

1. The Research Question

The aim of my project is to identify those factors that lead to different labour market patterns for women in post-industrial countries. The kind of question that I have in mind could be formulated as follows:

Why are there different possibilities for female labour market outcomes, trajectories, patterns... in different countries? More specifically, why is the distribution (of income, of the types of jobs that women can get...) more egalitarian for women in some contexts than in others?

2. Its Relevance

The theoretical background of the topic relies, in my opinion, on the confluence of three traditions of literature that are fundamental to understand some of the classic and contemporary social research.

- Firstly, the kind of studies that have dealt with social stratification patterns on which much of the origins of Sociology can be found.
- Secondly, the growing field of atypical types of employment deriving from de-regulation of some labour contexts and the gender studies regarding labour market.
- Lastly, the welfare provision literature connected with the kind of approach that governments take about social inequalities.

The relevance of the topic is not limited to its well-established theoretical backgrounds. In my opinion, the research question has very important implications for the economic and political fields. On the one hand, from an economic point of view, labour market

(de)regulations and the outcomes associated to them are one of the most debated and controversial issues in post-industrial countries. The question of how to deal with inequalities through state provision, on the other hand, has traditionally been a critical point in the political arena and one of the debates in which, historically, left and right policies have been more diverging.

3. The Variables and their Operationalization

What I intend to do is not a study of female labour market trajectories compared to those enjoyed by men, but rather a comparison among women in a country and women owning similar characteristics in other(s). So, I am not so much concerned with gender inequality but rather with inequality among women. This is, to my understanding, one of the strongest points in my research, as the greatest part of the research concerning women in labour markets has compared women's situation with men's one, but has underdeveloped –as well theoretically as empirically- the inequality of women as a group.

Although at this stage I have not decided yet the specific operationalization of my variables, some of the possibilities are as follows:

- Dependent variable: inequality in the distribution of a labour market outcome (that could be income, type of jobs that women can get, career trajectories...)
- Independent variables:
 - Women's personal characteristics: such as educational attainment, class origins, marital status, child(ren)...

- Institutional factors: such as labour market reforms with direct or indirect effects on women, welfare provision that enhances or inhibits their participation and labour attainment...

What I find interesting in the kind of design that I have in mind is its dynamic approach (dealing with individual data for women's trajectories over time) combined with the introduction of macro-level variables that interact with the individual-level ones. This aim implies a diachronic analysis within countries that I would like to complement with a comparison of two or three countries among each other. The specific form of the comparative method (be it a most similar cases design or a most dissimilar cases one) is still an undecided issue. One of the possibilities is to select similarly regulated labour markets that end up in different patterns of female inequality; alternatively, I could compare countries with diverging degrees of labour market regulations but similar patterns of female labour (in)equality. Of course, alternative country selections can be made up attending not to the degree of regulation but to any other relevant variable.

4. Available Data Sources

As far as I know, the only data set that provides with comparable longitudinal information for women is the FFS (Family and Fertility Survey), but the labour market data is not its strongest part. Other labour market data sets have much good information but also different designs in each country, so that the comparability is not guaranteed.