

Artigo submetido a 11 de Setembro 2020; versão final aceite a 15 de Julho de 2021
Paper submitted on September 11 2020; final version accepted on July 15, 2021

Gender (In)Equality in Local Employment: A Perspective of Municipal Executives

A (Des)Igualdade de Género no Emprego Local: Uma Perspectiva dos Executivos Municipais

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Abstract

Despite the existence of a legal framework that protects gender equality in Portuguese society, several social realities oppose this democratic principle, specifically those relating to the scope of employment where various discriminatory practices continue to be reproduced. Several obstacles and discriminations faced by women in their work in the sector were found and research was directed in the attempt to understand more globally the issue of gender inequalities in Douro society and its relationship with the potential that tourism represents as an empowerment factor for women. The software MAXQDA 2018 was used for data analysis and six general themes emerged: conditioning; experience in local politics; gender equality; policies to support local entrepreneurship; labour market; gender stereotypes. It is possible to perceive the influence of social, cultural, educational, and political conditioning in women's participation in the local labour market. Although it is evident the importance and dynamism of tourism in the Douro region it is invisible the increase in employment and new opportunities for locals and subsequent reinforcing the gender discrimination as a reality for tourism demand. Understanding this reality is an alert to the need to uphold the legal and moral principle of the right to gender equality.

Keywords: women, gender discrimination, tourism, employment, and local policies

JEL Codes: C19; J16; Z32

Resumo

Apesar da existência de um enquadramento legal de protecção da igualdade de género na sociedade portuguesa, várias realidades sociais opõem-se a este princípio democrático, nomeadamente as que dizem respeito ao âmbito do emprego onde várias práticas discriminatórias continuam a reproduzir-se.

Foram encontrados vários obstáculos e discriminações enfrentadas pelas mulheres no seu trabalho, tendo esta pesquisa sido uma tentativa de compreender de forma global a questão das desigualdades de género na sociedade duriense e a sua relação com o potencial que o turismo representa como fator de empoderamento das mulheres. O software MAXQDA 2018 foi utilizado para a análise dos dados, tendo emergido seis temas gerais: condicionamento; experiência na política local; igualdade de género; políticas de apoio ao empreendedorismo local; mercado de trabalho; estereótipos de género. É possível perceber a influência dos condicionamentos sociais, culturais, educacionais e políticos na participação das mulheres no mercado de trabalho local. Embora seja evidente a importância e dinamismo do turismo na região do Douro é invisível o aumento do emprego e de novas oportunidades para a população local e o consequente reforço da discriminação de género como uma realidade para a procura turística. A compreensão dessa realidade alerta para a necessidade de resguardar o princípio legal e moral do direito à igualdade de género.

Palavras-chave: mulheres, discriminação de género, turismo, emprego e políticas locais

Códigos JEL: C19; J16; Z32

1. INTRODUCTION

Portugal has assumed gender equality as one of its goals, with a series of policies, laws and institutions with the objective of promoting it in society, in line with the EU mandates in this matter and with other commitments acquired at the international level. Recent data from EIGE annual report (2020) place Portugal as the 16th country of EU on the Gender Equality Index, scoring 6,6 points below the media, with a score of 61,3 over 100. Despite the positive evolution in the last decade, deep gender inequalities still persist in society. One of the domains that has improved is the work, considered as the second-best score, with 72,9 points (EIGE, 2021), but it doesn't seem enough to eliminate some inequalities, deeply rooted in minds and social practices.

The weakening of contractual links, job insecurity and involuntary part-time work mainly affects the female working population (Casaca, 2010). According to Ferreira (2010), being a woman is associated with a deterioration of employment conditions, namely low wages, scarce opportunities for professional development and access to social benefits, weak or inexistent social protection and inherent risk of economic and social exclusion. Although there has been an increase in women's participation in the labour market in recent years (Singh, 2007), the distribution of employment by economic sector continues to demonstrate a notorious pattern of gender segregation in the labour market. According to the Commission for Equality in Labour and Employment (CITE), women in Portugal earned on average 17.9% less than men in 2014. In addition, Working Conditions Authority (ACT), data from 2015 shows that approximately 61% of jobs in the informal economy were held by women (CITE & ACT, 2012).

As stated by Di Stasio e Larsen, (2020) the basis of gender equality in the labour context presupposes a set of equal rights such as access to employment, vocational training and career advancement, the guarantee of equal pay, the elimination of labour market segregation, balanced participation in work and family life, and equal sharing of parental responsibility. These principles are enshrined in the Portuguese labour law and explicitly laid out in the labour code, despite the law recognition of equality between men and women, several issues of gender inequality remain, both in public and private labour context (Baum, 2013).

This study aims to confirm the realities of the local labour market in terms of gender discrimination and contribute to a better understanding of this social problem in order to reflect on the main actors and drivers of municipal employability behaviour.

