

Gender inequalities in a tourist region: the case of the Canary Island companies in a pre-pandemic scenario

Francisco Flores-Muñoz

University of La Laguna, Spain

ffloremu@ull.edu.es

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8194-9394>

Alberto Javier Báez-García

(corresponding author)

University of La Laguna, Spain

abaegarc@ull.edu.es

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6278-8169>

Josué Gutierrez-Barroso

University of La Laguna, Spain

jgutierb@ull.edu.es

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5968-3254>

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Abstract

The Canary Islands conform the most populated ultra-peripheral region of the European Union with almost two million inhabitants, receiving more than 13 million tourists in 2019, in a pre-pandemic scenario. Therefore, the islands represent a very particular setting to explore the impact of the global pandemic in business in general, and also in gender diversity and the situation of women on corporate boards in particular. Firms from several industries were observed in detail, as retail, wholesale, construction, manufacturing, repair and sale of vehicles and accommodation. The study explores the setting just before the advent of the coronavirus to their lives in a region which is obviously highly fragile to these events. The study reveals huge gaps in gender equality, with women less present and with less executive power than men, particularly in companies with better results and from certain industries, which confirms previous stereotypes. Further research will be required by means of longitudinal studies.

Keywords

Gender diversity, women on corporate boards, corporate governance, tourism, COVID-19

Introduction

Since the development of primitive societies of hunters-gatherers till the advent of modern societies, it is possible to objectively identify and quantify gender differences in roles and rights, that has been evolving in each period. In fact, it is possible to analyze each culture and to detect patterns of behavior that differ between men and women in a variety of contexts (Samkange & Dingani, 2010). These socialization processes are in many cases different for women and men and they imply inequality in the workplace. Work performance and career development imply different life trajectories. These processes have a close relationship with the social constructions of gender throughout history and are linked to a greater or lesser presence of women or men in certain productive sectors or better working conditions in terms of salary and presence of men with respect to women, despite the fact that these differences started to smooth recently at the global level, in particular in the last decade (Bennouri, Chtioui, Nagati & Nekhili, 2018; Conyon & He, 2017; Duong & Evans, 2016; Galindo-Reyes, Ciruela-Lorenzo, Pérez-Moreno & Pérez-Canto, 2016; Liu, 2013).

This increase in gender diversity is not enough to guarantee gender equality in an effective and complete way, as long as women are still highly underrepresented in top management positions (Dencker, 2008; Dworkin, Schipani, Milliken & Kneeland, 2018; Menicucci, Paolucci & Paoloni, 2019; Stainback & Kwon, 2012). In fact, the mere escalation in percentage of women does not mean automatically that gender differences vanish (Chen, Ge, Lai & Wan, 2013). Some of the remaining problems are the salary gap that affects negatively to women, who are also more present in young (not so well established) corporations (Skaggs, Stainback & Duncan, 2012), and with less seniority (Barrientos Báez, Báez-García, Flores-Muñoz & Gutiérrez-Barroso, 2018). The aim of this study is to explore the setting just before the advent of the coronavirus to a region which is obviously highly fragile to these events, a remarkable tourist destination.

Gender, professional career and top management in turbulent times for the tourism industry

The reduction of gender inequalities is being the object of both academic and legislative attention. An egalitarian society will not be achieved without social justice where males and females have the same opportunities to access employment (Barrientos Báez *et al*, 2018) distributing power and influence equitably between both genders (Samkange & Dingani, 2010). This is a key issue of the Welfare State (Terjesen, Aguilera & Lorenz, 2015). In this sense, more and more states have developed specific regulation in order to try to guarantee gender equality at workplace (De Cabo, Gimeno & Nieto, 2012; Nadeem, Zaman & Saleem, 2017). Although there has been an advance in the achievements of formal equality through the legal development that promotes it, it is not enough to achieve actual equality. It is convenient to consider the role of the private sector promoting better practices even beyond regulation (Fitzsimmons & Callan, 2016). In this sense, it is relevant to highlight the case of countries such as Norway, which was the first to regulate the presence of equal gender balance in 2003, so that the company boards of directors should have at least 40% men or women. But this was the achievement of another previous measure that had an key impact on labor relations, that is, the establishment of equal pay (Skalpe, 2007). Sweden, Spain or France, among others, have followed the same path (Dang, Bender & Scotto, 2014; De Anca & Gabaldon, 2014; Kang, Cheng & Gray, 2007; Upadhyay & Zeng, 2014). Spain, with some delay compared to other European countries, approved in 2007 the same 40% indicated above with the Law for the equality of men and women, specifying various measures in this regard (Terjesen *et al*, 2015; Segovia-Pérez, Figueroa-Domecq, Fuentes-Moraleda & Muñoz-Mazón, 2019). Four years later, in 2011, the identical 40% representation requirement was approved

