

The challenges of activating voices and illuminating silences in European media policy. The gender dimension⁷⁷

Claudia Padovani

claudia.padovani@unipd.it

University of Padova, Italy

I. Introduction

My contribution to the conference *Media Policies and Regulation: Activating Voices, Illuminating Silences* introduces and critically reflects on a set of challenges that interrogate policy makers, media professionals, the academic community and citizens alike in relation to gender-relevant media policy in the European multi-level context. All such stakeholders, in fact, are invited to recognize persisting gendered disconnections and inequalities that characterize media operations and media systems.

The theoretical approach adopted here is one that acknowledges the relevance of ideational elements in world politics: beliefs, principles, ideas, knowledge and particularly norms, may evolve over time and consolidate at the supranational level, hence informing the adoption of policies across sectors and levels of authority, from the global to the local. As we have argued elsewhere (Padovani & Pavan, 2011), ideational forces are cen-

⁷⁷ These notes build on recent research activities conducted in the European and supra-national contexts, including a 2012 study on Area J of the Beijing Platform for Action (adopted in 1995 at the Fourth World Conference on Women) in Europe conducted in response to a call for tender issued by the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE/2012/OPER/07). The final report, titled *Study on Area J of the Beijing Platform for Action: Women and the Media in European Union* is available for download on EIGE's website. The study was conducted by a consortium led by prof. Karen Ross as project leader and myself as senior researcher, together with Osservatorio di Pavia and Zegebe University, in cooperation with a network of 28 researchers across the EU + Croatia. It aimed at identifying the presence and roles of women and men in managerial roles in 99 media organizations across Europe, while mapping out policy-initiatives and mechanisms to promote gender equality across Europe. I also refer to a research project, funded by the University of Padova in 2012-2013, aimed at empirically analyzing the area of trans-national communication governance that focuses on the nexus between women, media and communication (titled: 'Networks and Power in Gender-oriented Communication Governance'). Finally, this contribution relates to an ongoing effort, conducted in the context of the International Association for Media and Communication Research (IAMCR) and aimed at contributing scholarly knowledge to the Unesco promoted 'Global Alliance for Media and Gender', as well as to major UN events planned in 2015, including the Beijing +20 celebration, World Summit on the Information Society +10 and MDGs 2015.

tral to (world) politics: they imbue communicative exchanges and sometimes translate into discourses, understood as shared set of concepts, categories, ideas that provide its adherents with a framework for making sense of situations, embodying judgments and fostering capabilities (Berejikian & Dryzek, 2000). If a number of conditions are met, discourses consolidate into formal provisions and norms, thus providing “shared standards of behaviour for actors with a given identity” (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998). Once norms have been adopted they enjoy a formal validity deriving from the “details written down on paper in the form of treaties, conventions and agreements” (Wiener, 2008: 4) but they should not be conceived as definitive nor immutable: on the contrary they are always confronted with the challenge of actual implementation and factual validity, as well as by alternative normative proposals. Indeed, between formal validity and cultural adaptation, there is another “layer” of validity, the “social recognition” of norms, which provides a framework of reference for the implementation of norms, rules and principles.

Such a constructivist approach is consistent with a definition of (global) communication governance that I have elaborated over the past few years (Raboy & Padovani, 2010; Padovani & Pavan, 2011) and which reflects an understanding of ‘policy’ that includes regulatory as well as cognitive and ideational elements, particularly norms. I therefore talk about the gender dimension of media policy referring to *the multiplicity of networks of interdependent, but operationally autonomous actors, that produce relevant knowledge and cultural practices; develop frames that imbue public discourse and orientate policy agendas; articulate principles and visions towards normative frameworks and policy responses to shortcomings and unbalances characterizing the nexus between women, communication and mediating technologies.*

On these bases and looking at media policies and practices in the European context, a set of challenges can be identified pertaining to gender and communication media, presented below to reflect on how silences may be illuminated and voices activated:

- A. a *normative* challenge – that of **norms’ adoption** – related to the strengths and weaknesses of the existing European normative framework concerning the promotion of gender equality in and through the media;
- B. a *regulatory* challenge – that of **norms’ social recognition** - that concerns norms’ translation into policy provisions at the national level, by institutional and private actors (including governments, parliaments and media companies);
- C. finally a *networking* challenge – referred to as **norms’ cultural adaptation** - deriving from stakeholders’ engagement in culturally adapting and implementing normative provisions on the ground, with a view to create a gender-aware and gender-sensible European community of practices in and across the media.

