

TRANSFORMATION

Stories of toxicity and redemption
On media literacy and how media can impact our lives



Created during the project Transformation



Funded by
the European Union

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Gönül Öner, Spanish participant of Transformation, is talking about the media landscape in her country



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— Media Literacy

Why should we care about media literacy? Hell, what does it even mean?

Media literacy has many academic definitions. With different intersecting fields (including sociology, psychology, anthropology, cognitive science...), Media Literacy is a vast field in which the focus is how people receive, interpret and act on the messages that they receive. For the purpose of this project, and simplifying things greatly, we could say that **media literacy is the ability not to get manipulated by media.**

Media Manipulation and Fake News are urgent problems in Europe. On the next page, you can see how well are citizens of 35 European countries doing in this discipline in the year 2021. In Finland, less than 1/4 of the population would get fooled. In the Czech Republic, almost every 2nd person would be manipulated. And in Macedonia, most people can't truly protect themselves from media manipulation.

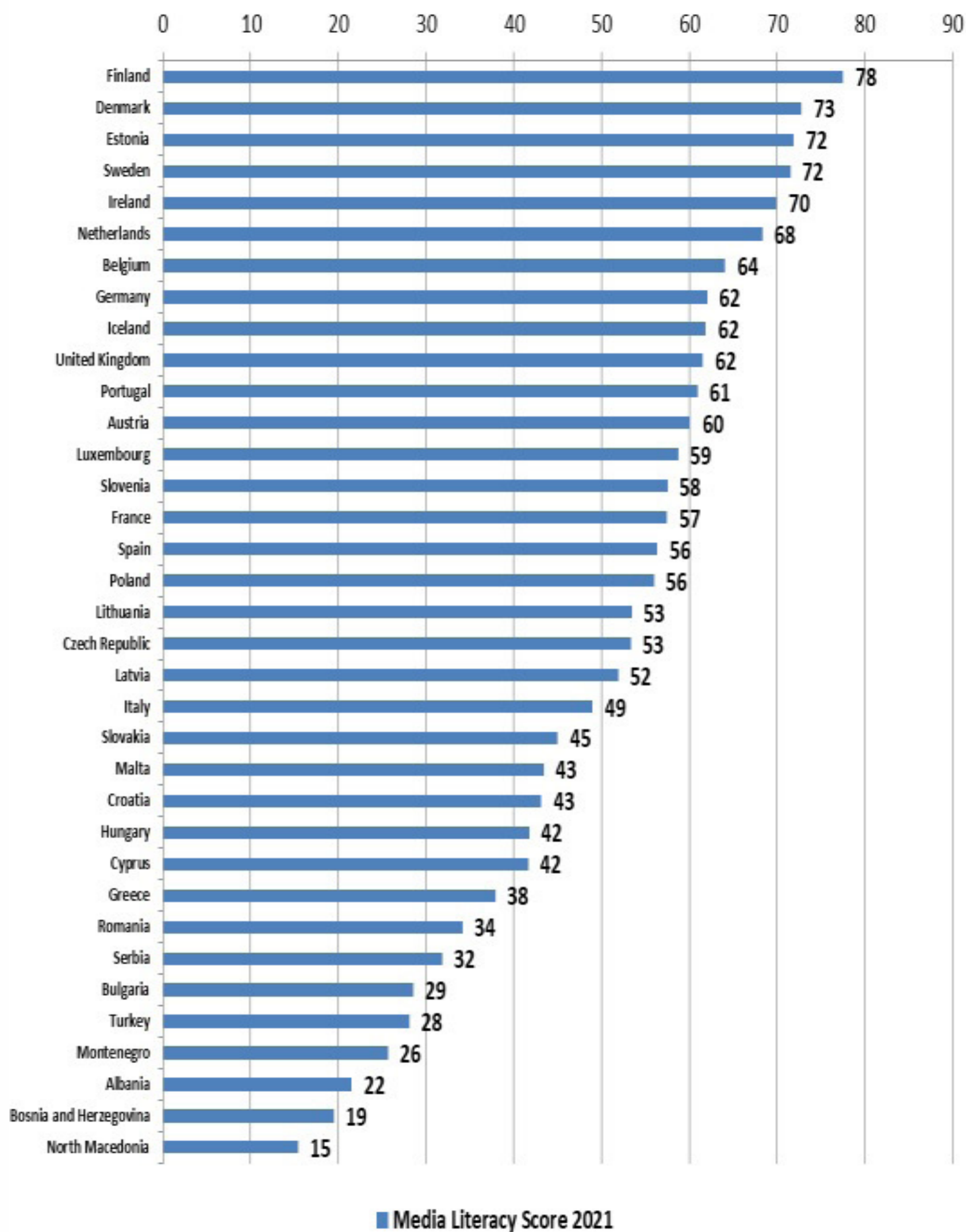
This is the situation in the time of the covid pandemic, of War in Ukraine, in the time of the internet and social networks, when production of fake news reaching thousands of people is easier than ever before.

As we are living in a democratic society and we are having the right to more or less influence politics, it is important to be aware of what information are we basing our decisions on. What news is influencing us, and how, who produced them, and why, and it is a time to ask ourselves:

Do I really know, or am I only manipulated?

—Vojta Žák

Media Literacy Index 2021 ranking and scores



Source: [Media Literacy Index 2021](#)

How much about media literacy do I know?

Can you explain what do the following terms mean?

If not, Google is your friend. But careful. Not everything that is written is trustworthy. Academic resources are usually the best for discovering relevant information.

- Agenda setting
- Priming
- Framing
- Inclusion/equality/equity
- fact/opinion
- Stereotype/prejudice
- Confirmation bias
- Selective perception
- Narrative/counter-narrative
- Toxic narrative
- Discourse/dominant discourse
- Polarisation
- Othering
- Hate speech

Note:

Hey, what is this good for? Why don't you explain the terms straight away?
Well, all those topics are rather academic and this is not an academic book. If you want, here you can find a [greatly siplified explanaiton](#) for easy understanding. But it is not ideal. We encourage you to dedicate some time to learn about those topics. You will discover they are an inseparable part of your life. Maybe you just weren't aware of it.

Gabriel Vivas-Martínez is explaining
a difference between narrative and toxic narrative



— on media

Humans are fish swimming in a medium of language

Just as the term Media Literacy, the idea of Media itself is a complex concept that entails different elements depending on whom you ask. During our Transformation project (more about the project on page 31), we used the terms 'Public Media' and 'Social Media' to refer to the different ways in which a message is spread among our communities and, in particular, among young people. In a narrow view, we talked about Public Media such as newspapers, television, and radio, seeing journalists as producers of the media messages.

