

**THE ROLE OF THE MASS MEDIA IN THE
(RE)DISTRIBUTION OF POWER
A COMPARATIVE REPORT**



Community
Framework Strategy
on Gender Equality
(2001-2005)



Ministry of Welfare
of the Republic of
Latvia

*Project Mass Media in (Re)Distribution of
Power*

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(RE)DISTRIBUTION OF POWER
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About the project

The project “Mass Media in (Re)Distribution of Power” is executed in terms of the Community Framework Strategy on Gender Equality (2001-2005). It seeks, by challenging and changing the existing stereotypes, to reach a situation when both genders are motivated and enjoy equal opportunities to participate in decision-making on issues important for the whole society. The project partners are the Ministry of Welfare of the Republic of Latvia, the Danish Research Centre on Gender Equality, the Giacomo Brodolini Foundation (Italy), the Ministry of Social Affairs of the Republic of Estonia.

More information can be found at the project website: www.medijuprojekts.lv

The research reports analysed here have been prepared as a joint venture within of the international project “Mass Media in (Re)Distribution of Power”, supported by the Community Framework Strategy on Gender Equality (2001-2005). The endeavour involves four countries - Denmark (the Danish Research Centre on Gender Equality), Estonia (the Ministry of Social Affairs), Italy (Giacomo Brodolini Foundation) and Latvia (the Centre for Gender Studies of the University of Latvia and the Public Policy Institute). The research process began in March 2004 and was finalized by December 2004.

There were two previous research projects focused on the relationships between women and the media in the medium-term Community Action Programme:

1) An international and comparative study of the participation of women in television programmes, organised by the public television channels in the Netherlands, Germany, Norway, Finland, Sweden and Denmark (1997-2000);

2) The study “Images of women in the media”¹.

These and other studies² have manifested of a traditional division of subject matter between women and men. Women are assigned subjects such as human relations, family, health and social issues, while men are assigned such topics as politics, economics, etc., in the media. Biased stereotypes are used in reporting on women. Men are used more often as experts than women etc.

This study has made use of various media texts, as well as interviews with female politicians and media experts. The study correlates the positioning of gender in the media with manifestations of gender equality in the world of politics, analysing the way in which the media portray female politicians. By challenging and changing

¹ Images of women in the media. Report on existing research in the European Union. Employment & social affairs. Equality between women and men. European Commission. Directorate-General for Employment. Industrial Relations and Social Affairs. Unit V/D.5. ISBN 92-828-5675-5. 1999.

² See: Bertone, Chiara. Bringing gender into the debate on the ES/EU : the construction of a "women's perspective" in the Danish referendum campaigns. Aarhus: Institut for Statskundskab, Aarhus Universitet, 1998; Butler, Judith. Undoing gender. New York, London: Routledge, 2004; Gal, Susan. The politics of gender after socialism: a comparative-historical essay. Princeton (NJ): Princeton University Press, 2000; Gallagher, Margaret. Gender setting: new agendas for media monitoring and advocacy. London, New York: Zed Books, London : WACC, 2001; Gauntlett, David. Media, gender and identity : an introduction. London, New York: Routledge, 2002; Gender and human development in Latvia. Riga : UNDP, 1999; Jansen, Sue Curry. Critical communication theory : power, media, gender, and technology. Lanham [etc.]: Rowmann & Littlefield, 2002; Mainstreaming gender, democratizing the state?: institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women. Manchester, New York: Manchester University Press, 2003; Reproducing gender : politics, publics, and everyday life after socialism. Princeton (NJ): Princeton Univ. Press, 2000; Squires, Judith. Gender in political theory. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000; Wood, Julia T. Gendered lives: communication, gender, and culture. South Melbourne [etc.]: Thomson, Wadsworth, 2003. etc.

the existing stereotypes, the project aims to reach a situation when both genders are motivated and enjoy equal opportunities to participate in decision-making on issues important for the whole society.

The objectives of this project are:

1. To raise awareness of media practitioners, policy makers and general society about the existing gender stereotypes that prevent full and equal representation and participation of both genders, especially, women in the decision-making process on issues important for the whole society;
2. To promote the change of media practitioners' and policy-makers' gender stereotypes that prevent full and equal participation of both genders in political decision-making;
3. To increase balanced representation and participation of both genders in the decision-making process through a balanced and non-stereotypical portrayal of women and men in the media.

This study allows readers to compare the way in which women are positioned in the media in Italy and Denmark, both of which are stable western democracies, and in the new EU member states of Estonia and Latvia. The research findings in all four countries proved to be quite similar, despite the fact that Denmark has done very well in promoting gender equality in politics, that Italy's public sphere is fundamentally influenced by the Roman Catholic culture, and that the public sphere in Estonia and Latvia involves myths about the patriarchal order of life, hypocritical ideas about women's equality back in Soviet times, as well as an orientation toward the democracy and consumer society of the West. The four studies supplement one another, offering a widespread, albeit sometimes contradictory depiction of discourse in politics and media, as influenced by late modernity.

“Woman With a Capital W”

Research findings: data and analysis

A phenomenon that was revealed in all the studies was described quite precisely by a media expert who had been chosen by the researchers in Denmark - editor-in-chief of the weekly magazine *Se & Hør* Henrik Qvortrup: “Women who

wish to insinuate themselves into the media and be successful as politicians have to be women with a capital W.” Another Danish media expert - Sasha Amarasinha, manager of communication in the international media conglomerate Egmont, has characterised the situation in a similar way, saying that the media talk about female politicians just as if they were characters in fairy tales. They do things “in spite of” being women, “they are capable of doing both things”, or “they often have to make sacrifices to reach their goals.” The researcher points out that this is true not only in politics, but also in any realm where women are powerful.

In interviews and in media text analysis in all of the studies, researchers have found that women are questioned and evaluated to a particularly scrupulous degree so as to find out whether they are adequately perfect in the private sphere to allow them to take part in the public sphere and vice-versa - if they are able to deal with their obligations in the private sphere without losing their perfect nature in the public sphere.

A wider study of this issue can be found in the Latvian research report, because specialists analysed media discourse during the period when the Latvian president, Vaira Vīķe-Freiberga, was re-elected to her office by Parliament.

Coverage of the president was mostly neutral and informative. Headlines in the daily newspapers were quite similar - “President Prepared to Work Just as Intensely”, “Second Term Opens Window of Opportunities” etc. In the Russian language media, Vaira Vīķe-Freiberga was presented as an “auntie” and as a lady professor with status. Her visual image supported this presentation, as she is always well presented and in a suit. It was also stressed in the Russian language press that Vaira Vīķe-Freiberga was a “foreigner” and thus not competent. In *Chas* she was described as a “Canadian of Latvian origin” who deals with domestic problems “with no confidence”. In another Russian language daily, *Vesti Segodnya*, Vaira Vīķe-Freiberga was presented in the categories of “us” and “them” - focusing on its own Russian speaking audience, the newspaper wrote that Vīķe-Freiberga was the “president of the Latvians”, but not of Latvia and all of its people. In this case, the politician’s differences were presented not on the basis of gender, but rather of her life experience and her long-term links with a different community. The trend here is similar to the situations in which gender differences are emphasised. When female politicians are discussed in terms of their public role, their experience and their

relationships, the media tend to present that which is different, not that which is held in common.

The depiction of Vaira Vīķe-Freiberga in the mass media differs radically from the way in which other female politicians in Latvia are presented. The president's descriptions are not gender-based, but when questions are asked of other women in politics and comments are made about them, the situation is quite the same as in Denmark.