Each of these challenges is briefly discussed below and some proposals are made on how European voices could be activated in engaging with EU strategies for equal opportunities in and through the media.

II. The normative challenge

The normative challenge relates to the strengths and weaknesses of existing European frameworks concerning the promotion of gender equality in and through the media.

At the global level, the international community addressed the nexus between women and media from the early days of its intervention on women, development and peace, in Mexico City, 1975, on the occasion of the first International Conference on Women. But the widely recognized starting point for any analysis on the topic, is provided by the Beijing Platform for Action (Beijing PfA, 1995) where the so-called 'Area J' invites all interested stakeholders to:

- Strategic objective J.1. *"Increase the participation and access of women to expression and decision-making in and through the media and new technologies of communication"*; and
- Strategic objective J.2. *"Promote a balanced and non-stereotyped portrayal of women in the media"*.

Area J, including its accompanying recommendations, has provided, over the past twenty or so years, guidance principles for the adoption of further institutional provisions, laws and codes of conduct, monitoring and advocacy initiatives, from the local to the global.

On the occasion of the *Study on Area J of the Beijing Platform for Action: Women and the Media in European Union*, European provisions in response to the Beijing normative frameworks have been mapped and analyzed⁷⁸.

What emerged from the analysis is that the EU has committed to the Beijing goals since late 1995 and has adopted a number of provisions, which confirm Area J functions as the normative reference point for European interventions. Nevertheless EU provisions do not seem to be always consistent across the different institutions: the Commission, Council and Parliament often 'speak different languages' in their formal documents, thus

⁷⁸ A list of policy documents adopted by EU institutions and CoE can be found, searched and visualized in the Mapping Global Media Policy platform, in a section devoted to 'Gender and Media in Europe'. The present text synthesizes section 1.2.2 of the EIGE report.

showing conflicting interests at play around these issues (particularly in what concerns 'freedom of expression' and member countries' responsibilities in media policy). It can also be highlighted that mostly 'soft provisions' have been adopted, and there have been different priorities in the normative orientation over time, with more attention to access to decision making positions in media industries in the '90s than in early 2000s, when problematic issues related to women representation and stereotypes have gained renewed attention. Today, a still prevailing tendency to concentrate on stereotypes and images, rather than on participation and access of women to the media; whereas when the focus is on women participation in decision-making (as in EU Strategy for Gender Equality 2010-2015) seldom mention is made of the media sector. Partly different is the case of the EU Parliament, which has been concerned with participation in decision-making over the years and more recently with a specific reference to challenges brought about by the information society; while it is important to recall the many contributions elaborated by the Council of Europe, since 1984, with more concrete proposals, including the adoption of monitoring mechanisms, ad hoc research, codes of conduct.

As far as silences to be illuminated, we can argue that, in spite of the long term commitment to gender equality in the EU, the disconnection between policy sectors when it comes to the media is evident: gender programs tend to have a conventional and instrumental view of the media, not fully understood as meaningful stakeholders in the field; while much European policy-making relating to the media and audiovisual industries has been characterized by a lack of attention to gender equality issues, and a seeming lack of commitment in pursuing a gender-sensitive approach to policy and its implementation.

In this context, it is certainly interesting to note that a very institutional voice has been activated: that of the Irish Presidency of the Union (I semester 2013), who decided to assess the situation in relation to Area J 1 in 28 European countries and invited EIGE to coordinate the study. Furthermore, we can think of this research collaboration as an 'activating experience': research teams from many countries have worked together; contacts have been made with media organizations to collect the data; methodologies and information have been shared a mapping of European actors and initiatives and policies have been conducted and systematize; there are now plans to strengthen this informal European research network. There seems therefore to be a momentum around these issues, while states are now called to implement a number of recommendations, expressed in the EIGE Report and adopted by the Council of the Union in June 2013.

III. The regulatory challenge

As per the regulatory challenge, the same European project has contributed to shed light on how international and European norms have translated into policy provisions at the national level, thus showing the degree of ‘social recognition’ of gender equity norms across institutional and private actors (including governments, parliaments and media companies)⁷⁹.

In the following I summarize some basic findings⁸⁰.