We also talked about Social Media, referring to platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Reddit, etc, realising that any user of those networks can become the producer of a message. This idea of the message, and communication with the audience that receives those messages, was important for understanding how narratives are built and spread.

Communication is the connection between points A and B, through which a certain information or message is travelling. The medium is the means through which the communication is flowing. Communication can be understood as a road between cities and its medium is the asphalt.

Communication can be happening in between two people and the medium can be the voice, language, air, written text, pictures, visuals...

The medium can be a fairy tale, a movie, a book, or free speech. And for all of those things, the same analysis principles for public and mass media can be applied.

That is why we worked with the idea that Media literacy is much more than just journalism. We are living surrounded by media, even though we are not calling it that way. And all the messages we are receiving through media are forming our perception of the world.

— Gabriel Vivas-Martínez

How is media shaping your beliefs?

Name 5 beliefs you have about the world.

For every belief, try to think about 3 messages you received from media in your life that could be forming such a belief.

— example from the Transformation

For a long time, I had a belief women are bad drivers, without thinking much about it, or having any proof about it.

BELIEF

Women are bad drivers.

MESSAGE 1

A joke.

In the time of my youth, there was a joke running around in my class:

*"A woman behind the steering wheel is like a star.
You can see her, but she can't see you."*

MESSAGE 2

Friendly joking.

When we were attending driving school, whenever any girl went to her lesson, both teachers and her classmates started to joke in the following way:

*"It is good we are in school and not in the streets, you won't be able to drive us over," or
"At what time is your lesson? Five? Damn, I am going for pilates. Where are you driving so I can avoid the area?"*

Sadly enough, women were joking in the same way:

"I have my lesson, so don't go to the streets, I wouldn't want to kill you."

MESSAGE 3

Entertainment show.

Jokes about women behind steering wheel were a popular part of Politické harašení, an entertainment show I was watching with great amusement as a kid.



— on discourse and toxic narratives

How we support toxicity in our life

Most common shared narratives (media messages) are forming the dominant discourse – the type of narrative that the majority of our society is promoting. (We cannot be talking about all humanity, though, as different societies live in different discourses and hold different beliefs. But you can ask yourself: what is the dominant discourse in your country regarding LGBT+, immigrants, etc?).

Especially the ones who are growing within the dominant discourse, without hearing about the opposites, are vulnerable to its influence. In the Middle Ages, people were growing up with the belief that the Earth was flat. That was the dominant discourse of that time. Even if someone would hear from somebody the Earth was a globe, they would consider it foolish. And they would support the dominant discourse by promoting it further, and teaching their friends and kids that the Earth is flat: Telling legends about ships that sail too far and fell over the edge of the world. Making jokes about the lunatic Bruno who claims the Earth is a globe and is to be burned at the stake soon.

Yet, we are supporting the dominant discourse of our time in the same way. Without knowing the truth. Without having data to speak about the truth.

Such a dominant discourse can be that Women can't drive. We are contributing to that discourse by telling jokes supporting such a stereotype. And such a stereotype will become a prejudice for somebody – probably for a man who will never let his wife drive their car because he will feel superior to her driving skills.

To take a step back, not all dominant discourses are automatically bad (even though it is useful to realise they exist). What we consider dangerous are so-called toxic narratives that are part of the dominant discourse.

And as a toxic narrative, we understand anything that is promoting prejudice, discrimination, exclusion, and harm of minorities, vulnerable, and/or historically oppressed groups. For example women. But not only them. Far away from that.

— Vojtech Žák

National Toxic Narratives and How We Challenged Them



— North Macedonia

Victim is to blame

A toxic media narrative spreading in North Macedonian society is “the victim is to blame”. This exclusively applies to women victims of violence done by men. The official media outlets are not spreading this narrative so openly, as it is incorporated into the mentality of the society, yet they do not oppose this narrative with a counter narrative. Moreover, in Macedonian media the victim is the first to be described in detail, and not the predator, which puts a subtle, but heavy accent primarily on the victim.