Interviews with politicians in Italy showed that the women themselves wanted to become authoritative, i.e., that they wanted to be seen as "women with a capital W". Italian women want to be treated equally, to impose themselves on others, to gain more self-esteem which might enable them to develop allies among male politicians. They also claim the need to join in so that they can gain more strength.

Estonian researchers concluded that politics, as the ultimate public sphere, are seen as a man's world, a masculine area in terms of culture. Women in this sphere are seen as being exceptional. This appeared in the statements that were made. Women who were active in politics tended to be opposed to politics as such. In the case of women, the media always emphasise the competitive demands of private and public life, contrasting the political career to the woman's family, home and relationships. It is presumed that when a woman is a politician, she must sacrifice her private life on the altar of her public activities.

Discussion

This media study shows that no matter how different is the experience of various countries in terms of culture and democracy, and no matter what achievements have been made in the area of gender equality in public office, the fact is that in some countries there still exists a tradition ill to link women primarily to the private sphere, considering women who work in the public sphere to be exceptions to the norms which prevail. One can assume that these are not always conscious ideas in societies. They exist at the level of myth, and they differ from one group to another. Women themselves can facilitate the existence of these myths, arguing that politics is a "dirty" business, the "sphere of men" (i.e., "useless", "unpleasant" and "alien" for women). These are ideas that are used as arguments in the public sphere when women explain why they do not wish to enter politics. This, of course, merely strengthens the myth, which says that politics are an area for men alone. In media texts, politics are

distinctly displayed as a special area of activity, sometimes one that stands above all the others. In this sense, the insistence that women should be involved in politics can almost be seen as care for their welfare.

The fact that women are criticised more than men in politics has no clear purpose, because societies and the media have no idea of what an ideal female politician should be. Judging from the questions that are posed by journalists and from an analysis of the resulting media texts, women have to be better than the average male politician, they have to validate the gender stereotypes which exist, but they also have to reduce any demonstration of signs of their gender.

Typically, the traditional stereotypes are not used with respect to women who have spent a long time in politics and/or who have achieved a high political status. If stereotypes are applied to them, then at a very negligible level and mostly because the media often want to entertain their consumers. This is seen in the Danish study. In Latvia, the situation is more complicated. The participation of the Latvian president in politics is questioned in a different discursive context - “locals” vs. “foreigners”. In this case the Russian language media no longer focus on the traditional division between “Latvians” and “non-Latvians” in terms of language. The discourse has changed.

Powerful women can change the public discourse of politics to a significant degree, because they often appear in the mass media. After Vaira Vīķe-Freiberga became president of Latvia, the style of speech among most politicians changed radically. Politicians who had spoken aggressively and even offensively or vulgarly in the past became more intelligent and tolerant in their speech. It is also true, of course, that the presence of women in politics can influence changes in the political agenda.

The discourse of female politics in the public sector is very unclear and even contradictory in all of the countries, which were involved in the research. The discourse involves traditional biases and stereotypes, but also a new role which requires the construction of specific identifiers. The media are oriented toward this issue when it comes to women - which women become involved in politics, what kinds of women are they, how and why do they become involved? The media pose such questions far less often and far less aggressively when it comes to male politicians. The discourse between woman and man in politics is one in which the two sides influence one another and are, in fact, dependent on one another. Identification of the woman's new discourse, therefore, is impossible without modernisation of the

old-fashioned discourse of the man. Otherwise the public sector is governed by the contradiction between the democratic norm that says that everyone has the right to take part in public life and the myth that politics are an area for men - something that ensures higher demands against women who wish to take part in politics. Female politicians, in other words, are not supposed to be “one of us”, they have to be “one of the best among us.” Gender-created discourse can then promote the next effect - the gap between female politicians and ordinary people, because the critical questioning and evaluation of female politicians repeatedly demonstrate how excellent they are as people. The images of female politicians in the media, therefore, are very contradictory. There is harsh and offensive criticism against women who are newcomers or who have failed, while women who have won are universally recognised as authorities. This means that in the field of public communications, there are characterisations and behaviours vis-à-vis female politicians that offer a false view of the roles that women can play in politics. This encumbers the ability of other women to enter politics, because the media do not allow women to gain sufficient social experience about politics as a manifestation of the public sphere.

The way in which female politicians are reflected in the media can hinder the emergence of the discourse of female politicians in accordance with public characterisations and the shifting roles of women and men in everyday discourse. This can create a gap between the performance of politics in the media and the personal experience of individuals with respect to that performance. The performance of politics as a manifestation of power is of a hierarchical nature, but in everyday social experience, power is increasingly balanced among many actors (e.g., flat structures in organisations). This was seen in Denmark, where most of the surveyed female politicians said that influence, praise and criticism in the parties, which they represent, are reasonably equally apportioned between the two genders.

Conclusions

When it comes to the media in these aspects, they must critically evaluate their content so as to find the correlation between the realities of life and the attitudes of various groups in society on the one hand and views about women in politics on the other. The study in Latvia, “Men and Women in Governance,” showed that the trust of people in the media is under threat, and the media are criticised for their manipulative nature. Of fair significance in dealing with this problem could be

women, particularly “women with a capital W”. They can facilitate equal dialogue in the public sector and reduce the positioning of various hierarchical relations of power.

Women as Actors in the Public Sphere

Research Findings: data and analysis

In the survey of female politicians in Denmark, 74.5% of respondents said that “men and women have an equal amount of influence in my party.” A total of 54.5% of respondents said that “men and women spend an equal amount of time when speaking in the group.” When it comes to the real distribution of power in parties, however, only 43.1% of respondents agreed with the statement that “gender does not make a difference in the distribution of posts,” although a total of 80.4% agreed to the statement that “I have never felt that my gender is an obstacle in the group.”

The situation in the Danish parliament is not all that balanced. Less than one-half of the female politicians (39.2%) agreed to the statement that “men and women spend the same amount of time in talking,” and even fewer (29.4%) agreed that “men and women have the same share of power.”

A typical explanation of why women take the floor less frequently in Parliament than men is this: “Men and women speak in different ways. Women, generally speaking, cut to the chase. They do not feel the need to hold their ground through the use of solemn and fancy words.” The unequal distribution of power is explained through the fact that “men are in the majority, and that’s why they have more power. It’s sort of a tradition,” one that is dictated by “male values. As a woman, you have to play by the rules of the game in order to have an impact.” Another problem is parliamentary bureaucracy, because “men are in the majority when it comes to management.” Still, 80.4% of respondents agreed to the statement that “I have never felt that my gender is an obstacle in Parliament.”

Informal communications networks can be a factor that significantly affects the formal distribution of power. Such networks shape interpersonal relationships and promote the ability of politicians to gain the support of others. The evaluation of this phenomenon differs to a great degree from one country to another. Female politicians in Latvia say that it is a problem, while their counterparts in Denmark say that it is

not. The reasons probably do not lie in different experiences with democracy. The Swedish daily *Svenska Dagbladet* ran a study that found that informal networks are a major problem, because they exclude women from the centre of decision-making.

A parallel study that was run in Latvia, “Men and Women in Governance,” points to another phenomenon that affects the public arena - the fact that there are different political aspects in the system. At the local government level, the primary role is played by the personalities of local politicians, and women have a good chance to move forward in this area. In larger local governments and at the level of the state, the taking of decisions depends on party policies and corporative links. The higher the level of politics, the greater the inequality of gender representation. It is harder for women to move up the ladder on their own and without the support of men.