in France (Nekhili & Gatfaoui, 2013). These measures of great significance in labor relations have had an impact on the increase of women on the boards of directors of companies located in states with legislation prepared for this purpose (Brieger, Francoeur, Welzel & Ben-Amar, 2019; Thams, Bendell & Terjesen, 2018). Even more, salary gaps are more accentuated in states with a lack of regulation on the subject (Christofides, Polycarpou & Vrachimis, 2013).

In androcentric societies, where we observe how the masculine precedes the feminine, we find and therefore increase inequalities in the workplace (Vujko *et al*, 2019) and the reproduction of social inequalities (Segovia-Pérez *et al*, 2019). In this scenario, gender identities are present (Duffy, Kline, Mowatt & Chancellor, 2015). The beginning of the careers of men and women is marked by the differential socialization process, encouraged by patriarchal societies that facilitate acceptance of a culture based on stereotypes and traditional gender roles (Samkange & Dingani, 2010). The work culture does not favor the professional promotion of women (Segovia-Pérez *et al*, 2019) and stereotypes facilitate access to power and management positions in companies compared to women (Fitzsimmons & Callan, 2016). In societies where discrimination is legitimized, the salary difference between men and women is greater (Janssen, Tuor Sartore & Backes-Gellner, 2016). The under-representation of women in decision-making processes helps to reinforce stereotypes (Mendelberg & Karpowitz, 2016). Despite the fact that women have obtained better academic results than men (Appold, Siengthai & Kasarda, 1998; Dworkin *et al*, 2018; Menicucci *et al*, 2019) they have greater difficulties in developing a full professional career. The exception is located in companies dedicated to export and in foreign companies where the balance between both sexes is higher (Chen *et al*, 2013; Patterson, Bae & Lim, 2013; Shu, Zhu & Zhang, 2007). Foreign companies can be agents of change, but the correct development of their standards depends on the local organizations with which they interact (Mun & Jung, 2018). In this sense, access to employment, hours, wages, job promotion or corporate advantages, among other issues, are issues in which inequality is highly present between men and women. This is specified in different physical and psychological barriers to overcome (Costa, Bakas, Breda & Durão, 2017; Krishnan & Park, 2005; Liu, 2013) detailing the concept of the *glass ceiling* (De Cabo *et al*, 2012) visualizing the inconveniences to endure in order to reach the highest positions in corporations (Carvalho, Costa, Lykke & Torres, 2019; Samkange & Dingani, 2010) and that of sticky soil, that is, those difficulties in being able to leave the private sphere towards the public sphere and therefore access the labor market. Regardless of the economic sector of reference, the percentage of women is higher in larger companies (Krishnan & Park, 2005; Skaggs *et al*, 2012) and in family companies, regardless the size (Bennouri *et al*, 2018). However, it is at small and medium-sized companies where the percentage of women in management is higher (Alonso-Almeida, 2013; Çiçek, Zencir & Kozak, 2017; Duong & Evans, 2016; Menicucci *et al*, 2019; Segovia-Pérez *et al*, 2019; Skalpe, 2007). Family companies are characterized by a fuzzy and somehow insufficient separation between the family space and the work space, with an influence of the family dynamics being reproduced in the firm (Cesaroni & Sentuti, 2014). Family companies facilitate a rapid transition towards highest position of the company (Liu, 2013) due, among other reason, to its own nature, as they are inherited regardless of the gender of the offspring, characterized by highly involved personnel in the company who have been able to appreciate it as part of their socialization process due to the personal experiences lived within it (Nekhili & Gatfaoui, 2013). But if there is already gender inequality in the family business, these differences are likely to be maintained with the offspring (Phillips, 2005). Similarly, when the top manager of a company is a woman, they tend to be significantly younger than their male counterparts (Dang *et al*, 2014; Khan & Vieito, 2013).

