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Translating Ideas into Actions: Analyzing Local Strategic Work to Counter Violent Extremism

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ABSTRACT

Despite the growing importance of local action to counter violent extremism (CVE), empirical research on the local organization and management of CVE is scarce, especially regarding public administrators' strategic work to translate policies and recommendations into frontline practice. Based mainly on ethnographic data and departing from new institutional theory, the paper refines our understanding of the symbolic, material, and relational work used to translate a diverse flow of ideas into concrete action in diverse institutional settings. Due to the institutional complexity, the cultural skill of the local CVE coordinator is identified as pivotal to successfully legitimizing and implementing CVE efforts.

KEYWORDS

Violent extremism; local government; translation; institutional work

Introduction

Despite becoming increasingly localized, and today widely considered the "backbone"[1] of European countermeasures, knowledge on municipal efforts to counter violent extremism (CVE) is still underdeveloped. While progress has recently been made in understanding the relevant content and ideas of local public policies,[2] incentives for local policymaking,[3] local collaborative structures,[4] and local frontline professionals' perceptions and practices,[5] answers to the question of *how* local CVE policies are translated into practice still have some distinctive gaps.[6] One such gap concerns the administrative, organizational, and strategic aspects of such translation. Indeed, previous research on CVE provides limited insight into how local administrators plan, design, implement, govern, and legitimize efforts for and in collaboration with a diverse set of internal and external stakeholders and audiences.[7]

In this paper, I will address this gap by "shadowing"[8] a municipal coordinator (MC) tasked with translating a CVE policy (adopted in 2016) into action in a large Swedish municipality. The paper's methodological approach is chosen in view of its aim, which is to explore the everyday work undertaken to advance the institutionalization of CVE efforts. The paper's main analytical focus is on the strategic practices applied by the MC to facilitate new thinking

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and actions among frontline practitioners, to negotiate and coordinate efforts in multiagency collaborative structures, and to legitimize municipal CVE efforts for internal and external stakeholders and audiences. The paper also discusses the types of skills that are important when carrying out these practices, especially in relation to the diverse and complex institutional context in which the MC acts. Given that, this analysis is not primarily evaluative, but rather descriptive. To offer a processual perspective on such organizing activities, I anchor my study in two concepts associated with new institutional theory – translation[8] and institutional work[9] – which are further elaborated on in the theoretical framework.

There are four rationales for undertaking this study. First, Swedish municipal CVE policies are typically vague in terms of concrete measures,[10] and previous research on local CVE efforts indicates that public administrators, in such conditions, possess extended agency and latitude to influence the types of efforts and how they are implemented.[11] Consequently, the MC constitutes a suitable actor to study when exploring translation processes concerned with CVE. Second, the MC represents one of the most common and central figures in local CVE organizing, being the designated public administrator tasked with implementing policies, facilitating collaboration, and building knowledge of CVE.[12] This type of public administrator predominantly acts horizontally, rather than vertically, to address specific policy issues.[13] While previous research has explored the roles, conditions, and practices of MCs concerned with handling related issues,[14] in-depth empirical research on MCs' strategic practices when handling CVE is still scarce. Third, much of the MC's work involves planning, designing, and implementing efforts to facilitate certain behaviors and practices among the city's frontline professionals. However, the MC lacks the hierarchical mandate to command key professional groups (e.g., teachers, social workers, and youth workers) to implement certain practices. Instead, CVE efforts must be negotiated and legitimized in consensus-oriented processes. We know little of how MCs tasked with CVE try to influence the actions of third-party actors, which is unfortunate given the fundamental impact of these processes on how CVE efforts are translated locally. Fourth, the MC must deal with a high degree of institutional and organizational complexity. There are conflicting perspectives on whether CVE is a municipal issue to begin with,[15] and the frontline professionals responsible for conducting efforts are guided by often conflicting institutional logics.[16] Further complicating the work, there are not only diverse internal stakeholders (e.g., different professional groups, managers, and local politicians) to consider, but also external ones (e.g., the media, experts, and governmental agencies) that influence municipal work. Studying the components of this complexity, and how they are handled by the MC, offers insights into the challenges related to local translation processes.

The rest of the paper is organized as follows. First, I provide an overview of how grand challenges such as violent extremism are organizationally handled in the public sector. This is followed by a section outlining the research context, focusing on policies influencing CVE efforts in Sweden. I then explain the theoretical framework underpinning the data analysis. After that, the methodology of the paper is presented. This is followed by the findings, which are further analyzed in the "Discussion" section. Lastly, I outline my contributions.

Managing CVE in local governance: multiagency approaches and local coordinators

The complexity and uncertainty that characterize grand challenges,[17] or wicked problems,[18] such as CVE constitute serious structural tests regarding the attributes typifying both traditional public-sector management and new public management.[19] In contrast, addressing grand challenges has called for public officials to forge management structures that recognize and correspond to the complexity inherent to the challenges.[20] Accordingly, the most common structural approach to such problems has been to use diverse collaborative governance structures.[21] Such governance structures are typically characterized as both cross sectoral and multi-level; they are also usually formalized, consensus oriented, knowledge intensive, and focused on implementing a particular policy or solving a public problem.[22]

Collaborative governance structures have a long history in crime prevention,[23] a policy issue often interwoven with CVE in Swedish municipalities.[24] With this history in mind, Cherney[25] suggests that the design and implementation of local CVE efforts would benefit from drawing on experience of crime prevention policy and practice. Accordingly, Cherney identifies three lessons for municipalities when building capacity to manage CVE: (a) invest in employing and training personnel; (b) develop material objects (e.g., guidelines and toolkits) to support frontline professionals; and (c) recognize that practices must be adapted and tailor-made in relation to the local context where they are implemented. From the opposite perspective, Ekblom[26] has discussed why local crime prevention efforts fail, and identifies the complexity embedded in multiagency approaches as one important factor. More specifically, professional groups and organizations define and understand the existence and extent of particular problems in divergent ways. This leads to differences not only in how the problem is perceived, but also in the efforts and resources considered appropriate to use when countering the issue. Professional groups are also guided by diverse cultures and bodies of knowledge that might be hard to integrate. This can lead to conflict and problems in implementation processes, especially in circumstances when the problem is poorly mapped or defined. Taken together, Ekblom's insights help

contextualize the challenges facing the MC when trying to institutionalize CVE in the municipality, while Cherney's three capacity-building lessons provide a basis for discussing whether the MC is working in a productive direction.

