

DOING BUSINESS IN ISLAMIC COUNTRIES

NEGOCIOS EN LOS PAÍSES ISLÁMICOS

ÁNGEL ANDREU ESCARIO

EAE Business School, c/Joaquín Costa, 41 (Madrid).

angel.andreuescario@campus.eae.es

The so called “Islamic world”, no doubts about, is a general interest topic, and of special relevance for Spain; from a single economic perspective, as an example, the ten years after the 2008 crisis have seen a significant positive contribution coming out from the duplication of exports to this environment, exports that account nowadays to 10% of the total volume of Spanish companies. This achievement, a relevant one, tops off centuries of privileged relations.

In a more general view, we are seeing a convergence among economic interests and every kind of relations (oil and gas, large international investment projects, the growing influence of the axis China / India / Arab countries / Africa...) and tensions of all kind in every dimension.

This book, that I am honoured to introduce, explores some specific items of this complex reality, always from an entrepreneurial perspective: the different authors have posed ourselves questions that, in the scope of our areas of research and experience, bring light to the influence of several factors of the Islamic environment onto the business models, with the aim to explain what elements have to be considered to operate in these countries.

The first point of view is the global scope of Islam: the Islam religion is a cohesive strength that overcomes the enormous differences among the countries, the economies and the societies that share this religion base, and

that approaches many of their plans, operations and actions. Religion, a dimension less and less relevant in the civil and economical life of Occidental countries, continues -if not grows-being fundamental in every business dimension of the Islamic environment.

The second point of view is its own dimension: current expansion of Islam will shortly make this religion the largest all over the world, gaining as well -although still minor- share in the Occidental countries.

The third point of view is its specialization or “self-containing” direction: several of the analysis collected in this book explore, analyze and explain how these countries -despite their diversity, differences and heterogeneity- develop, accept, implement and share their own business tools and formats: from the Halal ranges to the Islamic banking, a growing set of owned models and “ways of doing” is extending across the Islamic world consolidating even more the commonalities. Legal, environmental and social structure commonalities are explored as part of this view.

All these trends, when read and understood together, define a new way of doing businesses. Our traditional Western approach is barely consistent with this construction. And if we would try to extrapolate from here, it looks like we are seeing how a new future “giant” is in consolidation, with more intense access barriers, requirements for technologies and business solutions different to the Occidental standards, and well aligned with the future development opportunity regions and countries. Traditional business paradigms to operate in the Islamic environment have to be revisited by our companies as part of the many cultural shifts (more usually linked to factors where we feel more comfortable. technology, digital transformation, etc) that will be necessary to align our competitive edge to the Islamic economies.

Books like this -we all the authors think- are necessary although modest contributions: the distance between the more general analysis of business transformation drivers that’s usually found in the literature and the Islamic business requirements is growing, and will have to be filled up to position our companies in this complex environment.