GENDER DIVERSITY AND GOVERNANCE: AN EXPLORATIVE STUDY OF ITALIAN UNIVERSITIES

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Structure

- Setting of the study
- Aims
- Literature and institutional context
- Methodology and methods
- Analysis of results
- Conclusions and implications
Proportion of men and women in academic career in 2010 in EU-27 and in 2011 in Italy (European Union, 2013; Sagramora and Morana, 2013)
Setting of the study: Universities

- Low proportion of women in academic career (leaky-pipeline effect)
- Glass ceiling effect
- Low involvement of women in strategic decisions (36% in EU-27 vs 17% in Italy)
- Different wage distribution
Differences between the yearly salaries of male and female researchers as a percentage, year 2006 (European Commission, 2007)
Aims

- Analyzing the extent to what female academic are involved in the top level governance structure of Italian public universities
  - Does the institutional pressure made by the last reform of universities (Gelmini’s Law 240/2010) contributed to a formal change?
  - The extent to which universities have complied with their regulations, implementing positive actions for gender equality in the definition of the university’s governance structure.
  - The composition of academic bodies, board and academic senate, based on gender, in order to detect the presence of a less represented gender.
Literature

- Three sex-role centered theories explain the glass ceiling effect and the low level of influence of women in the workplace (Hull and Umansky, 1997)
  - Person-centered theory
  - Structural-centered theory
  - Bias-centered theory
Institutional context

- Italian Constitution 1948 – gender equality;
- Law 215/1992 provided financial incentives to firms with predominant female participation, or to institutions that promoted women's entrepreneurship;
- EU Recommendation Rec(2003)3 of the Committee of Ministers (Council of Europe, 2003) referred to measures to improve equality between women and men in the participation of political and public decision making;
- Law 120/2011 - The participation of women on company boards has been regulated with regard to listed companies. The number of members of the less represented gender on a board should not be less than one-third.
Institutional context

- Law 240/2010 (Gelmini’s Law) – Universities’ reform states the equal opportunity principle. A detailed legislation is missing and the establishment of rules on equal opportunities in statutes and regulations has been delegated to the autonomy of the universities.

- A patchy situation can be depicted when discussing academic senate and board of directors composition
Methodology and methods

- 64 public universities were considered.
- Universities’ official acts were collected through a web analysis.
- A basic descriptive content analysis to classify the information included in statutes and regulations of the universities has been conducted; the approach used is a quantitative one. Spearman’s rho was calculated.
- Data on the composition of the academic bodies, the board and the senate, were collected to assess the extent to what the top governance boards of universities were formally aligned to the gender equality principle.
The assessment of gender equality in the composition of the university boards was made considering the minimum target concerning gender representation as defined by Law 215 of 2012 with regards to the governance of local governments, the latter was considered a proxy target for the university organizations. That law fixed a maximum level of two-thirds representation of one gender.
Analysis of results: board of directors

62% of universities inserting a results’ obligation have respected it.
Analysis of results: academic senate

57% of universities inserting a results’ obligation have respected it.
Composition of University boards

Board of directors:
- Women: 24%
- Men: 76%

Academic senate:
- Women: 25%
- Men: 75%
Conclusions

- Normative interventions (such as Gelmini's Law) do not necessarily influence organizations' behavior.
- Which is the role given to non academic women in the university boards?
- Further issues require to be investigated:
  - Female academics barriers to reach top governance positions;
  - University resistances to gender equality.
Thank you!