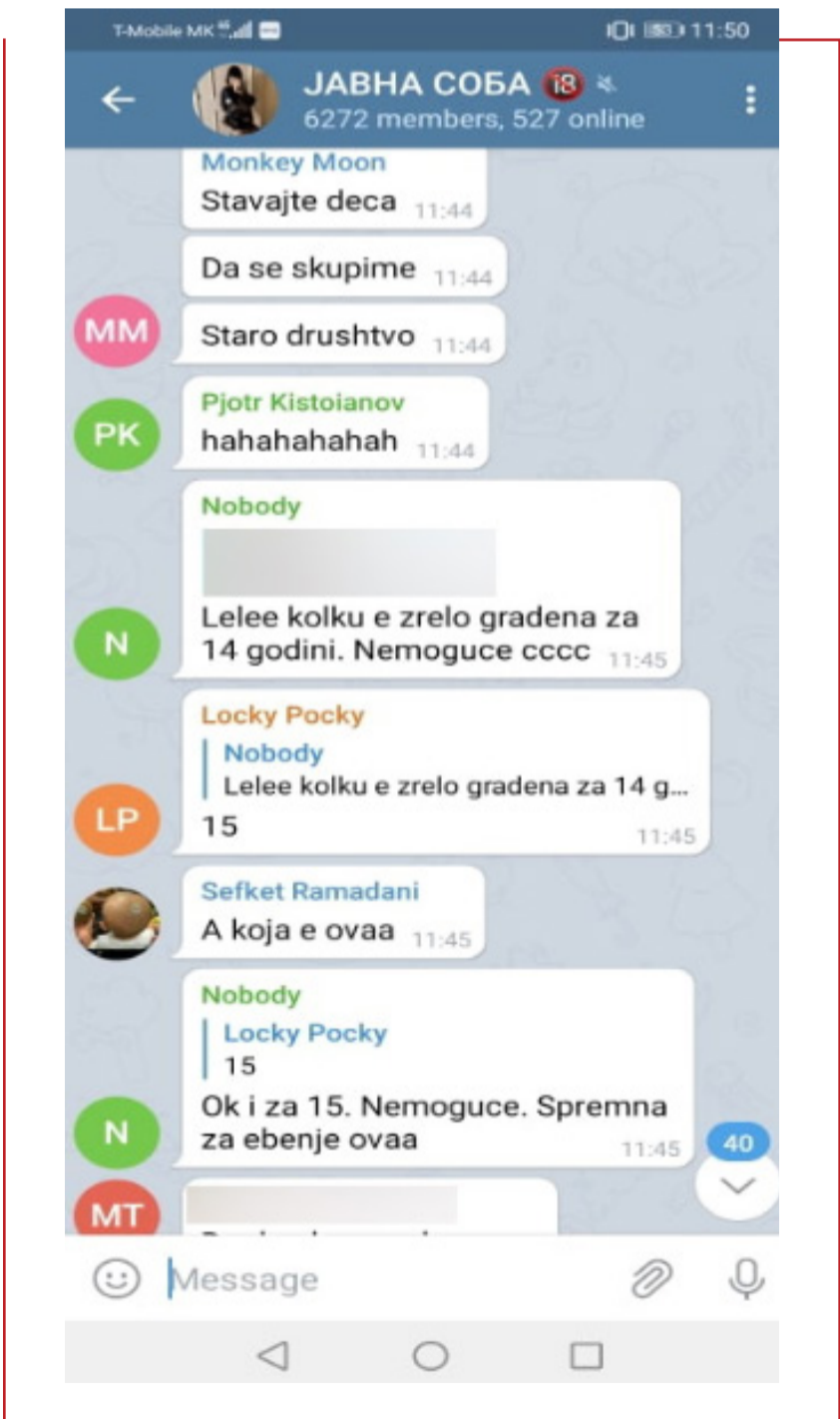
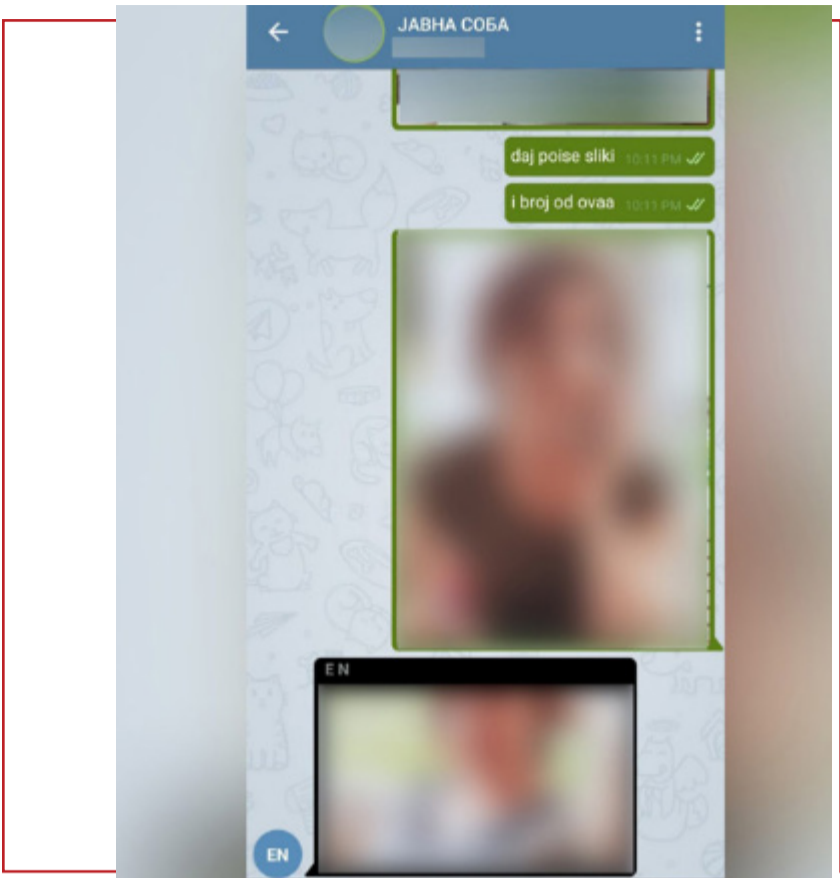
This is a deeply rooted in the society and it is not treated adequately by the authorities at all. Nowadays, after 30 years of independence and big pressure from the public, the authorities are starting to react to cases which involve violence against women.

The legal protection was also weak (starting to strengthen nowadays) and the court cases almost always ended in light or non-punishment for the violent men. The method of “copy-paste journalism” is a part of the problem because a big number of websites spread information just for the clicks, without investigating the matter or presenting another side of the story. Few media are actually deepening their reporting on the topic, most of them (and the ones that had the most audience) are targeting sensationalism.

As a consequence, men in Northern Macedonia receive encouragement to repeat and even intensify the actions. The domestic violence raised in percentage during the pandemic, and the media only presented the perspective of how many women were violated and not how many men violated women.

Going further and braver, this issue escalated and resulted with a few “products”, such as the Telegram chat named “Public room”, “GevgelijaHub”, etc. These private rooms/chats involved more than 8000 men per room where they [shared photos and video materials of girls and women](#).

Regarding this matter, there has been a lot of talk about women’s morality in the past few months, how could they be photographed like that (sometimes nude), even though some of the photos were not explicit, nor with pornographic content, they were downloaded from other social networks and shared with the identity of the girls, taken out of context and shared with offensive words and private information, such names and surnames, phone numbers, and sometimes even home addresses. These actions resulted in [prolonged and offline harassments](#) of the victims.



“Public room” was a gathering of paedophiles, and yet the main public discourse of the topic discussed was women’s morals. Some of the materials that were shared among the members were private photos and videos that the women once sent to their partners or ex-husbands.

A question about the so-called revenge porn opened, which is the public sharing of other people’s private materials (photos or videos) with sexual content without the consent of the person to whom the materials belong, with the aim of embarrassing and humiliating them in public.

As the website mkd.mk states in one article related to this topic “the expression used is a double victimization, when instead of condemning those who commit violence, in this case sexual, the behaviour of the victim is condemned.”

Activists for the protection of women’s rights emphasized that feminism needs to be activated in such developments, where the questions surface that women are actually always victims and that even in the case of “Public Room” it is about gender-based violence.

The case was partially closed when the alleged founders of the chat room “Public room” on Telegram were located. Since the Telegram application has a policy of not cooperating with governments, the police used their own methods to enter the network, and the data they obtained, they checked with mobile operators, but it is a long and complicated process, sources are stating for the sdk.mk website.

A part of the problem exists in the ugly truth that some of the member of this chat room and even the predators are policemen, so they protect each other and other men. The founders of the chat room were accused only on the matter

of child pornography, because in the group there were found materials of girls younger than 10 years with explicit narrative towards them. Dozens of women who are officially prosecuting this chat room and the damage it has done in their lives are still lost in the labyrinth of justice and wait for their cases to be solved.

