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Learning and teaching gender in the digital age: insights and reflections on the AGEMI project

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Abstract

The achievement of gender equality across the media industry, both in terms of representation but also in employment, has been a goal amongst activists, women's organisations and many stakeholders across the sector, for several decades and has been seen as fundamental in achieving gender justice more generally, such is the piv-

otal role played by the media in contemporary societies. This article considers the ways in which issues around gender inequality and actions designed to challenge them, can be usefully incorporated into media and journalism programmes, particularly by taking advantage of a range of resources which are available online. It takes a case study approach by focusing on one particular set of resources which have been produced by members of an action project team, Advancing Gender Equality in Media Industries (AGEMI). While describing how the diverse components of the AGEMI online platform have been operationalized, we also highlight what we have learned in terms of their potential to create and develop gender-sensitive curricula and modules; and we discuss the opportunities which a shift to more online teaching, prompted by the global pandemic, offers to rethink the role of educators and students in the learning together process of knowledge transfer and production.

Introduction

Training the current generation of journalism, media and communication students to make them aware of persistent forms of gender-based underrepresentation, silencing, and discrimination in the cultural industries is vital for ensuring the future of a sector which acknowledges the importance of gender diversity and equality in all its practices.

This has been recognized since the earliest international debates on gender equality, peace and development in the 1970s (for example, during the United Nations Decade for Women 1975-85) and has been regularly re-stated over subsequent years. The Fourth World Conference on Women (1995) in Beijing and the resulting Platform for Action (PfA) mentioned the need for the education and training of students, as well as professionals and experts in its recommendations relating to the media (Section J)¹, while calls to integrate journalism and media studies with the knowledges produced by feminist and gender scholars have become more frequent in recent years, both at the international level² and in the European context³, particularly in relation to the goals and approaches adopted in the Bologna Process⁴ (Grunberg, 2011; Garcia-Ramos et al,

1 Beijing PfA Par. 241(a), 242(b), 243(c), 245(d).

2 See UNESCO 'Priority Gender Equality Action Plan 2008-2013'.

3 See Council of Europe Recommendation CM/Rec(2013)1 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on 'Gender equality and media'.

4 The reform known as 'Bologna Process' gave rise to the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). The Preamble of the 1993 Berlin Communiqué stressed the pivotal role of universities in ending gender inequality, alongside long terms goals of integration and internationalization, also through cross-disciplinary

2020). It has been repeatedly affirmed that education is core for the transformation of cultural values and organizational cultures which will lead to the achievement of gender equality in and through the media and, as a result, gender justice in society at large.

Nevertheless, it has only been in the past few years – in view of the Beijing+20 and Beijing+25 retrospective analyses – that country specific⁵ and cross-national comparative assessments have been made to critically investigate the extent to which the recommendations and goals of the BfPA have been implemented and achieved. One initiative worth mentioning is the international exercise conducted in the context of the UNESCO UNiTWIN Network on Gender Media and ICT⁶. Thanks to support provided by the UNESCO International Program for Development Communication (IPDC) in 2018, the Network conducted a study entitled ‘Mapping Educational Strategies for Creating Gender-sensitive Journalism, Media, and ICT Curricula’ in 11 countries⁷, to investigate the existence and main features of courses and modules dealing with gender which were being taught in media and journalism and communication degrees. The findings of that mapping exercise reflected those of analyses that have looked more broadly at the implementation of women/gender/feminist studies in higher education, and across a variety of disciplines over the past two decades (ATHENA Network⁸; Braidotti & Vonk, 1999, 2000, 2001; Grunberg, 2011; Verge et al., 2018), and demonstrated that very few gender-focused courses have been established, gender-focused degrees are rare and gender perspectives are rarely mainstreamed or integrated into courses or modules which constitute the typical journalism or media degree programme. Instead, the content and focus of such curricula remain confined, if mentioned at all, to the more ‘conventional’ issues such as gender representation (in news, fiction, advertising) or inequalities in the newsrooms, while little effort is made to expand students’ understanding of the interplay of structural inequalities, gender-based violence or the role of media policy, not to mention the very limited integration of LGBTQi+ experiences of exclusion. Most courses are offered at undergraduate level and there is a diffused tendency, where courses do exist, to consider them as add-ons and women-targeted component of degrees: most are electives which indicates a low degree of institutional commitment in response to international recommendations for gender-mainstreaming. In fact, in the majority of cases discovered during the research, where sustained efforts to enrich the educational offer with gender-sensitive perspectives have been present, it has been the result of individual scholars’ interests and commitment, where expert researchers bring their knowledge into the classroom as well as sharing their social engagement at local and community level and in transnational scholarly networks.