Gender and media in national legislative contexts

In most EU Member States, only occasionally equality legislations, which prohibit discrimination on the ground of sex, refer specifically to the public broadcaster, in relation to employment but also in relation to representation and portrayal (this is the case, for example, in Austria, Finland, Spain and the UK). Some EU Member States have initiated Charters to support more women into leadership positions, including in the media, but these are recommendations rather than legislative requirements (for example, Denmark). In the United Kingdom, any media organization licensed to broadcast is required by law to promote ‘equality of opportunity to employment between men and women’. However,

79 Beside policy provisions, the project also collected data on a number of policy-related aspects (see the examples compiled in Annex 8 of the final EIGE Report):

Examples of research conducted into any aspect of gender and media (governmental)

Examples of legislation on any aspect of gender and media (governmental)

Examples of formal media monitoring organisations (governmental)

Examples of formal media & gender monitoring organisations (governmental)

Examples of monitoring organisations which focus on the media (NGOs)

Examples of monitoring organisations which focus on gender and media (NGOs)

Examples of media unions with a women’s officer post (media professionals)

Examples of media unions with a women’s council (media professionals)

Examples of organised groups of women media professionals (journalists, filmmakers, etc.)

Examples of research undertaken or commissioned into any aspect of gender and media (media org)

Examples of high profile cases of media professionals taking their employer to a tribunal on the grounds of gender discrimination (media org)

80 See EIGE Report 2.6.1 on National policies.

there are no government provisions for women in decision-making roles within media organizations.

An interesting innovation seems to be developing in Portugal where, within the context of the fourth National Plan for Equality, Gender, Citizenship and Non-Discrimination (2011-2013), a provision has been adopted to issue an award on Women and Men in Media, sponsored by the Commission for Citizenship and Gender Equality (CIG), with the strategic objective of creating an environment that fosters equality by promoting non-stereotypical gender representation in the media and enabling the visibility and expression of women in the media.

Gender equality policies and measures adopted by media organizations

Table 1 below shows how many media organizations, out of 99 major media companies in 28 European countries, have adopted equality plans of different kind: codes, policies, implementation and monitoring mechanisms. Across the surveyed media organizations – with some differences between the public and private sector - only a tenth has adopted diversity policies or codes of conduct, less than that have codes of conduct which make explicit mention of gender; while mechanisms to monitor and implement such plans – committees or delegated officers – seldom are found. In synthesis we can highlight that only media companies in 14 countries have adopted some kind of provision related to gender to orientate their operations.

Policy/Provision	Public/Mixed	Private	Total
Equality opportunities/diversity policy	9	10	19
Gender Equality policy/code of conduct	10	4	14
Code Of conduct (mentions gender)	6	5	11
External code of conduct (general)	3	2	5
Implementation and monitoring mechanisms			
Committee responsible for (monitoring) equality policy	9	6	15
Equality/Diversity Officer	9	4	13
Equality/Diversity Department	6	6	9

Table 1 – Policy provisions adopted by 99 media organizations to promote gender equity in 28 EU countries.

Table 2 shows the distribution of adopted policies and mechanisms across the 14 countries where provisions have been adopted. Whilst some of the other organisations in the sample may have some or all of these policies, the research teams were unable to find any evidence during the conduct of the project; which calls into question both the relevance given to the topic and the sometimes insufficient publicity given to gender equality initiatives.

Country	Code of conduct (mentions gender)	Gender Equality policy/ code of conduct	Equality opportunities/ diversity policy	Committee responsible for (monitoring) equality policy	Equality/Diversity Department	Equality/Diversity Officer
Austria	0	1	0	1	0	1
Belgium	1	0	1	1	1	1
Finland	1	0	1	2	0	1
France	0	1	2	1	0	1
Germany	1	2	1	1	3	1
Hungary	2	0	0	0	0	0
Italy	1	0	4	2	0	0
Latvia	3	0	0	0	0	0
Portugal	0	0	1	0	0	0
Spain	1	4	4	4	2	3
Sweden	0	2	1	1	0	3
Netherlands	0	1	0	1	0	0
UK	0	2	4	1	3	2
Croatia	0	1	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	11	14	19	15	9	13

Table 2 – Equality provisions adopted in 14 EU ‘active’ countries.