The majority of female politicians in Denmark do not believe that they are treated in the same way as their male colleagues are in media. Only 43.1% of respondents agreed with the statement that “male and female politicians speak for the same amount of time and receive equal coverage in the media.” Female politicians need to engage in greater efforts than men in order to win recognition in the media for the political work that they do. Only one-quarter of respondents believe that men and women have to engage in the same amount of effort. Nearly one half (43.1%) of female politicians believe that there is a difference between male and female journalists when it comes to the way in which politicians are described. A similar assessment was given by respondents when it comes to the influence of age in relations with the media - 60.8% of respondents believe that age and publicity are related to one another, both in a positive and in a negative way. Younger women may take advantage of the fact that the media like to see young people. On the other hand, youth can lead to a situation in which one is not taken particularly seriously.

Many of the respondents argued that the media seek out different things when they deal with male and female politicians. When describing women, they are more evaluative, more interested in the politician’s appearance and private life. Men, by contrast, are “just” politicians.

Some aspects of the presence of female politicians in the public sphere is revealed in an Italian study of the way in which women are represented in public debates on television and of the role, which they play in this process. The researchers systematised the roles in accordance with the concepts of victim, champion, feminist and icon, arguing that these concepts determine the way in which female politicians

interact with the hosts of broadcasts, with other participants and, of course, with the audience.

The “victim” projects classical stereotypes about the behaviour of women. She demonstrates a lack of protection, she uses the word “we” instead of the word “I”, she stammers and appears bemused, etc. The “champion”, by contrast, accepts the male model of interaction, she is active, and her aim is to make things known. She is a witness and champion of the truth and demonstrates confidence that comes from her experience. The “feminist” represents herself as a woman who is aware of her specificity. She engages in double thinking, allowing her to be seen both as the subject and the object of discussion. The “icon” has a role that is based on a symbolic dimension (intellectual, like an emblem, popular, like a mask, etc.). The icon demonstrates the way in which a female politician, by claiming her femininity, hopes to create a new role in the public arena, to create a role for herself - the icon of human instincts and passions. For example, a woman can merge two different stereotypes which are typical but very contradictory - that of a mother and that of a wild animal. In other words, she displays both a protective and an aggressive attitude, making use of this double stereotype in the political discourse.

Discussion

The research demonstrates that there are many differences in the way in which women position themselves as actors in the public sphere. There are also great differences in the communicative situations that are based on various groups and structures in society. There are many contradictions here, and there are many ideas for future research projects, too.

An important contradiction, for instance, was seen in the survey of female politicians in Denmark. Women in political groups and in Parliament perform a more important role and hold a higher status than is reflected in the media. A similar conclusion can be drawn from the Latvian study, “Men and Women in Governance” - in smaller local governments, women as individuals have a more equal opportunity to win political power than is the case in larger local governments and at the national level. Personal characterisations are of lesser importance at the higher level, because voters are more focused on candidate lists than on concrete candidates.

It is important to note that in the public at large, most voters shape attitudes vis-à-vis politicians not on the basis of personal opinions about candidates that have

been developed as the result of individual experience, but rather on the basis of how information from the media is interpreted. Accordingly, we can conclude that there can be some contradictions between the individual views of people when it comes to the potential role of women in politics on the one hand and the roles that are proposed for women by the mass media on the other. Generally speaking, however, the media offer little room for debates about new interpretations of the role of women.

Politics is a form of public activity, and various communications processes are involved. If politicians wish to be successful, they must become public personas, ones who are attractive among voters. Female politicians in Denmark stressed that voters are the most important factor in politics, insisting that they are much more important than the media, which means that the views of voters, not of the media, are a point of reference.

Sadly, rules concerning behaviour in the public sphere can be quite harsh, and the media are not always focused on problems and events, as opposed to people outside of the context of events and problems. These are factors that keep many women from becoming involved in politics in the first place. They are afraid that their children will be attacked or that the attitudes of neighbours or acquaintances will change. These concepts were mentioned by Latvian women in the study “Men and Women in Governance.”

The Danish study pointed to another contradiction. In the survey, female politicians rejected the idea that they should use their gender to affect the media, but in in-depth interviews, this idea was not rejected as firmly as in the survey. Women in in-depth interviews admitted that there are good and bad sides to the use of gender, and these are dependent on the specific communicative situation.

Conclusions

Stereotypes about female politicians are less important among the public than they are in the media. The discourse that is proposed by the media may be old-fashioned when compared to individual and group discourse, it does not reflect true relationships. The media need to take a critical look at whether they reflect the roles of male and female politicians in an analogous way.

People who are elected to local government office or to Parliament are obliged to shape a public image so that voters recognise them and the media allow them to become spokespeople or experts on behalf of specific viewpoints. Women in politics,

too, must shape a public image and promote their level of recognition. Of great assistance here might be women who are well known in other sectors of the public sphere, women who do not avoid the media and who strengthen their own image. Gender discourse is a much less sensitive issue in other areas than in politics, and the discourse of power is much less important there. The greater the number of women who appear in the public sphere and demonstrate their knowledge, competence, level of responsibility, ability to take decisions, etc., the more will be processes of cultivation which create long term effects in politics. The gender discourse in the context of the (re)distribution of power will change.

Women urgently need competent and professional PR support. The attitudes and views of audiences must be studied when it comes to gender issues. There should be efforts to change the attitudes of the audience when it comes to women in politics, and any changes in this regard should be encouraged. Women must no longer be presented as nothing more than supporters or decorations for male politicians. Given that women tend to make reference to the group, it would be good for NGOs to become more active in the development of the public sphere (enhancing the communications skills of women, ensuring a background for female politicians, etc.) and help to establish the content of the public sphere (positioning important subjects, breaking down gender-related stereotypes, raising public disputes about any attacks against gender, etc.).

Stereotypes: losses and gains

Research Findings: data and analysis

Modern day politics, as the Danish expert Henrik Qvortrup has put it, “are partly characters. The substantial differences between one party and another are actually blurred today. Consequently, politics become more and more a question of which politicians hold the qualifications that we think make them able to lead the country. Due to this, the way that you present yourself as a person makes a great difference. The public relates not only to the politician’s opinions, but also to the kind of person that the politician is.”

Analysis of this process differed from one project to the next, but still we have results that allow us to characterise the common phenomena in this area.

One way that the media present and then the public accepts the images of female politicians is the emphasis of special narratives and details, repeating these over and over again in place of fundamentally important descriptions of these women. The Danish study provides us with an in-depth look at these processes, analysing stereotypes and interviewing the politicians who have faced media stereotypes so as to find out how the process begins.

The Estonian study shows that the way in which the media represent female candidates differs from the way in which male candidates are presented to a certain extent, reproducing the traditional and stereotypical gender images of women (but also of men). Media texts were analysed on the basis of a four-category system - Mr/Mrs Everyone, Father/Mother of the Nation, Hero and Charmer. It was found that female politicians were most often presented by the media in the role of Mrs Everyone (in 48% of texts). Male politicians, by contrast, were more frequently presented as Father of the Nation or Hero. Mr Everyone was only the third most frequent role (found in 19% of the texts).

The Danish media offer distinctly archetypal or clichéd images of women - Mother, Blonde, Teacher, Iron Lady, Witch, Ice Queen, Chit, Seductress, Old Maid. Most of these images are based on facts, events, details and characterisations that are taken out of context in communicative situations. Stories are told about politicians on the basis of these episodes, details or linguistic comparisons. External appearance is a fairly typical basis for stereotypes. Researchers selected certain quotes from Danish newspapers that concerned female politicians. Some made reference to the politician's hair colour, particularly if the woman was blonde. In that case, the word "blonde" was often accompanied by the words "blue-eyed". People often consider women who are blonde and blue-eyed automatically to be naïve or distinctly stupid. This does not mean that the Danish media consciously or purposefully choose to describe certain female politicians as stupid and naïve, but it is suggestive if reporters choose to apply this label to young female politicians.

