

Capitalizing on **qualified human resources** in the tourism sector: How **gender equality** can promote **innovative forms of economic growth**?

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Over the last five years, two research projects¹ on gender issues in the tourism sector – shortly entitled Gentour I² and II³ – have been developed at the University of Aveiro (Portugal). These projects were submitted to the critical assessment of an international pool of evaluators, and both rely on solid research which was developed upon strong methodological rigor and in collaboration with an experienced and multidisciplinary research team.

At the international level, there is a considerable body of literature on gender, but the analysis of gender issues in the tourism field has yet to be studied in more depth. While research on tourism networks and internationalisation has boomed over the last two decades, there are no studies that consistently analyse the interactions between gender and new forms of economic growth. Thus, these projects come across as the main studies in this domain and as valuable inputs to this relatively new body of knowledge, bringing new perspectives into research on gender equality in organizational contexts, and at the same time creating mechanisms and strategies to fight gender employment inequalities.

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¹ Detailed information about the objectives, methodology and results of this project can be found in the projects' official website: <http://www.genderintourism.com>.

² "Towards the improvement of women's skills in the tourism sector. Profiting from the vertical mobility for ethic and economic purposes" (PIHM/GC/0073/2008).

³ "Does gender equality have a say in the boost of innovative forms of economic growth? Reviving the economy through networks and internationalisation in the tourism sector" (PTDC/CS-SOC/119524/2010).

While Gentour I project was designed to make a diagnosis of organisations in the tourism sector and their managerial personnel based on the analysis and evaluation of the constraints to women's vertical mobility, the central objective of the (still ongoing) project (Gentour II) is to evaluate how tourism companies and organisations deal with gender equality and to evaluate the potential played by networks and internationalisation to promote forms of gender equality and to introduce innovative forms of economic growth. This will comprise the study of how organisational and economic growth affect gender equality, as well as how gender affects decisions towards growth and strategies used thereof.

In line with the objectives set out for both projects, different methodological approaches were combined, namely theoretical and empirical research, qualitative and quantitative methods and the collection of primary and secondary data.

An extensive literature review on gender issues formed the basis for a conceptual framework and allowed the collection of different case studies (in different cultural, geographical and sub-sector settings) and the identification of best practices. Secondary sources were also used to collect statistical information about tourism enterprises, higher education and employment. The collected information constituted the basis for launching online surveys targeting women pursuing higher education studies in tourism, regarding their objectives, motivations and expectations (in the scope of Gentour I), and targeting top-management positions (e.g. senior managers and directors, CEOs, heads of department) in tourism companies and organizations, regarding the interaction between different strategies for growth and gender equality (in the scope of Gentour II). In order to get more information about the organizational structure of tourism companies and organizations, as well as their priorities, strategies for growth and most commonly felt constraints, semi-structured interviews and regional workshops were also used to inquire key stakeholders from the tourism industry. Both projects cover the totality of the Portuguese national territory (Mainland and Islands), and an exploratory study was carried out in Brazil. Besides allowing for a comparative analysis, the inclusion of Brazil is important so that the suitability of the tool developed would be tested at an international level.

Other than the innovative contributions to the design of theoretical and methodological frameworks, Gentour projects are expected to have strong managerial implications, thus gradually contributing to the empowerment of women, so that they can play a greater role in the global marketplace, also promoting national competitiveness and higher levels of wellbeing for the society.

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