It is also important to consider the existence of practical measures to promote gender equality. Table 3 below shows the number and different possible measures that have been adopted in 99 major media organizations across the EU Member States, again stressing differences according to media organizations' forms of funding (public/mixed, private).

Practical measures	Public/Mixed	Private	Total
Policy on sexual harassment	12	11	23
Dignity at work policy	10	9	19
Policy on maternity leave	10	7	17
Policy on paternity leave	9	6	15
Harassment Advisors	3	2	5
Policy on parental leave	1	0	1
Equality awareness training for staff	6	3	9
Leadership/management training for women	4	2	6
Trainee positions for women	3	0	3

Table 3 – Practical measures adopted by 99 media organizations to promote gender equity in 28 EU countries.

The overall study has therefore illuminated a silent/shadow situation: in spite of recent interventions by the European Commission, including the report *Breaking gender stereotypes in the media* elaborated by Advisory Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men (EC 2010) which states that “women should be actively promoted in senior positions in media companies...”, a number of problematic aspects, concerning the gender dimension of national as well as internal media regulation across Europe, remain to be highlighted:

- few national equality legislations exist in Europe, aimed at reducing gender discrimination and fostering women's access to decision-making positions, refer specifically to the media, including the public broadcasters;
- fewer than 1 in 7, out of 99 media organizations, have specific gender related equality plans; and, in general, they tend to adopt the general non discriminatory principle included in the Audiovisual media Service Directive of 2010;
- quite clear differences can be found between the public and private sectors, where public service broadcasters are more likely to have policies in place than private organizations;
- few organizations have formal mechanisms for monitoring their equality policies, or practical measures to promote gender equality. Without such mechanisms for both

monitoring how organizations are performing against their own equality policies but also devising a plan of action in response to the collection of data, it is hard to see the real value of such policies;

- furthermore, the study demonstrates that the existence of national laws, media organizations' equality plans and adopted codes do not, of themselves, necessarily bring about change: often where policies and codes have been adopted, the actual presence and relevance of women in managerial roles remains much lower than that of male. This confirms the necessity to adopt, as suggested above, an articulated and multidimensional perspective on policy and governance to include cognitive elements and cultural practices.

In the European context, it is relevant to mention that a number of voices have been active over time and constitute good practices, which have also been mapped out. Amongst these: the BBC Gender equality scheme of 2007 (including programmes to help working mothers, generous parental leave, childcare vouchers, regular events and workshops are targeted at women...); the *Corporación de Radio y Televisión Española* (RTVE) adoption of innovative strategies (advertising campaigns; raising awareness of discrimination and violence against women; use of non-sexist language...); the *Österreichische Rundfunk* (ORF) Austrian public service broadcaster who has adopted a gender equality plan with the main goal of raising the overall representation of women to 45 % of the workforce; the HRT Croatian Radio and TV, the public service broadcaster, who has developed a plan for the promotion and implementation of gender equality and established a group to monitor and evaluate the plan which included a gender analysis of the existing workforce.

As far as active voices, it is crucial to recall the role played by professional associations and unions associated with different aspects of media professional practice. Key amongst these entities is the European Federation of Journalists (EFJ), which has a long history of commitment to gender equity in the profession. EFJ, in November 2012, published a handbook on good practice in [gender equality amongst European journalists' unions](#), indicating a number of strategies for promoting gender equality to be taken up by a variety of different organizations, not just unions or professional associations. Also at the level of the nation state, gender-focused professional media organizations and monitoring initiatives, across the EU Member States, are generating good practices which should be better known and connected. Some of these are included in a new database created by EIGE titled [Collection of methods, tools and good practices in the field of Women and the Media](#).

We should then acknowledge the many active voices operating across Europe to monitor, assess achievements and shortcomings in gender and media; their role in raising awareness within media organizations and fostering a culture of equity and empowerment is crucial to transform European and national policy provisions into actual practices on the ground, both in relation to media content and to media operations, functioning and governance.

IV. The networking challenge

Finally, I consider the networking challenge deriving from stakeholders' engagement in culturally adapting and implementing normative provisions on the ground.