Quite often, very unimportant details are "attached" to female politicians so as to stereotype them. The speaker of the Latvian parliament, for instance, was known as a "snowflake" in the media, because in one interview she had thought back to her childhood, when she wished to perform the role of a snowflake in a children's performance.

In their interviews, Danish politicians cited a series of motives for why they had achieved a certain image in the media - an image that often enough was based on stereotypes. Some respondents said that the media focus more on what they wear than on what they say. The media try to entertain the audience, so journalists avoid in-depth topics. They seek out stories that are easy to tell. The Danish politicians also said, however, that they sometimes are happy to use the images which the media have created about them, because that facilitates the communications process and enhances the recognition level of the women.

The public relations companies, which are hired by political parties, can also help in establishing an image. One of the situations to be analysed in the Danish study focuses on a failed PR attempt to position a young politician as an “angry young woman”. She was asked to pose in a masculine posture for photographs, and the media focused on this, suggesting that perhaps she was a little bit too masculine. The attempt to surprise the public failed in this case, and media expert Henrik Qvortrup explains it as follows: “I don’t believe that we want women to be angry. It’s a characteristic, which we don’t consider to be particularly feminine. We want them to be proficient, competent and with plenty of guts, but not angry.” The image that was produced for the young woman, in other words, was out of step with the audience’s stereotypical understanding of women in the field of public communications. Accordingly, it did not satisfy expectations and was not accepted.

According to the female Danish politicians who were interviewed, audiences have expectations about what they should look like and how they should behave. These expectations can be quite varied, but at the same time they are strict enough to affect the way in which politicians act. There have been female politicians in Denmark who have changed their behaviour, appearance, dress style, makeup, etc.

The Italian study, too, shows that descriptions of the political environment and the descriptions which women offer of themselves as female politicians match one of the roles which they sometimes play on television programmes - a “victim”, both “wounded and raging”, and a “champion” - someone who is a privileged witness to a certain truth. These are stereotypes, which reflect the outer limits of the discourse of power.

It has to be said that Italy is not the most typical country, due to its close links to Roman Catholic culture. In comparison to Protestant countries, Italy deviates from the standard affective meaning (i.e., positive meaning) of gender stereotypes. Female

stereotypes are considered in a much more positive way than is the case with male stereotypes, because women have “great power at an emotional level” within the family - something that is based on motherhood. This “powerful figure” has permeated the feminine and masculine imagery over the centuries. Women who try to reshape the image find that they lose something.

In all of the countries that were studied, there are stereotypes that are based on gender patterns and affect the way in which women in politics are demonstrated and perceived in a trivialised or negative context.

The Danish researchers took a look at the way in which the media wrote about two birthdays - the birthday of a female politician and the birthday of a male politician, both of them from one and the same party. The male politician was presented as one of the “few bright young hopes, a spokesman in the area of foreign affairs,” while the female politician was presented with the words “married, with two kids and a member of Parliament.” Her status as vice president of her party was not mentioned until halfway through the article. As far as the status of the two people in their party is concerned, the newspaper described them in very different ways. He was said to be a “popular man on his home island” and someone who is “close to the country’s vote catcher”. She was also a vote catcher in her own, small constituency - not because of her skills, though, but more due to the fact that “her name had, in these parts, a familiar ring to it. Her father (..) is the country mayor.”

This case study displays several tendencies that are quite typical. First the woman was presented in private, not public discourse. Second, the man’s achievements were linked to his knowledge, skills, etc., while the woman’s success was attributed to a happy coincidence, to secondary factors, etc. Third, the woman’s life story was displayed through gender framing, while the man’s life story was presented in accordance with concrete events, facts and changes in this person’s life. Similar findings were made in Estonia - it is the gender-framed personality of a female politician that is represented in women’s magazines and mainstream journalism, and not her social role in politics.

The Estonian researchers concluded that one factor which promotes the existence and dissemination of such stereotypes is that women, including female politicians, are gender-blind in this sense. They do not see the hidden messages and patterns that apply to the approach that journalists take in writing about them. Even outstanding politicians do not question the way in which they are interviewed or

portrayed in the media or the themes about which they are questioned. Thus they unconsciously follow along gender patterns that are based on stereotypes, often finding themselves presented in a trivial or even a negative context. The reasons for this gender blindness include a conscious choice to follow patterns and gender roles accepted in society, no matter what the constraints are when it comes to the woman's political career and public image. The problem can also be media illiteracy in terms of gender-based points of view. The Danish study brought up another reason - that female politicians sometimes have an interest in promoting gender stereotypes. Politicians there admitted in interviews that sometimes they accept the images that are presented by the media, adding that often enough they do not feel strong enough to take a stand against the images that are produced by the media (particularly if this happens at the start of the female politician's career).

The Estonian research also pointed out that stereotypes are not just sets of erroneous beliefs which can be changed by presenting and disseminating the "correct" information, because stereotyping develops around the issue of power. Groups uphold stereotypes about other groups with which there is or there could be a struggle over dominance and subordination. The media tend to construct and confirm the stereotypes that are distributed in society. These insist that masculine qualities such as ambition, independence, competence, logic, frankness, rationality, etc., are needed by anyone who wishes to succeed in politics. A female politician can certainly possess those qualities, and a journalist can perceive them when writing about the politician, but it is more likely that the journalist will focus on the "anomaly" of a woman in politics and on the qualities that are supposed to be feminine. In short, the journalist once again produces a gender frame. "Female" characteristics include gentleness, understanding, empathy, reliance, interest in one's own appearance and the need to be protected.

In this case, the media (re)produce a conflict between masculinity and femininity, trying to maintain the cultural stereotypes that apply to women's roles and feminine standards. According to the personality discourse in the relevant texts, female politicians do not express their emotions, they seem self-confident, stable, coherent and strong. As women are stereotypically expected to be different, i.e., feminine, stereotypically feminine qualities are stressed - crying, pique, tenderness, emotionality, sensitivity, edginess, weakness, etc. These are often attributed to women in complicated situations.

Language is one of the most effective resources in the shaping of stereotypes, because it offers extensive opportunities to demonstrate whether one or the other gender does or does not fit into a certain discourse, as well as to determine the role and status of each gender in that discourse. Latvian researchers point out that the media often use masculine pronouns in referring to events where both women and men have been present. Words that are applied to men include concepts such as “doer” and “decision maker”. Active verbs are used to describe the activities of men in politics. Parties themselves seek to present themselves as “powerful” and “manly” so that they can win power. One of Latvia’s political parties went so far as to use the phrase “Man of My Word” in its sloganeering. The meaning, of course, was that promises would be kept, but the values which are depicted in that slogan - ambition, responsibility and honesty - are applied in this case only to the male gender. Men, in other words, are the ones who will ensure that promises that are made to voters are actually kept.

Language also reflects the self-assurance and readiness to undertake responsibility of politicians. Male politicians clearly demonstrate their own or their party’s readiness to act: “I *want* our team to win,” “I *want* to change the image of Latvia, “This is our country,” etc.

