

Preparing for the possibility of using violence and risking death requires individuals to create a **testament through writing or videotaping** at the meso level. Once people take this step, it becomes more difficult for them to withdraw. Furthermore, individuals rationalize their acts of violence towards an out-group by emphasizing the non-human characteristics of the out-group, often likening them to vermin such as rats or cockroaches (Haslam, 2006). This involves portraying the out-group as a potential threat to the in-group, thereby justifying the use of force against them. **Appeals by authorities** to use violence are significant at the macro level (Doosje et al., 2016).

4.1. DERADICALIZATION

In his 2012 study, Azyumardi proposed six methods for de-radicalization: rehabilitation, re-education, re-socialization, fostering national insight, moderate religious development, and entrepreneurship. The description of this strategy is as outlined below:

Rehabilitation: There are two approaches to implementing the rehabilitation program, namely;

The development of independence to train and support former convicts in acquiring skills and expertise.

To effectively engage in dialogue with convicted terrorists, it is essential to prioritize personality development. This will promote a better understanding of their mindset and foster acceptance of diverse perspectives.

The rehabilitation process involves collaboration with various entities, including the police, correctional institutions, the Ministry of Religion (if it exists) and mass organizations.

Re-education: The purpose of reeducation is to deter by imparting enlightened teachings to the public, thus preventing the neglect of developing this understanding. In the case of convicted terrorists, education aims to provide them with knowledge and understanding about radical ideologies that promote violence, so that they come to recognize that acts like suicide bombings are not a form of jihad but are instead synonymous with terrorism. As regards sport and supporting a particular club president, violence to uphold the status quo is also not the right route.

Re-socialization: is a program that helps former terrorists and convicts reintegrate into society by guiding them in socializing and interacting with the community. Universities can promote de-radicalization through

educational initiatives like public lectures and workshops. Students are encouraged to engage in critical thinking and promote a strong sense of nationalism to resist harmful ideologies.

Advancing national insight fosters national unity and reduces violence acceptance.

Religious formation involves activities to foster an inclusive, peaceful, and tolerant understanding of religion. Religious development involves promoting ideological moderation, particularly by transforming radical and violent ideologies more towards an inclusive, peaceful, and tolerant orientation.

Entrepreneurship: By offering training and financial support, we aim to foster an entrepreneurial mindset and prevent the development of violent tendencies. Entrepreneurship plays a significant role in the implementation of de-radicalization. The corporate sector has the power to generate employment opportunities, decrease unemployment rates, boost individuals' earnings, and enhance productivity. Furthermore, the corporate sector also plays a significant role in fostering creativity and independence among individuals.

4.1.1. EXERCISES – EXAMPLES FROM YOUR OWN LIVES

Transversal examples: there is a fine line between what is a good ideal, but which taken to the extreme loses legitimacy.

1 - Give examples from your own lives and regarding what you may have seen - whether in real life or in film / the movies (for those less travelled and with less experience).

"Correio da Manhã writes in its Thursday edition [Februrary, 2024] that a video found on the mobile phone of Carlos Nunes, known as 'Jamaica', proves that Fernando Madureira incited a climate of terror at FC Porto's general assembly and intimidated members. 'Jamaica' filmed the head of the Super Dragons and Vítor 'Aleixo' circulating among the seated members, while chanting, in a clear climate of intimidation. The recording was one of the many pieces of evidence that supported 'Macaco's' pre-trial detention." (*Record*, 2024).

Radicalism in sport. People have to take off wrong club shirt which they have on. Trying to maintain the status quo. FCP and the official supporters (Super Dragões and their leader). Same with the No Name Boys - Benfica. Bruno Carvalho while President of Sporting – the players given a real physical beating. What is wrong with sport and how radical may it become?

"Sporting Lisbon's former president is charged with kidnapping and terrorism for 'ordering 50 football hooligans to attack his own players during training'.

Bruno De Carvalho will be tried for ordering 50 hooligans to attack his players.

The attack occurred on May 15 [2018] after the hooligans entered Sporting's facilities.

Argentines Marcos Acuna and Rodrigo Battaglia 'received worst of the attacks'.

They were reportedly kicked, punched and even received death threats.

There are 43 other people to be tried but it is unknown whether a date is set".

(Mayes, 2019)

"Former president of Sporting Lisbon Bruno De Carvalho will be tried for ordering 50 football hooligans to attack his own players during training.

