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Chapter 10.

Assessing the UNWTO's global report on women in tourism: tourism's impact on gender equality

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Introduction

Several observers have claimed that tourism provides women more opportunities for employment compared to other industries, as entrepreneurs, employees and leaders (Twinning-Ward & Zhou, 2017). As employees, women make up the majority of the tourism workforce, constituting 54% of all tourism workers (United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), 2019). Meanwhile, certain researchers have contended that in the context of entrepreneurship, tourism appears to offer greater opportunities for women in comparison to other sectors because businesses in tourism do not require heavy start-up financing (Twinning-Ward & Zhou, 2017).

However, one should be cautious before equating the high representation of women across the tourism industry with 'equality' and 'empowerment'. Whilst women represent the majority of the tourism workforce, this employment is characterized as 'lower quality', with relatively low salaries, as well as part-time and temporary contracts (Blake et al., 2008; Lacher & Oh, 2012; Santero-Sanchez et al., 2015). Most aspects of tourism work have been found to be dominated by informality, through high staff turnover, long working hours, subcontracting, 'flexible' working conditions, the prevalence of 'casual workers' and seasonal variations in employment (International Labour Organization, 2001).

Enloe (2014) has identified that the current global tourism industry and government dependence on tourism revenues remain reliant on sex segregation and gendered pay inequity, as women continue to be paid less than men (on average, 14.7% less according to the UNWTO (2019)). This means that tourism is a labour-intensive sector, and companies and governments need to maintain low labour costs and high taxes, to ensure profits are either maintained or increased. In turn, Ferguson (2011, p. 238) has cautioned that "this involves maintaining a large pool of temporary labour to be drawn upon in times of high demand, made up of predominantly young and/or female workers". Consequently, the gendered division of labour becomes an important consideration in assessing the impacts of tourism because tourism work maintains and reconstructs gendered performances through legislative frameworks, differential treatment, unequal pay and daily social relations (McDowell et al., 2007). The expansion of the tourism industry also influences significant

changes in the nature of tourism work, who does it and how it is done, particularly in relation to women's employment and entrepreneurial participation (Baum, 2013). All of this underscores the need to examine tourism's relationship to gender equality, when considering the social impacts of this industry.

In response to these concerns, feminist tourism scholars suggest that questions around where men and women in the tourism labour market are, as entrepreneurs, employees and leaders, need to be addressed if we are to move towards gender equality and sustainable development (cf. Figueroa-Domecq et al., 2020a; Figueroa-Domecq et al., 2020b).

Perhaps one of the most recent efforts to promote gender equality through tourism has been the second edition of the *Global Report on Women in Tourism*, which was produced in 2019 by the UNWTO, in collaboration with UN Women, the World Bank, the German Development Agency and Amadeus (a global technology company). The relevance of this second edition is unequivocal and arises from two important points. First, the report was completed by the UNWTO, the UN's specialized agency for the promotion of tourism and one of the most influential international organizations informing tourism sustainability. It is also the only agency of the UN that integrates member states and the private sector within the governance structure. Second, this report is the only international report that evaluates the position of women in the tourism industry, with the second edition arriving ten years after the first edition was published in 2010, during a period where 'gender equality' has become one of UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Taking all this together, in this chapter we analyse the UNWTO's 2019 *Global Report on Women in Tourism*. Included in this analysis is an assessment of the report's Action Plan, which outlines actions designed to respond to the challenges set out within the report. We undertake an analysis of the report and action plan with the aim to critically assess the ways 'gender equality' and 'empowerment' are framed by the UNWTO and how tourism is positioned as a medium through which to generate impacts in regard to gender equality and empowerment. Based on a Critical Frame Analysis for studying and comparing the framing of gender inequality in a systematic way (Verloo, 2005), we identify prioritized themes and recommendations. We also utilize significant concerns identified by feminist tourist scholars as a framework through which to assess the claims set out in the report and action plan, as well as the potential of tourism to generate impacts associated with gender equality and empowerment.

To that end, the chapter begins with a contextual overview, detailing the UN and UNWTO's engagement with tourism as a promising avenue in which to impact gender equality and empowerment. We then move to assess the tensions and concerns identified by feminist tourist scholars regarding the utilization of tourism as a medium through which to generate gendered impacts. The following section presents the results of the Critical Frame Analysis, where priorities and discrepancies are identified. The chapter concludes by identifying measures required in order to render enhancement of gender equality and empowerment through the medium of tourism in specific contexts, whilst also cautioning against the universalized positioning of tourism as a way through which to generate gendered impacts.