To explore this working reality in the context of tourism in the Douro region, six interviews with women in city council positions in Douro municipal councils were analysed. Through a qualitative analysis of these interviews, we wanted to understand their views on the social reality of the Douro region, paying special attention to their perceptions of gender inequality at a general level and in the tourism labour market in particular, and to the need for gender equality measures or policies in their municipalities.

The interviewees were selected due to their status as representatives of women in local society occupying positions of social relevance, which gave them, in theory, a strong understanding of social realities, as well as the possibilities for transformation through political action. It was not initially considered that the mere fact of being a woman implied awareness of gender inequalities in the various spheres of life in society, and consequently acting in accordance with their position in the city council, promoting measures to correct these inequalities.

It is considered that the interviews with the councillors, who constitute a heterogeneous sample in terms of party affiliation, political and territorial responsibilities, age and training, reflect the different conditions existing in local societies. In this sense, it can be seen that women in positions of political power are fundamental agents of change in the local political context, who can promote the transformation or persistence of stereotypes and inequalities.

Despite all the scientific knowledge produced on this subject, little is known about this subject in the labor market in the Douro region. Bearing this in mind, this article intends to initiate a debate on gender inequalities, raising questions about support and actions that can promote better working conditions for women, not only in emerging sectors such as tourism, but also in the traditional ones, as agriculture, commerce or care sector, not forgetting the domestic work that women usually perform alone in their homes.

Considering also the importance of the emerging tourism sector in the Douro region, it will also be interesting to understand from the participants whether they think it is possible to alleviate local gender inequalities in the local labour market. This study also intends to generate important content for the development of new studies in this field. The fact that this study is applied in the public sector, responsible for municipal management, gives the article a relevant originality in academic terms, given the scarcity of studies in this field in municipalities (Lucca, Costa, & Guimarães, 2020).

In structural terms this paper is organized as follows: a brief initial introduction to the theme under study in order to better understand the reality observed in the empirical study; a description of methodology and procedures adopted; the results presentation and discussion; and finally, the conclusion and recommendations.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Gender (in)equality in the workplace

Gender inequality is a concept that encompasses many areas of social experience (Grunow et al., 2018). However, this issue has been discussed mostly in relation to women's participation in the labour market (Gornick et al., 2008). Combating gender-based discriminatory attitudes and behaviours in the workplace has become not only a moral imperative, but also an economic one, given the business implications (Busetta, Campolo, & Panarello, 2020). Nowadays, it is perceived that discriminatory attitude in the workplace induce financial losses and reduce the ability of companies to innovate, which significantly threatens their business development and global competitiveness (Flage, 2018). It is on the basis of this understanding that world organizations, such as the United Nations (UN), recognize gender inequality as a widespread problem that must be tackled in order to promote sustainable development (George, Howard-Grenville, Joshi, & Tihanyi, 2016).

According to the UN *Human Development Report* (2015), gender inequality occurs as a function of the type of work that men and women perform as a whole, it is women who bear the responsibility for domestic work, and women's participation in double jobs, low-paid, or part-time jobs without opportunities for career advancement or security. Data from European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) 2020 report shows that the gender gap in unpaid housework is one of the widest in UE (EIGE, 2020), updating the conclusions of Costa, Carvalho e Breda, (2011) and proving that this fact, linked to the traditional stereotype of women, continues to suppose one of the main barriers for gender equality.

Recent studies show that in terms of employment, gender gaps appear to be narrowing in some countries (Singh, 2007). However, although some progress is being made, there are still large inequalities. According to 2012 data from CITE, relating to Portugal, women earn 18.5% less per month than men (CITE, 2017). Although gender inequality in the labour market is not permitted by law, the labour market has indicated otherwise (Busetta et al., 2019), revealed by the fact that women are often associated with higher levels of unemployment, involuntary work, low remuneration and part-time contracts (Casaca, 2010).

It is clear that the labour market is disaggregated according to gender, with the occurrence of horizontal segregation. According to this principle, there is a strong tendency for women and men to enter into sectors of activity which they consider to be the most suitable according to their gender (Costa, Carvalho, & Breda, 2011). Therefore, when we look at the issue of equal opportunity, women face more difficulties than men in securing career advancement due to vertical segregation, better known as the 'glass ceiling' effect, referring to the invisible barriers that prevent women from reaching higher positions in their careers (Busetta et al., 2020). Compared to men, women tend to occupy lower positions in organizational hierarchies and are less likely to reach top positions (O'Leary & Deegan, 2005; Ranftl, 2006).