Negative impact on youngsters

Young people are under the severe impact of this topic. Most of the materials targeted the younger generation. As they spend most of their time on the internet and social media, they are finding escape, but also a dominant reality in this space.

Shocks like this have an enormous amount of negative impact on the youngsters, such as shame, social exclusion, no sense of belonging, no legal protection, exposure to negative context, deepening the separation between the genders, increased misogyny, depression, prolonged violence and possible suicide.

The issue is still active, as the chat rooms still exist [under different names](#), and this creates great anxiety among youngsters. They never know who, where and how will be targeted.

Counter-narrative

“#The victim is not to blame, we should treat chauvinism and anger-management among male population.”



Click to watch the video

Audience

The targeted audience is men 18-60 years old. We believe that this audience has to be targeted and treated with counter narratives because there lies the most chauvinism, possibly passed from generation to generation.



Medium

Since the issue itself appeared on social media, we decided to make a social media campaign. We chose this approach due to the format that is most used nowadays. Therefore, we created a social-media-friendly video of up to 1 minute.

Message

The message of the counter-narrative “the victim is not to blame”.

This counter-narrative to the narrative that “she asked for it” is really important, due to the wrongly positioned perspectives in the society, which leads to double victimization.

We are trying to present a perspective of the possible anger issues of the predators, so we can see the picture more clearly, raise awareness and possible empathy.

The campaign consists of a video, in which we are showing a car, elegantly riding down a road and then a man hitting the car with a golf stick, actions covered by voice-over. In the end, the campaign states that it is a shame that we have to compare women with a car, so the men develop a possible empathy for the matter.

— Liljana Tancheva, Azra Abazi

— Portugal

A country of soft tradition

In the first part of this project, the Portuguese participants carried out a research activity with the other participants. This investigation took a look at the current news in Portugal. It allowed the identification of various ideas and perceptions of discrimination in the country against other ethnicities and nationalities; an exaggeration of coverage of some news topics, especially through “agenda setting”, which leads to the degradation and forgetfulness of others of great importance; and a widespread idea that politicians are not condemned or held accountable for their political actions, being untouchable when represented by the media. These results served as a basis for the research in the second part of the project.

Participatory research was not completely held in the 2nd part of the project. Although there was a discussion between the two representative people of Portugal and Spain, looking for common trends, or narratives in the two countries.

Broadly speaking, the endangered group is the population itself, because we can't separate the issue among people, it's a global problem, ingrained in everybody, just differently. It could be said that the hero is the better version of each one. Although as a global phenomenon, it requires individual horizontal research.

This means practically all strata of the country.

Description of the toxic narrative(s)

*“We are a country of soft traditions”,
‘Somos um país de brandos costumes’.*

This is a quote attributed to the Portuguese dictator António de Oliveira Salazar in the 1930s after escaping an attempt on his life by conspirators. This quote is at the centre of a toxic narrative, and has never completely left our contemporary mentality, as is still usually presented as an exaltation of the people, a “way to be Portuguese”. It proposes that «We are proud to be very welcoming and laid back people. That we don’t harm others, either countrymen or people from other nationalities. We are passive, and we don’t change the Status Quo, so we are fatally unable to change».

This narrative simultaneously excuses many historical atrocities committed by our ancestors, as well as it justifies the disguised messages of racism and discrimination towards other social groups. On the other hand, it serves also as a pacifying message to the people, “asking” them to put themselves in a position of apathy, inactivity, and of non-revolution towards the established power, namely political and institutional.

How does the narrative spread

It was possible to identify polarising conclusions in the research of this toxic narrative. Ironically, there were a few findings that actually proposed the passivity of the Portuguese population as indeed true. However, not due to historical contexts, or much less “genetics” of the people, but rather due to systemic problems, such as the lack of development in self-esteem and knowledge about psychology topics. One research points to the “softness” of the people as a result of their insecurity leading to a general lack of responsibility towards personal actions, which is maximised for example in political and organisational decision-making positions.

Aside from the precedent historical quote coined by the Portuguese dictator, and colonial past, this narrative may have arisen from two different backgrounds that converged. On one hand the current education system; on the other hand, - most important here, - social media. Online social networks, tv-news and morning/afternoon shows have the tendency to increase and exaggerate what people already think of themselves and their society, while taking critical thinking out of the equation.

Online social networks shield people from the real repercussions they have in their world, while simultaneously giving people the impression of knowledge and action. Tv-news and news talk shows exaggeratedly cover specific topics, especially through “agenda setting” in very simplistic manners leading to degradation and forgetfulness of others of great importance.

Examples

Apathy and Inactivity:

The widespread idea that politicians are not condemned or held accountable for their political actions, being untouchable when represented by the media, because they should be seen as fatherly figures. This is obviously not true, as for example: very recently, the “Premier José Sócrates” and the “Minister Miguel Relvas” were caught in various scandals, among them money laundering (BBC news World Europe, 2014)^{1,2}, and even acquiring fake diplomas (Diário de Notícias, 2016)³.

Although social media presents and carries problems of corruption and incompetence, it does not actually allow people to have action, or better put, to review themselves, to improve themselves. In Portugal, corruption is rooted in a “clan mentality”, and having “soft traditions” allow groups to become complacent and uncritical: The others are the corrupt ones, the lazy ones.

Although the idea of politicians not being held accountable keeps being spread, most people still blame the politicians, corruption and incompetence for all their problems. «Most people assume examples come from above, and politicians are “the bad ones”, but if they could look seriously at themselves they would see they have the exact same behaviour within their sphere of action» says Marisa Moura in a research (Jornal de Notícias - Notícias magazine, 2015).⁴

Veiled discrimination

Racism is still imbued in Portuguese culture, and discriminatory differences linger. While in the south it takes a stronger racist tone, in the north it takes a more strata and economical one. On July 25th 2020, a retired nurse man who served in the military during the colonial war against Angolan independence, repeatedly shot the Guinean actor Bruno Candé to death, due to racially motivated reasons. «Complaints of racial discrimination in Portugal rose 50%, to 655 last year, however many incidents are not reported, and the real figure is thought to be far higher» said the Secretary of State for Equality Rosa Monteiro in March 2020 (BBC news World Europe, 2020, [5]).⁵

In May 2019, eight Portuguese police officers were found guilty of kidnapping and beating up six black youths in a neighbourhood four years earlier (BBC news World Europe, 2019).⁶

In Portugal, there is a racist quote that is often employed in a very aggressive way which completely defies the idea of the peaceful people:

1 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-30160193>
2 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-30177599>
3 <https://www.dn.pt/portugal/lusofona-protegeu-relvas-mas-tribunal-anula-curso-5259990.html>
4 <https://www.noticiasmagazine.pt/2015/povo-de-muito-bran-dos-costumes/estilos/comportamento/9571/>
5 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-57645012>
6 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-48345089>

*“Go back to your country”,
‘volta para a tua terra’.*

Yet, there still are veiled ways in which some use this quote, especially from the right, putting the blame on the victims. Migrants are considered guilty of not adapting to the system and to the white European culture, now in decline. In an opinion piece, Fernanda Cancio, challenges the veiled messages of racism (Diário de Notícias, 2017, [7]).⁷

Negative effects this narrative has on people

- Promotes “clan mentality”, corruption and a tendency to make wedges;
- Veiled racism and discrimination;
- Apathy, inactivity and fatalistic negativity;
- Lack of self-criticism and self-improvement;
- Negation of the truth.

