

Public education and the challenges of religious pluralism – opportunities of the public educational mandate facing religious radicalization and endangerment of liberal rights

Mirijam Wiedemann, Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports , Baden-Württemberg

[Introduction and visual impulse]

What do these young people and their fates have in common?

They are students and were radicalized in Germany.

Today I would like to talk about this issue.

My name is Mirijam Wiedemann, I work for the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport in Baden-Württemberg and by showing you these images I would like to lead over to my presentation's topic: ***Public education and the challenges of religious pluralism – opportunities of the public educational mandate facing religious radicalization and endangerment of liberal rights***

The presentation is structured as follows:

-

- 1) Current demographic, social and religious developments in Germany
- 2) Challenges and religious based threats to individual rights
- 3) The legal framework of the public school system
- 4) Opportunities and measures

As in the Federal Republic of Germany as a whole, processes of demographic and social change can also be discerned in the Federal State of Baden-Württemberg.

According to the Microcensus 2013, 3 million people with immigration background had been living in the state of Baden-Württemberg, which accounts for 28% of the total population. Among the under 20-year-olds it is even 40%. Among other things, that gives rise to an influx of new religious and ideological offers and to a mixture of diverse ideologies.

This religious change, which has been discernible for a long time, can only be approximately grasped by terms such as "subjectivization", "biographization", "aestheticization" and "pluralization". It is above all subjectivization and, in this context, individualization that underlies the progressive social change in society. Due to the increase of economic independence and the experience of growing moments of freedom, which are also reflected in the development of the most diverse "family organizations", the separation from former traditional communities progresses. The lack of previously defined and clearly structured social communities leads to the dissolution of traditional ways of life, conventions and orientations for action, which were also accompanied by a feeling of security and support.

New patterns of commitment and dependency have established from major systems, such as the labor market, as well as education and employment systems.

The new feeling of freedom and the associated possibility of self-design through self-techniques lead to a voluntarily intended genesis of the subject. The so-called "concern for oneself" (M. Foucault), often superficially referred to by people as ego-centrism, aims at an essential factor, namely external acceptance. "As the other one sees me, so am I", entirely in the sense of Althusser's invocation model. Enhanced forms of materialism, consumerism and superficiality emerge, which can also be observed in our daily television program. Popular shows, such as "Germany's next Topmodel" or "The Bachelor" are just a few examples.

With the perceptible growing diversity of our society in a globalized world, acceptance of pluralism is growing, particularly in the area of the various world interpretations. However, these increasing choices of life make it increasingly more difficult to shape oneself and to establish one's identity. This can be seen above all in the example of the booming esoteric healing market.

Another phenomenon that also influences the religious landscape is the so-called "event society". The urge for enjoyment as well as the conscious contemporary experience with the goal of eudaimonia is mirrored in the offers of religious and ideological actors. The terms "spiritual healer" and "coach" are just a few of them.

Precisely these developments are increasingly being identified also in contemporary fundamentalist groups. There is a growing need in society for tangible support, binding rules of life with a clearly defined footing. It is precisely these needs that actors of extremist and radicalized offerings take advantage of. By allegedly offering solutions and due to the suggested power of the group its members experience an increased self-importance in contrast to an apparent unwieldy, impersonal and value-free world.

Why are the so called conflictual groups, meaning those that contain possible threats to individual rights, not simply banned?

This principle is reflected in the constitutional foundations of the Federal Republic of Germany:

Art. 4 I, II GG

(1) Freedom of faith, conscience and religious and philosophical belief are inviolable.

(2) The undisturbed practice of religion is guaranteed.

The imperative of the ideological-religious neutrality of the state is preserved and only intervened if the fundamental rights are endangered, restricted or violated.

Nevertheless, the state does justice to its public assistance by promoting counselling and prevention measures, which will be addressed later on.

This legal basis also gives rise to the following framework conditions for school actors and educational contents in the state constitution of Baden-Württemberg and its school law.

The educational mandate of the school in Baden-Württemberg is described in §1, section 2 of the School Act:

[...] the students [are to be taught]

*in responsibility before God, in the spirit of Christian charity, humanity and love of peace, love for the people and the homeland, **respect for the dignity and conviction of others**, the will to achieve and personal responsibility as well as social probation and to promote the development of their personality and talent, **to educate for the recognition of the value and order conceptions of the free democratic basic order**, which in detail does not exclude a discussion about them, whereby the free democratic basic order, as anchored in Basic Law and the National Constitution, may not be questioned .[...]*

I would also like to refer to the *Beutelsbach Consensus (1976)*, which has the status of an educational maxim not a law, in which the following has been recorded by the State Agency for Civic Education, political didactics and representatives of politics and denominations:

- 1 The prohibition of overwhelming / prohibition of indoctrination*
- 2. What is controversial in science and politics must also appear controversial in the classroom (except RE)*
- 3. The student must be able to analyze a political situation and his own interests*
- 4. Neutrality obligation (except for RE)*

Here again, reference is made to the need for pluralism and the ban on conveying uniform perspectives, as well as the need for a diversity of different perspectives. The classroom and the school should be the place where the endurance of such a variety of perspectives can and must be practiced.

Precisely because it is also Germany in which more and more forms of ideological-religious fundamentalism arise that disregard or even reject the diversity of perspectives. It should be clearly emphasized once again that diversity of perspective is not to be equated with value-neutrality. This distinction is also reflected in current discussions about the Sharia or the wearing of Islamic headscarves or burqas which have been strongly accompanied by the media.

So Democracy also means acceptance and tolerance towards different attitudes, actions and life choices within the framework of the Basic Law of the Federal Republic of Germany.