In the Latvian media, the behaviour and activities of women are traditionally (and more) used to create political negations that have nothing specifically to do with women. If a woman displays her emotions, then there is talk of feminine hysteria. If she does something that is not too popular, then the media speak of the kitchen and things that are done therein. This upholds the traditional Latvian stereotype, which says that cooking is a woman’s job. This is a direct reference to the female gender. If a female politician behaves loosely, she is said to have “hit the streets”. In the process of dominant gender stereotyping, a man could never be hysterical, a gossip or a prostitute. The entire political process, indeed, is often viewed as a male-only sphere.

A fairly interesting phenomenon to be found by the Latvian researchers is that the language, which is used by the media, is often quite militaristic. Words such as “battlefield”, “wars”, “attacks” and “defence” are used when writing about politics. A sensitive issue in Latvia has been the implementation of bilingual education at schools where classes were previously taught in minority languages, and Russian language newspapers used of the following imagery in writing about the issue: “The ones who take on the schools will take on the whole country! Russian speaking parents are

prepared to engage in a radical fight on behalf of the rights of their children.” This is perhaps an example of post-Soviet discourse, but it also reflects ideas, which are traditionally linked to male discourse - taking part in wars and battles so as to use force in dealing with relationships and conflicts.

In all of the studies researchers found another difference between the male and female gender, more so in some than in others, depending on the focus of research. The difference is that men in the media discourse demonstrate self-assurance and dependence on themselves. Typically they use the singular word “I”. Women, by contrast, more often make reference to the group, i.e., to their political party.

A former Latvian foreign minister, when speaking about why Latvia was moving toward the European Union, once had this to say: “I am speaking as a man who has children. The most important issue is not how many seats my party will win, but rather the guarantee that Latvia will follow along the same course of development that we started 12 years ago. A new shift has occurred, and there is no reason to be afraid *if you are still a man...*”

As can be seen very clearly in the Estonian and Danish studies, the media tend to separate out two different images for women - one applies to the context of life, while the other applies to public life. Femininity is reconstructed through a discussion of relationships with others - husbands, children, parents, etc., and of housework. The conflict between the private and the public sphere occurs in the domestic, the political and the educational discourse. A mother’s role, relationships and housekeeping, as opposed to education, career and politics.

The questions that journalists pose in their interviews and the way in which they decide to portray the subjects of their stories are of great importance in the reproduction of general stereotypes and in the emergence of new ones when it comes to the presentation of a specific female politician.

Discussion

Stereotypes, of course, have existed as long as human beings have existed, no matter the time and the culture, which has prevailed. Often enough they are accepted as simple examples of “common sense” and truth. As all of the studies that are discussed here show, stereotypes have multiple meaning in the way in which they are used in the modern context of communications. In research projects, stereotypes are described as a “simplified form of a mental representation of reality through

categorical generalisations” (from the Italian study), or as “concepts, helped by groups, which are constructed and maintained through many different discourses” (the Estonian report). In the political discourse, stereotypes emerge through active communications between politicians and their audience, but indirectly - through the mass media. Stereotypes are actively criticised not only because they simplify reality, but also because they offer incomplete or false ideas about individuals or groups. Still, the fact is that participants in communications processes make intensive use of them. The media use stereotypes to build up more attractive, clearer and more easily understandable stories about politicians. Politicians use stereotypes to enhance their level of recognition, to be more attractive among their electorate, and to position their ideas more clearly. The audience uses stereotypes to simplify the way in which the content of communications is structured and to evaluate communications in accordance with individual mental frames.

The widespread use of stereotypes in the processes of news and communications is a fundamental factor in determining the sustainability of stereotypes. This is even truer given that stereotypes have various levels of depth. Open and direct stereotypes are gradually disappearing, but they continue to exist on the basis of associations, language, etc. The existence of stereotypes in the political discourse is enhanced by the active use of stereotypes in entertainment and advertising. The concept of the “young blue-eyed blonde”, for instance, is a fairly common stereotype of women, and this image is used to promote all kinds of products and services. It is quite understandable that this image of a woman - one that is used to sell washing powder, automobiles, drinks, etc., one that is based sexual, not social or intellectual characterisation - has created a series of biases against women.

Sadly, female politicians are fairly active in the establishment and preservation of stereotypes if the stereotypes are of use to them so that they do not lose their popularity among their audience.

Conclusions

Stereotypes are very common in modern communications. This has much to do with the process of journalism, which involves story telling. It is a key, therefore, to understand the nature of stereotypes and the mechanisms whereby they exist and are disseminated. Only then can we predict the way in which they will affect the quality of public communications. Only then could we encourage politicians and the

media to be more responsible in the creation and dissemination of stereotypes. This is an absolute prerequisite if participants in the public communications environment are to be focused on ethical relationships and on individual responsibility for the effects that are created by stereotypes that are offensive or simply lies. Stereotypes have a double application. They not only correlate and uphold norms and biases, but they can also be used to forecast future ideas, individuals and relationships so as to make these clearer to the public at large. Public discussions and analysis are a feasible way of controlling these processes and encouraging their positive development.

Individuals and societies cannot fully avoid stereotypes, because they are necessary to a certain degree. Still, their dissemination in the public sphere and their influence on audiences can be reduced. The most powerful forces in influencing stereotypes that exist about women in politics must be female politicians and female journalists themselves. They must be more critical in evaluating gender discourse in politics, as well as their own gender blindness.

Old and New Stereotypes of Women – for Entertainment

Research Findings: data and analysis

Italian research project took a look at the way in which stereotypes about women are presented in fictional and entertainment programmes on television, as well as at the way in which these stereotypes present the roles of women and the relationships between women and men in the discourse of power³.

The authors concluded that when it comes to TV fiction since the 1980s in Italy, the way in which female subjects are portrayed is very sad:

- the decision making skills of women are weaker than those of men, both in private and public life;
- female characters are presented as always depending on men;
- female characters are shown more in the household environment than at work.

Italian fiction is mainly centred on male protagonists. Most of all, women are always bound to the idea of motherhood. No woman is single on her own accord, women are always married, and they have children to fight or die for. No woman

³ That was not the main purpose of research but gave some good background for understanding the cultural context.

chooses to terminate her pregnancy. Sometimes women get pregnant by mistake, and there is no control over the birth rate. Television fiction in Italy nevertheless presents women as positive characters. They are often the heroines in melodramas, although there are very few female characters with real power.

A second important phenomenon that is illustrated by the Italian study is that young and good-looking women who (unlike celebrities) can be met by anyone on the street are used in all kinds of entertainment programmes. A common feature in all European infotainment programmes is the so-called “phagocytizing body” effect (the definition of that concept can be found in the CNEL research⁴). They have no clear-cut professional identity, and they lack specific artistic skills. Their only function is to attract the attention of the audience and to show off their bodies.

Discussion

Much of this can be explained through the cultural context of Italy (a long-standing division of sexual roles due to gender stereotypes in the Roman Catholic culture; strong pressure to change these roles, arising from the increased participation of women in various areas of work; the representational parity of men and women in most jobs). Still, the stereotypes are not as distinctly presented in the TV products of other countries, although they remain fairly widespread. The dissemination of the stereotypes is promoted by local TV products and by products of global mass culture. In Latvian TV programmes, for instance, soap operas from Mexico and Argentina present women through stereotypes that are similar to the ones that are found in Italy. What is seen in those programmes is a Cinderella story, with the stereotype of the girl who becomes a princess and the prince who is actually a shepherd. The good and strong man rescues the poor woman from her everyday problems by overcoming evil or by being perfectly ready to share his property with the woman.