Counter-narrative

**“We Are Not, At All, of Soft Traditions
Não Somos, De Todo, De Brandos Costumes”**



[Click to watch the video](#)

The message of this campaign consists of **4 basic ideas**:

- The Portuguese are more violent and emotionally unbalanced than they think;
- The Portuguese are more insecure of themselves than they think;
- The Portuguese are less cultured, informed and have less knowledge of reality than they think;

- They have more personal power and responsibility than they think, but need to learn how to use it correctly for the public well-being: giving themselves to others, with less greed» (real public, not close ones).

This is important so that people can observe themselves better, try to find their own mistakes, their own toxicity towards others. It is important to counteract the insecurity felt among people which is projected into others in an unhealthy state. To take individual responsibility seriously and not judge others.

A counter-narrative video against the usual Portuguese toxic sentence “We are a people of soft traditions” (Somos um Povo de Brandos Costumes), counteract the notion that Portuguese people are passive, uninterested.

Audience

The campaign is directed to the Portuguese, in consideration for the people living abroad; the people who live in Portugal, across all the economic spectrum; people from other countries living in Portugal; and others, considering moving to this country or spending a vacation.

For people who already live in Portugal, it is good that they can grasp some sense of the dictomic reality they are in. It is important that all the economic spectrum can access this information and be aware in order to change themselves towards a better society. For the ones from other nationalities living or spending time in the country, is important to be aware of the cultural and communication mechanisms through which this society has been working by, thus be prepared and gain the ability to integrate but also improve it with their capacities.

Medium

To counteract this toxic narrative, it was proposed to create a series of short videos of a comical nature, created by our association. It should be distributed and published on the online platform YouTube, with its own channel and working similarly to short episodes. The purpose was to satirise the apparently peaceful character of the Portuguese, focusing on small details and characteristics of the people and culture in each different episode, promoting a change in behaviour and self-revision without too hard feeling of guilt, and instead a chilled approach.

The Medium was selected based on the expertise of its creators with experience in video, photography, writing and editing, as well as the artistic satirical style in which it is presented; While the YouTube video format was selected for its availability and free content accessible by all, as well for the feedback and comment section provided, generating discussion. The length of the video was made to be direct and reminiscent of the present quick culture of information in which we live, without having to actually use other social media (e.g. Tik Tok, Reels).

⁷ <https://www.dn.pt/opiniao/opiniao-dn/fernanda-cancio/se-somos-racistas-volta-para-a-tua-terra-8624654.html>

The video format was inspired by several pieces of media, among them satirical comedy and poetry/spoken word:

Gato Fedorento “Conta do Restaurante” (2006):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SDy7MbVd2F8&t=1s>

Porta dos Fundos “Pobre” (2014):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8NILQp2xmZ8>

Alice Sousa (2022) in TEDX Aveiro:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_WhRn6b8dBE

Alice Sousa (2022) Commemoration of “25 de Abril” with “Março”:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hXxMoXBFibM>

Alice Sousa (2021) presents a poetry book about racism:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eZ8idYOTr9s>

thejuicemedia (2019)

“Honest Government Ad | Visit Australia”:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J6vvpQEaRdk>

- Rui

— Spain

Discrimination and Racism Against Refugees from Third Countries

Toxic narratives play a big role in equality and human rights of refugees. It is clear that refugees from third countries are not welcomed as refugees in Europe.

As you can read in [this news](#)¹, while a large group of Africans who wanted to immigrate from Morocco to Spain was killed by the Spanish police, you can see in [this news](#)² that Spain has allowed Ukrainian refugees arriving in Spain to seek protection.

As mentioned above, non-white, non-well-educated, non-well-dressed people, especially coming from Africa, Syria, Iraq, Iran, face discrimination.

Refugees that do not fit the profile of a “typical European” (fair-skinned with light-colored eyes) find themselves at the border, prevented from fleeing, while light-skinned refugees are allowed.

1 <https://www.ft.com/content/8a6e7c9c-f58d-4388-9bf3-a138291484c1>

2 <https://www.schengenvisainfo.com/news/spain-has-helped-more-than-20000-ukrainian-refugees-in-the-last-ten-days/>

The discrimination the people from 3rd countries face once they arrive in other countries, may not only be due to skin colour but also to nationality.

All refugees should be treated in a similar way **regardless of nationality, race, or religion.**

Negative impact on youngsters

Discrimination and bullying can make refugees feel isolated, fearful, lonely, and powerless, and it lowers their confidence. These can lead to depression and self-harming/suicidal behaviours.

Discrimination and bullying pressure refugees to try hard to fit in. This means they give in to peer pressure and participate in activities they do not want to. By giving in to peer pressure and trying to fit in, a refugee can easily lose their past and culture. It creates cultural divides within their own family and community.

When the discrimination and bullying in school are very severe, it makes young refugees drop out and impacts the rest of their lives.

- Merve

References

[Reuters.com | Ukraine crisis gives chance to shift away from 'toxic' narratives towards refugees](#)

[Opiniojuris.org | Why the Discrimination against Non-white Ukrainian Refugees is a Violation of International Law](#)

[Brycs.org | DISCRIMINATION & BULLYING Integration Barriers: Perspectives from Refugee Youth](#)

Counter-narrative

Watch the Instagram account
[Do You Welcome Refugees](#)



— Greece

Police state - Police Brutality

The main toxic narrative is that the media are presenting police brutality as something good for our protection, and they can use every mean, including extreme violence. There are no consequences for their actions. Throughout this narrative, simple citizens are being victimized and stigmatized, presented as perpetrators. That's why it is dangerous for everyone, especially young people who are divided.