The attack occurred on 15th May 2018 as the players were training, with 50 football hooligans entering the team's facilities.

The thugs attacked several players and staff and also wrecked the locker rooms at the club's training ground."

(Mayes, 2019)

4.1.2. SUGGEST MOVIES TO WATCH ON THE TOPIC OF RADICALIZATION

Documentary on North Korea?

Documentary on Gypsies? Fear of losing traditions and roots. Closed society.

Greenpeace. Environmentalists. Good base. But shocking decisions. Video on animals being killed. Foie gras in the making. Whales being killed. Good idea but wrongly transmitted?!

Women undressing in public. Feminism.

Gay parades also exaggerate, perhaps.

Psychologists. Experiments in labs. Transforming children into what we want – Watson – behaviourism to the extreme. CIA operatives... as with gymnasts and sportspeople...

5. COURSE SPECIFICITIES

5.1. LEARNING OBJECTIVES

A lot of information is now available to a lot of people, due to the Internet and to social media. To be able to judge and think for oneself is essential. To be able to discern what is right and what is perhaps fake news is paramount.

"Enhancing critical thinking and media literacy, particularly in the use of internet and social media, such as to counter discrimination indoctrination, polarization, and violent radicalization." (VirtuEU project proposal, p.7).

5.2. LEARNING OUTCOMES

With this course on radicalization we aim to create awareness of what radicalization means and to build trust in national governments and hence lower extremism. A prime means of prevention of radicalization is active citizenship.

"According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), in Europe on average 4 out of 10 people trust their national government while 4 out of 10 do not. Distrust in national governments, combined with high rates of radicalization in the European and Western Balkan Countries raise an alarming need for Europe to invest in active citizenship as a means of prevention, defending Democracy and social cohesion." (VirtuEU project proposal, p.4).

The belief in democracy and its positive points needs to overcome the growing Euroscepticism and dissatisfaction with national governments.

"Reducing Distrust and Dissatisfaction rates among citizens. Distrust and Dissatisfaction with national governments is a trend that undermines Democracy, and hinders the foundations of society. In Europe (Central and Eastern) and Western Balkan Countries trust in Democracy is in peril. At the same time, radicalization and extremism rise, while Euroscepticism still remains a worrying issue, quite high on the European agenda." (VirtuEU project proposal, p.5).

6. REFLECTION AND FUTURE STEPS

It will be a true challenge to motivate youths via online and offline activities, devised to increase their knowledge on crucial aspects of democracy and civic participation. VirtuEU and this course on radicalization, in particular, will assume a prominent role in the process.

VirtuEU is to invest "in increasing the knowledge of the participants in civic participation, democracy and social initiative emphasizing the history of Democracy in Europe and the European structures. Deeper understanding and knowledge of democratic and governmental procedures decreases the levels of distrust, and leads to more stable societies." (VirtuEU project proposal, p.8). VirtuEU is to foster and encourage "the active participation of citizens. The project foresees specific non-formal educational activities that will further motivate the participants to be more involved in civic society and contribute or start their own social initiatives." (VirtuEU project proposal, p.8).

Portugal is seen to have a feminine and pacific culture, and to be "a country of gentle customs" ["*Portugal é um país de brandos costumes*"]; focused on well-being and quality of life. We aim to also share our perspectives on different matters relevant to the European Union.