This is a phenomenon, which differs not only from country to country, but also among various television channels in a single country. It depends on cultural traditions and target audiences, but the overall phenomenon is always the same –

⁴ See “Donne Lavoro e TV – La rappresentazione femminile nei programmi televisivi” (“Women, Work and TV – Female Representation in TV Programmes), 2003, conducted by CNEL (Consiglio Nazionale dell’Economia e Lavoro), carried out by Cares, Observatory of Pavia. The scientific supervisor was Gianni Losito.

fiction and entertainment on television have much to do with the thinking of people about the roles and relationships of women and men. This is achieved by demonstrating specific models of behaviour and relationships. TV fiction is more actively watched by audiences than campaign debates and the like, because the stereotypical roles and relationships are based on stories that everyone has known since childhood – good overcomes evil, women are patient and humble and are rewarded for it, people who use their strength for honest purposes see the strength increase, etc.).

Entertainment programmes on television are a powerful source in upholding old-fashioned ideas about a woman being nothing more than an assistant to a man. The programmes modernise and expand the stereotypes. Everyone knows about the “young, blue-eyed blonde” on television. She is pretty, but stupid in terms of her coding. This is a fact, which is encouraged by visual mass communication. When it comes to political discourse, an audience can see a “young, blue-eyed blonde” who is educated, intelligent, well-organised, etc., but if she seeks a status above that of the average man, the audience is (understandably) surprised and doubtful. The stereotype of the “young, blue-eyed blonde” that is constantly presented on television shows the woman standing in the shadow of the man, refusing to speak or using very few words, smiling all the time and engaging in primitive activities.

Conclusions

The discourse of political power is not a closed phenomenon, and it must be stressed if one looks at the redistribution of power between women and men. This is a process, which is deeply affected in various ways by the overall cultural context that prevails and by the content of communications that exist. The role of the mass media in the (re)distribution of power, therefore, should be studied together with a look at the overall discourse of communications content. The point is that the causes of many phenomena can be explained outside of the concrete consideration, i.e., they can be described through political discourse in the mass media.

The Media:

Independence or Dependence on Stereotypes and Political PR?

Research Findings: data and analysis

All of the studies make clear that there are three fairly serious problems in the operations of the media. First of all, journalists and the media are quite active in disseminating tendentious stereotypes about women instead of reflecting the varied and changing role of women in politics. Second, it is distinctly noticeable that men in the media are asked to discuss “hard topics”, while women are asked to talk about “soft topics”. Third, there is a quantitative disproportion between male and female politicians in the media.

The Estonian study found that female candidates are often depersonalised to a greater degree than male candidates. They are more often described through the characteristics of party membership, i.e. - through collective identity, not individual authority. Women have also more often been discussed in the context of the private sphere and gender, something that has been found to be a universal tendency in portraying women of any individual nature or social position.

Estonia’s researchers looked at the portrayal of female politicians in the weekend editions of newspapers and in women’s magazines, finding that the media tend to construct dominating and conventional conceptions about society and gender roles in the portraits of female politicians. Moreover, female politicians are perceived to be rather exceptional in their personality. Their female nature and their private life are more commonly represented than are their social role or professional capacity. In

media texts, politics are represented as a very stressful and complicated field, and this suggests that the media texts can be seen as representation of doubts about whether the role is appropriate for women and whether women can deal with the difficult jobs of politics. Journalists do not, however, pose questions which would allow readers or viewers to gain information that would allow them to evaluate the professional qualities, experience, education, career, etc., of women, so as to know whether they might be successful in politics.

Journalists also tend to focus on the private lives of female politicians, often moaning about their “neglected” children. One woman who was interviewed in the Latvian study had this to say: “I do not like the fact that the media usually ask how I balance this with family life. Men are never asked about how they balanced out career and family. Ask the men, too. Men are fathers, after all!”

One of the Danish female politicians was posed the following question: “Why do you still live at home with your mother and sister instead of getting married and starting a family?” This was in 2002. Two years later, she was ready to explain: “The question is based on an old-fashioned image of a home, one with children, a dog, etc. I’m not surprised when I’m asked that question. I’m a rather conscious type, I’m more prepared for the question. I’ve also noticed, however, that the situation is different for men. I don’t believe that many readers are astonished at what it says about women and not about men. Most people who are asked this question do not wonder why it has been asked, and men don’t wonder why they have not been asked the question.”

Attitudes toward childless female politicians are fairly negative in the Estonian media. Journalists have also complained about mothers who have entered politics while their children have still been very young, arguing that that is when a child needs the mother the most. The Estonian expression “raven mother” is applied to such women.

The Estonian researchers also found that the body plays a very important role in a woman’s identity, and the media make reference to this even when the woman’s occupation is not purely “decorative”. The media speak about the makeup, hair, hands, nails and legs of female politicians, they discuss the way in which women in politics “decorate” themselves with clothes and accessories. They reproduce traditional concepts about female culture. According to media representation, for instance, it is astonishing if a female politician does not use feminine beauty aids.

In the Latvian study, “Men and Women in Governance,” it was concluded that respondents believe that the media focus attention on the visual images of women, as opposed to men, who are more often asked to express their views. The same is true in the advertising campaigns of political parties. Women are assigned only “social” roles, while men represent economics, finances and business - these are areas in which it is commonly believed that a good education, a strong mind and great analytical abilities are needed.

The Danish researchers looked at the way in which the tabloid newspaper *BT* covered a cabinet reshuffle in 2000, discovering fairly fundamental problems in the way in which female politicians were depicted in that context. Five new ministers were appointed, and two of them were young women. The prime minister was photographed with these two women and with a third minister who was also a young woman. The next day, on its front page, *BT* reported that “sex appeal can be used to sell cars, washing powder ... and politics. Nyrup is seen here using two young and pretty blondes to sell a fatigued and rusty government.”

In 2004, the then editor in chief of *BT* admitted to researchers that “this one was a bit rude, I admit that. The three girls were naturally furious, because ‘here we are being appointed as ministers because we have certain skills, and what do the media notice? They notice only that we’re women, and that is chauvinistic.’ I understand that they were angry, but I would like to defend us just a bit. I believed that it was a proper analysis of this cabinet reshuffle. The reshuffle *was* about Nyrup feeling the need to prosper. He needed liveliness. It was hardly a coincidence that three photogenic young women were appointed as ministers. In this sense, the term ‘Christmas decoration’ was correct. This was obviously a part of his considerations. The three women probably had all sorts of professional qualities, but that’s a different matter. The purpose of the cabinet reshuffle was to give the voters - not least the female voters - the impression that this was a dynamic government, one with young women in it. The cabinet reshuffle, furthermore, was not about professionalism, it was about gender and age. I understand that the three ministers were furious. I know that they were, and I can easily relate to that, but I still believe that the headline, no matter how extreme it was, was actually quite adequate. We were dealing with Christmas decorations, with ornaments. That’s because being a woman can also be an advantage in politics. I don’t believe that Anita Bay Bundegaard would have been appointed to

that post if she had been a man. I believe she was appointed because she was young and, not least, a woman.”

In all of the studies, researchers accented the fact that the media use female politicians to report on and analyse cultural, social and similar issues, while using male politicians to talk about things such as economics, the EU, NATO, etc. The Estonian researchers looked at opinion articles in the press, including ones that had been written by political candidates themselves, and found that the presence of women in these articles was almost the same as the overall percentage of women among all candidates. At the same time, however, there were considerable differences in Euro-specific materials - only 13% of the candidates to appear in media texts in this area were women.

On Radio Latvia, meanwhile, “special” issues for women include the Latvian language and culture, family and children, the problems of poor people, overall human mental values and equality.