Understanding the history of efforts to call attention to gender inequalities in the media is valuable in as much as they make visible the contemporary gaps and shortcomings that feminist media research, focusing on the gendered nature of the curriculum, have highlighted since the early ‘90s. Calls to transform educational practices and for a reconsideration of the material being taught, including the content of textbooks and handbooks, have been numerous (Gallagher, 1995; Rakow, 1993; UNESCO/IAMCR, 2018). Yet, as highlighted by Margaret Gallagher in her preface to a recent volume published in the UNESCO Series on Journalism Education (UNESCO, 2019), ‘... feminist media scholarship is still seen as a specialization within communication, rather than as a perspective to be applied to the field as a whole’ (Gallagher, 2019, p.19). Hence the very issue of curricula development has seldom been addressed and this regularly re-emerges as a major shortcoming. In fact, the complex articulation of gendered and other inequalities within and across media content and structures can hardly be addressed through individual modules offered by individual educators and trainers. Such complexity requires an explicit acknowledgement of the multi-dimensional forms of inequality (in working conditions, career progression, access to decision-making positions, experiences of abuse and harassment in the professional environment and in the field and by citizens through online

exchanges.

5 Detailed analyses from the Spanish context can be found in Paldo & Martins 2014; Garcia-Ramos et al, 2020.

6 <http://www.unitwin.net>. This is an international network of institutions and scholars from around the world working to advance research training and program development in UNESCO’s fields of competence by building university networks and encouraging co-operation between gender, media and ICT scholars.

7 Australia, Chile, Ecuador, Spain, United States, Ethiopia, India, Italy, Mexico, Dominican Republic and Costa Rica.

8 Created in 1996 by the Association of Institutions for Feminist Education and Research in Europe (AO-IFE), and selected as a Socrates Thematic Network Project in September 1998, the ATHENA Socrates Thematic Network Project was the first to conduct an evaluation of Women’s studies across European countries, to then become a forum for reflection, a platform for policy-making, advice and quality evaluation in a specific area; as well as a teaching network, focusing on co-operation activities in the field of curriculum development, and teaching methodologies in the early 2000s.

trolling, to name some). It also invites an awareness of the diverse contextual geo-cultural elements of such inequalities and of the necessary (but often missed) interconnections between theoretical perspective, empirical research and professional practices.

It is therefore all the more relevant that some efforts in the direction of elaborating comprehensive and articulated proposals for curricula development have been made in recent years, through transnational collaborations amongst expert scholars⁹. One such attempt is the AGEMI project – Advancing Gender Equality in Media Industries - which has developed an articulated framework whereby core themes have been identified and turned into a set of interconnected digital resources, building on the feminist tradition of openness in research and advocacy for social change (Pando & Martin, 2014). AGEMI recognises the complexity of the field, the need to build bridges between theoretical and practical knowledges and the need to acknowledge the commonalities and differences across geo-cultural diverse contexts.

In the following discussion, after providing a short introduction to the AGEMI project and platform, we discuss how these challenges have not only been embedded in the AGEMI platform, but also how the resulting tools and resources have been tested, put in practice and explored through concrete on-and-offline interventions. We also discuss the ways in which AGEMI enhances cross-cultural dialogue, at times thanks to unexpected but productive collaborations which emerged part-way through the project. Finally, we make some closing remarks about the importance of online resources such as those which constitute AGEMI in the context of the challenges to teaching and learning prompted by the Covid-19 global pandemic and beyond. The aim is to tell a story of what has been realized and achieved, while showing the potential of connecting available resources, committed scholarship and a bridge-building, collaborative attitude towards transforming journalism and media education and practices.

The AGEMI project

The Advancing Gender Equality in Media Industries (AGEMI)¹⁰ project takes a research-informed approach to challenging gendered inequalities and inequalities in the media, both in terms of representation but also employment. It draws on decades of research around the gender-media relationship which recognises the multiple inequalities and intersectionalities produced by our different contexts, our different realities, our different knowledges, our different cultures and norms and our different access to both media and information. The consortium members who comprise the AGEMI team are a mix of educators and media professionals¹¹, a combination of experience and expertise which has proved effective in designing, creating and curating a set of resources and activities which are inspiring and informing students, citizens and media practitioners in a number of different ways.