The UNWTO's approach to gender equality

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted in September 2015 by the United Nations (UN) General Assembly, encompasses 17 SDGs and their 169 corresponding targets. 'Gender equality: achieve gender equality and empowering all women and girls' is identified as Goal 5. Goal 5 is premised as central to the achievement of the SDGs, with the UN recognizing that sustainable development is not possible, "if one half of humanity continues to be denied full human rights and opportunities" (United Nations World Tourism Organization, 2015, p. 6).

The UN defines 'gender equality' as,

> "equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities of women and men and girls and boys. Equality does not mean that women and men will become the same but that women's and men's rights, responsibilities and opportunities will not depend on whether they are born male or female. Gender equality implies that the interests, needs and priorities of both women and men are taken into consideration, recognizing the diversity of different groups of women and men. Within this context, gender equality is not a 'women's issue' but should concern and fully engage men, as well as women. Equality between women and men is seen both as a human rights issue and as a precondition for, and indicator of, sustainable people-centred development" (UN Women, 2020).

The UN links the concept of gender equality with empowerment, although it provides no formalized definition of the latter. Empowerment is a ubiquitous term both within tourism

scholarship and tourism policy, although it is broadly understood as "the enhancement of assets and capabilities of diverse individuals and groups to engage, influence and hold accountable the institutions which affect them" (Bennett, 2002, p. 11). Empowerment is often conceived to possess two important elements. The first element is a 'process' or 'change', which signifies empowerment as something requiring an improved condition, where one moves from having less power to having more power within a social context. The second element of empowerment is 'human agency', which refers to the freedom and willingness to exert one's choice without severe consequences (Malhotra et al., 2002). The UNWTO does not explicitly discuss the relationship between gender equality and empowerment but rather, more broadly, the empowerment of women, both individually and collectively, is generally understood to be a precondition for the achievement of gender equality (Austrian Development Corporation, 2010; United Nations Population Fund, 2021).

In seeking stronger engagement with the UN's SDGs, the UNWTO declared 2017 to be a 'watershed moment', through identifying it as the official Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development, whereby tourism was positioned as a catalyst for positive change (United Nations World Tourism Organization, 2017). Through this, tourism became viewed as a way to advance the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and the resulting 17 SDGs; including Goal 5: Gender Equality. This view is enabled through the perception that tourism is a sector with a high representation of women. Consequently, tourism is perceived to have promise in provisioning employment, and in advancing the decent work agenda (Equality in Tourism, 2017).

Gender equality has historically held an increasingly important but peripheral position within the UN and UNWTO. 'Gender mainstreaming', that is, the policy approach that attempts to account for the interests and needs of all genders within policy, began in the 1970s, in part, due to the transnational expansion of women's movements and related scholarships, and the resulting gender perspective that many international organizations started to adopt (Palomo et al., 2017; Reeves, 2012). A milestone was the endorsement by the UN General Assembly of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1979 (United Nations, 1979). The impact of this convention on women's rights set the foundations of the following international global commitments, treaties, conventions and resolutions on women's rights (Cassola et al., 2014). In 1995 the Platform for Action was adopted at the UN Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, where it was recognized that without the active participation of women and their

incorporation at all levels of decision-making, equality, development and peace goals could not be achieved (United Nations, 1995).

Gender equality, however, was not meaningfully recognized within the UNWTO until 2007, when that year's World Tourism Day theme 'Tourism Opens Doors for Women' was utilized to highlight issues of gender equality (Ferguson, 2018). The UNWTO's engagement with gender equality led, in 2008, to the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between the UNWTO and UN Women, which aimed to harness tourism's potential to contribute to gender equality and women's empowerment. In 2010 the first edition of the *Global Report on Women in Tourism* was produced, whilst a second edition of the report was published in 2019 – whereby both reports highlighted the stark gendered inequalities within tourism.