Furthermore, generally the media support that simple citizens cause the police to argue, and they guide them to these extreme behaviours. Especially, they apply the term “anti-authoritarian” to youngsters who react to the government's abuse.

Negative impact on youngsters

Young people are being raised in a community which normalizes violence and where whoever goes to a protest is an anarchist and vandal, even if most people just want to protect their own rights.

As a result, many young people are not active because they will be characterized likewise. In this way, basic human rights are being violated. The feeling of fear is created everywhere, even in spaces that are supposed to be safe, like city centres, universities etc.

Spaces in which democracy, dialogue and freedom are being promoted, transformed into cages.

Police officers are hidden behind their job title and use their authority in order to “silence” the society’s power and serve the government’s interests, whatever they are.

Examples

Last year, many students from Greek Universities were protesting. Why is this happening? For 60 years we had university asylum. This asylum is symbolic. When Greece had a military dictatorship (1967-1974), the uprising started at a university. The government tried to end this, entering it on a tank and with violence. That’s when the society was motivated and rose up.

All things above are also supported by international amnesty.¹

Students at the university of Thessaloniki were peacefully protesting on campus. The police tried to disperse them with extreme measures, and there was violence.

Minister of citizen protection said on Twitter:

*“The police did the obvious thing, and they will stay at campus as long as it takes to make it safe. Society and common sense demands it.”*²

The same minister said:

*“Greek police are not violent, as many people think so. There is no such thing as wrong actions by the police. They are professionals.”*³

[Here](#) you can see a man who is provoking the police, then he is leaving, but the police are continuing attacking the students.⁴

In one of the most well known Greek newspapers:

*“The students attacked, police says.... A group of approximately 120 people attacked the police force, so a police man and an individual were injured.”*⁵

Counter-narrative

Audience

The audience of our campaign is young people, 18-25 years old, mostly students of Greek universities. We decided to focus on this group due to the fact that most cases of police brutality took place in at universities.

Message

Most of the Greek media are presenting the police brutality as individual cases. The statements of Greek politicians and

“The young people must be awakened and fight against police brutality and media misinformation.”

authorities were covering the police abuse of power, and they were trying to manipulate the narrative.

It is important raise young people’s awareness of the danger and take action in order to protect themselves and each other.

Our message is helping people understand the difference between violent and normal behaviour of the police and not be influenced by the toxic narratives.

Medium

Young people don’t use traditional media, and they are influenced by their surroundings, so we chose the poster to make it more approachable and direct to them. Also, the article is small in order not to be tiring for the reader.

As another step in our task to point out this issue as a toxic narrative present in our country, we created a questionnaire of ten questions and invited the young people to answer.

The questions that were asked were simple and aimed to show the opinion of youngsters about how effective, useful and properly trained the police officers are, but also how they see the rest of the young people who react.

The results revealed that young people do not give trust in the education the police officers have received or in the work they do, as the majority claims that their power is being abused.

- 42.9% voted that police officers do their job indifferently,
- 60% voted that the university’s police officers are not properly trained;
- 77.1% claimed that there is abuse of power.
- 71.4% believe that the incidents of police violence aren’t individual cases.

Those who voted maintain that the young people who are reacting are not anarchists.

The only question that seemed to fuddle the public is whether the citizens were to blame for the violence used by the police, although once again 51.4% said no.

This fact shows how seriously toxic narratives affect the knowledge of youngsters and how much they distance their actions from what they really believe.

- MaMi, G.L., J.V, A.B.

1 https://www.alfavita.gr/ekpaideysi/380527_diethnis-amnis-tia-yperboliki-kai-paranomi-hrisi-bias-kata-ton-foititon

2 <https://www.voria.gr/article/ipourgio-prostasias-tou-poli-ti-sta-ai-i-astinomia-tha-paremveni-panta>

3 <https://m.naftemporiki.gr/story/1724752>

4 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AAxGHv34x8I>

5 <https://www.ethnos.gr/greece/article/209641/epeisodi-astopthoifoithesepitethkanleehastynomiakaneilogogia2tray-matismoysexaseprosorinathnakohtoyfoithths>

#end

#police

#brutality



Αναίτιες επιθέσεις
αστυνομικών σε
απλούς πολίτες.

Κατάχρηση εξουσίας.

Αυθαίρετη συμπεριφορά
αστυνομικών.

Βία μέσα στα
Πανεπιστήμια.

ΔΕΝ

ΕΙΝΑΙ

ΜΕΜΟΝΩΜΕΝΑ ΠΕΡΙΣΤΑΤΙΚΑ



MaMi GL

AB JV



— Italy

Bamboccioni

It's since 2007 that Italian youngsters are called "bamboccioni", a word that in English can be translated as "choosy". This word was used by the minister of economy Padoa-Schioppa who accused our youngsters of not wanting to work.

This is only a toxic narrative because it hides a reality that's more upsetting than we can imagine, in fact for the young people in Italy finding a job is not that easy, and even if they find it the conditions are not so good.

This narrative is being spread through the media by important personalities of politics, entrepreneurship and entertainment such as Albano Carrisi, Flavio Briatore and Alessandro Borghese.

Negative impact on youngsters

The impacts on youngsters are many. The youngsters are seen as choosy and not wanting to work, their chances to find a good job decrease also because they lose some self-confidence. In addition, highly qualified Italian youngsters are forced to leave their home country to find a job abroad and in this way Italy loses highly qualified workforce.

"The lack of manpower is a dramatic reality that I face every day with my farm. The cause? Citizenship income above all."

-Albano Carrisi,
singer and entrepreneur in the agricultural sector



"Working while learning doesn't mean that you have to be paid. Young people nowadays expect to have a good salary."

-Alessandro Borghese,
chef and TV conductor



"Citizenship income is the main ambition of youngsters in Italy."

-Flavio Briatore,
entrepreneur



Counter-narrative

Audience

The audience of our campaign is Italian employers and older generations. We realized that in our country, older generations think that youngsters are choosy and lazy.

Message

We want to show that youngsters want to work, but with dignity and in better conditions. The message is presented through a comparison between a story of bad working conditions and one of good ones.

The counter-narrative is important because we need to raise awareness about working conditions and reducing the gap between generations and give our support to youngsters and show them that they are not alone.

"Neither choosy, nor slaves!"



[Click to watch the video](#)

Medium

We decided to use the format of a satirical double interview video because it is a simple and direct tool, pretty known and appreciated among the audience we want to reach. We decided to spread our video through Facebook because it is the most popular social network among our audience.