When the consortium came together at our first meeting to determine the shape and content of AGEMI, we had in mind several objectives, to:

- Raise awareness of gendered inequalities in the media and to both recognise and understand the interplay of complex and intersectional issues, amongst communication, media and journalism students and inspire them to develop a gender-sensitive approach to media through both interrogating media

⁹ Worth mentioning is the syllabus resulting from the UniTWIN Mapping project - Gender, media and ICT. New approaches for research, education and training (UNESCO 2019) - that offers a set of thematic modules, structured around topics and sub-themes, possible approaches, available resources and core references. The Network is currently working on the development of a 'syllabus bank', a list of courses with links to related descriptions and resources, so as to provide a one-stop resource for interested scholars and educators. From the Portuguese speaking world comes a resource developed by colleagues from the Centro de Estudos de Comunicação e Sociedade (CECS) of the University of Minho (Braga, Portugal) titled *De outro género: propostas para a promoção de um jornalismo mais inclusivo* (Of different gender: proposals to promote a more inclusive journalism) (2014). Of interest may also be the resources developed by a EU funded project (2007), which comprises a set of constantly updated gender curricula for diverse disciplinary areas - from agriculture to architecture to journalism and communication - organized in goals, content, integration issues. Available at: <http://www.gender-curricula.com/en/gender-curricula-startseite>.

¹⁰ AGEMI was co-funded by the Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme of the European Commission (2017-2019). It was subsequently funded by the Universities of Newcastle and Padova (2019-2021). The Platform is accessible at: www.agemi-eu.org.

¹¹ The AGEMI consortium comprise the Universities of Newcastle (UK), Padova (Italy) and Gothenburg (Sweden) together with the European Federation of Journalists and COPEAM

texts and organisational practices and in the production of their own journalism and other forms of media output. This was realized by creating a series of thematic learning units and a monitoring tool (AGEMI app).

- Provide information and resources about the myriad different ways in which media organisations, women's NGOs, media watchdogs and individuals have developed good practices in combating gendered inequalities in the media, by developing a Resources Bank of Good Practices.
- Create opportunities for intercultural learning and exchange amongst young people in order to enhance understanding of different cultural contexts and subject positions through guided learning, creative play and conversations. This took the form of a summer school and participation in online, cross-cultural courses.
- Develop activities to bring media, communication and journalism students into dialogue with media professionals in order to better understand and appreciate their different learning and professional environments and demands. The summer school and opportunities for internships responded to this goal.
- Provide 'live' experiences of professional practice amongst media, communication and journalism students and thus enhance graduate employability in media industries. Internships at selected organizations across Europe was crucial in this respect.
- Curate and create resources of relevance and interest to media professionals which would maximize the potential for attitudinal, behavioural and cultural change in the media sector. Beside the learning units, this goal was met through conducting and recording interviews with media professionals, policy-makers and advocates (GEMTalks).

As well as the various activities which we organised to work through the AGEMI resources we also promoted AGEMI at academic conferences and via various online networks. As a consequence, we now know that elements of the learning units have been incorporated into existing university syllabi and/or formed the basis of new curriculum activities, because our colleagues running those courses have told us. These include Higher Education Institutions (HEI) in the UK (for example, UCoventry, UStrathclyde), in Europe (UMalta, UVienna, UComplutense in Madrid) and beyond (UNepal, Rochester Institute of Technology, US) alongside our own students in Newcastle, Padova and Gothenburg. However, we also believe (and hope!) that they are being used in many other courses and contexts and although it would be very nice to know about their wider penetration and use, our original aim was to produce resources which were freely available and downloadable and that's what we've done. We also created a You Tube channel¹² where all the video-lectures and associated practitioner interviews are available to view in discrete playlists which enhance and extend their scope, reach and audience beyond the academy. The You Tube channel also constitutes the principal aspect of the project's sustainability plan. We were also cognisant of the need to extend the reach of the project beyond the English-speaking world, so all the learning units have bespoke subtitle files in English, French and Spanish which ensures accurate translation and anyone accessing the learning units via the AGEMI platform, can also download the video transcripts.

Addressing complexity: The AGEMI framework and interconnected resources

The AGEMI team recognized from the outset that a highly competitive economic environment, platform dominance and shifts in production practices are transforming the media industry as an economic sector, with the retrenchment of both vertical and horizontal segregation along gendered lines operating alongside new opportunities for women (and men) enabled by the rapid development of digital technologies. Therefore, any educational intervention needed to understand both the realities of an ever-changing media environment but also the challenges of promoting a gender-sensitive professional practice in a highly time-pressured and demanding context. Dealing with such complexity requires a holistic approach, which AGEMI has elaborated by identifying plural forms of inequality, pulling together examples of good practices that can be implemented to address them and suggesting forward-looking educational practices.

