

Gender inequality and **female managers in the tourism sector**: An analysis of **glass ceiling factors**

MÓNICA SEGOVIA PÉREZ * [monica.segovia@urjc.es]

CONCEPCIÓN DE LA FUENTE CABRERO ** [concepción.delafuente@urjc.es]

PILAR TALÓN BALLESTEROS *** [pilar.talon@urjc.es]

LYDIA GONZÁLEZ SERRANO **** [lydia.gonzalez@urjc.es]

Keywords | Class ceiling, Women, Tourism, Managers, Loss of talent.

International research focused on women and the glass ceiling in the tourism industry is limited and almost inexistent in Spain. This fact contrasts with the important role that the tourism sector plays in the Spanish economy. Analysis of the glass ceiling and the factors that influence its existence is particularly important from the human resources point of view, since it represents a loss of talent, which the sector cannot afford to waste presently.

Numerous studies have cited the barriers that prevent women accessing upper management positions. In particular, most of the authors who study this variable (e.g. Falkenberg, 1990; Brett & Stroh, 1997; Powell, 1999; Sarrió, Barberá, Ramos & Candela, 2002; Cohen & Huffman, 2003; Albrecht, Björklund & Vroman, 2003) point out the existence of a series of social and personal factors, which lead to the underrepresentation of women in management positions.

These factors can be divided into two different groups: external factors (EF), on which women have less influence, or, internal factors (IF), on which women can exert their influence in the decision making process. According to this classification, the main factors that determine the glass ceiling would be:

- i) Internal factors (IF): Among the internal factors, educational training (both the level and the type of studies) and aspects related to family and the role that women play in this area are quite common.
- ii) External factors (EF): Those that have a direct impact on women's careers, and may have their origin in their own natural environment, as for instance, sociocultural factors, corporate culture and company policies.

From this theoretical framework, a study designed in three major phases using methodological triangulation was conducted. A combination of qualitative methods (in-depth interviews and the use of bibliometric-secondary sources) and quantitative techniques (including census and surveys) were deployed. This paper presents the findings gathered during

* **PhD in Sociology** from the Universidad Complutense de Madrid (Spain). **Director of the Sociology Programme** at the Universidad Rey Juan Carlos (Spain).

** **PhD in Business Administration** from the Universidad Rey Juan Carlos. **Vice-dean** of the Faculty of Social Science and Law of the Universidad Rey Juan Carlos (Spain).

*** **PhD in Advanced Marketing** from the Universidad Rey Juan Carlos. **Vice-dean** of the Faculty of Tourism Science of the Universidad Rey Juan Carlos (Spain).

**** **PhD in Business Administration** from the Universidad Rey Juan Carlos. **Associate Professor** at the Universidad Rey Juan Carlos (Spain).

the third phase, whose objective was to analyze the employment situation of women in the hotel sector, thus identifying the factors that lead to the glass ceiling in the tourism sector, within the Community of Madrid.

The survey was conducted on the basis of 261 three, four and five star hotels within the Community of Madrid. Nevertheless, this unit of analysis (universe) did not focus on the number of hotels but on the number of women holding management positions in this realm. Given that there were not prior or actual figures available on the number of females in top-managing positions, for the purpose of designing the study, data gathered in a census performed in previous phases of the project was extrapolated. As a result of this, a questionnaire was sent out to the total number of women holding decision-making positions; at the same time one acknowledges the scope of the study would be reduced to hotels with less than 200 rooms, where the only existing managerial position is held by a General Director. Finally, a total of 196 responses were obtained, which represents 32% of the total of females in senior management positions.

Empirical data obtained throughout the research process reveals that senior management positions in three, four and five star hotels, as well as in hotel chains, not only are mainly male-dominated, but also there is gender stereotyping in some of these positions (e.g. hotel reception (75%), housekeeping (100%)). Thus, it is clear to us that the glass ceiling phenomenon exists in the hospitality industry.

The results obtained from the investigation support most of the literature review identified regarding the characteristics of the glass ceiling in the tourism industry. One of the key drivers for the situation of women in high positions in the hospitality industry is the traditional-familiar culture that surrounds hotel management and that has an important impact on certain positions.

The findings indicate that the hospitality industry is still a traditional sector, where managerial positions continue to be mainly male-dominated and there is also a strong stereotyping of certain posts. On the other hand, another reason is the difficulty in reconciling work and family life, since geographical mobility, flexibility and 24-hour availability per day (especially during the first few years of motherhood) plays a determinant role. In a nutshell, family is a pivotal factor that is likely to influence women's careers, since these relegate their professional development, by deciding not to advance the corporate ladder in management and executive positions and adopt a more active role in family life.

References |

- Albrecht, J., Björklund, A., & Vroman, S. (2003). Is there a glass ceiling in Sweden?, *Journal of Labor Economics*, 21(1), 145-177.
- Brett, J. M. & Stroh, L. K. (1997). Jumping ship: Who benefits from an external labor market career strategy?. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 82(3), 331-341.
- Cohen, P. N., & Huffman, M. L. (2003). Individuals, jobs, and labor markets: The devaluation of women's work. *American Sociological Review*, 68(3), 443-463.
- Falkenberg, L. (1990). Improving the accuracy of stereotypes within the workplace. *Journal of Management*, 16(1), 107-118.
- Powell, G. N. (1999). *Reflections on the glass ceiling: Recent trends and future prospects*. In G. N. Powell (Ed.), *Handbook of gender and work* (pp. 325-345). Thousand Oaks, London: Sage.
- Sarrió, M., Barberá, E., Ramos, A., & Candela, C. (2002). El techo de cristal en la promoción profesional de las mujeres. *Revista de Psicología Social*, 17(2), 167-182.