Despite centering on cooperation and consensus, collaborative structures still must be governed in certain respects. Here, the coordinator or cross-sector strategist represents a key actor and an increasingly popular solution at different levels in the Swedish public administration.[27] In the relative absence of studies on the strategic practices of MCs working with CVE, the literature on crime prevention again provides a solid basis for better understanding the roles and practices of MCs.[28] Cherney and Sutton[29] identified three distinctive functions of coordinators active in crime prevention in local governments. First, coordinators are change managers, acting purposefully to change the actions of a wide range of local actors in relation to crime prevention. To achieve this, coordinators strive to establish local multiagency collaboration to enroll actors to co-produce efforts and embed "new" practices in already established procedures. Second, local coordinators are flexible problem solvers, which is required as new issues and tasks continuously arise in the complex settings where coordinators act.[30] For example, media attention to certain issues must be addressed, and local conditions, both organizational and cultural, constrain what can be achieved. Third, and perhaps most important in relation to this study, MCs are transformative agents of a more cognitive and cultural sort, as MCs aim to influence new ways of thinking and speaking of issues to support major shifts in policy. As noted by Baak et al.[31] in a study of local CVE coordinators, language is a central tool with which to achieve change. In their study, the coordinators adapted their language to the people with whom they were communicating and to the specific purpose (i.e., teachers versus federal funders of CVE projects) in order to advance the implementation of CVE efforts. To sum up, and as noted by Cherney and Sutton,[32] Cherney,[33] and Hughes and Gilling,[34] the three functions described above indicate that MCs need to know a great deal about strategizing and organizing, rather than only having technical and issue-specific knowledge.

Research context: CVE efforts in Sweden and the city

When reviewing CVE efforts in Sweden, it is obvious that municipalities have become increasingly responsible for countering terrorism, extremism, and radicalization, all issues traditionally managed by national or international authorities.[35] The National CVE Coordinator's Office, established in 2014, was the first entity to propose that Swedish municipalities should adopt local CVE policies in 2015, highlighting collaboration as key to successful prevention.[36] To manage CVE efforts and collaboration locally, the National Coordinator (NC) also suggested that every municipality "should have a designated

function responsible for coordinating the preventive work against violent extremism."[37] This advice was heeded by the municipalities, and by the end of 2016, the NC announced that all 290 municipalities in Sweden either had a coordinator assigned to the task or a contact person for liaising with the NC.[38] Some major municipalities, such as the one studied here, have one or more coordinators working full-time on CVE efforts, while most combine their CVE duties with other functions, usually security coordination/management and public safety/crime prevention coordination.[39]

The present case city drafted its first CVE policy in 2015. This policy received substantial criticism from the political opposition, which claimed it was too "soft" in terms of the measures suggested. After revisions, the current policy was adopted in early 2016, and the MC was appointed the following autumn after several years of police service. The current policy is general in character, emphasizing guidelines, principles, and objectives rather than concrete actions. Examples of objectives include safeguarding democracy, preventing polarization and marginalization, and improving knowledge among employees. In relation to these objectives, some concrete efforts have been launched, but the MC describes the status of the city's CVE work as "still emerging." With that said, the policy is more concrete regarding the organizational setup, describing how a municipal coordinator is to lead collaborative efforts targeting both internal and external stakeholders. Internally, the MC is primarily considered a strategic actor involved in designing, implementing, and governing the city's CVE efforts. Hence, the MC is not supposed to intervene in handling specific CVE cases, but relies on frontline professionals to do so. Externally, the MC is to establish collaboration with actors who could advance the city's CVE efforts and represent the city in relevant national and international forums. Organizationally, this means that the MC links the city's absolute leadership (i.e., politicians and senior managers) and frontline professionals, but also represents the city in communication with external actors. The MC is located in the city's executive office, in a division housing other coordinators and developers whose tasks are cross sectoral and city wide. Another important organizational principle suggested by the policy is that all CVE efforts should, as far as possible, be integrated with current organizational structures rather than forming new ones. This approach is motivated by the close similarity to general crime prevention, an established municipal operation, and by the lack of evidence supporting the implementation of specific CVE methods and structures.

The policy also calls on all city districts and sectors to co-produce CVE efforts by adopting specific action plans. Such plans are to contain local situational snapshots, activities, and evaluation routines. This is important because the city is organized in multiple districts, all with their own political–administrative organizations, which are complemented by centrally governed sectors (e.g., educational services and social services). The districts and sectors

face fundamentally different CVE challenges. Some districts and sectors deal predominantly with recruitment and activities from right-wing extremism, while others are mostly preoccupied with countering militant Islamism. Some districts have less obvious problems with recruitment, but instead include possible targets of terrorist attacks. To embed this complexity within the organizational setup, all city districts and sectors have designated CVE effort coordinators, who in turn have diverse backgrounds, professional identities, and hierarchical positions. Consequently, the context is characterized by institutional complexity and hybridity, as it consists of "incompatible prescriptions from multiple institutional logics."[40] These institutional logics guide the coordinators' interpretations of the CVE problem, perceptions of the practices suitable for addressing it, and ideas about how to organize.[41]

Besides their day-to-day occupations in the districts/sectors, the coordinators are organized in a CVE coordination team led by the MC. The group is the main forum for discussing implementation of the city's CVE efforts, and the main setting for sharing information about current trends in the extremist milieus inside and outside the municipality's territorial boundaries, the international and national recommendations and policies that affect the city, training and lectures, and other relevant topics. Although organizationally placed in the city management office, the MC has no hierarchical mandate to make decisions that the sector/district coordinators must follow; instead, the MC's initiatives and interpretations must be legitimized and accepted by other means.