As stated above, the existence of national laws, media organizations' equality plans and codes do not, of themselves, necessarily bring about change: often where policies and codes have been adopted, the actual presence and relevance of women in managerial roles remains much lower than that of male; while stereotypes and degrading portrayals of women remain a diffused feature of media content. This confirms the necessity to adopt a multidimensional perspective on policy and governance to include cognitive elements and cultural practices; but this also calls for a proper recognition, and possibly better connection, of existing initiatives, often conducted by civic organizations in response to persisting discrimination and inequalities, as resources towards the creation of a gender-aware European community of practices in and across the media.

Examples of past and recent initiatives are the EBU Charter 1995, the Global Media Monitoring Project conducted since 1994; the participation of European researchers in the International Womens' Media Foundation study and Global Report on the Status of Women in the News Media of 2011; the WACC & European Federation of Journalists tool kit on 'Gender ethical journalism and media house policy' published in 2012.

Civil society organizations, as well as researchers and media professional networks emerge as potentially powerful actors of social change, since they contribute to illuminate silences through monitoring and rigorous investigation, data collection and the development of concrete proposals. Nevertheless, our analyses have shown that these actors do not always actively foster the normative standards that have been formalized by the international community and the EU; references which may indeed support their efforts. They operate according to their own claims and frames, and across Europe almost exclusively in their national languages; thus not taking advantage of shared understanding of problems and opportunities for change. Problematic is also the almost total absence of academic and research institutions, particularly from issue networks and spaces where media and gender issues are discussed, addressed, commented upon. This invites the scholarly community, particularly media and communication scholars, to elaborate strategies to make the knowledge we produce relevant across spaces of place and policy-making and spaces of flows and public discussion.

I argue there is a need to consolidate, update, expand and publicize the resources that have been created, often as results of academic research projects; with a view to translating scientific knowledge into more accessible forms.

One example is offered by thematic sections focused on 'Gender and Media' in the Global Media Policy mapping platform and dataset (www.globalmediapolicy.net/sections):

they include profiles for people, organizational actors, policy documents and resources, active across Europe and internationally. Gender and media is the main focus, paralleled by a broader understanding of equal opportunities, gender mainstreaming and the promotion of women in decision-making.

Another resource is the [Women&Media platform](#): a digital platform publicly accessible and aimed at fostering gender equality in and through the media, traditional and new, particularly in the European region. The platform hosts relevant information, resources and multimedia content that has been created and gathered as a result of research, educational and advocacy projects. It operates as a collaboratory space where researchers, educators and media professionals, as well as advocates and policy makers, can contribute their knowledge and understanding towards meeting the goals of the Beijing Platform for Action.

Mapping, sharing and making these and other existing resources interoperable is a challenge but this would certainly constitute a major contribution towards more inclusive gender-aware, policy-oriented research and advocacy.

V. Concluding remarks

Looking at possible steps that we could take - as researchers and educators operating in the European context - we should start from outlining the adoption of the Report *Advancing Women's Roles as Decision-makers in the Media* by the Council of the European Union (June 20-21, 2013). This provides institutional support to any activity that aims at a) implementing the agreed upon normative framework, b) making use of the adopted indicators, c) following up with specific recommendations that have been made. Moreover, possible spaces for cooperation (with a particular focus on the academic community) are:

- to maintain and expand the level of commitment that has accompanied European projects, involving EU institutions, EIGE, research teams, professional organizations; and to take advantage of the high degree of trust and shared understanding that such activities have often generated. This in view of producing more relevant research and comparable findings, including qualitative reading of national and local situations, to inform future policy programs;
- to make use of the available resources - collected data, written materials and digital platforms - to strengthen the collaborative networks of actors and association, particularly higher education institutions, universities and educational agencies, where existing courses and resources could be connected, and ad hoc collaborative modules organized; to activate actors in national contexts, yet connected across Europe, to follow up with the European Council decision of June 2013, and monitor developments and implementation based on the proposed indicators and recommendations;

- to work collectively towards sustained multi-stakeholder dialogues and policy-oriented initiatives, bringing together media professional, civic organizations and particularly scholars and educators, in a joint effort to engage with (and monitor) national institutions and media organizations, in view of building a truly European gender-aware community of practice, and research and analyses, committed to foster gender equality in and through the media;
- to look outside Europe, taking advantage of existing collaborations (as in the case of the EIGE project: the international advisory committee) and of the upcoming Global Alliance on Media and Gender, which may facilitate linking projects for gender equity and social change across different regions, thus decentering and enriching our still too often Euro-centered gaze.

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