

Chapter 23

“Female Charm”: Women’s Role in Tourism Internationalization, Innovation, and Networking Strategies

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ABSTRACT

A significant challenge faced by the tourism and hospitality industries in a rapidly changing world, is the ability to sustain organisational growth. Some of the main strategies for achieving organisational growth are those related to innovation, internationalisation and networking. Addressing tourism studies’ contemporary shift to a focus on social influences, this study investigates the relations between gender and organisational growth. Qualitative analysis of focus groups with managers from the seven administrative regions in Portugal provides an in-depth account of tourism and gender issues based on empirical evidence. Viewing the ways in which tourism managers contribute to organisational growth through the angle of gender, this chapter provides a compelling account of the delicate and often invisible interactions between economic and social transactions. Results illustrate how women as a labour source are paradoxically viewed as both an asset and an impediment to organisational growth strategies.

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INTRODUCTION

Creating gender analyses of tourism processes is essential for a more holistic representation of today's reality (Ferguson & Alarcón, 2015). This is because gender roles and relations silently order social dynamics, thus invisibly influencing economic structures, such as organizational growth strategies. There is a need to investigate the ways in which gender influences the discourses surrounding gendered economic structures, in order to open space for alternative conceptualizations of the economy that are more realistic and representative of people's experiences. Since the underlying processes of the economy are constituted through economic discourse (Barker, 2005), where discourse is created through language, social institutions and practices, the ways in which economic discourse is gendered, is investigated in this study through qualitative analysis.

Drawing on feminist economics theorizing, such as Gibson and Graham's (2006) feminist analysis of the capitalist economic system, this paper aims to expose the ways in which the organizational growth strategies of internationalization, innovation and networking are gendered.

The subject area of tourism is currently characterised by a critical turn as scholars are increasingly questioning the social constructions that act to maintain unequal power relations and the structures upholding socio-economic processes that restrict human potential (Bramwell & Lane, 2014). Critical theory is used to critique neoclassical economic interpretations of these growth strategies as being predominantly embedded within a masculinised discourse. Critical theory seeks to interrogate taken-for-granted assumptions about theories and hence is useful in uncovering the ways in which gender roles are embedded within economic structures.

By challenging mainstream economic theorizing and questioning the relationship between power and knowledge, this study opposes the coercion of a unified scientific discourse, drawing attention to the ways in which hegemonic masculinity is present within organizational growth strategy discourse. Whilst there are many things that influence managerial style, such as age, class, ethnicity, sexual orientation and the social distribution of power and influence, in this study we focus upon the variable of gender. As is true for all gender research, it is important to bear in mind that findings are relative and context specific.

Since many organisations privilege masculine norms of managerial communication, women and feminised men often face systematic discriminations (Ashcraft, 2009). Indeed, past literature echoes the overarching discourse of “think manager-think male”, which continues to be a barrier to women's progress in management and consequently their involvement in organisational growth strategy creation (Gherardi & Murgia, 2014, p. 691). Indicative of this limitation is the low number of women in managerial positions, especially in executive positions. For example, in 2013, only 14.6% of Fortune 500 companies were headed by women (Soares, Barkiewicz, Mulligan-Ferry, Fendler, & Wai Chun Jun, 2013). In Portugal, only 7.3% of stock indexed companies were led by women in 2014, which is one of the lowest percentages in Europe - a masculine dominance in top-level management that illustrates how gender roles influence economic discourse (Catalyst, 2015).

The performance of stereotypical gender roles are particularly evident within tourism, that is a highly gendered area with strong horizontal segregation (Baum, 2013) of occupations (e.g. women are chambermaids, men are bus drivers), a prevalence of men in top-level management positions and the use of sexualised images of young, attractive women to advertise holiday destinations (Jordan, 1997). Not surprisingly, tourism is one of the sectors with the largest pay-gap, with women earning on average

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