

*An analysis of the most important values, and the role of women in the Euro-Mediterranean region*

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*How media shapes society perceptions, the use of news content in relations with the events in the regions and the main information sources used.*

*A critical review.*

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***An analysis of the most important values, and the role of women in the Euro-Mediterranean region***

By Ella Stevenson

**Module 2.1 and 2.2**

In the second module of the Anna Lindh Foundation (ALF) course, the central values of the European and Mediterranean region are explored both concerning everyday life and women, the values people wish to instil in their children and how the media shapes perception. There are more differences and complexities in this section than I found in the one previously. This module is key to understanding and “de-othering” the other, often achieved through a quantitative approach. In my presentation, my focus was on the first two modules which aimed to uncover the values parents hold most dear for their children, and the role of women and their empowerment.

Module 2.1. entitled ‘The Most Important Values’ takes a look at the most important values in various places within the Euro-Mediterranean region - in Europe, respect for other countries and family solidarity were the core values of society, whereas in SEM participants, religious beliefs, obedience, and family solidarity took precedence. Mohamed Tozy also makes a note that there is a correlation between the decrease in religiosity and the respect for other cultures as a progressive value - whereas, in the more religious SEM countries, religious values and obedience come hand in hand. This provides an interesting insight into how religion, and religious history, can play a role in shaping values. Nabil Fahmy and Emilia Valsta highlight the need to avoid overgeneralization, as even within a single country the results can vary widely due to societal factors. This can include the urban-rural divide and class differences - demonstrating the authors’ acknowledgement of how certain variables can shape the overall outcome. This differentiation is key to implementing any sort of policy and to understanding cultural differences - applying a different approach to each country will reap far greater rewards, and their approach demonstrates a clear methodology.

In Nayla Tabarra’s article ‘Intercultural Education between Local Values and Universal Principles’, the author discusses the concept of fear and how it interacts with the perception of universal principles and provides recommendations as to how these problems can be overcome. The three main fears can be identified as the fear of influence on one’s culture and religion, the effects on economic and political stability, and a fear of diversity in the public sphere. The author identified a tension between the idea of fostering mutual understanding across borders and accepting diversity, and universal principles and public life values. Above all, this demonstrates the complexity of cultural relations, yet helps to find a blueprint to improve relations within the region. Regarding the ranking of core values, the author underscores the need to take into consideration the cultural gap between secular and religious lenses when viewing the world. However, this article could have been clearer on what the parents feared specifically in terms of their children mixing with other cultures, as much is left to the reader to speculate - perhaps even some common examples could have helped to clarify.

One of the most striking parts of the article is the exploration of whether or not people from different religious and cultural backgrounds should have the same rights and opportunities. When you combine the data for those who ‘disagree’ and only ‘somewhat agree’, 30% of European participants and 39% of SEM participants hold some degree of resistance to people of different cultural backgrounds having the same rights. This striking revelation demonstrates that there is no unanimous agreement on equality for all as a fundamental human right. Tabarra suggests that the reluctance for diversity increases when diversity and their children’s schooling come together, which provides an interesting reflection that people appear to want their children to have a more structured and value-based upbringing, perhaps more than those without children or with older children would like to have in their day-to-day lives. In providing potential reasons behind these trends, Tabarra provides great insight to help the reader understand, and strengthens their overall argument. There are many levels to how people perceive their most treasured values and why they may fear universal principles, as while a quarter of both participating populations saw the other as a threat to political and economic stability, they also agreed (82%) that promoting the organisation of multicultural events helps people to live better together; the role of cultural diplomacy helps to bring down the barriers and fears to provide for a more easeful exchange of ideas and the “de-othering” as mentioned earlier, again through a quantitative methodology.