Theoretical framework

To understand the *process* of organizing CVE efforts in the city, I turn to the concept of translation as understood in Scandinavian institutionalism.[42] Translation offers a sociological, micro-level perspective on institutional and organizational change. Translation is rooted in the work of Latour, who suggested that "the spread in time and space of anything – claims, orders, artifacts, goods – is in the hands of people," and that these people "may act in many different ways, letting the token drop, or modifying it, or deflecting it, or betraying it, or adding to it, or appropriating it."[43] Later, Czarniawska and Joerges[44] used new institutional theory to develop translation into a powerful theoretical lens that helps explain why organizing ideas, objects, and practices change as they are circulated. Here, the "local" is understood as constitutive of how ideas are translated; specific actors (e.g., the MC), cultures, structures, and traditions all influence how practices are implemented and interpreted locally.[45] In the context of this paper, this suggests that any idea concerning the organizing of CVE will change as it is being moved: from abstract idea into policy or other material objects, from objects into practices, and between the contexts where CVE efforts are to be implemented (i.e., different municipal districts and sectors).

To understand *the practices* of the MC to translate CVE organizing ideas into actions, I turn to the concept of institutional work, which offers a way to conceptualize how individuals strive to create, maintain, and disrupt institutions.[46] Institutional work analytically focuses on actors' strategic *efforts* to achieve particular institutional outcomes (i.e., creating, maintaining, and disrupting), and not on the *achievement* of specific institutional ends per se. Typical of research in the institutional work stream is the exploration of how actors with "a future-oriented intentionality"[47] try to influence institutions, rather than how institutions influence actors,[48] traditionally the dominant approach in institutional theory. In the words of Lawrence et al., institutional work offers "an institutionally situated understanding of the effect of actions on institutions."[49] embracing the historical paradox of embedded agency – that is, the tension between institutional determinism and agency.[50]

The types of institutional work done by actors have been conceptualized in various ways. Lawrence and Suddaby's[51] foundational paper identified 17 types of institutional work, each connected to a specific, intended institutional outcome (i.e., creating, maintaining, or disrupting). Perkmann and Spicer[52] reviewed studies of institutional work and found three clusters of activities related to political, technical, and cultural work. Later, Hampel et al.[53] concentrated on how institutional work is carried out, suggesting that it can be symbolic, material, and relational, which fits the present analytical focus on strategic practices.

Symbolic work targets the cultural and normative elements of institutions, in this case, by creating, translating, and exploiting symbols, identities, and language to advance the institutionalization of CVE efforts in the city. Four types of activities can be discerned in this category: linking, framing, positioning, and educational activities. Starting with the last, *educational activities* are useful for promoting the awareness and skill needed to create new institutions. Knowledge fosters both a sense of security to engage with CVE issues and expertise to do so, and has been identified as a key instrument for successfully implementing CVE in municipalities.[54] If actors feel comfortable conducting a task, the likelihood of their implementing it increases.[55] *Linking* certain practices to wider cognitive–cultural and normative institutions helps build the legitimacy of new institutions, making them seem less novel and more familiar to the relevant professional groups.[56] Ultimately, this helps advance the institutionalization of CVE: for any practice, idea, or issue to become institutionalized, it must first make sense to the actors adopting it.[57] *Framing* refers to communicative actions that shape the "schemata of interpretation"[58] and help actors understand and confer meaning on occurrences in their social life and in the world. By being framed in certain ways, CVE efforts can appear more or less appropriate and/or necessary to implement. *Positioning* refers to benchmarking activities, and includes comparing the city's CVE approach to

that of other external actors, or referring to practices as better/worse. By positioning a CVE practice as a "best practice," normative pressure to adopt this practice increases.

Material work refers to the construction, use, and impact of material objects to further the institutionalization of CVE efforts in the city. As Jones et al.[59] argued, material objects help stabilize, anchor, and reproduce the regulative, normative, and cultural/cognitive elements of institutions. Once manifested in material objects, institutions become less tied to humans and can travel in time and space more rapidly.[60] Therefore, material objects offer durability and transferability to institutionalization processes.[61] Here, four types of activities supporting CVE institutionalization in the city were identified: educational (see previous paragraph), defining, vesting, and theorizing activities.[62] When *defining*, actors construct and formalize rule systems, membership boundaries, and hierarchies to stabilize patterns of behavior. *Vesting* refers to the creation of rules and structures that confer property and information rights on certain individuals/groups in the organization. *Theorizing* is an activity intended to develop and specify certain abstractions – concepts, practices, and theories – to support the institutionalization of CVE efforts. Theorization often entails telling stories of causality, making the abstractions appear stable and rational.

Finally, relational work[63] includes what Lawrence and Suddaby[64] called advocacy: the use of "direct social suasion."[65] Relational work is central to creating networks, relationships, and identities and to formalizing rules, scripts, and boundaries. Here, three types of activities are noted: formalization, interpersonal work, and hierarchical escalation. *Formalization* refers to efforts to formalize processes central to CVE efforts in the city, especially those contested by and subject to resistance from district/sector coordinators and professionals. By formalization, the MC creates institutional pressure for stakeholders to conform to the city's structures and processes. *Interpersonal work* comprises informal social activities serving different purposes depending on the target group, but that typically involve strategic relationship building. The last activity is *hierarchical escalation*, which involves the strategic involvement of senior managers by the MC to resolve issues, conflicts, and internal resistance. To sum up, the institutional work perspective helps inform the analysis of what the MC is trying to achieve (i.e., institutionalizing CVE efforts in the municipality) and the strategic practices (i.e., activities) applied to do so (i.e., symbolic, material, and relational work).

Methods

This paper is a single-case study of the everyday work of a municipal CVE coordinator and uses shadowing[66] as its main data collection method. Case study designs are typically applied when "how" or "why" questions are being posed, when the investigator has little control over events, and when the focus is

on a contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context".[67] Drawing on Yin's work,[68] the single-case study presented here is motivated by the exploratory purpose of the paper in relation to a specific topic (i.e., the MC's strategic work to institutionalize CVE) about which the literature is limited and acquiring relevant primary data consumes considerable time and resources.