In light of the above, and in agreement with Byrne et al., (2019), there is an increasing tendency for women to consider entrepreneurship as a way to fight inflexibility and stagnation in their jobs. Hytti (2010) noted that this phenomenon in women's careers is driven by prejudice and adversity in the workplace. Tourism is often considered a female sector, as the global workforce in this domain tends to be comprised mainly of women (Costa, Carvalho, & Breda, 2011). The fact that tourism-related jobs require tasks and skills that are typically perceived as female, such as caring and feeding, has led to a feminization of the sector (Costa et al., 2017). According to Yukari and Kato (2008), although employment in the tourism sector is still far from fulfilling completely desirable conditions and is considered a short-term solution for women, its strong growth could provide an opportunity for women to enter the labour market.

Recent qualitative researches in Douro region (Makanse, 2017; Makanse, Oca, Rodrigues & Mendonça, 2018) revealed the same gender inequalities as the ones identified by research team of University of Aveiro for the whole country (Carvalho, Costa, Lykke & Torres, 2014; 2019; Costa, Carvalho & Breda, 2011; Costa et al., 2017).

The work in the tourism industry has showed to be very demanding and arduous, through extensively working hours, night and weekend shifts and the performance of a great range of tasks, despite the fact that most women still perform the double working journey at home (Makanse, 2017, p.107)

Addressing the potential of tourism in combating gender inequalities has become a common theme, and it is clear that employment in this sector can have a positive effect on and contribute to achieving greater equality opportunity (Costa et al., 2015; Moswete & Lacey, 2015). However, some doubts remain, regarding its effectiveness, given that for some authors (Ferguson, 2011; Moreno & Cañada, 2018) this sector is far from being a viable alternative employment route for women, since the repercussions that tourism has on the lives of women who work in it are still widely discussed in the literature.

As mentioned by Ferguson (2011), employment in tourism is based on gender inequalities that provide a large global supply of highly flexible, underpaid workers with entrepreneurial skills. According to 2012 data from *Gender in Tourism*, although women account for about 60.1% of all workers in this sector, their work is mostly unskilled (81.8%), and only 41.1% with management positions. When we consider supervision and coordination roles, women are in a minority (14.1%) compared to men (26.4%) in the tourism sector (GENTOUR, 2012).

The research of Makanse et al. (2018) proposed the use of gender politics to combat the obstacles that women face in tourism sector, that are leading, not to a women emancipation but to a gender inequalities reproduction.

Detailing the complex constrains and possibilities for the interviewed women working in the Douro region can provide useful development implications. There are still a number of obstacles that limit the ability of women to capture tourism-created opportunities. If benefits for women and their employment position in tourism industry want to be maximized, tourism development initiatives must be planned with careful consideration. Therefore, equal politics on gender issues are desired in the territory, aiming to face and challenge the easily perceived inequalities in the region (p. 54).

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Method

Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) is a type of systematic research of personal experience (Tomkins, 2017). Its main purpose is to understand lived experiences by exploring how individuals make sense of their personal and social universe through the meanings that participants give to their experiences (Smith & Osborn, 2008). Based on this understanding, it is used to highlight the individual lived experience of a given phenomenon, based on the study of individuals' perceptions (Jeog & Othman, 2016; Smith, et al., 2009).

In this research, the IPA method proved to be essential in conducting the study as well as in the process of collecting individual interviews. In turn, based on the principle of the hermeneutic cycle, the units of meaning and themes that emerged from the reports and interpretations of the discourse were analyzed, creating relationships between them. Through this process in this study, we sought to give greater consistency to the content of the interviews, providing a better understanding of the themes explored. By using this methodology, it was also intended to secure more accurate results and impose greater clarity on them, based on the commitment that governs this method of analysis — to 'give voice' and 'make sense'. Given the complexity and subjectivity of human behaviour, we understand the importance of trying to explore participants' attitudes more consistently using other information gathering and content analysis tools.

To operationalize this study, a semi-structured questionnaire was constructed and administered to councillors with portfolios related to tourism, employment, social action and education, belonging to eight municipalities in the Douro NUT III region.

3.2 Participants

For this study, a convenience non-probabilistic sample, characteristic of pilot studies, was constituted (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016). The sample was selected based on the experience of people who are responsible for developing actions that minimize gender inequality at the local level. Thus, we restricted five participants, aged between 30 and 50 years old, with a university education, holding councillor positions and assigned portfolios, such as tourism, education, culture, social action, employment and professional qualifications. One of the interviewees was deputy mayor. To be eligible, subjects must meet the following criteria: 1) representatives of the municipal executive with functions and experience in the area of gender inequality 2) voluntary participants.

3.3 Instruments

A semi-structured questionnaire was administered to the interviewees and developed based on the typology of questions suggested by Smith et al., (2009) to apply the phenomenological method (Table 1). The interviews were conducted descriptively and narratively in line with the methodology and collected through audio-recorded. Participants were asked to offer two insights: one more personal, about their own experience as women encountering possible gender discrimination in the political sphere, and the other of a more global nature, which was aimed at uncovering perspectives on the difficulties that other local women face in terms of social and labour aspects in the tourism sector in their municipality.

