

Gender and tourism: Women's leadership in the hotel sector

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In modern society, gender relations have been discussed under different perspectives and, increasingly, issues related to discrimination and prejudiced behaviours are being challenged and opposed.

Taking into account the evolution of female participation in the global labour market, it is noticeable an increasing number of women occupying positions that were previously restricted to men, and also occupying leadership positions. However, this development has been limited, largely due to the dual role of women, who spend more hours than men dealing with parenting and household tasks, despite the fact they both have jobs outside home (Costa, Carvalho & Breda, 2010).

The literature on gender within tourism research is relatively recent (Kinnaird, 2000). Studies show that, in most regions of the world, women make up the majority of the tourism workforce, with a tendency to concentrate on lower level and underpaid jobs, and also carrying out a large amount of unpaid work in tourism family businesses (UNWTO & UN Women, 2011).

In Brazil, the tourism labour market employed 2.27 million people in 2008, a number that corresponded to 5.76% of the total formal employment in the country. According to a survey by the Economic Research Institute Foundation, the hotel industry is labour intensive, showing a great contribution to the tourism sector (Ministry of Tourism, 2011).

Given this reality, this research is driven by the need to better understand the specificities that mark gender issues in tourism labour market. More specifically, the focus of the present work is the evolution of female participation in the labour market, highlighting the characteristics of women in leadership positions. To undertake this research, a case study approach was chosen, focusing on female leaders in the hotel industry in Fortaleza, Ceará (Brazil).

A qualitative study, exploratory in nature, was developed through semi-structured interviews, which aimed to gather data on the career path of these female leaders. In total, 27 women holding leadership positions in hotels in Fortaleza were interviewed. The interviews, which lasted on average 30 minutes, were recorded and took place between June and August 2012, in the respective workplaces of the interviewees.

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The collected data allowed understanding how these women reached top level positions, how they approach and handle various stakeholders of the hotel industry, especially male ones, and their leadership styles. Results indicate that early entry into the labour market, dedication, education, entrepreneurial skills and dynamic personality were instrumental in the progression of these leaders. On the other hand, work directly affects family relationships, being the cause of several problems in their personal lives, such interference being less notable in the case of single women.

References |

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