Shadowing is an ethnographic method in which the researcher follows a person or object to learn about and understand "the work and life of people who move often and quickly from place to place."[69] Direct observation methods such as shadowing have been described as the "gold standard" of qualitative data collection.[70] A key reason for this status is that observing people in their social settings avoids problems inherent in self-reported accounts and can also reveal structures, processes, and behaviors that interviewed participants may well be unaware of.[71] This approach typically strengthens the validity of the findings, as the researcher observes "what is going on" rather than relying on retrospective accounts of the same processes, which can be biased according to what is socially acceptable or be tactical in relation to the participants' own interests.[72] Considering the methods applied in studying CVE, Ellefsen and Jämte[73] suggested that there is a "substantial lack of independent scientific study that follows practitioners' PRVE [i.e., prevention of radicalization and violent extremism] work as it plays itself out" and that such data would provide "valuable in-depth knowledge about how this work is practiced on the ground, including decision-making processes, initiation of measures, evaluation of and changes to ongoing prevention processes."

McDonald outlined what shadowing means in practice:

> When they have a project meeting or meet with a customer, the researcher sits in. If they have coffee with friends who are colleagues from another site, the researcher goes too. The researcher 'shadows' the target individual from the moment they begin their working day until they leave for home … Shadowing activity will be as various and complex as the job of the individual the shadower is investigating.[74]

In shadowing, a person or object is dynamically followed, in perhaps the most apparent divergence from traditional anthropological practice. While the anthropologist is traditionally fixed to a site and is watching "native dances during the day and going at five o'clock to the British embassy,"[75] the shadower is flexible in relation to time and space. The method is also highly suitable for studying the micro-level institutional processes of interest here, and has a strong tradition in Scandinavian institutionalism.[76]

I shadowed the MC for two working weeks in 2020 (i.e., 74 hours in total). As part of the shadowing, I attended seven formal internal meetings with other city employees, three meetings with external partners, and two combined lectures/meetings during which the MC first presented and then discussed

the municipality's CVE efforts, violent extremism, and radicalization. For two working days, I also shadowed the MC during a network meeting with other municipal CVE coordinators.

Before the shadowing started, I had conducted two semi-structured interviews with the MC: one in 2017 and another in 2019. These mainly concerned the rationales underlying various aspects of CVE efforts in the city. The prior interviews were complemented by an additional five analytic interviews[77] during the fieldwork. An analytic interview is particularly suited for dialogue, in which I could return to certain questions, themes, issues, and reflections that had emerged during the day, and discuss them with the MC. It is also a method that can be combined productively with shadowing, as "looking at what people do creates openings for interviews about what people actually do, in which a number of insightful aspects of work and processes arise."[78] The analytic interviews also gave the MC a chance to critically discuss my interpretations, both empirical and theoretical, strengthening the validity of the findings. After the fieldwork, two further interviews were conducted to follow up on the work in the city and to discuss some of the preliminary findings. In total, the data analyzed consist of 8.5 hours of interviews. Lastly, I analyzed the content of material objects (i.e., digital education programs, leaflets, and a report form), which will be presented in the "Findings" section.

Data analysis

When shadowing the MC, I took extensive notes on my computer (if sitting down) or on my phone (if standing up). In total, the fieldwork generated 1239 notes, each representing a particular observation by the author. The notes were initially structured according to a rough template consisting of the following headings: time, place, type of communication, setting, actors present, meeting agenda (if any), observations, and reflections. I did not use any specific theoretical concepts to structure the data collected in real time in the field. However, once I returned from the field, I uploaded my notes to an analysis program and reanalyzed them. The interview transcripts, policies, documents, and website material were then added to the material. Taken together, the data triangulation primarily helped both deepen and broaden my understanding of the case. Some themes soon emerged as more significant and important than others, further concentrating the analytical work. Inspired by Raviola and Norbäck's[79] approach, theory was then used to lift the initial "empirical" codes to a more abstract level. Here, the categorization of types of institutional work developed by Hampel et al.[80] helped divide the data into three categories representing *the means* by which the institutional work was conducted: symbolic work, material work, and relational work; from these, further subcategories were developed (see

the "Theoretical framework" section). The research approach can therefore be considered abductive, inspired by Alvesson and Kärreman's[81] proposal to treat data as a dialogue partner of theory.

Findings

The MC's work in the city can be divided into activities directed toward two distinct target groups: implementers and audiences. *Implementers* are employees of the municipal organization, or of organizations contracted by the municipality, who are directly involved in implementing CVE efforts. This category includes district/sector coordinators, managers of professionals, and the professionals themselves – the frontline workers of the municipality. Concerning the last two categories, it is especially managers and employees in the school sector, social services, youth centers, labor market programs, security sector, and other sectors who encounter citizens on a daily basis who are of interest.

Audiences[82] are actors who have an interest in, and the social status and power to affect perceptions of, CVE efforts in the city. Therefore, they are important for the MC to influence. Here, the audiences include national and local politicians, international and national CVE forums, top-level municipal managers, experts, other MCs from larger cities, representatives of national agencies, and the media. The purpose of targeting these actors with institutional work relating to the city's CVE efforts is to show that the city is in control of the issue and has rational structures and practices in place. Ultimately, this can help the municipality maintain and gain legitimacy for its current approach.

The target groups and the distinctive purposes related to them result in different symbolic, material, and relational activities (a table summarizing the findings is provided in Appendix A).

