



Interview with [Carmen Herrero](#) (Universidad de Alicante)

COSME: *Dear Carmen, thanks for agreeing to this interview. We would like to start with a couple of questions regarding your career and your research.*

How did you decide to become an economist? (or to pursue a PhD in economics)

Carmen: Actually, I do not have any degree in Economics. Both my undergraduate and my PhD are in Mathematics. I enter Economics by chance: at some point my Department sent me to teach Maths in the Economics Department, and this way I contacted some fellow economists. Then I participated in a meeting in Mexico, and there I met Salvador Barberá and Joan María Esteban, and they were pushing me in learning Economics and working on that. I then spent one year in Oxford, informally following courses at the time I started my research....this was the starting point.

COSME: *What are your most and least favorite parts of your job as a research economist?*

Carmen: My most favorite part is when the ideas start to appear. You are facing a problem and then you think of ways of pursuing a solution. The feeling of viewing a path is exciting. Also I enjoy presenting in seminars and meetings. My least favorite part is the intermediate polishing of the papers, when you start having a product but you know that it is still a lot to do before it is something you can submit. Nonetheless, I also enjoy the final steps of this procedure.

COSME: *What do you consider your best work and why?*

Carmen: It is difficult to say, since I have worked in many different topics. In the axiomatics of distributive problems, there are several papers that have become standard references in the field. In Health Economics there are also a few papers with important contributions, as the adjustments to avoid discrimination for handicapped people and the new way of looking at the universalization of some screening programs, that have been recognized in practice.

COSME: *Now we would like to know about your experience regarding gender in our profession.*

In the departments where you have worked, what was the representation of women among the faculty?

Carmen: In my Department the representation of women is not bad: 12 out of 35. Furthermore, 4 full professors out of 12 are women. We have a better share than in other Departments

COSME: *Do you think gender plays a role, either in terms of how well you work with different colleagues (coauthors), or in terms of the recognition of your work (or in any other dimension)?*

Carmen: This is difficult to say. I had some problems at the beginning of my career because of my gender (it was clear in those days, and made explicit even at some points). From my side, I never had any problem with coauthors: I work equally well irrespective of their gender. Other characteristics are more important. About recognition, I cannot say. I tend to think that the lack of recognition may have more to do with your own ambition in trying better journals (or in some occasions with information) rather than with gender.

The only problem that differentiates the possibilities of women vs men in academia has to do with the inability to fulfill simultaneously the role of housewife (specially motherhood) and the time you need for research. What happens in many cases is that research goes last: as teaching is unavoidable, many promising women delay research, and most likely they miss the opportunity of a career.

COSME: *Did you have any female mentors or role models? How about male mentors?*

Carmen: I do not have any female mentor, but I have male mentors. About role models, yes: Birgit Grodal, Marilda Sotomayor and Françoise Forges, to mention some.

COSME: *Are you a mentor to junior women economists? Do you consider this important? What is the gender composition of the PhD students you have advised so far?*

Carmen: Yes, there are several junior women that frequently ask me for advice. Among my PhD students I have 4 women out of 15.

COSME: *What advice would you give to research economists starting their career, particularly women?*

Carmen: I would tell them to work hard, be ambitious and cooperate. I faced cases where very promising women abandon early due to their couple. I tried to make them understand that love cannot prevent fulfillment, but this is difficult to understand at early ages...

COSME: *What do you think about department policies that extend the tenure clock to women or both men and women when they have children?*

Carmen: I think this is a sensible policy. An alternative is to reduce teaching load temporarily, provided that research is unaffected.

COSME: *What do you think are the most interesting questions still to be answered regarding the economic behaviors of men versus women?*

Carmen: I think that the most important point is to change the role of women vs men in general. Education in gender equity is still a pending subject. It has to do with discrimination at all levels, from violence to salary discrimination. And it is worrying the way teenager women think and act in this respect in a large part of our societies.

COSME: *What do you think could be done in order to promote gender equality in our profession?*

Carmen: I am not in favor in principle of affirmative action, but I recognize that in some cases it is justified. Favoring women under similar background and research outcome could be of

interest, but I prefer indirect measures as the one I mentioned before of reducing teaching load when having small children.

Nonetheless, the most important required change is of cultural nature: to reach a point in which both men and women see each other as equal in capabilities, duties and responsibility.

Thanks again for your time.