- Peter, Donatos, Dahiry, Madiyam, Claudia

References

Toxic narratives

[Corriere.it | Da Borgese Cuttaia](#)
[Ilfattoquotidiano.it | Dopo Borghese anche Briatore contro i giovani che vogliono essere pagati per lavorare. E riparte con l'attacco al Reddito di cittadinanza](#)
[Ilmessaggero.it | Al Bano contro il reddito di cittadinanza](#)

Data

[Labparlamento.it | Rapporto Istat: siamo davvero un esercito di "bamboccioni"?](#)
[Greatplacetowork.it | Classifica Best Workplaces Italia 2022](#)
[Open.online | È vero, c'è uno squilibrio tra Italia ed Europa sugli stipendi dei giovani – Il grafico](#)

— Latvia

Anything is better than Russian

We made a survey collecting responses from 50 participants in the age starting from 13 up, regarding the language policy in Latvia and their attitude towards the Russian language use in Latvia. 100% of the respondents speak Latvian and, within them, 76% know also Russian language.

The research aims to discover how politics impact the Language policy in the educational system. It is based on the fact that since the beginning of the Russian invasion in Ukraine, Latvian Government aims to ban not only Russian schools but also Russian as a second language in Latvian schools.¹ The pretext used by the president of Latvia Egils Levits that Latvia as an EU country should provide a bigger diversity of European languages in the Educational Curriculum.

We could not agree more that in the 21st century knowing at least 3 languages is a must, nevertheless the language offered in the educational system should reflect the sociopolitical and economical reality of each and every country.

1 <https://zinas.tv3.lv/latvija/sabiedriba/tuvakajos-gados-krievu-valodu-skolas-plano-aizstat-ar-kadu-no-es-valodam/>

Knowing languages creates a dialogue and bonds between different nations and cultures. Knowing languages welcomes the tourists in our country, helps to establish trade agreements etc. Till now, we have always had references to Russian literature, historical events, music and cinema. Russian language knowledge till now has been a great resource for investigation, learning and leisure. Deleting this reality is not the most appropriate way on how to deal with the continuing conflict between Russia and the Western countries. It would be rather considerable to focus more on the region itself. Broaden our vision towards other Slavic countries, study their languages and literature as well.

In the past 10 years, Latvian youngsters have complained about having difficulties finding a job without knowing Russian because obviously entrepreneurs are interested in communication with their clients. Despite that already in 2021 E.Levits announced that it should not be a requirement in the Latvian job market.²

On June 15, 2022, Latvian Newspaper (Latvijas Avize) published an article where a mother of a teenager complained that a chocolate factory “Laima” refused a job for her son because of a lack of Russian language knowledge.³

Based on personal experience during the past years, the coexistence between Latvian and Russian has been quite moderate and Russian youngsters have improved their Latvian language knowledge leading to better collaboration. We didn’t observe the typical nationalist street fights we were witnessing back in the 90s. Now fear of the past hate and social division will come back.

Negative impact on youngsters

Currently, the hate against Russians and Russian-speaking people in Latvia is rising among young people. Russians born in Latvia often are still addressed as “occupants”. More than 25 % of Latvian inhabitants belong to the Russian-speaking community who were born in our country and after the independence in 1991 they still couldn’t get Latvian citizenship. From the 1st of January 2020 two non-citizens of Latvia can choose whether they want their child to get Latvian citizenship or not.

The content of the information in the media in Latvian and Russian languages are different, and we don’t have a common information space for all the people in our country.⁴ The polarization is very strong. This is dividing the society.

Russian-speaking youngsters are getting uncomfortable and afraid to speak Russian because of the rising hate against them (personal experience).

2 <https://www.lsm.lv/raksts/zinas/latvija/prezidents-krievu-valodas-zinasanas-latvija-var-prasit-tikai-ja-darba-pienakumi-saisti-ti-ar-attiecigajam-arvalstim.a409428/>

3 <https://www.la.lv/laima-krievu-valodas-nezinasanas-del-atsaka-darbu-skolenam-izraisot-iedzivotaju-sasutumu>

4 <https://www.facebook.com/groups/797146063650035>

Counter-narrative

Audience

Youth in the age of 13 to 25 because this is the young students generation who is directly impacted by Russian language situation in Latvia in two aspects:

- 1) On the one hand, they are struggling with getting a job after graduating from school due to the lack of Russian language knowledge.
- 2) On the other hand, Latvian government is suggesting to eliminate Russian as a foreign language from the Educational Curriculum and implement a law forbidding employers to demand Russian knowledge if not directly connected with tourism.

““Language is an opportunity we all can embrace.”



Click to watch the video

Message

Our campaign is based on spreading 40-45 seconds videos where our friends and acquaintances speak about themselves and the use of Russian language in their personal life.

Latvian policymakers are spreading narratives that cause hate towards the Russian language due to its propaganda in Latvian society and the current war situation in Ukraine. This causes a polarization in the field of language use because English is a must despite the politics run by the USA, meanwhile Russian language use is directly impacted by the actions of Russians politics.

Nevertheless, we have to understand that this war is not eternal and the situation might change in a couple of years. We can not politicize the language that is an important means of communication, negotiation, and mutual comprehension.

We want to spread the awareness that each and every language is a treasure and should not be polarized and othered, and we have to take into consideration our neighbouring countries and know how to communicate. And even considering the current political situation you have to know the language of your “enemy” to approach it.

- Agata, Edite, Ieva

— Poland

Media lie

Research based on a group of 21 Polish people showed that the attitudes towards media are heavily negative.

First participatory research

In one of the two participatory pieces of research, we asked participants to give three endings to a sentence:
"Media are..."

From all the replies, **64% of words and adjectives** used were negative with people repeatedly using words like *'corrupt', 'biased', 'harmful'* and even *'dangerous'*.

Responders also said that the media can be essential to maintain democracy, they are 'the power' and they were the cause of the civilization leap.

The majority (approximately 70%) of the responders were adults (30-40).

Second participatory research

Our second participatory research was carried out in a younger group of five 18-19-year-olds.

In a set of interviews they were asked about their usage of media, which pages they visit (if so), why they use those specific ones and where they seek out news about the world.

The interviews showed that the younger generation gets news mainly from Tiktok and Instagram. Some of the profiles mentioned were two news-oriented influencers: Lukaszbok_kiks and Faktomaniak.

Toxic narrative and how it spreads

Among adults the toxic narrative we identified is a complete lack of trust in any media. **'All Media lie'**.