Table 1. Typology of the questions in the interpretative phenomenological interview.

Typology of the questions	Example
Contextualisation	- <i>How long have you been in office?</i>
Sense/Meaning	- <i>What does gender inequality mean to you?</i>
Narrative	- <i>Can you tell us about the difficulties you have been experiencing throughout your career?</i>
Descriptive	- <i>Where are most of the women in the municipality working?</i>
Evaluative	- <i>How do you view women's participation in leadership or leadership positions?</i>
Comparative	- <i>Do you think women are supported equally with men in this profession?</i>

Source: elaborated by the authors, adapted from the methodology in Smith et al. (2009)

3.4 Procedure

3.4.1 Data collection

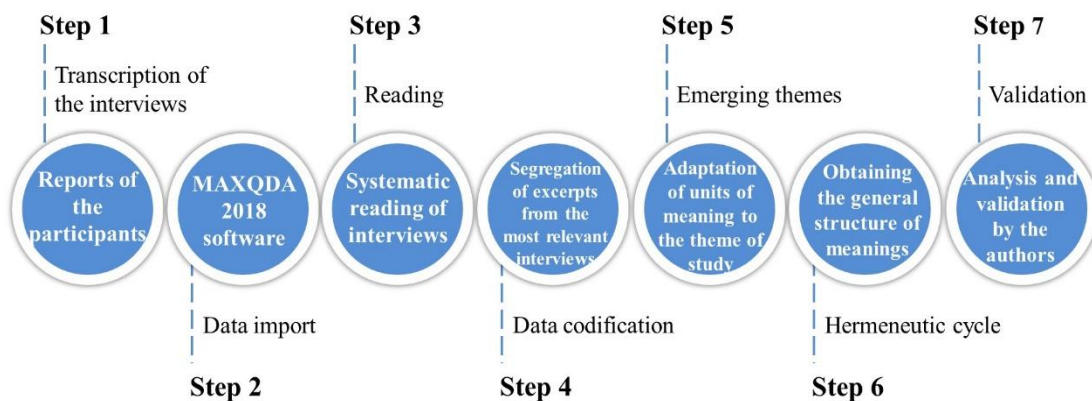
Data were collected between October 2018 and January 2019, and the conditions were the same for all participants: the questionnaire was administered in person by appointment. The collection of interviews was extremely difficult, given that the topic elicited in some local councillors avoidance reactions and a fear of granting the interview. The reports that were collected were considered valid for the purposes of analysis.

3.4.2 Data analysis

The content analysis of the interviews was based on the basic principles that characterize the IPA method (Smith et al., 2009). The transcription of the participants' reports and their organization was completed using the MAXQDA 2018 software, allowing reinforcing the general meaning of the study and, consequently, enabled a more efficient resignification of the interview content, with emphasis on emerging themes and units of meaning. In order to obtain greater consistency in the general structures of meaning and in order to guarantee the most likely interpretations, a circular logic of conjecture and validation was adopted, governed by hermeneutic principles (Giorgi & Sousa, 2010). Then, in order to achieve greater congruence between the emerging themes and units of meaning, a new content analysis of the interviews was carried out.

With the support of the MAXQDA 2018 software, the excerpts of the most relevant interviews (units of meaning) were coded according to the theme under analysis, later converting them into relevant expressions (emerging themes). In the light of the occurrences and relationships between themes established by the analysis software, it was possible to interpret the results in order to establish hierarchies and assumptions between the codifications. It should be noted that the fact that the results come from a process of interpretation means that there is an element of subjectivity. In order to increase the consistency of the codification and interpretation of results, the data were submitted for consideration by the authors, who sought consistency and coherence between the themes and the units of meaning. Figure 1 highlights the seven phases of the data processing and analysis.

Figure 1. Description of the seven-step data analytical process



Source: adapted from Smith et al., (2009), elaborated by the authors.