Symbolic work

Lectures, presentations, conferences, meetings, and other forums for verbal communication constitute the main arenas of symbolic institutional work. The MC values all such arenas highly, as they provide a chance, as the MC put it, to "set the stage" for what CVE is, how it is organized, and how it should be enacted in the city. Both the CVE policy and the MC recognize that general knowledge is low among the city's implementers, hindering the institutionalizing of CVE. The MC exercises control over *educational activities*, either by handling all presentations or being selective about who can lecture or present CVE to implementers. The externally hired or recommended experts are evaluated by the MC based on perceived quality, and on whether their expertise is relevant to and complements the city's approach. As mentioned,

the MC also works purposefully and strategically with educational activities targeting particular audiences. According to the MC, there is still an obsolete and distorted image of the quality of the CVE organization and practices in the city. To counter this and present updated information, the MC is an active presenter and participant in both domestic and international forums. In these, the MC can identify misconceptions about the city's CVE efforts, delegitimize them, and convey a more accurate image of how the city works.

The CVE efforts must be implemented, as previously noted, by diverse frontline groups working in the city. The MC described the structure accordingly: "I do not work on an individual level, I do not work on actual cases like that. I do not have ongoing collaboration with the police about how we should collaborate on these issues on the local, but rather on a strategic level." Frontline workers in the social welfare sector are typically highly institutionalized,[83] making them more resistant to change.[84] To overcome this, the MC *links*[85] CVE efforts to institutionalized practices currently used by professionals. Adapting discourse and rhetoric is central to such linking, and expressions such as "doing this is very similar to . . . " or "this can be seen as an extension of . . . " are used in communicating with frontline workers. Another method is to link the city's CVE efforts to the institutional demands arising from national or local recommendations or policy. Such linking connects the city to a wider normative and cultural context, resulting in institutional pressure for implementers in the city to support CVE efforts – "If everyone else is doing CVE like this, why shouldn't we?" The MC is strategic in using such linking, and recommendations that are incompatible with the municipality's approach are disregarded. Regarding audiences, linking the city's efforts to recommendations and policies at the national and international levels is equally important. Such linking is used strategically by the MC to connect the city's efforts to the recommendations of elite actors (e.g., experts, academics, and national agencies). However, linking activities are also imposed on the city by particular audiences. The city is part of several national and international CVE networks that influence what it is doing regarding certain aspects of CVE. For example, in a meeting with the district/sector coordinators, the MC instructed the coordinators to compile and structure the city's CVE efforts according to a template constructed by such a network. The MC regards such linking as less important for implementing CVE efforts in the city than it is for shaping audience perceptions of city efforts.

Another strategy of the MC is to *frame* CVE efforts in ways that appeal to specific implementers and audiences. In presentations or discussions with implementers, the MC was careful to frame CVE efforts in a way that was coherent with the professional logic guiding their everyday work. In the context of this paper, institutional logics can be understood as the supra-organizational formal and informal rules that guide professionals' actions, interactions, and interpretations of situations.[86] For example, when

discussing CVE efforts with social workers, the MC and the sector coordinator framed the city's efforts as consistent with the values, beliefs, and norms typical of their professional work. In practice, this entailed stressing that CVE efforts are not about intelligence gathering for security purposes, but about the social care of individuals at risk. The framing of CVE efforts shifted when discussing CVE efforts with security guards or police representatives in the city. In these instances, the city's efforts were reframed to fit a societal security agenda, emphasizing that the efforts would help decrease risks and increase the city's opportunities to detect risky elements. A second strategy, used in relation to both implementers and audiences, is to frame violent extremism as a fundamental threat to societal and professional values, such as human rights and democratic rule. Again, the MC's expertise on violent extremism is used as an asset to represent the threat as potent and challenging, making CVE efforts seem necessary to protect these values. For implementers and audiences alike, CVE is also framed as a subfield – a field positioned within a parental field[87] – of the broader and more established crime prevention field. Reframing CVE as part of broader crime prevention efforts appeals to the previous experience and knowledge of implementers and audiences, creating a sense of familiarity with the issue of CVE and helping reduce uncertainty about CVE as an issue.

When using the fourth type of activity relating to symbolic work, i.e., *positioning*, the MC compares and situates the city's CVE efforts in relation to other actors or to previous actions by implementers in the city. Notably, this is done by labeling practices/actors as better/worse. Practices or messages that correspond to the city's approach are portrayed as effective and appropriate for the city. For example, when meeting with social workers in the city, the MC shared examples of previous suitable behaviors of peers in the city, to strengthen professional norms for handling CVE cases. The same positioning is used in relation to external actors/practices. Here, the MC actively draws on and disseminates those practices and structures broadly conceived as the "best," but only those coherent with the city's approach. By positioning the city's efforts as in line with the most fashionable approaches and examples, the city can gain legitimacy from both implementers and audiences.[88] Interestingly, the opposite approach – highlighting bad examples – was also used. Actors representing a strongly divergent approach were frequently questioned by the MC. Here, questioning divergent approaches serves as a way to protect the legitimacy of the approach chosen by the city and to frame the city's approach as the most appropriate one.

Taken together, the activities used by and reflections of the MC clearly indicate how much of the work concerns legitimizing CVE as an issue, rather than coordinating and designing efforts. For example, the MC claimed: "It's not really about coordinating very much. It's more about starting up, making

the issue known, and having a general grasp of the issue." Here, language emerges as central to the MC's efforts to institutionalize CVE in the municipality. Approaches, actors, and practices are linked, framed, and positioned rhetorically such that the municipality's approach is conceived as appropriate, familiar, and/or necessary by implementers and audiences alike. Underpinning change are educational activities used to establish a new discourse about CVE as a municipal and professional issue. This observation resonates with previous research identifying the strategic use of language as a central tool with which MCs advance the institutionalization of CVE efforts,[89] and as a way of addressing the complexity embedded in multiagency approaches, as discussed by Ekblom.[90] The adaptive use of rhetoric also functions as a way to discursively translate CVE efforts to the local conditions in the individual sectors of the municipality, in line with Cherney's[91] suggestion about how to build capacity in municipalities. In turn, such translation requires both rhetorical skills and an understanding of the diverse cultures of the respective sectors and districts of the municipality.