Adopting a holistic approach acknowledges the intersecting issues in the media and journalism field that pertain to gender inequality in and through the media. Such issues include unequal representation in content; limited access to media and decision-making and barriers to career progression; gendered cultures in newsrooms and digital programming organizations and gendered language; and harassment on- and offline,

12 <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCmXR4IaUAYx-EqUECLUJVCQ>.

particularly against women journalists, women in the public eye and/or women who are in positions of authority or governance. Attention also needs to be paid to how technologies are transforming the media professions, how gender intersects with other forms of privilege and power such as age, class, race and sexual orientation, and how policy and advocacy initiatives can help overcome unequal practices. From this plurality of issues, we elaborated an articulated thematic framework comprising a set of learning resources which include video-lectures, reading materials and interviews. The learning resources are organised as a series of units where each one is complete on its own and can be used as the basis for the organization of thematic modules but where together, the units can also be taken as a course. The themes include those typically associated with gendered media analysis such as representation, newsroom cultures and language, but also – consistent with our holistic approach - topics such as harassment, digital technology and policy initiatives which are less frequently included. Each unit is framed so as to provide a context which draws on relevant research and literature, supplemented by interviews with media professionals and policy-makers who discuss how the themes are materialised and experienced in newsroom practices and strategies which have been employed to combat gender inequalities in media organisations. Importantly, the learning resources encourage learners to ask questions not only about what they are viewing and how their own practice might become more gender-aware, but also how the issues raised can be understood and are being operationalised within their own media context, from the micro dynamics of everyday media practices to the macro context of available national and international normative frameworks.

The same approach informed the creation of a global collection of ‘good practices.’ As the project responded to a European Commission’s call to ‘overcome gender stereotypes in education, training and in the workplace by promoting existing good practices on gender roles’, one of our goals was to make visible the many creative and transformative initiatives organized and undertaken by media professionals, as well as by civil society and women’s organizations, public institutions and universities over the years. We were aware that many of these gender-sensitive and gender-empowering ways of doing and being the media were almost entirely unknown to a wider audience and wanted to make them accessible and inspirational to a wider audience than simply the communities involved in their production. Moreover, the AGEMI Resources Bank of Good Practices reflects our approach to revealing complexity due to the adoption of an operational definition of ‘good practice’ in the gender and media context which comprised: a) a set of the criteria according to which a practice or initiative could be regarded as ‘good’ – for example, sustained over time, transformative in approach, replicable - together with; b) an articulated typology of initiatives which includes monitoring, awareness-raising, training and education, policy design and adoption, and networking for change¹³. Although we are aware that many more empowering initiatives have been and are being implemented across the world region that deserve to have been included in the Resources Bank, what this database offers is a series of about 100 good practices that can be creatively considered in an educational setting and we have created different entry points into the database. By using a semantic search, learners and browsers can identify initiatives that address specific inequality issues such as violence and harassment or gender stereotypes in the media and explore the different approaches taken by different initiatives and critically reflect on their potential adoption in different contexts. Using the ‘bubble’ search, it is possible to focus on types of good practices such as those focused on training and education, and to explore the collection by looking for, say, guidelines which promote inclusive journalism. It is also possible to start from in/equality issues such as representation or access to decision-making and therefore discover mentoring and leadership programmes which have been initiated by different media houses. Finally, using the interactive map as a starting point, users can see whether models exist at a local or national level which inspire the development of new initiatives, or if potential partners exist in a given national or regional context. An interesting example of how these different educational practices can be combined and then made relevant to a specific context, comes from the University of Vienna, where using the AGEMI Resources Bank enabled a group of students to identify the gender equality policy instruments elaborated by the public service broadcaster in Austria (ORF) and to make contact and then conduct interviews with journalists and managers at ORF to better understand how and under what conditions policy adoption and self-regulatory measures are making a difference in fostering gender equality within media structures and through media content¹⁴.