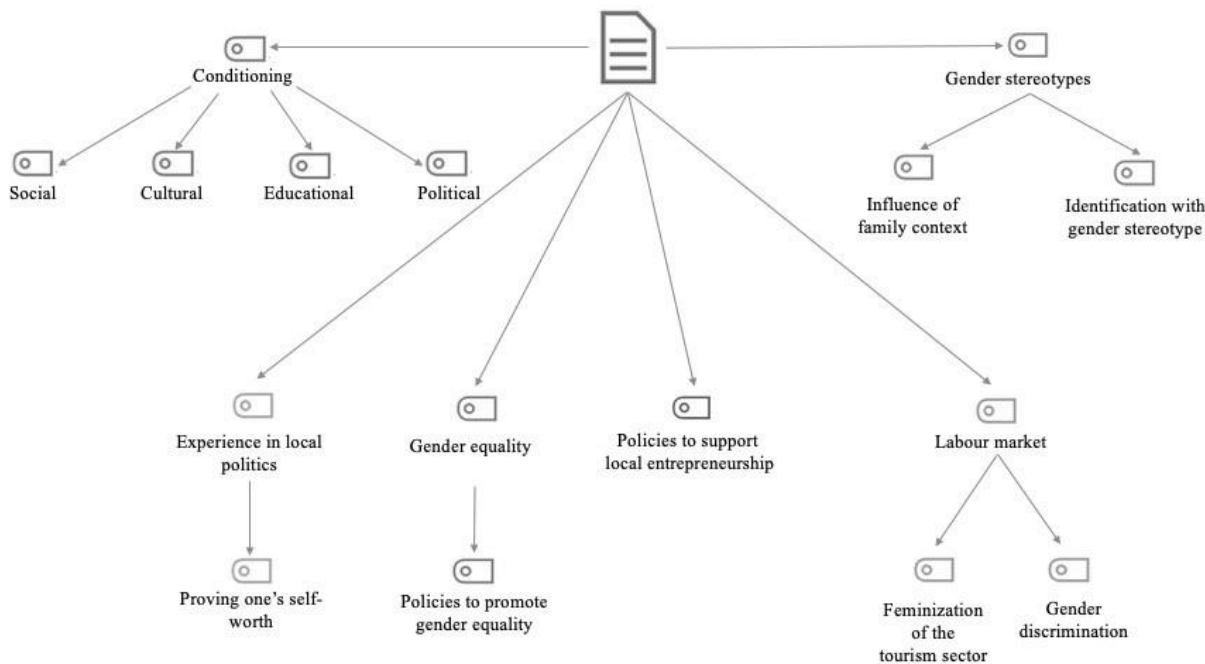
4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The main objective of this study was to analyze the opinions of women with responsibilities in municipal management about gender inequalities in the Douro region. More specifically, it was intended to understand if the individual experiences of the interviewees and their perceptions of their surroundings revealed awareness that the interviewees themselves and other women in the municipality had experienced situations of gender discrimination at work in their municipality. It was also intended to

explore the understanding of the role of municipal institutions not only in promoting gender equality policies, but also in combating the segregation of work by gender locally. The objective was also to examine whether there was a favorable perception of local tourism as a means of overcoming discrimination and the precariousness of female labour for women living in the region.

The results of the content analysis of the semi-structured interviews showed the main emerging categories or themes, characterizing the interviews carried out according to their occurrence (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Map of the global categories obtained from the content analysis of the semi-structured interviews



Source: elaborated by the authors

The phenomenological analysis enabled six themes and 10 emerging sub-themes related to gender discrimination at work to be identified. Table 2 summarizes the content of the units of meaning assigned in the content analysis of the interviews. After a detailed and systematic analysis of the data collected, it was confirmed that there was a clear approach by the participants to the main themes associated with gender inequality in the workplace.

According to the participants' discourse, there are four types of conditioning that influence discriminatory attitudes and behaviours on the basis of gender in the region. In general, for these participants social, cultural, educational and political types of conditioning have a mediating effect on the role of women in the workplace and in society. The fact that differences in treatment based on gender prevail, appears to be intimately connected to perceptions of common practice in daily life, although most respondents recognize that often this understanding of the role of women is morally and legally wrong, as Costa et al., (2015) refer.

Given their experience in local politics, the participants are unanimous about the need to prove their own worth. According to them, because they are women, they need to demonstrate and exert more effort than men to show that they are capable and deserve the position they hold. Also, it can be seen from their statements that they feel an additional pressure at work and are being constantly evaluated by local society according to the perspective of Tharenou, (2005).

Based on councillors' reports the local belief persists that women are naturally second to men. In this sense, participants contend that education and politics play an important role in combating these stereotyped beliefs imposed by local culture and society. Most of these women realize the importance of the intervening role of local politics in the fight against this social paradigm, but they admit that there are no known gender equality promotion policies that encourage changes in discriminatory attitudes and promoters of inequality, as suggested by Gournick et al., (2008).

With regard to gender issues, participants reported that there is a tendency for more women than men to work in tourism-related activities, which contributes significantly to the feminization of the sector. The interviews suggest that in terms of employment, tourism in this region is a lever for women, being

the main employment sector that contributes to their emancipation, being in line with Moswete and Lacey, (2015).