And yet, as claimed by Ferguson (2018), the UNWTO continues to have no guidelines, programmes or policies on gender equality, beyond the *Global Report's on Women in Tourism*, nor is there a dedicated budget or specialist knowledge within the organization to respond to issues of gendered inequalities (Ferguson, 2018). For this reason, as further claimed by Ferguson (2018), the UNWTO upholds a 'basic' understanding and analysis of gender issues and does not produce clear guidance on how tourism might contribute to Goal 5. At the same time, management practices within UNWTO have been criticized as patriarchal because they have been found to lack representation of women in leadership roles, whilst offering limited opportunities for women within the organization (Khoo-Lattimore et al., 2019). The 'Secretariat General', for example, the highest management level within UNWTO exhibits limited gender representation and is currently managed by three men. This is all notwithstanding consistent discursive claims by the UNWTO that tourism is aptly placed to enhance gender equality.

A number of critiques from feminist tourist scholars have also been levelled at the UNWTO, in response to the organization's lack of critical engagement with the concept of 'gender equality'. In constructing 'gender equality' the UNWTO has come to identify 'gender' as 'women' or 'girls', who are understood to be 'vulnerable'. This essentialist positioning of women as vulnerable has tended to place women in a position where they are required to receive advice and education from development agencies, rather than rendering women with the agency to be actively involved in participating in ideas and skills development (Ferguson, 2010a). More broadly, the UNWTO has tended to frame 'gender equality' as an economic concern, whereby the subordinate position of women is viewed as a

barrier to economic development (Ferguson, 2011). Based on this view, Ferguson (2011) perceives that enabling opportunities for women not only enhances growth opportunities by allowing greater numbers of the population to contribute to the economy, but also stereotypically assumes that if women are given economic opportunity, they are likelier than men to share any resulting prosperity with family and the broader community, thus assisting broader national development goals (cf. World Bank, 2007).

Given this economic framing of gender equality, the UNWTO measures equality through employment (Cukier, 2002; Ferguson, 2011), whereby 'employment' refers to both direct employment and entrepreneurship. In assessing tourism, feminist scholars have been critical in the association of equality and empowerment with employment and entrepreneurship for three main reasons. First, arguably, many of the employment forms within tourism do not result in enhancing the position of individuals. This is because much of tourism work is notoriously flexible, dominated by informality and dependent on seasonal visitors. When tourism work is discussed, it is often in gender-neutral ways, that fail to recognize that it is more than likely to be women in positions of flexible, low-paid work (Ferguson, 2011). Within such discussions the barriers to women's paid work are often limited, with 'light touch' insights regarding the requirements of unpaid care work, and the tensions and disruptions to traditional power relations that might arise from women's movement into paid work.

Second, whilst tourism may contribute to equality in terms of increased employment, feminist scholars have been cautious in equating employment with the enhanced position of women within society. This is because a singularized focus on employment fails to deconstruct and bring to question the broader social structures that actually produce gendered inequalities within specific contexts (Kimbu et al., 2021). Such a focus on work thus ensures the status quo producing gendered inequalities remains intact, securing the subordinate position of women, despite their potential newfound location within paid work. Third, the prioritization of women's economic participation is narrow and not viewed as a process, resulting in the omission of alternative conceptions regarding how gender equality might be enhanced and how empowerment might be constructed by women themselves (Equality in Tourism, 2017; Ferguson, 2010a; Kimbu & Ngoasong, 2016, Kimbu et al., 2021).

Questioning tourism's role in achieving gender equality

Despite the UNWTO's declaration of tourism's role in advancing progress in this area, the UN's 17 SDGs have received limited attention within tourism scholarship (Bramwell et al., 2017). Boluk et al. (2019) and Hall (2019) suggest that this is, in part, due to the scepticism held towards the SDGs given the lack of critical thinking associated with the way the UN has attempted to realize the goals. Weeden and Boluk (2014) have also questioned the positioning of tourism as a supporter of sustainability, where contrastingly tourism has more commonly been associated with negative contributions to sustainability and is arguably less sustainable than ever. In this context, tourism is thought to reinforce tradition gender roles and unequal divisions of labour, rather than improving sustainability (Jimenes-Esquinas, 2017). Tourism scholars have thus argued that if tourism scholarship is to engage with the SDGs, it needs to do so in a way that questions the favouring of market-oriented approaches within tourism and ask: "whose voices are prioritized, whose are neglected, and which stakeholders should be actively facilitated to participate in processes and decision-making in order to have full and fair representation and empowerment" (Boluk et al., 2019, p. 851).