Bridging knowledges: AGEMI as a space for dialogue between

¹³ For a detailed description of the project framework see: www.agemi-eu.org

¹⁴ For more information see the description of the ‘Action Research and Learning – creating enabling spaces in teaching’ at the Department of Communication at the University of Vienna in the AGEMI ChanGE section at: <https://www.agemi-eu.org/mod/page/view.php?id=509>.

academia and the professional world

In late August 2018, we organised a summer school, designed primarily to road-test and sense-check the materials we had developed by the mid-point of the project, together with providing opportunities for student-professional interactions and finally, the opportunity to learn mobile journalism skills and put them into practice by producing a short news package. We worked with 10 students from each of the three consortium universities comprising a mix of undergraduate and postgraduate students and other participants included the consortium partners, other academic and technical staff from the University of Gothenburg and media professionals from the Swedish PSB (both TV and radio), the Belgian, French-speaking PSB (RTBF), the BBC, the International Association of Women in Radio and Television and the Italian association of women journalists (GiULiA).

While the AGEMI team had imagined that we would spend most of the week working through the learning resources, it quickly became clear that without the regular presence of an AGEMI team member, the students found it hard to concentrate fully on the web-based content for any length of time. Not only were most of them using their phones or tablets to read the content as we had thought we would have access to computer rooms which never materialised, but we had also put them into non-friendship groups, so they were keen to find out about their new colleagues. We subsequently encouraged them to explore particular aspects of different units and encouraged proactive learning through the process of going into the local community to make a gender-focussed news story. Hearing the groups talk about the stories they produced was the highlight of the week's activities. Four key learning points for the AGEMI team were the importance of ensuring a suitable working environment, to make activities short and varied, to build in 'downtime' across the week, and to mix up the students to promote confidence, collaboration and cultural exchange. At the end of the summer school, a feedback workshop was facilitated by the independent evaluation team who had also attended to gather feedback on the experience. Overall, participants were enthusiastic about what they had learnt. While they enjoyed working through the learning unit materials and thus developing awareness of gender inequalities in the media (formal learning), what they particularly enjoyed was hearing from media professionals, the opportunity to spend time with other young people from different cultural contexts (dialogue) and learning to produce mobile journalism (practice).

The other element of student-professional interaction was the internship programme and 25 of the summer school participants took up an internship at a variety of different host organisations from across Europe, including mainstream media organisations such as newspaper offices, radio and TV stations and broadcasting HQs, women's advocacy NGOs and media unions. The internships took place between September 2018 and April 2019 and lasted for a week. Again, this was a very successful initiative from the point of view of both students and host organisations, not least because there AGEMI team members acted as liaison and ensured that each internship was focused on a task related to gender and media and which was agreed between the intern and the host. The setting up before, the support during and the feedback after, are all crucial aspects of a successful internship, together with clear expectations and a task to deliver, the lack of any/some of which has been found to undermine its effectiveness (see, for example, Zehr & Korte, 2020). One of the interns produced the first video promoting the BBC's 50:50 project and another had her article published in the online version of her host's newspaper.

While we appreciate that internships are part of many academic programmes, what was different about the AGEMI experience was the focus on interns being encouraged to work on an explicitly gender-focused project during their internship and to work semi-independently on their own project while also being regarded as a full member of the team. The internship provided an opportunity for students to put their new learning from the Summer School and engagement with the AGEMI learning resources into practice and this worked extremely well.

Intercultural learning and exchange: AGEMI engaging with virtual exchange

While our primary intention was to provide learning resources for university students, one of the largest cohorts of learners who have actually used the AGEMI resources so far have been participants in two courses organised by the NGO, Sharing Perspectives, many of whom were university students but some were not. Our collaboration with this Dutch NGO was one of those serendipitous collisions of timely but unanticipated mutual interest since they were looking for course content and we were looking for opportunities for

dissemination. Sharing Perspectives is one of the ‘implementers’ in an EC-funded project, EVE (Erasmus + Virtual Exchange)¹⁵. EVE provides opportunities for young people (18-30 years) living in Europe and the Southern Mediterranean, to participate in online facilitated dialogues which aim to encourage intercultural awareness, enhance confidence and develop communication skills and competences. Each EVE course is thematically-driven and in each of 2019 and 2020, EVE courses hosted and facilitated by Sharing Perspectives included one on the theme of Gender in/equality in Media and Journalism¹⁶ based on the AGEMI learning units and the other resources available on the web platform: a total of 636 learners registered for the two courses (314 in 2019 and 322 in 2020). Each course ran over five weeks and included both synchronous (2-hr blocks each week) and asynchronous elements as part of the ‘virtual exchange’ approach. This combines the use of technologies that facilitates ‘mobility at home’ with the possibility to create safe and facilitated environments for young people to engage in geo-culturally diverse classrooms, exchange ideas and experiences on controversial topics, gain awareness – in this case on gendered media realities - while developing transversal skills such as group work, collaboration, speaking in public and communicating in English. Importantly, active engagement was strongly promoted as a crucial component of participation, both in terms of the intercultural dialogic exchange but also through completing set ‘homework’ and a final assignment produced as a video, audio or written text drawing on interviews undertaken by the learner with people in their own community, around the topic of on gender inclusion.