There has also been inequality in the presence of men and women in campaign debates on Latvian radio and television channels - men participate more than women do. Radio 4, for instance, was mainly created on the basis of a man’s voice (in about 70% of the programmes that were concerned) and far less with the help of a woman’s voice.

It is also true that in all of the media outlets, the largest number of appearances involves those politicians who are at the top of candidate lists. Traditionally, these have usually been men. Women appear only as a part of a team of otherwise male professionals.

Discussion

The media analysis that was conducted in these studies leads to a whole series of questions. Is the positioning of women and men in election campaigns caused by the policies of the media, or are the media influenced by party advertising and PR activities? Do the media select participants in programmes and discussions themselves, or do they allow the parties to make those choices? Do the media discuss the positioning of female candidates vis-à-vis the gender proportions among the relevant party’s candidates or vis-à-vis the public at large? Do journalists purposefully or subconsciously reflect gender stereotypes? Could it be that the media are upholding

contradictions between male and female gender discourse so as to dramatise their coverage of political issues?

These are questions that may offend many principles and standards of journalism, but the question of Prime Minister Nyrop and his “Christmas decorations,” alas, shows that editors often do not interpret situations on the basis of analysis and journalistic ethics. Rather, they “believe” that their own interpretation must be the correct one.

The problems are made all the more complicated by the fact that many female politicians take part in the discourse that is offered by their parties and the media, perhaps deliberately, perhaps not, perhaps consciously, perhaps not. By this, they do not facilitate the level of recognition of their gender-based descriptions. They use political discourse to promote the emergence of new stereotypes, and they also make use of the stereotypes that emerge from the masculine culture.

The issue of how “gender” can influence a candidate’s selection for a certain post appears quite frequently. The first person to be nominated to become Latvia’s European commissioner was a woman, but she was later withdrawn. There was much discussion in the media about her competence, and this involved lots of gender stereotypes, some of them very offensive. There was little discussion of the claim by the prime minister that his decision to nominate the woman was based in part on the fact that the incoming president of the European Commission, Jose Manuel Barroso, had specifically asked for a woman. That is commendable in one sense - high-ranking institutions are seeking to ensure gender balance. On the other hand, these efforts cannot be based on mechanical selection of candidates just because of their gender. That is a primitive way of dealing with issues, and it can certainly be seen as a form of discrimination, albeit, in this case, against men.

Conclusions

No matter how contradictory and debatable the situation in the public sphere and the media, there have been fundamental changes in the traditional gender discourses. Individuals of late modern societies, according to the sociologist Ulrich Beck, want to “live their own lives”, but these are “experimental lives”, as traditional and conventional role stereotypes are increasingly losing their functions. Individuals, groups, communities and societies all need to establish new patterns of being, for that reason, and it is of course true that the media have an enormous role to play in this

process. Without the media, there cannot be an open space for public communications. The reality today is that the media do not always conform to the ideals that would apply to them if they were to observe the theory of social responsibility. The media, just like individuals and societies, are changing their identities and are engaged in an active search for new identities. This means that in studies of power and gender, it is key to look for new aspects of media analysis instead of just claiming once again that the media disseminate gender stereotypes. The issue of how and why the media do so is far more important, and that is a subject for future research.

The research projects: characteristics and analysis

Description of the research projects

The Danish research project consists of two parts:

1. *From their point of view*, the projects focus on the experience of female politicians in Denmark insofar as the importance of gender in the political and the public context is concerned. The survey is based on a survey of female MPs that was conducted in March, April and May 2004. All parties, all age groups and all durations of political careers were represented in the survey. A total of 51 of the 61 female MPs in Denmark took part (MPs from the Faeroe Islands were not included). This is a response rate of 76.1%, or three-quarters of the female parliamentarians. A questionnaire with 30 statements was submitted to respondents, with responses to the statements divided into categories such as “agree”, “partly agree”, “partly disagree” and “disagree”. The various statements were divided into three categories by topic - the respondent’s political party, Parliament, and the media and the public. The survey was anonymous.

2. *From the media point of view*, the focus is on the way in which the Danish news media present female politicians and on the grounds for such presentation. This was a qualitative survey that was based on:

a) a survey of the Danish print media. The survey uses quotations from Danish newspapers that were found on Infomedia, an electronic database that contains articles from Denmark’s daily newspapers from 1995 until the present day. The quotations came from articles of all genres concerning descriptions of female politicians. The

method was to search for portraits of or interviews with the politicians and then read them so as to find descriptive material;

b) in-depth interviews with senior female politicians - eight women from eight parties took part in an interview (seven are included in the analysis). The women were chosen because of their position in their parties and because of the kind of publicity that they have received - being portrayed as a woman and/or a certain type of woman instead of as “just” a politician;

c) in-depth interviews with two professional media consultants.

In the framework of the Estonian project, *two research projects were conducted:*

1. Representation of women candidates during the campaign for European Parliament elections - analysis of 1,246 media texts that were published at beginning of spring 2004 in the daily newspapers *Eesti Päevaleht* and *Postimees*, and in the evening newspaper *SL Õhtuleh*. The texts were briefly analysed from the qualitative point of view, using the category system that was introduced by Schwartzberg, who defined four different role types for politicians in political advertising: Mr/Mrs Everyone, Father/Mother of the Nation, Hero and Charmer;

2. Portrayals of female politicians in the weekend editions of newspapers and in women’s magazines - qualitative research concerning 16 portraits of five well-known female Estonian politicians in the Estonian print media (the *Arter* weekend supplement to the daily newspaper *Postimees*, *Eesti Päevaleht*, *SL Õhtuleht* and the women’s magazines *Anne*, *Stiil* and *Annabella*) between 2000 and 2004. The main criterion in choosing those women who would be analysed was the number of published articles about each politician during this period. Nine media discourses (with sub-discourses) were analysed - politics, relations, personality, domestic, education, career, appearance, hobbies and dreams.

The Italian research project included three components - the project report and two supplemental research reports on stereotypes and on a qualitative analysis of the participation of female politicians in the country’s political information programmes. The following the survey methods were used:

1) qualitative analysis from a semiotic and communications point of view, focusing on selected television programmes that were broadcast during the month that

preceded European Parliament elections in 2004. A unified analytical framework was used to observe: (1) the choices that each programme makes with regard to subject matter; (2) the roles which actors assume; (3) the communicative styles of the actors; (4) management of the interaction among the actors; (5) organisation of space and the placement and movement of actors in the space; and (6) the public persons who are present;

2) a total of 14 semi-structured interviews with women who held or were seeking political office at that time - parliamentarians, senators, a councillor to the Commune of Rome, and candidates for the European Parliament. Of these, seven had taken part in the programmes, which were qualitatively analysed. All of the women were over 40 years of age;

3) four interviews were carried out with communications experts and five with journalists. Here, too, all respondents were over 40.

The Italian research report also presents the results of an analysis of the way in which women are represented in fictional, entertainment and infotainment programmes on television, as well.

In the Latvian research project, the main research issues were these:

- Traditional and new gender-related stereotypes in the mass media and the way in which these stereotypes are introduced in political discourses;
- The way in which the presence of women in politics influences changes in the meaning of such concepts as “femininity” and “power”;
- Gender, ethnic and power discourses in the Russian language media;
- The way in which gender-based stereotypes appear and the way they influence the discussion of issues during pre-election campaigns;
- The point of reference of politicians and journalists when considering political issues and reviewing gender-related problems.