Material work

When presenting the findings regarding material work in the city, this paper will start with the three types of material objects frequently discussed and used during my fieldwork: information leaflets, digital education programs, and forms for reporting concerns. These objects were inscribed to various degrees with four types of activities supporting CVE institutionalization in the city: educational, defining, vesting, and theorizing.

A small information leaflet entitled "This is how we work against violence-affirmative extremism," folded to the size of a business card, is handed out in meetings and in connection with presentations by the MC. In it, hierarchies, structures, and information central to the city's CVE approach are described. The leaflet briefly defines who in the city is strategically responsible for what actions, and whom to turn to in case of a concern. Regarding reporting concerns, vesting rules for information exchange are provided. To ensure that laws regarding secrecy and personal privacy are followed, the leaflet informs employees of restrictions and provides directions regarding where certain types of information are to be reported/shared. Such vesting is embedded in theorization formulated by the city; it is a routine that guides actions through step-by-step instructions. Given the type of information in question and the age of the persons of concern, the implementer is instructed to present information in a predetermined sequence.

The digital education program can be accessed by all city employees and is advanced and informative. The program takes 60–90 minutes to complete, includes video and images, and is interactive in design. Participants must press buttons and answer questions to move forward, and are constantly asked to

reflect on certain issues. According to the MC, which was involved in designing the program, the purpose is to improve implementers' knowledge of what violent extremism is and of the most prominent extremist milieus, and to guide how to think and act if one encounters the problem in one's work. In relation to defining, the city's structure for handling CVE is not only presented but also visualized and embodied in video. Key district/sector coordinators present their roles and how CVE efforts are implemented in their specific sectors/districts. The MC suggested that this is a highly strategic choice: the implementers should know whom to turn to, and the program gives the city's CVE efforts faces rather than organograms. Furthermore, the program also informs the participants of other governance actors' activities and responsibilities in the context of CVE. The MC reflected on this activity as central, since there is a lot of confusion: "What are the different measures? Who can undertake them? In what mode? Should we cooperate?" Consequently, the municipal organization and its efforts are positioned relative to other actors' efforts, effectively situating the municipality as part of a larger societal effort while limiting its responsibility. Vesting is also developed, as the rules for information exchange are extended to encompass the juridical conditions that affect the performance of CVE. Again, the MC has not created these rules per se, but assembled those perceived as adequate for municipal operations. Regarding educational activities, these are naturally extensive in an education program. In addition to being given in-depth information about terrorism, extremism, radicalization, and extremist milieus, the employees are asked to reflect on how they, in their specific roles, contribute to resilience in the face of extremism.

Lastly, a form for reporting concerns/events relating to CVE has been created and implemented. Given the size of the city, it is difficult to access comprehensive information about the frequency and nature of extremism-related events and concerns. Here, the form, designed by the MC, fills an obvious function by collecting information regarding a number of variables: when the event/concern occurred, the type of reporting actor (e.g., teachers and social workers), and when the form was completed. The form asks the respondent to provide information about the concern/event to which the extremist milieu can be related, and whether any other vital information can be shared. The form also provides information about restrictions and purposes: no personal information should be provided to prevent violation of privacy laws, and the form should be submitted to the sector/district coordinator. The material from the form is used to map where and how extremism appears in the city, and to inform the yearly updating of CVE policies. The form is brief and focused (about one A4 page), but the variables of interest serve an important purpose. Indeed, the variables effectively define the type of

information important in CVE efforts, why it is important, and who has access to it. As such, the form represents central organizational structures and institutionalized meanings relating to CVE efforts.

Taken together, these findings map and deepen our understanding of the role that material objects play in institutionalization processes related to CVE. These objects are especially important considering the size and complexity of the municipality, and they enable the MC to educate, define, vest, and theorize aspects of the municipality's CVE effort beyond physical interactions. In addition, the form for reporting concerns/events related to CVE illustrates how material objects also assist in transferring information of importance. In line with Cherney's[92] suggestions, material objects can support professionals when engaging with CVE efforts and radicalization cases. Without such support, the MC reflected, there would be an increased risk of uncertainty among the professionals, which might lead to unintended consequences such as violation of privacy, subjectivity in reporting, or underreporting.[93]

Relational work

Formalization, a key activity in relational work, includes the establishing of policymaking standards (i.e., requiring that all districts/sectors have CVE policies and regulating how and when they are to be updated), routines (e.g., the reporting chain and local mapping procedures), and certain organizational elements (i.e., that all district/sectors must have a CVE coordinator). Formalization is also used by the MC as a measure to reconstruct professional identities. By creating and formalizing specific CVE working groups (i.e., a VE task group–a special team within the social services that handles individual extremism cases–and the CVE coordination group) and functions (i.e., the district/sector coordinators), the professional identities of those involved are affected. That key personnel now identify themselves as "CVE workers/coordinators" indicates that CVE is becoming increasingly institutionalized, as identities and institutions are "in constant interplay."[94] Formalization also serves an important symbolic purpose in relation to audiences, as it implies that structures and processes are stable, rational, and appropriate.[95] Here, the city policy offers an important basis for the MC, as it entails directions supportive of the structures and processes being formalized.

Interpersonal work represents a collection of informal social activities serving different purposes depending on the target group. Regarding implementers, the MC uses interpersonal work in connection with presentations and meetings, creating new strategic contacts in the organization and improving established relations to gain support. Interpersonal work is both planned and ad hoc. The MC is explicit about sometimes planning to attend presentations or meetings not so much for their actual content, but for the chance to informally discuss matters with attendees identified as important for the

municipality's CVE efforts. The incentive for interpersonal work in relation to implementers is clear: "If they know of my function, they cannot say that they are unaware that CVE efforts exist." Thus, interpersonal work can be seen as a way to stimulate the inclination of implementers to co-produce CVE efforts.