Table 2. Structure of the units of meaning

Themes	Subthemes	Units of meaning
Conditioning	Cultural	<i>(...) it's cultural, and it's going to be centuries before we can change that (...) the ladies are those who take care of (...)</i>
	Political	<i>(...) I think it's really bad that there is a law that requires a percentage of women in politics (...) it was the only way we could gain any entrance (...)</i>
	Social Educational	<i>(...) when one of us doesn't make dinner we are discriminated against by the whole society (...) (...) we have no notion of it at the time but stereotypes start in pre-primary, in education (...)</i>
Experience in local politics	Proving one's self-worth	<i>(...) we have to prove what we are worth every day, and there are men who are worth nothing and do not have to prove it (...)</i>
Gender equality	Policies to promote gender equality	<i>(...) we provide no specific help, but we are helping to do what we can (...)</i>
Policies to support local entrepreneurship		<i>(...) There are community funds (...) then there were some calls, one or the other from Tourism de Portugal, four calls, we tried to disseminate them, we also tried with projects, we tried to involve private individuals, we also tried to support them to do these projects (...)</i>
Labour market	Feminisation of the tourism sector	<i>(...) of course the restaurant also has a lot of women in the kitchen (...) the typical gastronomy is very linked to women and unfortunately tourism for women goes through the kitchen, unfortunately still only goes through this (...)</i>
	Gender discrimination	<i>(...) they haven't come home yet, we go out to the street and when we go back we have everything waiting, as we left it in the morning (...) then if it's not done at home it's all our fault and they can go out and have a beer on the terrace to relax and we have to iron (...)</i>
Gender stereotypes	Influence of family context	<i>(...) I am grateful for the education I had because in my house my father and my mother always got along very well and I never understood this inequality (...)</i>
	Identification with gender stereotype	<i>(...) We have home life, we have children, but as much a man helps, the woman is the woman (...) it's really for men and that's why women will never be able to cross men's border (...)</i>

Source: elaborated by the authors

According to the interviews, a common feeling prevails among participants that there is no *gender equality* between men and women. In their view, the local labour market itself is responsible for promoting labour segregation, often associating women with seasonal and precarious work, and men with continuous and well-paid work. Overall, the interviewees admit that this trend is somewhat contradicted in political terms, given the fact that they mostly hire women for schools and social welfare organizations (IPSSs). Although this reality is not a previously established measure in the fight against women's unemployment, it stands out for being its sole or main route of local employability for women, which ultimately reinforces horizontal segregation, as the study of Singh, (2007) reinforces.

Within municipalities, women in the Douro region are often employed in agricultural work, IPSS and educational institutions. In the case of agriculture, women are subjected to seasonality, like men, but earn lower wages in the same position. With regard to municipally funded social institutions, normally women are allocated in articulation with the employment center through fixed-term employment

contracts. In the tourism context, the interviews show that women are mainly employed in hotels, craftsmanship, and restaurants, and are also subject to the seasonality of tourist demand.

According to councillors' opinions, the main employers in the municipalities in the Douro region, are still the municipalities themselves and the municipal concession institutions (IPSS, clusters of schools, community care homes, etc.). Local entrepreneurship initiatives and municipal resources to encourage the creation of self-employment by locals are scarce, from the latter depending on European Community funds and frustrated by the complexity of the legislation with which these types of projects are associated.

In terms of employment within the tourism industry women are more closely linked to the hotel, restaurant and handicraft sectors; this trend is closely related to the cultural principles that characterize the Douro region. Regarding this issue, the participants declare that there is no consistent political criterion for the entrepreneurial initiatives that emerge in the various municipalities and that support policies for local entrepreneurship are essentially based on monitoring and supporting applications to EU community funds to create own job. The images associated with the role of women, as caregiver, cook and artisan, tend to fit women to similar services catering to local tourist demands, showing that existing policies are indirectly promoting the feminization of the tourism sector, since local supply mainly focuses on activities that women tend to perform, as evidenced by Baum (2013).

Although the interviewees understand the importance of building an educational base and political actions that can help to eradicate this social scourge, they warn of the extreme difficulty of changing mindsets and behaviours that are strongly rooted in the local culture. According to their personal experience, *gender stereotypes* are still prevalent, such as the fact that a wife's life is managed according to her husband's wishes, and accepted by the local community (Grau and Zotos, 2016).