The primary impacts on course participants were awareness-raising and changed behaviour, together with some multiplier effects where learners discussed issues with peers and family, thus embedding new learning acquired through online sessions in their everyday lives. From the feedback questionnaires composed from both sets of learner comments, 80% of students said that the content was ‘very’ effective in raising such awareness: Farida, a young woman from Tunisia had this to say: “The experience gave me the chance to enhance my knowledge about women in not only in the Arab world but also in the western world. As a woman, before starting this virtual exchange, I had no idea about what women are experiencing in the media industry such as sexual harassment, violence and discrimination but through the discussion and lectures my knowledge deepened and I became more aware.” Mustafa from Morocco appreciated the opportunity to dialogue with people from different cultures and communities and considered that he developed more confidence through such interactions: “Chatting, more confidence, having fun and discussing different opinions.” Sarah from Ireland recognised her own complicity in not challenging gender stereotyping and intends to change her practice: “I learnt that gender inequality does exist and I play a role in it. It makes me more conscious of my own decisions and how I should behave as a future female journalist and do not let gender negotiate my career.”

However, these very positive assessments of this particular virtual exchange are not always shared by participants in other courses. For example, in their study of cross-cultural working between students in the US, Malaysia and China, Sandel et. al (2019) found that the Malaysian-Chinese pairings were significantly more satisfying for students than when Malaysian and Chinese students were paired with American students, where these latter pairings were seen as less positive, less friendly and more formal. This could be because of cultural dissonance/affinities but the context and purpose of engagement are also key elements in virtual exchanges. Interestingly, in several studies of blended learning effectiveness, one of the hindrances to more universities or departments moving to a more blended form of teaching and learning is institutional culture (Godlewska, et. al., 2019). Some of the issues include a lack of staff capacity able to engage with blended learning, resistance to innovation and change, a lack of research-informed models to support institutional adoption, and a lack of institutional definition (Smith & Hill, 2019).

Learning from doing

The holistic approach we have taken recognises the need to provide better connections between theory and practice, between education and employment, between students and practitioners. The AGEMI resources thus encourage a variety of different users including teachers, trainers, students, researchers, women’s organisations and media professionals, to listen to the voices of the women and men who speak in the GEMTalks collection of interviews. They provide opportunities to activate class discussions based on the concrete experience of professionals and policy-makers, thus bringing ‘the real world’ closer to the educational setting. As well as listening to journalists such as Maria Ressa (CEO of Rappler in the Philippines) talk about their experiences of sexism and harassment, other interviewees such as Vanessa Offiong (Naija

15 <https://sharingperspectivesfoundation.com/erasmus-virtual-exchange/>

16 https://europa.eu/youth/erasmusvirtual/activity/gender-inequality-media-and-journalism_en

Data Ladies) and Mariana Santos (Chicas Poderosas) talk about the activist projects they have initiated to promote and protect women's voices, often using the affordances of digital technologies.

Overall, the AGEMI approach hopes to inspire students and participants to engage with the materials through the hands-on activities and reflective exercises which are embedded in the learning resources and to connect with each other through dialogic exchange. With this in mind, we encourage learners to further explore their own local, national and regional media landscape and perhaps get involved with existing transnational initiatives which are making use of the AGEMI resources. In autumn 2020, the Complutense University in Madrid organised a series of workshops targeted at young media and communication researchers, future teachers and well as media professionals. The course leaders drew on both the AGEMI resources but also ideas for developing new gender and media syllabi which had been scoped out by the UniTWIN Network on Gender Media and ICT¹⁷. Another example comes from COPEAM, currently working on delivering online training for communicators from across the Mediterranean, who will use the AGEMI platform as a starting point to support participants in the production of new gender-sensitive video materials, documentaries and interviews, grounded in a comprehensive understanding of how intersecting inequalities can be addressed through media. Of course, it's one thing to design a set of resources which we believe are useful and meaningful, but quite another to test out if what we have produced has resonance and indeed relevance for the intended audiences and in particular, to our primary audience, that is, journalism students. Both the AGEMI team and other colleagues – as per the examples described above - have used the resources in teaching and the feedback received is quite encouraging. Using the AGEMI Summer School as a testbed to work through both the resources and their general orientation was extremely useful and enabled us to refine both some of the content and structural elements of the AGEMI platform. While student feedback has been affirming, the challenge was always to create resources which would be meaningful and make sense to different users, not only for media and journalism students and educators but also for media professionals and third sector organisations. We are not sure that we have adequately met that challenge and the work in which we are currently engaged is precisely to re-imagine these other audiences and identify meaningful ways to re-present the resources to respond to the different needs of these potential end-users.