The present study offers an analysis of the political gender discourse in the media:

1) before and after the parliamentary election in Latvia which took place on October 5, 2002 (covering the period between September 3 and October 15, 2002);

2) before and after the election of the president of Latvia, which took place on May 22, 2003 (covering the period between May 22 and June 26, 2003).

The researchers have identified the following areas and objects of study:

- The emergence of the agenda and its influence on gender-related themes;
- Discursive similarities and differences between men and women as participants in the process of communications;
- Analysis of media language and of the communicative styles of male and female politicians;
- The behaviour and language of female and male journalists when interviewing female and male politicians;
- Instrumentalisation of gender in the area of political power in the Latvian and Russian media in Latvia.

The methodological approach in the study was a critical discourse analysis, combined with frame analysis. Media messages were reviewed from the gender perspective - 1) how female and male politicians demonstrate their gender affiliation; 2) the gender context of the mass media; 3) the reflection of gender aspects in the media.

In all of the materials, particular interest was paid to the following factors: the female politician, the male politician, family, the role of the mother, the role of the father, sexuality, work and the labour market, politics, violence, and the roles and images that are attached to politicians or “achieved” by politicians depending on gender.

The following sources were used for the analysis:

- 1) Five national daily newspapers, three in Latvian (including one example of “yellow press”) and two in Russian;
- 2) Discussions, interviews, political debates, analytical broadcasts, news, live broadcasts, population surveys and political satire on channel one and four of Radio Latvia (in Latvian and Russian respectively) and on the first channel of Latvian Television (in Latvian);
- 3) Campaign advertising from the various political parties, as well as the pre-election programme series “Battles of Giants” that was presented in the form of candidate debates on Latvian Television.

Conclusions

All of these studies offer a very impressive review of the theoretical studies of gender and of the applied research projects that have been conducted in this area. The studies correlate the positioning of gender in the media with manifestations of gender equality in the world of politics. The various studies differ in terms of the background information and the volume of information that was chosen.⁵ Some researchers focused more on the theoretical background, while others concentrated on previous empirical research that had been done in these subject areas. The Italian research project, for instance, has a more extensive theoretical segment and a wide historical review of empirical studies in Italy and elsewhere in Europe. The Estonian research report reviews the latest empirical studies in that country. That allows for the systematisation of many local studies, data correlation and generalisation, and wide circles of people would gain access to a review of processes in specific countries and groups of countries. A good example here is the Danish researchers' use of the survey that had been conducted by the Swedish daily newspaper *Svenska Dagbladet* to explore gender equality in the Swedish parliament.

Researchers in the various countries used different research methodologies in terms of developing theories and selecting methods but all of the methods ensured the collection of reliable and valid data.

One of the main objectives of the present research project was to obtain explanations of power (re)distribution in politics between both genders. One way of getting such explanations is to correlate media text analysis with the ideas of politicians, journalists and people from various groups of society about gender equality in politics, the implementation of power in contemporary democratic societies, and the influence of gender on media texts that reflect politics as a significant public discourse. This has been particularly well achieved in the Danish project, and the result of this is the availability of interesting information about how and why journalists have presented politicians (in this case - female politicians) in a specific way.

⁵ The comparative report was based only on national research reports translated in English, however some parts of these were not translated (for example, interviews with the Italian female politicians and journalists etc.) and thus not included in this report.

A separate project on men and women in governance was elaborated in Latvia, which illustrates not just the unequal distribution of power between women and men in politics in general, but also the differences in this realm that exist at various levels at which politics are implemented. The basic focus in these studies is on the national media, but the study in Latvia shows that this approach may be insufficient when looking at power redistribution in a society. Therefore it would be useful to review regional and local media and their treatment of the issue of political power distribution in further research, thus focusing on the context of local communities, too.

When analysing the media, more attention should also be focused on the nature of the media themselves, on the culture of journalism and the professional mentality of journalists. This can significantly affect the images of the presented politicians, and it can have much to do with the discourse of power in the mass media. This phenomenon is characterised quite well by the study of “Nyrup’s Christmas decorations” in the Danish research project.

Therefore when it comes to integrated international projects of this kind, more attention must be devoted to the clear identification of research issues. It will allow finding out general and local factors that affect the distribution of political power in the various countries. The results of such studies would be of greater research value, and they would also be more useful in order to present convincing arguments about the matter in relations with the public at large.

The gender studies need to focus more attention on men, too. The point is that when power is redistributed, of course, someone wins and someone loses. Without a complex study of these phenomena, we are threatened with a fairly cyclical determination of identical or similar phenomena - something that will not allow us to learn about new relationships in the discourse.

The challenge and innovation of this research has been to find out how the media display men and women in politics, thus influencing the redistribution of power between the two genders in the public sphere. It was noted that in the different countries of the project there have been and still are processes that encourage the rebalancing of political representation or the increase of female participation in decisional roles. Even in Denmark - one of the leading countries in the world when it comes to gender equality – the performed research indicates that gender still matters.

Recommendations

1. There must be regular, integrated and internationally applied research projects that are financed by the EU and by individual countries in order to monitor changes in gender discourse in the public sphere. These studies must include reviews of the latest local research activities to promote the inclusion of local data and analysis in international circulation, thus providing a more valid basis for subsequent research. This frees up resources for studying new gender aspects, without any need to prove that what has been proven before. Research should be focused more on causes. Qualitative research methods and interpretation of data should promote the participation of researchers of both genders.

2. There must be an emphasis on procedures that enable the multiple application of research results in practice - availability of research results on the Internet, seminars for interested parties in the target audience, publications in the media, etc.

3. It must be understood that the media, journalists and editors are a key resource in changing gender discourse in the public sphere. Research must involve case studies, because they represent one of the best ways of providing clear information about the essence of issues, as well as the possible forms of behaviour and interpretation that are involved. Case studies also create a platform for debates that lead to a better understanding of the issues at hand. Research projects should include PR activities for the media, the aim being to provide information to journalists and editors and to ensure the availability of resources. Research data must be used in the training of journalists.

4. In order to reduce the stereotyping of women and to enable the public at large to understand the multiplicity of roles that are played by female politicians in terms of their importance in governance, communications training and motivational enhancement must be offered for female politicians at various levels, particularly focusing on those women who are at the start of their career. This work must be done on the basis of the research results, and it must involve experienced female politicians, journalists and PR experts.

5. Institutions which engage in gender studies must work more closely with NGOs that focus on gender equality issues, so as to provide expert analysis of research results, to design new areas for research, and to support NGOs with the research findings.

6. There must be a search for international and/or local opportunities to place gender study resources on the Internet, ones that are accessible to a wide range of users and are easy to find.

7. There must be greater public debate about gender issues, focusing both on traditional and on alternative views about gender in late modern societies.

The list of projects

Denmark

1. The Handbag, the Witch and the Blue-eyed Blonds. Mass Media in (Re)Distribution of Power. (Danish report) Ulrikke Moustgaard Andersen, Danish Research Centre on Gender Equality, 2004.

Estonia

2. Mass Media in (Re)Distribution of Power. (Estonian report) Barbi Pilvre, Ministry of Social Affairs of the Republic of Estonia, 2004.

Italy

3. Mass Media and the Redistribution of Power. (Italian report) Fondazione Giacomo Brodolini, 2004.

Latvia

6. Mass Media in (Re)Distribution of Power. (Latvian report) Centre for Gender Studies of the University of Latvia, 2004.

7. Men and Women in Governance. (Latvian report) Aivita Putniņa, Linda Zīverte, Public Policy Institute, 2004.

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