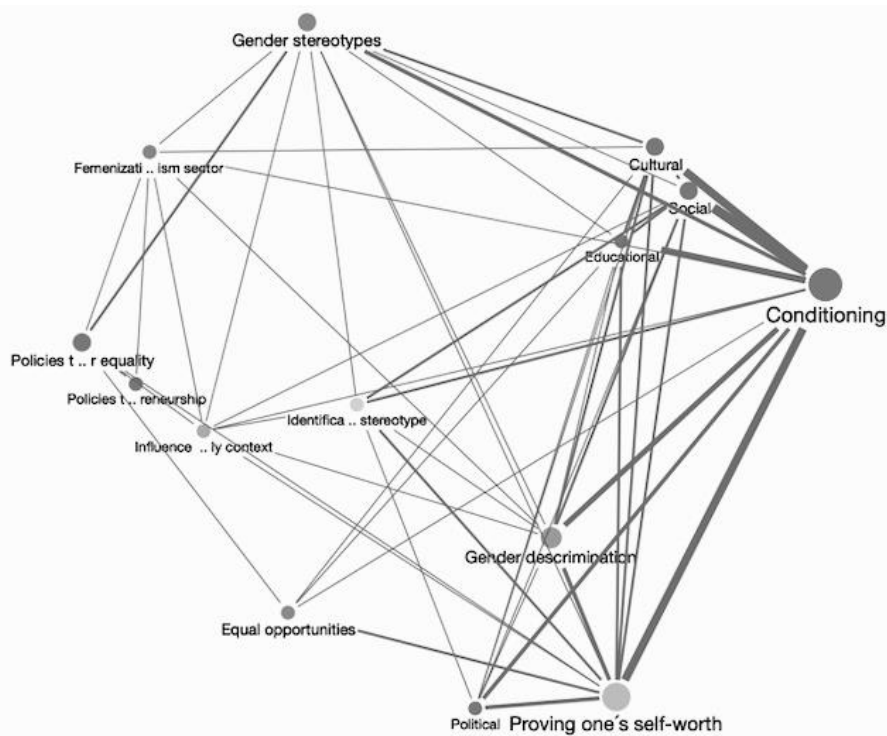
As mentioned by the interviewees, there is a factor that affects the way they perceive and face discriminatory attitudes expressed by the opposite gender. According to them, family context is a source key influence on women's position at work and in social life. They argue that the acceptance of discriminatory behaviour depends mainly on how it has been expressed within the family, so if parents do not educate their children with gender inequalities when building their personality, they are less likely to be exposed to discriminatory behaviour or attitudes in adulthood (Padavic, Ely, and Reid, 2020).

The narratives of some of the interviewees' shows that there is also an identification with gender stereotypes in their lived experience. When they claim that 'there are things for men and things for women' as well as when they point out that 'women will never be able to cross the men's border' and 'because then I have my family life and want it or not, we women we are always more concerned than men', we understand that there may be complacent attitudes towards some common stereotypes among the local population. This formation is in accordance with what was studied by Frolova et al., (2017).

Figure 3 allows us to understand the relationship between emerging themes and the level of saturation in the interviewees' discourse. Thus, we found that the most dominant themes refer to conditioning, proving one's self-worth, gender stereotypes and gender discrimination. The set of relationships demonstrate that the subject matter of study — gender discrimination — is strongly associated with the various types of *conditioning*, together with evidencing one's self-worth. This connection suggests that the social, political, cultural and educational barriers pointed out by the interviewees seem to have a relevant influence on discriminatory attitudes and behaviours on women, which encourages them to adopt a behaviour that proves their value and positioning in the labour market.

The participants revealed a feeling of frustration and indignation, due to a problem awareness, the inability to fight it based on the labour and social exclusion to which women are subjected, and a feeling of powerlessness in the face of scarce opportunities at the local level to address the precariousness of employment characteristic of the northern interior of Portugal. On the other hand, the interviewees reported that tourism has gained notoriety in the Douro region and has boosted the most disadvantaged regions. However, they pointed out that little had been done in the fight against the main endemic weaknesses of these municipalities. Locally, the growth in the sector appeared to be insufficiently consistent and broad to generate improvements in the quality of life of locals or help tackle social issues such as gender discrimination behaviours.

Figure 3. Occurrence of relationships between emerging themes identified in this study



Source: elaborated by the authors

Similarly, it seems that cultural, educational and social constraints cement the permanence of gender stereotypes in local communities. The fact that the interviewees did not describe any concrete policies to promote gender equality demonstrates little evidence of combat against inequality, which tends to perpetuate and contribute to a continuous flow of dissemination of gender stereotypes.

Based on the experiences described by the interviewees, women's participation in the local labour market appears to be influenced by social, cultural, educational and political conditioning of women. The barriers imposed by deep-rooted gender stereotypes have a considerable mediating effect on the conduct of women in social and work contexts. The historical context and traditions of the communities in the Douro region seem to have contributed to the endorsement of gender segmentation, leaving women in situations of inferiority and subordination within the family and society in general. Transversally, there seems to be municipal support against gender-based violence in conjunction with other public bodies, however local policies to combat gender discrimination in its entirety appear not to exist.

The results also indicate a significant relationship between political conditioning and proving self-worth. This trend seems to come from the fact that the parity law, which decrees that at a minimum woman should comprise one third of the members of municipal executives, enables women to assume prominent positions, but also puts pressure on them to prove to the opposite gender that they are competent and that they do not only hold office due to a legal imposition.