Further to this, whilst feminist tourist scholars have criticized the UNWTO's approach to gender equality, they have, at the same time, argued for the importance in championing gender equality within the context of tourism (Moreno & Cole, 2019). Moreno and Cole (2019) state that feminist approaches are central here because they introduce critical evaluations that bring attention to the structural gendered dimensions of tourism development and question why the tourism industry has remained resistant to the needs of gender equality policy, guidelines and programmes. As Moreno and Cole (2019) further assert, without the use of feminist approaches, gender equality will remain reduced to identifying quantifiable gaps between men and women and will, consequently continue to fail in identifying the influence of the broader policy environment and the structural barriers producing inequalities (Moreno & Cole, 2019). Moreover, feminist tourism scholars (Ferguson, 2011; Kimbu et al., 2020) caution that engagement with gender equality needs to move past a siloed approach that focuses exclusively on the tourism industry, omitting the ways through which gendered inequalities within tourism are linked to broader practices relating to society, culture, the economy and the environment.

Such calls within feminist tourism academic discussions align with conversations taking place beyond tourism that relate to the need to approach the SGDs from broader, intersectional perspectives. Ecologists, by way of example, have also highlighted the siloed approach given thus far to the SGDs, and have noted that we ought to consider the

interdependencies among goals (Stafford-Smith et al., 2016). As an example, ecologists Stafford-Smith et al. (2016) argue that without attention to interdependencies between goals it is possible that achieving one goal undermines the ability to achieve another. To illustrate their point, Stafford-Smith et al. present the example of consumption and water accessibility, where they note that the promotion of increased consumption to alleviate poverty could lead to the failure of other goals, such as the sustainability of water management.

The UN (2019) has further acknowledged that progress towards meeting the goals has been slow. And just as the UN was calling for the increase in actions in response to the limited progress, and the finite time remaining to achieve such outcomes, COVID-19 induced restrictions heightened the impossibility of achieving the goals. As a result of the pandemic, Naidoo and Fisher (2020) identified that two-thirds of the 169 targets are now under threat or are not well placed to mitigate the pandemic's impacts, whilst many of the issues that were meant to be resolved through the SDGs have been amplified. The UNWTO's turn to tourism as a catalyst for positive change has also been brought to question (Naidoo & Fisher, 2020), in response to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development's (2020) estimate that international tourism was to drop by 80% in 2020, particularly affecting countries where tourism accounts for a substantial dimension of the national economy. All of this has led to greater concern with the resilience of the SDGs, as well as the UN's focus on (economic) growth and the potential of tourism to achieve such growth, over that of enhanced well-being (Naidoo & Fisher, 2020).

A radical overhaul of the SDGs is now on the agenda, whereby in response to COVID-19, UN Special Rapporteur Philip Alston noted that "doubling down on an inadequate and increasingly out-of-date approach [the SDGs] is especially problematic" (quoted in Nature, 2020). At the same time, COVID-19 responses have illustrated that social changes to business as usual and normative everyday practice are possible, if there is political and social motivation from those with power to render it. Together the above arguments provide impetus for the assessment of the UNWTO's proposed measures to tackle gender equality.

Discussion: *Global Report on Women in Tourism*

In utilising a Critical Frame Analysis to assess the *Global Report on Women in Tourism* a number of issues were identified that, as we highlight in our discussion below, need to be (re)addressed to generate impact in regard to gender equality. First, we take issue with the

ways the report conceptualizes gender as binary (i.e., men vs women) and proposes universalized solutions. We suggest that this limits our understanding of the ways tourism both empowers and disempowers women, in specific contexts. Moreover, we identify how the report acknowledges the importance of technology while failing to account for the limitations encountered by women, in accessing information and communication technologies. We finally note how a prioritization is given to education, which whilst important, overlooks the lack of research undertaken to assess the outcomes of tourism education, as well as omitting recognition of the broader structural barriers and cultural challenges experienced by women seeking to gain empowerment through tourism education. We turn now to engage with these concerns in greater detail.

