COSME

Committee on the situation of women in economics

Newsletter 2019: Interview to Maria Guadalupe

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INSEAD

Maria Guadalupe was one of the keynote speakers at the XII Gender Economic Workshop held in Madrid

COSME: We would like to start with a couple of questions regarding your career and your research. How did you decide to become an economist?

MARIA GUADALUPE: Honestly, I wanted to study political science because I (poor naïve me) wanted to go into politics and, this is going to sound terrible, "change the world". Then I decided that political science would not be so useful so I decided to do law and economics instead, which I thought would be more useful. I registered in both degrees at the University of Barcelona and after one year of law I decided I did not like it while I loved economics. And that was it....

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

MARIA GUADALUPE: My favorite is the opportunity to think freely about new and big ideas. The least favorite is spending a lot of time (and I mean A LOT) reviewing and re-writing papers as a response to referees. While some of that is undoubtedly useful and a lot of the referee process makes the papers better, a lot of it I also think is socially wasteful. Science would move faster if referees "relaxed" a little.

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

MARIA GUADALUPE: This is like asking which of your children you love most....I cannot answer that question, I think the work with Catherine Thomas and Olga Kuzimina on multinationals and productivity and what we are doing now on firm matching is fascinating and important, the work with Mireia Gine and Vicente Cuñat on estimating causal effects

of corporate governance is also very valuable and has provided new insights, the work with Lucia del Carpio on social identity as a key driver of women's decisions is also very important. I am also really proud of my incursion into theater with Joe Salvatore when we recreated the 2016 presidential debates with the candidates' gender inverted. I really cannot chose!

COSME: Now we would like to know about your experience regarding gender composition in the profession. In the departments where you have worked, what was the representation of women among the faculty?

MARIA GUADALUPE: Almost non-existent in the senior ranks, some more women in the junior ranks. For example, I am the only senior woman in my current department. But I just came from a conference and the energy and quality of work among junior women was really amazing, so I predict things will look different in 10 years. If they do not, then this means the problem I even worse than I thought.

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)? For instance, were you surprised with the findings in a recent paper by Alice H. Wu, a current Harvard PhD student, quantifying strong gender stereotypes in the site econjobmarketrumors.com?

MARIA GUADALUPE: Definitely. Look at the list of people I listed earlier as coauthors: there are many more women than men, and this is not representative of the profession. I just heard about a paper that shows that at the NBER conferences, the average woman who is invited to present or discuss has twice as many citations as the average man. Or the work by David Card, Stefano Dellavigna and coauthors shows that papers published by women in top 5 journals are much more cited, suggesting that women have a higher bar to get in those journals. And this is in a context where we are supposedly encouraging women participation and people fear the bar is being lowered for women! well, it seems that the bar is still much higher.

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

MARIA GUADALUPE: I went to the LSE for my PhD and there were not many female professors. I had some great mentors but they were all men. I wish I had been able to study in an environment where there were several string women, with different styles, so that I would have internalized those as role models. I think a lot of it operates at the subconscious level.

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

MARIA GUADALUPE: If your institution does not give you one, find a mentor. And also look for role models, people that inspire you and you would like to emulate. I think the fact that Esther Duflo won the Nobel prize this year is great for our junior women joining the profession: she is an amazing role model.

COSME: Now a couple of policy questions. Women are still underrepresented in some fields, particularly in STEM. Do you have any suggestion to increase their participation in STEM degrees?

MARIA GUADALUPE: I think there should be more proactive programs to provide role models to smart women in school and high school so that they feel they can do a scientific career. Since this is not naturally occurring today, we should go out of our way to help them make decisions that are "gender-neutral" and given the current gender imbalances, that means being active in those crucial years.

COSME: What do you think about the selection process (hiring and promotion) in our profession? Do you think it is gender neutral?

MARIA GUADALUPE: I have no data to prove it at the recruiting stage, but the evidence I cited earlier about networks like the NBER and the publication data suggests a clear handicap in promotion. At the recruiting level I do not know, but the dean at my school (Laurence Capron, a woman) recently instaured a recommended policy which is to track that we interview a fraction of women that is proportional to the fraction of women produced by PhD programs we are recruiting from. This is not saying you have to hire them, but that you have to at least look at them. I think policies like this will help promoting women without being heavy handed and finding too much opposition.