From all this information an important question arises in the context of this lecture:

How can schools in Baden-Württemberg and their educational mandate meet these processes of change and the associated challenges?

Despite progressive secularization, increasing criticism of institutionalized religions and a decline in religious knowledge and familiarity in society, the demand for spirituality or spiritual experiences remains high, according to the SINUS Youth Study of 2016. Young people in particular find themselves in a search for possible answers and an associated dimension of depth. However, the answers should become "cooler", "trendier" and above all "easier", both in the response patterns and in its accessibility, and above all "less critical".

In this context, the already described strong differentiation of the religious and ideological landscape represents one of the core challenges, not only for society in general, but above all for schools. On the one hand, the aim is to create a peaceful coexistence of the different worldviews, and on the other hand, to promote one's ability for self-protection and decision-making to gain an understanding of personal responsibility with regards to the conflictual religious and ideological offers.

The pupils' world has changed and so their attitude towards life. The digital age has reached the classroom all along and the way students communicate in it. Most of them spend a major proportion of their free time online and there often encounter forms of religion in order to meet their desire for their quest for identity and search for possible answers.

In this context, schools can take preventive action in several areas. Baden-Württemberg's perspectives on the current discourse are as follows:

On the one hand, the state has the opportunity to sensitize teachers to such conflicts through teacher training. In the State of Baden-Württemberg the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport frequently offers such advanced training sessions in a three-day-course to prepare and inform teachers about contemporary developments.

On the other hand, it is a matter of imparting competences to the pupils in dealing with religious phenomena, which is often the task of religious education or ethics.

But also in other subjects, such as social studies or history, [media savvy](#) is increasingly being brought into focus in order to be able to critically question dubious offers and above all conspiracy-theoretical contents and propagandistic webpages.

In general, it should not only be about prevention, but also about the teaching of tolerance, which goes hand in hand with the concept of religious competence. This is essential for creating and maintaining a peaceful pluralistic society. Here, Baden-Württemberg's model of denominational religious education has a peculiar role, as it is able to impart and promote

this religious competence in a special way. The students deal with their own religion or religious background in an enlightened way as well as with those of others and learn to accept each other in a multicultural society. Likewise, the teacher himself has a prominent position which conveys not only the pure teaching about religion, but religion itself from an "insider's perspective". The danger of other suggested models within the RE discourse consists primarily in the role of the teacher, who looks at the most diverse religious traditions from "outside" or possibly from "above".

Therefore the state of Baden-Württemberg cooperates with seven religious communities in a nationwide unique model to secure this competence acquisition.

In class, whether in denominational religious education or ethics, it is also fundamentally important to show students how they can approach their questions, needs and aspirations without getting into dangerous situations. It is important that questions about identity, belonging, meaning and purpose, truth, values and obligations are raised. It should be about a critical and intellectual reflection of one's own religious situatedness and thus an examination of the differences to other religious, some radicalized or extremist or non-religious communities. The promoted competence enables the student to see through the tactics and dangers behind other conflictual religious and ideological offers. Inter-religious dialogue and religious understanding itself represent important stages on the way to promote integration, pluralism and tolerance, as well as the early recognition of religious dangers.

However, the school as a whole with all its actors has a key role in the field of sustainable prevention work.

Its main task is to identify student's problems at an early stage, assess them critically and take appropriate measures. A current challenge for all parties involved is that they do not have a knowledge-based foundation and a proven methodology to build an institutionalized strategy upon. Many projects and measures, which are already showing initial success, are running in an experimental stage.

Educational measures of **primary or universal prevention** generally do not have any specific target groups. All social groups are addressed. Its aim is to strengthen already existing desired attitudes.

One example is the project "School without Racism - School with Courage" in Baden-Württemberg. This moderated school network, to which over 1000 schools now belong, has carried out a series of projects against Islamic ambiguity since 2010. This also includes several handbooks for teachers, which provide comprehensive information on ideologies of inequality.

Secondary or selective prevention includes educational measures aimed at young people whose life situation is considered "burdened" or who have so called risk factors. However,

not all schools associated with them belong to the field of action. These measures rather focus on school-based locations that have been proven to be "hot spots" or schools where manifestations of specific problematic phenomena have been observed. The measures include furthering training for teachers and social workers to provide information on phenomena of radicalization and options for action. They also include expert advice and informative events for pupils, at which, for example, dropouts authentically report about their experiences in radicalized scenes. These informative events can be easily booked by teachers and principals at any time of the year and are free of charge.

Finally, the area of **tertiary or indicated prevention** should be mentioned. Measures in this area are aimed at specific pupils who already show signs of manifested problems. It is also about getting young people out of extremist radicalized movements. In the school context, tertiary or indicated prevention is an important field of action, but places high technical demands on its involved parties. The measures include, for example, certified training courses for teachers and social workers, which impart in several modules detailed knowledge about the course of radicalization.

If we are talking about the public educational school mandate facing radicalization it is a complex field we are working in and our task is far from being completed. We must keep working on our measures to be able to keep track of the current changes in our society and to make a sustained contribution to our children's future so they can contribute to our democratic society.

[Visual impulse]

"No survival without a global ethic. No world peace without religious peace. No religious peace without religious dialogue." With these words from the preface of the much-noted book from 2000, Hans Küng cuts right to the chase of the matter, as it shows exactly the way to prevent radicalization and further understanding and tolerance within humanity.

It is important not to leave our pupils alone on this path but to support and prepare them with all the help we can offer and to teach them how to use their freedom of choice and religion responsibly.