The highest presence of female employment are found in companies related to light industry, tourism, education, health or services, while in heavy industry, in transport, in manufacturing, in the production of chemical products or petroleum products, the percentages are lower (Chen *et al*, 2013; Pearlman, 2018; Skaggs *et al*, 2012; Tsou & Yang, 2019), however, some activities that are witnessing a progressive feminization process such as the public sector; education and health

are in a process of precarious working conditions. Within each sector, differences are also perceived, as in hotels or cruise ships, with a common division of labor in departments such as maintenance, mainly male, or cleaning, mostly female (Carvalho *et al*, 2019; Dragin *et al*, 2014; Vettori & Nicolaides, 2019). The gender differences shown in these economic sectors are influenced by the stereotypes present in society that presuppose better skills for certain jobs in certain economic sectors (Fitzsimmons & Callan, 2016; Pearlman, 2018), or the absence of professional ambition (Tsou & Yang, 2019) creating an initial disadvantage to access the labor market (Liu, 2013), among other issues. Stereotypes deepen gender inequality (Costa *et al*, 2017; Segovia-Pérez *et al*, 2019), limiting female career paths (Wong, 2005).

Taking into account the lower presence of women in companies, the beginning of employment, for women, occurs in jobs with similar qualifications to men but with a lower salary (Chen *et al*, 2013; Muñoz-Bullón, 2009; Pearlman, 2018; Perryman, Fernando & Tripathy, 2016; Sabina & Nicolae, 2013; Thrane, 2008; Tugores, 2008; Villarreal & Yu, 2007) and minors complete economic professionals (Duong & Evans, 2016; Kulich, Trojanowski, Ryan, Alexander Haslam & Renneboog, 2011; Skalte, 2007; Vettori & Nicolaides, 2019). Likewise, as a result of the prevailing culture, part-time work is more common in women than in men, as well as a lower facility for labor mobility or to extend the working day due to family issues (Carvalho *et al*, 2019; Duffy *et al*, 2015; Duong & Evans, 2016; Fitzsimmons & Callan, 2016; Legault & Chasserio, 2012; Sabina & Nicolae, 2013; Segovia-Pérez *et al*, 2019; Pearlman, 2018). When considering a vacancy for a higher-qualified position in a company, internal promotion is more likely to be awarded to a man when, in that society, the balance between male and female determines greater gender inequalities (Liu, 2013). However, when the position is advertised externally, the differences between both genders are reduced because the candidates already have experience in similar positions (Gorman & Kmec, 2009). The facilities not found mean that the percentage of men on company boards of directors far exceeds that of women (Skaggs *et al*, 2012) with different variations depending on the sector and the country. In this sense, professional promotion also depends on how workers involve in the social networks that can be created in the company and consolidated beyond its walls, contacts that cannot be strengthened by women so easily, due to part time jobs or to the need to attend to family matters (Carvalho *et al*, 2019; Fitzsimmons & Callan, 2016; Torrado Martín-Palomino & González Ramos, 2017) reinforcing gender discrimination (Nemoto, 2013). Without a good reconciliation of personal and professional life, it is complex to progress at work, particularly in certain sectors (Guzman & Kacperczyk, 2019).