That narrative is spread through articles in mainstream media, which point out how the 'other' channels lie. The constant fight leaves audiences with a lack of any trusted, reliable and unbiased source of information.

The open fight between mainstream media is a direct result of the political situation in Poland where the main government and main opposition media are constantly claiming the other one is lying.

The official channels overflow into social media. There are memes saying that 'media lies' and ones encouraging people to stop watching the news, 'I don't watch the news'. There are stickers in the street saying you should stop trusting what you read, satirical comic strips, YouTube channels, Twitter handles, Facebook groups and even a theatre play "Television lies".

Negative impact on youngsters

If the adults think that 'media lie' this will be shared with the younger generation. Children observe the attitudes of parents and then start believing that all media are biased, unreliable and can't be trusted.

Instead of learning how to improve their media literacy, they move completely away from the news.

Young readers are already mostly using social media to learn about the world, but the 'media lie' narrative makes them move away from any formal sources available on the newspapers websites, television or radio. Instead, they follow news on Instagram and Tiktok from influencers instead of trained professionals.

Finally, the lack of trust in any information, even from reliable sources, brings a sense of constant threat, and a lack of security about the world around us. Poor life and political decisions become a final outcome of the ignorance and misinformation.



"Man! The only media that do not lie are water, gas and electricity!"

[Source](#)



Internet meme mocking the logo of the main opposition TV station TVN with a caption: "I was CURED since I stopped watching TVN, my blood pressure is better, I can sleep calmly and my headaches are gone. I highly recommend it!"

[Source](#)

Counter-narrative

Watch the Instagram account
[Alfabetyzm_medialny](#)

Audience

The campaign is aimed at high school students in Poland, who are on the verge of becoming adults. They start getting involved in the social and political lives in their communities. We identified that the toxic narrative 'media lie' is particularly visible among older generations, and our main goal is to prevent that narrative from infecting the youth.

Message

Our campaign aims to inform young people about media literacy by sharing key terms, mechanisms and examples. We want to engage our audience in a discussion about their perception of media topics in comments to our Instagram posts. The message we want to spread is that it is important to inform ourselves about the world, while being aware that not all media messages are true or objective.

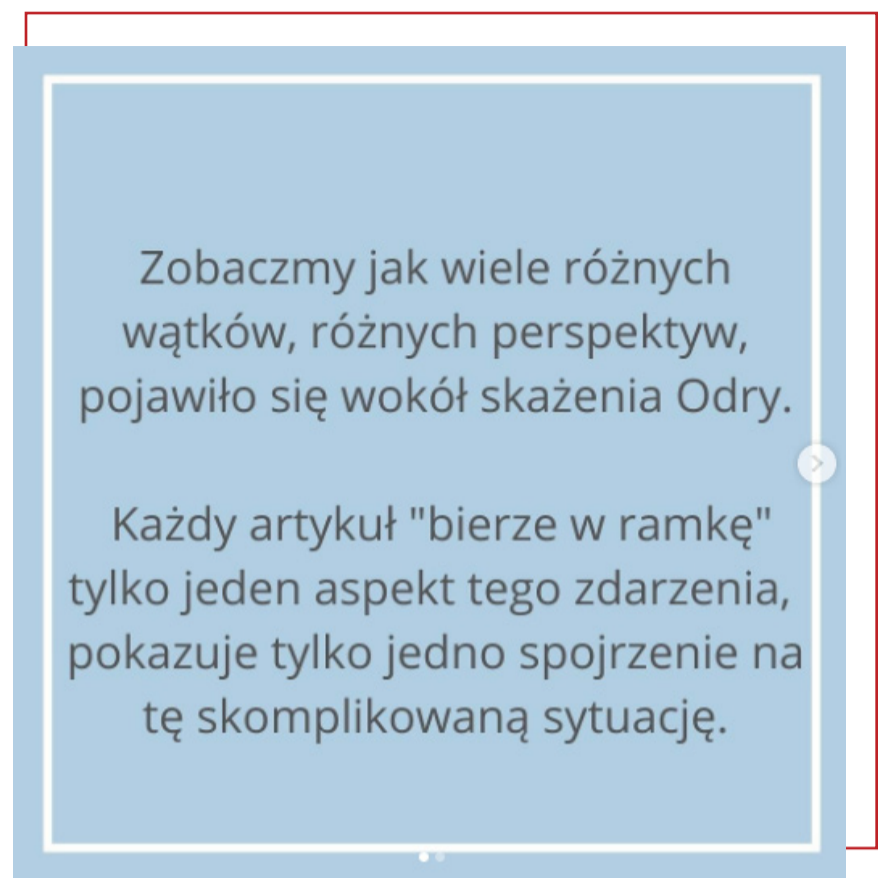
The level of news avoidance in the world is growing¹ and impacts the state of civil society and politics. Instead of giving into that trend, we want the young generations to have the tools to get information from various, trusted sources and use it to make informed decisions.

Medium

Our participatory research showed that among high school students, Instagram is widely used and the format of the posts is supporting publications in text and graphic form.

- Kasia, Alicja, Anna

1 [Reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk | Overview and key findings of the 2022 Digital News Report](https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/Overview-and-key-findings-of-the-2022-Digital-News-Report)



Participants of
Transformation 1 - Formation



— About Transformation



Transformation was a 2 phase Training Course funded by the Erasmus+, organized by INspire, z. s., in Czech Republic.

In the **1st phase** (12.– 17. 03. 2022, Chotěboř, Czech Republic), participants - youth workers from Portugal, Spain, Czech Republic, Poland, Latvia, Italy, Northern Macedonia, and Greece - were discovering what effect media has on the human brain.

In between phases, participants were running a participatory research among the youth from their circles, to discover toxic narratives influencing their well-being.

In the **2nd phase** (26. 6.–1. 7. 2022, Statek Habří, Czech Republic), participants were composing counter-narratives, empowering messages they would like to spread in their countries.



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Transformation

stories of toxicity and redemption

on media literacy and how media can impact our lives

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Transformation

stories of toxicity and redemption

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Language is not describing our lives. It is creating them.

What lives are we creating for each other?

What type of life are we living according to media in our countries?

What are the things we are believing in?

Transformation is a compilation of 7 stories from 7 different countries. Stories that we are perceiving through media, stories we dislike and we have decided to alter by creating different stories, optimistic stories, so-called counter-narratives.

Discover what are media instilling in minds of people from Italy, Greece, North Macedonia, Poland, Portugal, Spain, and Latvia and learn how to protect yourself from manipulation by media.

This book has been born
thanks to support from