Tabarra introduces their recommendations on how to dismantle this fear and alienation between Europe and SEM countries: a) bringing universal human rights principles and related values to the core of intercultural education, b) to change UNESCO’s principles of intercultural education to be ‘transformative, enabling learners to transform themselves and society’ and ‘value-based, promoting universally shared values such as non-discrimination, equality, respect and dialogue’. Through these changes, the author hopes to consolidate democratic concepts and human rights values, as well as a more inclusive approach to citizenship, and providing the space for the collaboration of educational and religious education policymakers. This people-to-people approach is undoubtedly a useful tool to ensure smoother relations, but it should also be accompanied with a pledge to encourage more peaceful and diplomatic dialogues between states, especially those with tense relations.

The second article in Module 2.1 drew closer attention to the position of Tunisia with regards to its relationship and connection with Mediterranean culture Dalenda Larguèche’s ‘Tunisians and Their Affiliation to the Mediterranean Region’. In this article, the author’s overarching mission is to explore the extent to which Tunisians are open to multiculturalism and relate it to the nature of Tunisian identity. The report shows that there has been a slight decrease among Tunisians’ tendency to identify the region with hospitality, as we saw in many SEM participants in the last module, likely as a result of problems concerning migration, the rise of Islamism, and the attempts to reshape the Tunisian identity around an Arab-Islamic image. The author notes that as a migratory people, Tunisians are more attached to their own country of residence than Europeans (59% and 36% respectively), however, they are more likely to think of a European country when moving instead of to the Gulf States in which there is a Muslim majority. From these results, the author concludes that the Mediterranean region is unified through culture, not necessarily religion. This concept, while it seems to have weight, may also be swayed by the types of opportunities available in Europe. Exploring the ways in which Tunisia presents an exception to the perceptions of the SEM region announces to the reader that there is room for differentiation between these countries and helps to dismantle the existing stereotypes, but also that Europe is not necessarily a tolerant utopia in comparison.

The concept of open-mindedness in Tunisia also proves Tabarra’s understanding of differentiation within the regions, as Tunisia is notably far more tolerant to celebrating culture and festivities than countries in Europe or the SEM region as far as demonstrations of public and cultural diversity are concerned. While there is a very complex relationship between Tunisia and the question of open-mindedness in the article regarding the threat of cultural and religious diversity, its statistics regarding the diversity of co-workers, in their children’s schools, or marriage into the family are noticeably closer to European statistics than its other SEM counterparts. Ultimately, the author makes the compelling case that Tunisian open-mindedness when consolidating Euro-Med relations solidifies its cultural affiliation with the Mediterranean and helps to form a basis for common Euro-Med policy.

The first portion of the module explored the intricacies of the relationships within the region with regards to the values held close, and the factors that helped to shape them. There is also a strong emphasis on how these values intertwine in Mediterranean culture, while still applying the much-needed country-specific approach. The case study of Tunisia in this section was also particularly interesting when combined with the questioning of Tunisian identity, especially considering a turbulent political atmosphere and the uncertain trust in the press. The section made clear that things need to improve regarding cultural diplomacy, but that there is significant room for such developments based on sharing ideas and a greater push for universal human rights values and a continually open dialogue.

In the second section of the module (2.2), the role of women concerning economics, politics and socially in the Euro-Med region are examined, focussing on how their experiences can be shaped by ideological, political or religious constraints. Tozy noted that societies that are more heavily influenced by religion were more reluctant to increase the role of women, particularly in the political sphere of influence. Interestingly, Tunisians came in first regarding the increasing role for women in the economic field (at 65%) surpassing the Dutch (at 55%). These comparisons are particularly important to make and present the situation very plainly, and it was a brilliant point made by the author to help deconstruct misconceptions about SEM regions, but also how tolerant Europe believes itself to be. It is only through accurately viewing the region and its beliefs that any progress can be made.