Gender equality and empowerment: Essentialized, universalized and dualistic

Feminist tourist scholars have consistently identified the need to conceptualize gender as a performance that is fluid and becoming, rather than pre-determined and essentialist (Figueroa-Domecq et al., 2020a), as informed through the feminist philosophy of Judith Butler (1990). Through such a framework, gender becomes something to be understood within place-based contexts, influenced by the specifities of society and place, rather than a universalized, essentialized, biological identity position. Conceptualizing gender in this way enables insights regarding how those working in tourism consistently negotiate their identity in different ways that both contest and reinstate normative gendered expectations. And yet, despite signalling engagement with key work at the intersection of gender and tourism (including, for example, Boonabaana, 2014; Cole & Ferguson, 2015; Ferguson, 2010a, 2010b, 2018; Jeffrey, 2018; Moreno, 2018; Pritchard & Morgan, 2000; Tucker & Boonanbaana, 2012), within the report, gender was persistently presented as a universal category, whereby women were positioned as vulnerable and lacking. By way of example, the report consistently suggests that women "lack self-confidence" (United Nations World Tourism Organisation, 2019, p. 91, p.115 and p. 146), whilst further noting that "a key challenge is women's own resistances, based on their belief that they lack the ability to become entrepreneurs or generate their own income" (United Nations World Tourism Organisation, 2019, p. 115).

More broadly, informed through the UN's framing of gender equality, the report adopts, from the outset, the position that tourism is a sufficient medium through which to respond to gendered inequalities and women's empowerment. This position is taken even though consistent concern has been put forth by feminist scholars as to the potentials of such

universalized claims in relation to tourism (Boluk et al., 2019; Moreno & Cole, 2019). We suggest that this monolithic assumption in the framing of tourism as an unquestioned source for good and medium through which women might be empowered is problematic for two main reasons. First, it is not made clear within the report how 'empowerment' is identified or measured, despite universalized and consistent claims as to the potential of tourism to empower. With consistent reference to women's movement into employment, it appears that empowerment is here equated with that of employment. Ferguson (2011) notes that the conflation of empowerment with that of employment should be a concern because much tourism work is casual, flexible and low paid, and is thus precarious. In engaging with Ferguson's (2011) unease, we do not seek to suggest that women cannot become empowered through tourism employment. Yet we do advocate caution in this area, particularly in consideration of the universalized positioning presented within the report. Second, rather than being wholly positive, tourism growth often leads to context-specific issues that have been found to effect women in complex ways. As identified by Moreno and Cole (2019) and Cole and Tulis (2015), for example, tourism has been found to heighten water insecurity because increased visitor numbers place pressure on vulnerable water sources. This places additional pressure on women because water collection is often 'women's work' in many contexts. We argue that the *Global Report on Women in Tourism* fails to capture such complexities that affect women's everyday experiences because of the report's positioning of tourism as a necessary good.

Admittedly, the report does respond to feminist calls for more place-based approaches when understanding tourism and gender (cf. Figueroa-Domecq et al., 2020a). It does so, most notably, by incorporating brief case studies and the report's 'world regions' approach, whereby the latter discussion is divided into sections on 'Africa', 'Asia and the Pacific', 'Europe' and 'Latin America and the Caribbean'. Nevertheless, the regions presented encompass large geographical areas, rendering difficulties in identifying specifities and variation by country or region.

'Asia and the Pacific', by way of example, is presented as a coherent region, inclusive of, for example, both New Zealand where around 70% of those working in tourism are women, alongside Pakistan, where women make up between 5-10% of the tourism workforce. This position overshadows the nuanced ways through which tourism intersects with cultural specificities to produce stark variations in outcomes for women across Asia and the Pacific. In Pakistan, for example, gendered inequalities begin within the household, with

mobility beyond the space of the home constrained by such expectations. Moreover, the patriarchal system makes it difficult for women in Pakistan to undertake formalized work in public facing tourism positions. Women in some parts of Pakistan are also restricted to the home setting during the tourist season due to their perceived vulnerability (Sayira, 2015). It has further been identified that many Pakistani women do undertake informal, unpaid work in the tourism industry, through cleaning and cooking, as part of family businesses. Yet, these positions are far from opportunities to deconstruct gendered divisions and empower women, because of their informal and unpaid nature (Sayira, 2015). All of these issues bring to question universalized claims regarding tourism's potential within the context of gender equality and empowerment.