Teaching and learning in unprecedented times: AGEMI beyond Covid-19

With the AGEMI platform, we have created something that did not exist before. We have done so building on a long-standing feminist tradition in listening to the needs and interests of students, colleagues and news media professionals and trying to overcome a prevailing 'guidelines to curriculum development approach' to produce content, materials, resources, activities and scenarios of use which are open, flexible and accessible to all. Positive responses to the AGEMI project invite further consideration about teaching and learning in an historical era of multiple crises/transitions. These include a generalized trend towards transforming learning-teaching practices and pedagogical approaches for online delivery but also a political climate that increasingly shows signs of discontent with and opposition to the promotion of gender-sensitive thinking and practice. Thus, renewed efforts in mainstreaming gender across journalism and media studies seems to be all the more relevant today as we witness the worrisome strengthening of a global movement against en-gendering knowledge, research and advocacy within a broader anti-intellectual ethos. This is operationalised by the closure of courses and programs focused on teaching about gender in countries including Bulgaria, Hungary and Romania¹⁸ but also attacks – discursive and physical - against both individual researchers and gender-focused research centres which have been taking place in countries including Italy, Germany, Sweden and Brazil since 2017 up to and including 2020. According to some commentators, these prohibitions are part of a broader European moment, exemplified by what is known as 'Agenda Europe'¹⁹.

17 The project 'Gender, Media and ICTs: New Approaches for Research, Education and Training' is briefly described in the AGEMI ChanGE section at: <https://www.agemi-eu.org/mod/page/view.php?id=509>.

18 An interesting platform to gather information about and to mobilize in response to the crusade against the so-called 'ideology of gender' is 'The Gender International. A Network in Defense of Gender and Sexuality Studies'. See: <https://internationaledugenre.net>.

19 This is a pan-European, Christian-extremist network created in 2013, committed to the 'restoration of natural order', which gathers members from movements across 30 countries of the European continent. It promotes a radically reactionary worldview which, if successfully implemented, would remove human rights in matters of sexual and reproduction of every single European and specifically for certain categories of persons, such as women, young people, and the LGBTIQI community. See: <https://www.gwi-boell.de/>

We suggest that this multifaceted resistance to raising awareness of gender inequality issues characterizes the growing influence of right-wing populist politics across the world. Working to en-gender the journalism and media profession today through encouraging critical thinking, revisiting curricula to foster exchange of theoretical and practical knowledge and promoting new educational models such as those promoted by AGEMI, appears to us as to be not only a way to promote equity within the media sector where improving diversity and inclusion is increasingly recognized as good for business, but is also part of the ongoing struggle for democracy and the protection of fundamental human rights. Where we have seen a proactive approach to the development of such courses has been in circumstances where faculty have autonomy to establish new programmes, where universities are pledged to promote gender equality through national initiatives such as the UK's Athena Swan charter mark²⁰ and/or where university leaders see the value (the 'good' university) of being part of an initiative supported by a global institution such as UNESCO²¹.

As well as a broader political antipathy towards or even prohibition against teaching about gender, there is the more 'positive' reason put forward for why discrete courses on gender are unnecessary, which is that gender awareness and equality issues should be mainstreamed across all curricula. Unfortunately, as our own research with UNITWiN has discovered (UNESCO 2019), the problem with everyone being expected to mainstream gender in their courses is that no one then takes responsibility to do so and nothing happens. That's why courses and resources which are explicitly centred on exploring gender and inequality in the media (and indeed in every other sector) are so crucial if we are to achieve the goal of gender equality in society more generally.