In Inès Safi’s article ‘Towards a Common Deconstruction of Gender Stereotypes’, they analyse the ALF survey on whether women’s role in the three fields mentioned above should increase, decrease or remain the same. While European statistics suggest increasing the role of women in politics and economics more so than SEM participants, the statistics are strikingly close, especially when concerning economics (where there is only a percentage point between them). Interestingly, there is a clear preference for the role of women to increase in the socio-cultural fields, more so than in the European region. However, the discrepancies between male and female voters must also be taken into consideration. In Finland, the rate of women in favour of increasing the roles of women doubles that of male voters; in France, Jordan and Palestine, the rate of men and women voting for an increase is very similar; the rate of women in favour of reducing roles for women are smaller on average, although in Palestine and Israel the rates of women and men voting are almost the same in socio-cultural and economic fields. As a result of the layered differences between each country, the author declares that it is so difficult to identify a trend for either region, thus a country-specific approach is taken.

Once again this module review turns to Tunisia as an exceptional case study. In each of the fields addressed by the initial survey, Tunisia stood out because of the sheer amount of men also in favour of a greater role for women, culminating in a relatively high figure when compared with both European and other SEM countries. However, the situation regarding their role in politics presents more challenges. While 31% of parliament are women, 12% of women voted in favour of a reduced role in politics, which Safi has argued may be due to religious beliefs, or the perception of the political arena and the ongoing conflicts. Another point of contention in Tunisia could also be the lack of male employment, which could explain the surprising trend of young Tunisians being less favourable to increasing participation of women, as they would be considered competitors in the labour market.

The author also notes that, not just for Tunisian women but for women internationally, other forces can alter the perception of women and their increased participation in the public sphere. Being expected to endure domestic violence, even in SEM countries where men are in favour of an increasing role for women, and the number of women in higher education outweighs that of men. This speaks volumes to the different experiences that women face on a day-to-day basis that has a massive impact on how they and those around them perceive the role. Safi also reaffirms the need for cultural context, as a simplified Western perspective cannot encompass the lived experiences and culture of women in other places. This flexibility of perception and methodology is vital to understanding the region and how to develop relations in the future, and adds a significant amount of weight to their essay.

Safi brings their article to a close through the acknowledgement of various Muslim women in history that have played various roles. There has also been a ‘shifting centre of gravity’, in which the sign of progress is now that women should not stay at home, they should be out working to fulfil the ideal of an empowered working woman. The author demolishes this concept, as they urge the reader to leave the definition of ‘empowerment’ open, that women should be free from ideological, political, and religious constraints to decide their path and not be deemed as inadequate after choosing the path she wants to take in life. To be free from the damaging and often one-dimensional ideas of what a woman “should” be. Those men must be willing to also break free from the structure that dooms them to repeat the patterns of domination that keeps them as both the victims and perpetrators. In providing an idea of how to move ahead in the future, the author presents how this can help the wider population in the future - and engages directly with the reader in a very effective manner.

To conclude, the first half of the second module provides an exceptionally in-depth and complex view of the Euro-Med region, and the almost endless narratives found there. It demonstrates the differences in various countries and how they interact despite them, but also most importantly it focussed on the similarities that bind the Euro-Mediterranean region and how, with apt policy manoeuvres and initiatives, a closer and stronger bond can be formed. Each of the authors present compelling arguments both with regards to the problems being faced in the region, but particularly with regards to the ways in which these problems can be eased with the changes they discuss in their essays. The variables that each of the authors considers (with regards to a country-specific approach) also demonstrates the complexities of the region and provide a far more dynamic approach to the topics the authors handle.

***How media shapes society perceptions, the use of news content in relations with the events in the regions and the main information sources used.***

*By Gega Irsa*

**Summary**

The main purpose of the paper is to present the developments of the Anna Lindh/ Ipsos Survey on Intercultural Trends in the Euro-Mediterranean Region documenting the important role Media plays in shaping opinions and attitudes. Many times, the media manipulates the audience, delivering only certain information about an event. This evidence is best shown in the ranking of the most trusted source of information that the Survey offers. People, especially youth are more prone to gather information from social media rather than traditional mass-media. This last one is losing her hegemony in the Mediterranean countries.

Mass-media is actually not neutral, and it conceals the true nature of things and helps with the manipulation process. While the article reports significant research supporting the view that certain types of information can have a negative impact on individual, the conclusion that an Observatory on how media cover issues and provide evidence can improve youth achievement based on a misinterpretation of the evidence.

