

Report on the Euro-Mediterranean trends

By Chiara Mascelloni

**Main Barriers**

**Intercultural Education and multi-cultural events for social cohesion**

In this module of the Euro-Mediterranean Intercultural trends, “Interaction across cultures”, I reviewed and analyzed the two sub-modules: “Main barriers” and “Intercultural education and multi-cultural events for social cohesion”. Translation is central in inter-cultural dialogue, actually the findings of the Survey on cross-cultural interaction barriers show that the language problem it the most significant one, being at 57% for European responders and at 39% for the South-Eastern Mediterranean ones. Cultural barriers rank immediately after language, with 38% and 25% respectively. It must be noted that medias often portray stereotypes and contribute to negative views, therefore their impact is not at all incisive. According to one of the experts, A. Buchler, there is the need of a strategy for translation in the Euro-Mediterranean region, one that takes into consideration these linguistic and cultural complexities.

The prevailing views are preventing dialogue and mutual trust, but what can be done in order to try and change them? Undoubtedly, promoting female role models to break gender stereotypes can help, as well as implementing more youth exchanges to counter prejudices and foster inter-cultural dialogue. Personally, I would add that these two measures could be helpful in every context and every region of the world, as they are an investment for the future. The last decade has indeed been difficult for this region, because of the financial and refugee crisis, religious extremism and the rise of far-right movements, just to name a few. This notwithstanding, the region is still perceived as a hospital place, but at the same time as possible source of conflict, unrest, insecurity. It is also associated with migration issues. Again, I would add, especially because of the medias framing. Moreover, most of the SEM respondents have not seen or heard anything about the EU on the mainstream medias, which brings about questions about their reliability. A high proportion of EU respondents to the Survey show interest in culture and lifestyle of the SEM countries, the near total majority, 81%, while this percentage is at 65% for SEM countries. Although a bit less, it is still safe to say that there is a mutual interest, and it has increased since the first edition of the Survey. Could direct cultural contact experience help in bringing about a positive change in reciprocal perception and deeper understanding? Growing mutual interest and demands for exchange, mobility and personal contacts are present.

It is by now renowned that top-down policies will not help; rather what is vital is a sense of ownership and common space. Civil society engagement is clearly indispensable, especially in highly volatile, rapidly changing situations where the state institutions may often be distrusted. The Anna Lindh Foundation is focused on translation as an essential feature in achieving this result, and have launched a wide study on it since 2012, meant as a basis for future research and a help for an Euro-Mediterranean Translation Program.

The following phase of this project was the Translation 4 Dialogue Conference of 2016, in Slovenia, attended by various actors involved with translation activities. There is the necessity of more face to face encounters, targeting children, and overall, properly training the next generation of writers, translators, publishers, cultural operators and so forth. The Manifesto for Translation was issued, regarding the role of translators, calling for stronger policies to support such an essential role. We must ask ourselves: without funding, what can really be done? With the results of the latest Survey, it is clear that the web is gaining prominence both as a source of news and as a means for interaction between SEM and EU countries, especially among the young generations. Internet is this important for young people in SEM countries because of the increase of travel restrictions in both directions, and strict visa-related policies.

Language and cultural differences function as the main barriers, as stated beforehand, but the level of tolerance is encouraging and often contradicting of the mainstream media narrative. SEM countries are in general more conservative, but this notwithstanding, curious. What it is possible to gather is that a translation strategy is needed, indeed, but it must consider many factors: the variety of the setting, translating more than just books, the importance of the internet medium. There also needs to be a facilitation for the encounter and creation of networks between independent cultural operators and, again, a focus on youth. Another feature too often overlooked is creative writing, perfect for creating sympathy and understanding, as it can offer insight, especially on the refugee crisis and what migrants experience. This can contribute to create a better understanding.

The second module focused on the so-called social enterprises. They are defined as an “entity that is primarily driven by the pursuit of social innovation and social change in various sectors”. Social enterprise is an umbrella term to describe entities that are driven by a social mission, such as co-operatives, fair trade organizations, and communicational enterprises. In this case, creative and cultural sectors have the center stage, although social enterprises also work in other fields. A very vast range of disciplines can be found: fashion, music, theatre, design, literature and so on. What needs to be first and foremost highlighted is that the creative environment is optimal for share, communicate, exchange in ways that could not be possible with just words. Since these enterprises are driven by social and/or environmental objectives, they can be the best choice to foster inter-cultural dialogue. Creativity is seen as a vehicle for cultural and social development, which in my opinion holds true across countries, continents and whatever differences. Creativity is free and beneficial for everyone involved in the process.

The findings on the benefits of multiculturality show that when 8 EU and 5 SEM countries were interviewed about cultural and religious diversity and its relevance for the prosperity of society, EU 71% and SEM 72% of participants strongly agreed. Also, on the benefits of organizing and promoting multicultural events, percentages of respondents strongly agreeing are very high: 82% for both areas. Equally, high results for the promotion of cultural diversity in public spaces: EU 67%, SEM 80% in agreement. We find out from these data that there is an alignment between citizenship’s attitude towards multiculturality and social cohesion and creative arts as a vehicle to enhance these values. Regarding the issue of radicalization, 82% of SEM respondents and 74% of EU agreed that promoting social creative entrepreneurship is beneficial. More than 80% of participants found that education and youth programs are needed to improve youth-led dialogue. By analyzing these results, it would be safe to say that the publics would completely favor the birth and development of young creative social enterprises. In order to draw the conclusions of this review, it appears evident that creative social enterprises could be crucial actors in improving intercultural dialogue and facing the shared social challenges of the region. Too much vagueness remains about the term, therefore agreeing on a definition could provide legitimacy. An understandable, immediate term is needed. Facilitating and improving access to funds and raising awareness, also to attract investors, are also strategies that should be implemented soon. Moreover, making sure that youth has proper access to digital tools, alongside with guidance in developing the skills, improving the financial, legal and regulatory framework. This is particularly true for the SEM countries, in which creative social enterprises do not have a special status and founding for start-ups are extremely difficult to obtain. The development of diverse networks, crucial in order to work in a cross-cultural environment, is also on the agenda.