The gender inequality also affects diversity in companies in a similar way that the lack of ethnic diversity (Rivera, 2012). The presence of women at the top management is an good proxy of diversity and equality for companies (Anazonwu, Egbunike & Gunardi, 2018; Krishnan & Park, 2005) at the same time an indicator of social responsibility (Bear, Rahman & Post, 2010). Faced with the idea of increasing female presence in management positions and in the boards of directors promoting equality, we find strategies to avoid it, by means of some harmful practices such as increasing the number of women as board members, so that the female percentage increases, but does not nevertheless have an impact on women's access to higher positions (Brieger *et al*, 2019; De Cabo *et al*, 2012). The presence of women on company boards of directors contributes to generating a positive professional promotion environment for women, also transmitting a clear commitment in favor of equality with clients, with suppliers and investors (Skaggs *et al*, 2012). Also, a better reflection of the different perspectives is detected when making decisions (Costa *et al*, 2017; Dworkin *et al*, 2018) without losing sight of the importance of long-term planning (Liu, 2013), better results in economic terms (Conyon & He, 2017; Julizaerma & Sori, 2012; Nguyen, Locke & Reddy, 2015) as lower levels of debt (Huang & Kisgen, 2013), lower business risks (Khan & Vieito, 2013; Perryman *et al*, 2016) or higher levels of savings (Arun, Almahrog & Aribi, 2015; Duong & Evans, 2016; Gull, Nekhili, Nagati & Chtioui, 2018) and innovation (Fauzi, Basyith & Ho, 2017; Ruiz-Jiménez, del Mar Fuentes-Fuentes & Ruiz-Arroyo, 2016). When companies have higher female qualifications, their productivity

increases (Tsou & Yang, 2019). Each member of a board of directors, male or female, is equally important to achieve company goals (De Anca & Gabaldon, 2014). With a growth in the female percentage on the boards of directors, new hires of women in these companies will increase globally (Cohen & Broschak, 2013). In the specific case of tourism, companies led by women create more employment and generate more sales than those led predominantly by men (Alonso-Almeida, 2013).

Therefore, the equality of men and women is positive for companies and for society in general. In addition, the balance between men and women has positive implications for companies in terms of a demonstrated better functioning (Appold *et al*, 1998; Conyon & He, 2017; Dezsö & Ross, 2012; Dwyer *et al*, 2003; Julizaerma & Sori, 2012; Khan & Vieito, 2013; Krishnan & Park, 2005; Nguyen *et al*, 2015; Perryman *et al*, 2016). The presence of women at the boards of directors (Huang & Kisgen, 2013) contributes to a positive change in the work culture (Skaggs *et al*, 2012). Despite of this, women on boards of directors do not play all available roles, but tend to assume mainly certain positions related to marketing, human resources or the vice-presidency of the company (Barrientos Báez *et al*, 2018; Dencker, 2008; Wong, 2005). Female leadership exercised from the main managerial position of a company contributes to smoothing gender inequality in that company by fostering the collaboration of employees playing a mentoring role with women with less professional experience (Dezsö & Ross, 2012; Dworkin *et al*, 2018; Liu, 2013). Professional mentoring is essential to move towards gender equality since in the absence of women on boards of directors, it will be more difficult to achieve a balance between both genders (Lee, Lan & Rowley, 2014). With the progressive increase in the percentages of women in company management positions, negative perceptions will be reduced (Rosette, Koval, Ma & Livingston, 2016).

And even in some jurisdictions and territories that lack such legal measures, gender inequalities tends to be reduced gradually, probably more because tourism, trade and other types of intense interaction between territories allow the resident population to connect with the visiting population with their respective cultures, values, gender identities and conquered rights (Duffy *et al*, 2015) and that interaction could favor a greater gender balance in tourist-receiving societies. Tourism has an impact on the elimination of social prejudices and the evolution of preexisting behavior (Çiçek *et al*, 2017). For all these reasons and due to the particular features of tourist corporations with respect to gender inequalities, it is relevant to explore the situation of businesswomen in these firms in a particularly intense tourist economy right before the pandemic. The coronavirus is expected to have a relevant impact on gender issues according to Alon, Doepke & Olmstead-Rumsey (2020) but that impact will not be properly measured if we lack the ex-ante scenario. That is the aim of this empirical work, with implications for further longitudinal analysis.