Finally, given the gravity of Covid-19, we cannot avoid reflecting on the pandemic and the resulting processes of university closures, social distancing and moving educational activities online, together with thinking about how it may impact future activities in en-gendering journalism and media curricula. Colleges and universities have been facing decisions about how to continue teaching and learning while keeping their faculty, staff, and students safe from a public health emergency that has created uncertainty and anxiety. From the beginning of the pandemic, we immediately recognised that AGEMI could be helpful in supporting educators who were forced to move their activities online with very short notice and who needed to improvise quick solutions. We therefore circulated, across academic associations and networks, some basic information, links and suggestions on how to take advantage of the affordances and possibilities of AGEMI's resources. We invited colleagues from around the world to integrate the video lectures and other learning resources with their online teaching, and to encourage students to actively explore the Resources Bank of Good Practices so as to develop their knowledge and understanding and raise awareness. We suggested listening to the GEMTalks as a way of reaching out to the 'real world' of professionals and advocates, from different locales, in their own terms and languages.

In some ways, this was an experiment, forced upon us by Covid-19, but one which we hope may help transform resources like AGEMI from being an emergency response through remote teaching (Hodges et al, 2020) into a well-planned online learning experience. The potential is there, as AGEMI is the result of careful design and planning, whereby elements such as pacing, pedagogy, learning and teaching roles, synchronicity, online assessment and feedback have all been taken into consideration. Moreover, if online learning aims to create learning communities, AGEMI invites the idea that such communities should not be confined to the classroom. The platform is the result of collaboration across the academic and media sectors and its resources cross linguistic and cultural boundaries. Hence, it is well positioned to support national and transnational collaborative projects aimed at connecting students and classrooms in critical and comparative discussions and analyses, starting from their own context, bridging theory and practice.

In the end, for most of us involved in journalism education within a higher education context, the typical model of teaching and learning is through real-time interactions with students in lecture theatres and seminar rooms, as well as enabling the development of the practical skills necessary for a career in the media, including broadcast, print and multimedia competences. We were clear from the very beginning, that with AGEMI we wanted to develop teaching, learning and information resources which would be hosted on an online platform and thus be accessible not only to the students in our own institutions but freely accessible to a global community of learners as well as to a broader and diverse group of educators, advocates, citizens, activists and media practitioners. Self-directed, remote and blended learning activities are not novel and established providers of distance education such as the Open University, based in the UK, have been providing such learning resources for more than 50 years. In his overview of the history of the sub-field, O'Dowd (2018) suggests that online, classroom-based collaborations have been documented from as early

en/2019/04/29/agenda-europe-extremist-christian-network-heart-europe.

20 <https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/equality-charters/athena-swan-charter>

21 <http://www.unitwin.net/>

as 1991 and their use has been particularly taken up by language teachers because of the obvious benefits of providing proxy environments to practice speaking and listening in different languages (see also Guth and Helm, 2010).

However, the past two decades have seen online learning, both self-directed and taught, synchronous, asynchronous and blended, taken up by increasing numbers of both HEIs (Smith & Hill, 2019) and in informal community-based contexts, the latter often accompanied by a distinctive set of pedagogical aims which, amongst other things, identify intercultural exchange as a ‘good’ in itself, not simply as a means to practice language proficiency or develop other competences. At a European level, the European Commission has been at the forefront of supporting innovative pedagogies including digital approaches, not only funding our own project but funding any number of earlier projects including UNICollaboration²² which, in turn, established (in 2017) the first journal dedicated to exploring and sharing good practices in the area of virtual and intercultural exchange, the online open-access and peer-reviewed *Journal of Virtual Exchange*²³ and most recently adopting a Digital Education Action Plan 2021-2027.²⁴ The future of the AGEMI platform - which may include expanding themes and resources, welcoming contributions from different contexts and regions, and creating conditions for consolidating partnerships between higher educational and media institutions - is thus to be envisaged within a global transitional phase in pedagogy.

We may be on the verge of a paradigm shift in the development of learning and educational experiences that could contribute to the transformation of the personal and professional realities of women (and men) in the media industry. Holistic, critical, adaptable and open resources like those provided on the AGEMI platform can certainly support this process but the real game-changer will be in fully recognising the historical moment in which we are all living right now and the opportunity it presents for a profound rethinking of our approach to learning and teaching, including a ‘re-booting’ (Padovani & Ross, 2020) of our role as educators and our students as learners: we should *all* claim a stake in the process of knowledge creation, exchange and production.

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22 <https://www.unicollaboration.org/>

23 <https://journal.unicollaboration.org/>

24 https://ec.europa.eu/education/education-in-the-eu/digital-education-action-plan_en

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