Regarding audiences, the MC is, as mentioned previously, often invited to give presentations and/or attend workshops, panels, and larger network meetings. The purpose of attending such events is, according to the MC, not always so much for the actual presentation or meeting content, but for the chance to make contact/improve relationships with the audiences. First, this offers an opportunity for the MC to present the city's advanced work and be regarded as modern and progressive in the eyes of such actors. Second, building relationships with other actors is also a way to access knowledge and practices that can be translated. The MC meets (digitally and physically) with other municipalities and national agencies on a regular basis. For example, the MC had a personal meeting with representatives of another city on an issue relating to foreign fighters returning from Syria/Iraq, effectively gathering information on how they had organized and their experiences. The MC reflected on such instances as "building on good relations," helping the municipality develop its approach.

The last example of relational work cited by the MC is *hierarchical escalation*. This type of activity was only used in relation to implementers and is a consequence of the MC's lack of authority to unilaterally decide on CVE efforts – that is, the MC cannot solely create the structures and practices identified as important. During the fieldwork, it became apparent that the city's CVE efforts were not fully embraced by all district/sector CVE coordinators. Indeed, some remained skeptical as to whether certain practices, knowledge, and meanings were suitable for the districts/sectors they represented. Obviously, this created problems for the MC, since the district/sector coordinators function as gatekeepers in the municipal organization, deciding what information and practices will be forwarded to the districts/sectors they represent. For example, during a meeting I attended, one sector coordinator thought a scheduled training day was irrelevant to the professionals hen represented and refused to forward the invitation to them. In a second meeting, another district sector resisted sending out a questionnaire, used to gauge situational awareness of extremism in the district, to frontline workers due to the extra workload it would entail.

In such cases, the MC escalated the question to a higher managerial level, drawing on an established routine in the municipality. The MC has weekly meetings with a manager (a senior and influential one within the municipality) during which different questions relevant to CVE efforts are discussed. Here, strategies for handling problems and issues in implementing CVE efforts in the city are drafted. In cases of resistance, the senior manager directly approaches the manager of the district/sector coordinator to seek solutions.

This usually resolves the resistance, and work can develop accordingly. The MC reflected on this type of process as a response to the complexity of the organization, serving as a last resort to keep the process on track.

Taken together, the findings highlight the prominent role that social relationships play in the institutionalization of CVE efforts. More specifically, they demonstrate how: (1) good informal relationships with audiences can be transformed to inputs in situations of uncertainty (i.e., the case of returning foreign fighters); (2) how strong relationships with implementers are important to prevent resistance; and (3) how strong connections to senior managers can help resolve resistance among implementers (i.e., in the observed cases, with district/sector coordinators). Accordingly, relational work constitutes a key strategy by which the MC can handle the lack of traditional hierarchical power typically embedded in the role. By formalizing (which relies on decision-making by senior managers in the administration) as many structural features as possible (i.e., reporting forms, district/sector policies, and work groups), the MC can govern by using policies. Interestingly, this formalization strategy means that the policy space discussed in the introduction is continuously shrinking due to actions by the MC. Hence, while the vague policy presents considerable latitude for the MC to translate the objectives into measures more freely, it also creates problems of governance that are countered by formalization.

Discussion

The "Findings" section presented and reflected on the MC's efforts to organize and institutionalize CVE efforts in the city. Here, the scope of the paper is broadened by discussing: (1) the roles and skills required in order to fulfill this task; (2) the origins of organizing ideas for local CVE efforts; and (3) the roles played by established institutions.

Most municipalities in the world can be considered institutionally complex settings to various degrees, especially when handling issues that rely on multi-agency collaboration. To be successful as a change manager in such settings, the MC needs to perform a wide range of roles and skills. As demonstrated in the findings, the studied MC is strategic, consultative, and operative[96] on a daily basis. This means that the MC shifts between being, for example, involved in strategic meetings concerning the implementation of certain practices, consulting district/sector coordinators on how to address specific concerns or events concerning extremism, educating implementers and audiences on extremism and radicalization, and networking at conferences and meetings to make valuable contacts inside and outside the city. Such a repertoire of roles and tasks requires knowledge of violent extremism, preventive work, the political–administrative bureaucracy, organizing, and how to informally build alliances and networks. In addition, this paper also

highlights how such work benefits from the skill to perform these roles in highly diverse institutional contexts. In development studies, the term "development translator"[97] is used to conceptualize skilled social actors "who read the meaning of a project into the different institutional languages of its stakeholder supporters, constantly creating interest and making it real."[98] This resonates well with the symbolic work of the MC, who continuously and skillfully adapts discourse and framing to the institutional context where CVE is to be implemented. This requires not only communicative but also cultural skills,[99] or a "sophisticated understanding of the cultural boundaries and meanings"[100] relating to the institutional settings where efforts are to be executed. Without such skills, suggested efforts might be met with skepticism and resistance from implementers, effectively decreasing the chances of successful institutionalization. Connecting this observation to Lawrence's[101] study of the translation processes associated with an injection site for users of illegal drugs, Lawrence highlighted how actors needed to discursively situate and adapt contested concepts (i.e., CVE) in relation to structured, coherent, and well-established discourses to explain their relevance and utility. Similarly, the findings also support Baak et al.'s[102] suggestion that the strategic and adaptive use of language is a central tool when working to institutionalize CVE efforts in complex settings.

Second, the findings illustrate the multiple sources from which organizing ideas can be translated. While this paper originally set out to explore how the local CVE policy was translated into practice, it became obvious during the fieldwork that the dynamic, contested, and changing character of CVE soon renders any policy out of date. While the general character of the present municipal policy (see the "Methods" section) creates latitude to retrospectively link current city efforts to the policy's content, little of the MC's institutional work is guided by the city's policy. Instead, ideas about organizing are in constant circulation within and between the city and its institutional environment, where they are further translated into material objects and practices through institutional work. Here, the yearly revised district/sector action plans serve as an intermediary, and are able to materialize the most important ideas. Some of these ideas derive from the MC's intention to gather the practices considered most appropriate, while other ideas are related to the institutional pressure exerted by audiences. For example, when particular issues (e.g., how to handle the children of returning foreign fighters) flare up in the media, the MC understands that questions will be asked about how this issue is being or will be dealt with by the city. In turn, this causes the MC to use his/her network to collect and translate ideas about how the issue can be addressed. Taken together, this strengthens previous research identifying MCs as flexible problem solvers,[103] but also echoes a key finding of Zapata Campos and Zapata[104]

regarding the translation of development aid: translation processes are uncontrollable and uncertain, constituted by myriad sources and twists that defies rational models of causality between policy and practice.