Methods and results

For the specific setting of the Canary Islands, data come from database was extracted on September 2019 from the Company House of the Autonomous Community of the Canary Islands, whose sectors of the National Code of Economic Activities were 50, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 20, 22, 23, 24, 25, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 41, 42, 43, 45, 46, 47, 49, 50, 51, 52, 53, 55, including mainly firms from retail, wholesale, construction, manufacturing, repair and sale of vehicles and accommodation. All firms presented in that registry availability of contact details and most importantly, gender of the person who appears as the reference position in the registry, with an indication of his/her role in the firm. Individual entrepreneurs are excluded. The size of the final database is 6,823 companies, practically the whole census of the archipelago. The analyzes were carried out using the R-Studio version 1.1.447 statistical package. The variables sales (thousands of Euros), age of the firm (years), employees (number), position of the contact person in the firm, and finally

sector of activity have been analyzed. Hence, the t-test procedures for independent samples, Pearson's correlation coefficient and contingency tables have been used in the analysis.

The descriptions of the quantitative variables considered as dependent are shown in Table 1. The average of sales is 3,477.2 thousand euros, while that of employees is 21.15 employees and 20.41 years of seniority. Regarding sales, the average is the one mentioned above, but it should be noted that half of the companies have sales equal to or lower than 126.6 (Median), with which we can observe that a few companies with sales high "pull" the middle up. The same happens in the case of the number of employees.

Table 1. Description of the quantitative variables analyzed

Sales (in thousands)	Employees	Antiquity
Min.: 0.0 1st Qu.: 244.7 Median: 726.6 Mean: 3477.2 3rd Qu.: 2232.5 Max.: 405826.0	Min.: 1.00 1st Qu.: 3.00 Median: 7.00 Mean: 21.15 3rd Qu.: 16.00 Max.: 1640.00	Min.: 0.41 1st Qu.: 12.66 Median: 19.84 Mean: 20.41 3rd Qu.: 26.53 Max.: 119.67

Table 2 shows the data of the dependent qualitative variables, as well as the gender variable, considered independent in this analysis. 81% of companies have a man as a contact reference, for 19% of women. In addition, with regard to positions, 52% have a statutory position as a contact reference, 26% base managers, 21% senior management and only 1% middle managers. The sector variable, for its part, is distributed in 24% of retail companies, 23% wholesale, 16% construction, 12% manufacturing industry, 8% repair and sale of vehicles and 7% accommodation, a key industry in the archipelago and actual engine of the rest of the industries.

Table 2. Descriptive data of the qualitative variables analyzed

Gender	Position	Sector
Male: 0.81 Female: 0.19	Senior Management: 0.21 Statutory Charges: 0.52 Base managers: 0.26 Middle Managers: 0.01	Accommodation: 0.07 Wholesale: 0.23 Retail trade: 0.24 Construction: 0.16 Manufacturing industry: 0.12 Repair and sale of motor vehicles: 0.08

There are significant differences according to gender for all the quantitative variables analyzed (Table 3). Thus, men are reference contacts in companies with the highest turnover, while those with the most employees almost always have men as their reference. Even so, the differences are too intense, as observed in Cohen's d statistic. Finally, there are no significant differences between the company's contact person and the age of the firm

Table 3. Quantitative variables according to the gender of the reference person.

Sales in thousands	Employees	Age of the firm
Male: 3821.49 *** Female: 2042.09 *** Cohen's D: 0.14	Male: 22.94 *** Female: 13.71 *** Cohen's D: 0.14	Male: 20.51 Female: 19.99

***: p-value > 0.99, **: p-value > 0.95, *: p-value > 0.90

When analyzing the relationship between the gender of the person of reference regarding the sector of the company (Table 4), it is observed that there is a statistically significant relationship between them (X-squared = 117.3, df = 6, p-

value $<2.2\text{e-}16$), as well as between the different categories. Thus, where there are more differences is in the retail trade (women tend to be more present than men), construction (favorable to men), repair and sale of vehicles (men again) and the accommodation sector (women tend to be more present in this key sector).

Table 4. Sector of the company according to the gender variable.