It was clear from this research that women in positions of political responsibility at the same level as men need to constantly prove their own worth and merit to be seen as competent and deserving of their duties. This subjugation appears to be a subjective norm that condition women's performance in positions of greater exposure and social mediatism. From their lived perspective, interviewees partly attribute the responsibility for such judgments to the discriminatory imposition of the parity law, the fact that their position is due to legal imposition may induce censorious behaviour and attitudes in co-workers. On the other hand, some of the interviewees stated that if it were not for legal enforcement, women would not have been able to gain a place in municipal representation and management positions.

According to the councillors' statements, the fact that there is a certain identification with attitudes and behaviours aligned to gender stereotypes is related to the influence of the social, cultural and educational barriers that exist locally. These constraints are believed to be a determining factor in constructing perceptions conducive to gender stereotypes. Although it is perceived that women are exposed to environmental conditioning, there are different attitudes and behaviours towards gender discrimination.

On the one hand, there is a posture of habituation and acceptance by some, as opposed to others, who assume a posture of nonconformity and combat towards this problematic.

From the reports, it can also be seen that opinions about gender inequality result mainly from their perceptions of the judgments/social impositions of their community. Apparently, there is a conscious subjugation to local values and beliefs, which are understood and accepted as subjective norms, common among peers coexisting in the various communities where the interviewees reside.

From another perspective, table 3 helps us to understand, in a segmented way, each interviewee’s contribution to the identification of emerging themes according to their reports. In individual terms, it is obvious perceived that the categories prove one’s self-worth, gender discrimination and gender stereotypes are common realities to all interviewees when confronted with gender inequality issues in the local labour market context.

Table 3. Occurrence of emerging themes identified in this study

	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6
Equal opportunities	3	0	0	2	1	6
Policies to promote gender equality	2	1	0	4	1	2
Policies to support local entrepreneurship	0	1	0	3	0	0
Cultural	5	0	0	2	1	5
Political	0	1	1	1	0	4
Social	1	0	2	4	2	5
Educational	2	0	0	3	0	2
Identification with gender stereotype	0	0	3	0	1	1
Influence of family context	1	0	0	0	3	1
Proving one’s self-worth	4	3	5	5	4	3
Gender discrimination	2	1	1	2	7	6
Femenization of the tourism sector	3	1	0	1	0	2
Gender stereotypes	4	1	3	1	1	3

source: elaborated by the authors

In terms of occurrence, the categories *equal opportunities* (6), *cultural conditioning* (5), *social conditioning* (5), *prove self-worth* (5) and *gender discrimination* (7) are evidenced by their frequency in the interviewees' reports. According to the same data, Participant 1 (P1), Participant 4 (P4) and Participant 6 (P6) appeared to contribute to a greater number of themes and subthemes in their testimonies.

Overall, based on table 3, it can be seen that participants obvious report on gender inequality issues and the conditions that may underlie certain discriminatory attitudes and behaviours in their community in a work context.

Using the analysis software MAXQDA 2018 it was also possible to build a word cloud (Figure 5) consisting of a simpler lexical analysis, highlighting the most influential words in the corpus of the interviews. Based on Figure 5, we can see the most common set of words in the interviewees' reports that are associated most strongly with gender inequality: women, tourism, men, Douro, municipality, county, work, companies, housing, capacity, professional, opinion, training, measure, region, life, discrimination and support. This output reflects the keywords, which, in turn, reflect the existence of this problem in the Douro region.

Although this paper is a pilot study with a convenience sample, we believe that these preliminary results are important for the development of new studies on this subject, providing an important thematic and methodological contribution to further research. Thus, giving this paper greater relevance and originality, in an attempt to better understand the attitudes and behaviours of people holding representative positions. Future studies should try to explore and understand other topics that were highlighted in the literature review and not covered by this study. It is suggested that future investigations expand the sample scope to another audience, in order to obtain more representative results. From a global perspective, the research adequately integrated and interconnected the various theoretical frameworks, despite the scarcity and insufficiency of enlightening empirical studies in this area.

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Acknowledgements

The authors of this study are grateful to all municipalities that made it possible to conduct interviews with members of the executive.

Funding

This study was financed: by the European structural and investment funds (European Regional Development Fund) through the Programa Operacional Competitividade e Internacionalização (COMPETE 2020) [Project nº 006971 (UID/SOC/04011); Funding reference: POCI-01-0145-FEDER-006971]; by national funds through FCT – Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia under the project UID/SOC/04011/2013; and by the project I& DOUROTUR – Tourism and technological innovation in the Douro, operation nº NORTE-01-0145-FEDER-000014, co-funded by the European Regional Development Fund through NORTE 2020 (Programa Operacional Regional do Norte 2014/2020)