By performing another VOSviewer bibliometric analysis (co-occurrence of all keywords, full counting method) on the Scopus database, using the terms facilitator AND democracy, 182 documents were found (search on 23-08-2024). Please see figure 3.
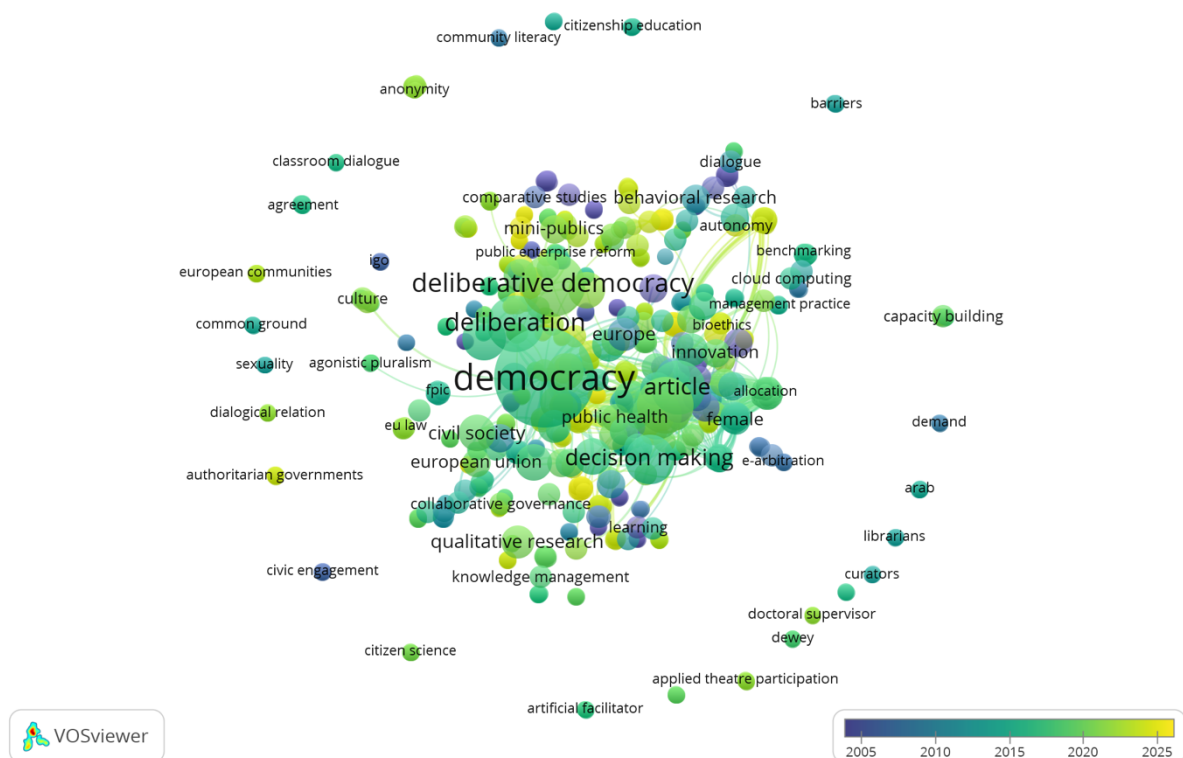

Fig. 3 - A VOSviewer bibliometric analysis on the Scopus database, using the search terms facilitator AND democracy – Overlay Visualization

Note in figure 3 the keywords knowledge management, European Union, Europe, civil society, civic engagement, dialogical relation / dialogue, deliberation, deliberative democracy, agonistic pluralism, culture, agreement, autonomy, and classroom dialogue. These keywords are essential to the VirtuEU project.

Deliberative democracy means the most recent paradigm of liberal democratic theory (Mouffe, 1999). "The model of "deliberative democracy", which is currently becoming the fastest growing trend in the field. Their main idea: that in a democratic polity political decisions should be reached through a process of deliberation among free and equal citizens, has accompanied democracy since its birth in fifth century Athens." (Mouffe, 2000, p.1).

Deliberative democracy sees in agonistic pluralism its alternative – whereby "the increasing success of the extreme right in several countries, western societies are witnessing a growing disaffection with democratic institutions" (Mouffe, 1999, p.745).

Mouffe, in SSOAR, (2000, from the abstract) writes:

"Democratic theory needs to acknowledge the ineradicability of antagonism and the impossibility of achieving a fully inclusive rational consensus. I argue that a model of democracy in terms of 'agonistic pluralism' can

help us to better envisage the main challenge facing democratic politics today: how to create democratic forms of identifications that will contribute to mobilize passions towards democratic designs."

Still further, according to Mouffe (2000, p.1): "the signs of disaffection with present institutions are becoming widespread. An increasing number of people feel that traditional parties have ceased to take their interests into account and extreme right-wing parties are making important advances in many European countries..."

Finally, we would like to set forth that ""Agonistic pluralism" as defined here is an attempt to operate what Richard Rorty would call a "redescription" of the basic self-understanding of the liberal democratic regime, one which stresses the importance of acknowledging its conflictual dimension.". (Mmouffe, 2000, p.14).

Can certain forms of conflict (in democracy) be positive? In view of the permanent presence of conflict in the political environment, individuals would do well to channel this conflict towards positive outcomes.

Much as with VirtuEU, the role of the facilitators will be to channel doubts and queries towards positive overall goals. Agonism emphasizes that certain forms of conflict may be positive.

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