Third, it is notable that the types of institutional work used by the MC were often intended to use the "old" to implement the "new" and "borrowed" CVE efforts.[105] While previous studies[106] have described how "the old" is delegitimized to make room for new institutions, this paper illustrates how already institutionalized ideas, beliefs, and practices (i.e., the old) are "recruited as allies to push for the investment of energy in new ones."[107] Indeed, both linking and framing activities are intended to decrease institutional resistance in highly institutionalized settings (i.e., schools and social services) by portraying CVE efforts as tightly coupled to the meanings, objectives, and practices that govern the everyday work. In some respects, the old institutions examined here were being used as resources when implementing the new ones.[108] For example, the defining and vesting work embedded in the studied material objects is anchored[109] in old institutions such as professional secrecy and the duty to report concerns about youth. Again, such work requires an advanced and sophisticated understanding of the institutionalized beliefs, attitudes, perceptions, rules, and behaviors guiding the everyday work of targeted groups, and of how CVE efforts can be integrated in these. This paper advances our understanding of how MCs act when embedding "new" practices in established procedures,[110] pointing to linking and framing as central activities to lower resistance and skepticism. Again, cultural skills are necessary to effectively conduct such activities.

Contributions

This paper makes a significant contribution to the literature on municipal CVE efforts by presenting an in-depth exploration of the strategic work involved in translating a policy into frontline practices. By shadowing a municipal coordinator (MC), the paper presents three types of institutional work – symbolic, material, and relational – used, and discusses their relevance to local translation processes. The paper also highlights the multiplicity of activities embedded in this work, and how the diverse institutional contexts where it is conducted require both knowledge and skills. The paper identifies the MC's cultural skills as especially important, since they help to link and translate discourse and practices related to CVE to the institutionalized cultural conventions present in the implementing contexts. This finding also underlines how much of the MC's work is about legitimizing, rather than coordinating or designing, CVE efforts for a highly diverse set of internal and external stakeholders and audiences. For policymakers seeking the successful implementation of CVE policies, the findings indicate that the

training of CVE coordinators should aim to strengthen and diversify their understandings of the institutional context where CVE efforts are to be implemented.

The paper also shows that the ideas the coordinator strives to translate into actions derive from multiple sources and are in constant transformation. Templates, recommendations, and issues from international and national organizations, experts, media, and politicians continually mix with the content of local policies, narratives, and experiences of addressing violent extremism, forming myriad sources from which ideas about how to organize CVE are retrieved. For future research on CVE, this indicates that we should look beyond policies to understand how CVE is organized, and pay closer attention to how circulating fashions affect local approaches.

As a final note, the generalizability of these findings is limited by the single-case design of the study. The case is nevertheless representative of many municipalities in Europe and the world, where local CVE efforts are still emerging, often led by a specific coordinator who works strategically in a complex setting to translate CVE policies into action. However, the present research agenda needs to be complemented by further empirical studies in other geographical and organizational contexts. This would facilitate comparative approaches, which can help discern general and context-specific processes central to understanding translation processes.

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Appendix A. An overview of findings

Targets and purposes			
Target group	Implementers: frontline workers, managers, and district/sector coordinators	Audiences: politicians, top-level managers, national agencies, international CVE forums, other European/Swedish cities, media, experts, etc.	
Purpose of	institutional work	- Translate organizing ideas into practice - Decrease resistance to CVE efforts - Increase issue attention among implementers - Legitimize CVE as a municipal issue	- Maintain organizational legitimacy - Display control and rationality
Symbolic work			
Type of activity	*Implementers*	*Audiences*	*Forms and arenas*
Linking	Linking CVE efforts to current professional practices Linking efforts to local, national, and international recommendations and policies	Linking city efforts to national and international recommendations and policies	Presentations, meetings, and educational initiatives

(*Continued*)

Targets and purposes			
Framing	Framing CVE efforts as coherent with stakeholders' respective logics Framing CVE efforts as a subfield of crime prevention Framing violent extremism as a serious threat to fundamental professional values	Framing CVE efforts as a subfield of crime prevention Framing violent extremism as a serious threat to fundamental societal values	Presentations, meetings, and educational initiatives
Positioning	Define better/worse actors/practices	Position the city's efforts, ideas, and local organization in relation to other CVE actors	Presentations, meetings, and educational initiatives
Educating	Training to increase knowledge of violent extremism, extremist milieus, and organizational structure Improve capability to discover and act on concerns/events related to extremism	Increase knowledge of the CVE approach in the city	Presentations, meetings, and educational initiatives
Material work			
Defining	Describe the hierarchy and roles between the MC, the district/sector coordinators, unit managers, and frontline workers Define what type of information is and is not of interest	Define external actors of interest, as well as their responsibilities and boundaries within the municipal organization	Information leaflets, digital education program, and form for reporting concerns
Vesting	Confer the right to information on city employees	Establish the juridical boundaries of municipal CVE efforts	Information leaflets and digital education program
Theorizing	Create routines for reporting and checklists of risk behaviors	Modeling the CVE structure in the city	Information leaflets and digital education program
Educating	Training to increase knowledge of violent extremism, extremist milieus, and organizational structure Improve capability to discover and act on concerns/events related to extremism	Spread knowledge of the city's CVE approach	Digital education program
Relational work			
Formalization	Create standards and formalize structures, working groups, and professional identities	Create standards for reporting and evaluation	Meetings
Interpersonal work	Establish new contacts Improve current work relations to build support	Establish important contacts and collaborations Be a representative of the city	Presentations, meetings, and informal communication
Hierarchical escalation	Use senior managers to overcome institutional resistance	Not relevant	Meetings and informal communication