Sector	Male % (str)	Female % (str)
Accommodation:	0.07 (-4.02) ***	0.11 (4.02) ***
Wholesale trade:	0.23 (1.70) **	0.21 (-1.70) **
Retail trade:	0.21 (-8.68) **	0.33 (8.68) ***
Building:	0.18 (4.97) ***	0.12 (-4.96) ***
Manufacturing industry:	0.13 (1.56) **	0.11 (-1.56) **
Repair and sale of motor vehicles:	0.09 (4.23) ***	0.05 (-4.23) ***
Transportation and storage:	0.09 (1.97) **	0.07 (-1.96) **

***: p-value > 0.99, **: p-value > 0.95, *: p-value > 0.90
str: Standardized Corrected Residues

There is also a statistically significant relationship between the gender of the company's reference person and the position held (X-squared = 82.932, df = 3, p-value < $2.2\text{e-}16$), as shown in Table 5. Women in general are referenced as statutory positions and men more in senior management.

Table 5. Company sector according to the gender variable.

Position	Male % (str)	Female % (str)
Senior Management	0.22 (7.68) ***	0.13 (-7.68) ***
Statutory Charges	0.50 (-8.03) ***	0.62 (8.03) ***
Base commands	0.27 (2.30) **	0.24 (-2.30) **
Middle Managers	0.01 (-1.19) *	0.11 (1.19) *

***: p-value > 0.99, **: p-value > 0.95, *: p-value > 0.90
str: Standardized Corrected Residues

Discussion and final remarks

As has been observed throughout this article, in general women are a reference for companies to a lesser extent than men (19% versus 81% respectively). These data correspond to other studies carried out in this regard, such as those applied in the United States (Conyon & He, 2017; Fauzi *et al*, 2017), France (Bennouri *et al*, 2018; Gull *et al*, 2018; Nekhili & Gatfaoui, 2013), Nigeria (Anazonwu *et al*, 2018) or Australia (Nadeem *et al*, 2017), in addition to other studies at the international level (Barrientos Báez *et al*, 2018). However, all these previous findings differ from the one carried out in this article in that not only large companies have been studied, but a massive sample of firms of all sizes, and therefore, it is a further step in determining the differences by gender in the leadership of large, small and medium-sized companies.

Another relevant result is that women are the reference for the firms with lower turnovers. Other studies (Krishnan & Park, 2005) follow the same line, highlighting that 51% of the highest-income companies in the United States did not have women on the Board of Directors. This could imply that companies with more economic capacity (and hence with more decision-making power) tend to be represented by men, exacerbating inequality at the higher levels. With respect to productive sectors, there is clearly a high masculinization in some activities like construction and repair and sale of vehicles, while accommodation and retail having women more frequently in charge. Thus, gender stereotypes are somehow fulfilled, corresponding to certain remaining social roles assigned to men and women.

When defining the sex of the position of the company's reference person, there is what could be called a concentration of men in senior management positions and of women in statutory positions, the latter positions perhaps with less executive capacity. Something similar highlighted by other studies, where only between 7% and 8% of companies have women as CEOs (Duong & Evans, 2016; Brieger *et al*, 2019). Thus, it is clear that the presence of women tends to be more testimonial (statutory positions) than in typically managerial functions (senior management).

In conclusion, the study that has been presented here follows the same line as other international studies, that is, the lower presence of women as a reference for companies than men. However, a much more exhaustive study has been carried out in this article, since an analysis of the sex of the person of reference has been carried out in a large number of companies in a tourist territory such as the Canary Islands, reaching the conclusion that there are great inequalities between men and women regarding the size, sector and turnover of the companies they represent in the corresponding records. This study contextualizes and confirms the main findings of the pre-existing literature on gender inequality in the particular case of the Canary Islands, one of the main tourist powers at a global level, and which presents a particularly relevant scenario to study the impact of the pandemic on these inequalities. For this reason, the significant gaps that have been detected represent a difficult starting point. It will be through longitudinal studies based on this that it will be possible to determine the future of women as leaders of economic reality under equal conditions.

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