***Key words****:* Survey, Mass- media, Social media, Influence, Manipulation, SEM Countries, Europeans

**Introduction**

Paul Gillespie analyses the information of the Anna Lindh/Ipsos Survey and relates it to significant trends in media behavior and practice emerging in the region. He explores public interest in news and information between European and SEM countries, how media shape public opinion and attitudes in the region, and the most trusted media sources for cross-cultural reporting. The author concludes by illustrating the elements of a future observatory and recommends more involvement of the media in the intercultural debates.

**Structure of the text**

The text is not a primary source but a comment on the original research. There are two different sections underlined in the text; first the role of media in shaping people’s perception and second which are the most trusted source of information according to surveys carried out by Anna Lindh Foundation. The author than seek to find a connection between those two sections considering internal and external issues, but also other social, educational, religious, and age as variables to be considered.

**Methodology**

The article is a quantitative research of collecting and analyzing data from SEM Countries.

The methodology used in here is criticized by one of the main experts, Paul Gillespie who calls also the need to consider other factors as migrants, refugees and the terrorist attacks in Europe as important indicators in shaping perceptions. Gillespie states that impressions of media coverage need to be deepened by research and finding debates by journalists and editors.

From another perspective arose a different opinion which highlights another weak point of the survey used by the Foundation. The need for education by promoting media literacy to train people to spot flowed information and foster intercultural dialogue in a larger scale. The evidence cited in the article does not support the overall conclusion on how the news content influence people’s mind.

**Reasons/Evidence**

The main source is the Survey, used to gather the opinions, beliefs and feelings of a selected group on individuals chosen for sampling. This include age, gender, and education. The primary Survey is focused on demographics in SEM countries and Europe which occurs every three years. The important issues this Survey takes into account are the influence of media and its content and also who respondent considers the most trusted source.

This research is carried out by the deductive reasoning: a formal method of top-down logic that seeks to find observation to prove a theory.

The aim of the Anna Lindh Foundation is gathering evidence (statistical evidence), seeking patterns, and forming a hypothesis to explain the huge impact media have on us. However, no amount of deductive evidence guarantees the conclusion.

There are always gaps in the evidence. There is a lack of evidence on quality- of – life measures. Experts claims the importance of the economic situation and social status. The media’s wider societal and cultural role can be observed, analyzed and discussed even under these important pillars, since mapping and understanding media more effectively are priorities for the Anna Lindh Foundation’s work in this period across all its intercultural activities. This survey’s findings provide a benchmark for that work.

**Conclusion**

In the modern society, mass media represents the dominant mean of social communication, giving the individuals and to the groups a permanent stream of data, facts and ideas. As we can read from the results of the different surveys, mass-media influences positive or negative opinions, behavior, mentalities, social norms and values, contributing to the increasing or to the decreasing of knowledge and general education level of people in different areas of culture and civilization.

Regarding this aspect, it is important the conclusion drawn by Paul Gillespie: he calls for the creation of a Media Observatory mechanism which can involve practicing journalists, editors and publishers in discussing issues of intercultural relations together with analysts and civil society representatives.

The media is relevant to most of the fields of work of the Anna Lindh Foundation, whether to communicate and report on the initiatives themselves at various levels, or to analyze relevant societal developments bearing on them. As Gillespie suggested, an observatory on how media cover issues of intercultural relations and to provide evidence-based resources for journalists could be developed by the Anna Lindh Foundation and a consortium of partners. However, results show an important influence of the media in SEM countries and less in the European one. If we focus on the impact of news content on perceptions, we will see “those exposed to media coverage of the South were significantly more likely to say it has to do with migration issues than those who were not”.

Further considerations suggest that interpretations of the Survey results and the impact of media on mutual perceptions must take into account the recent dramatic events concerning refugees, migrants and the recurrent terrorist attacks in Europe.

In my opinion, the values and the norms are represented in different ways, depending on the culture of each country. For example, values such as identity, tolerance, family, media, in SEM countries are reflected different in comparison with Europe.