Further to this, in discussions focused on women's low representation in tourism, suggestions are put forth that place onus on women to remedy their own underrepresentation. By way of example, the low representation of women tour guides in Africa is positioned in the report as 'a failure to attract women'. This is a statement that declines to acknowledge and deconstruct the cultural barriers in travel guiding, as well as the tourism industry more broadly, that make it difficult for women to uphold such positions. Anthropologist Angela Demovic (2016) highlights such concerns within the context of Zanzibar, whereby she identifies that women are required to negotiate the economic 'opportunities' derived from transnational tourism, alongside being urged to stay away from tourist areas. Demovic (*ibid*) cautions that women choosing to forego cultural and religious expectations of respectability by seeking tourism employment, risk accusations of immoral behaviour that influence long-term marriageability and perceived rights to share family resources. Women's tourism performances obtain the ability to contest such gendered constructions, but more nuanced discussion is required concerning how women might be supported in deconstructing such norms, so as not to reemphasize the onus that is placed on women.

Gendered tourism industries

Following the report's 'world regions' overview, the discussion turns to focus on four segments of the tourism industry ('*Digital platforms and technology', 'Hotels and accommodation', 'Tour operators'* and *'Community-based tourism'*). The *Global Report on Women in Tourism's* approach to dividing the discussion in this way assists in making sense of many of the main issues regarding gendered inequalities across the industry. Limited insight, however, is provided as to why these areas were deemed suitable, over and above

others, beyond briefly noting their growth (digital), dominance of men (tour operators), dominance of women (hotels and accommodation) or gendered inclusivity (community-based tourism). Consequently, there was no recognition regarding what gendered dimensions of the tourism industry may be omitted (and why) through this framework, meaning that significant issues currently being discussed in relation to tourism and gender, such as gender-based violence in tourism workplace contexts (Ram, 2018), water insecurity in tourism destinations (Cole, 2017; Moreno & Cole, 2019), tourism and migratory labour (Batnitzky & McDowell, 2013; Rydzik et al., 2012) and tourism as a process of neo-colonization (Pritchard & Morgan, 2000; Tucker, 2019), were not encapsulated through the thematic framing, and were thus not engaged with within the report.

'Digital platforms and technology' is presented as the first industry section in Chapter 4. Digital platforms are noted as an important aspect for consideration, given their significant growth, alongside the underrepresentation of women working in technology. And yet, the report paradoxically claims that the growth of digital platforms and technology within tourism is an opportunity to boost women's entrepreneurship in the tourism industry. This claim is presented event though the *Global Report on Women in Tourism* acknowledges that there is limited research regarding tourism and digital platforms and that, consequently, it is not yet known if digital platforms provide specific opportunities for women in tourism.

Such a claim lacks understanding pertaining to women's access to technology. The evaluation of technology as a way to develop women's careers in the tourism industry is complex (Figueroa-Domecq et al., 2020c). Costa et al. (2017), as well as Belgorodskiy et al. (2012) and Valenduc (2011), have identified that women's access to technology, both within and beyond tourism, is based on culturally specific gendered norms that have tended to lead to the under-presentation of women in technology related industries. Moreover, Holtgrewe (2014) and Valenduc (2011) have found that when women are involved in technology-related work, they are more likely to be represented in 'technically soft' positions. There are thus significant normative constructions influencing the underrepresentation of women in technology, that are not accounted for within the *Global Report on Women in Tourism*.

It seems that an intersectional approach to understanding relationships between gender, technology and tourism entrepreneurship may have been of use here, with the *Global Report on Women in Tourism* further suggesting that new digital platform tourism services, such as Airbnb, offer opportunity for women entrepreneurs because of their small start-up costs and the fact that the majority of Airbnb hosts are already women (United Nations World

Tourism Organization, 2019). What is omitted within this discussion are the nuances regarding who these women are, and which women might not have access to digital technology, reliable internet connections, and/or, perhaps most pertinently, the infrastructural assets required to be successful within a sharing economy. As an example, women in a number of geographical locations are far less likely (compared to men) to have access to home ownership, or second home ownership, which is a requirement in order to legally utilize Airbnb as an entrepreneurial opportunity (Rossi & Sierminska, 2018). Moreover, limited insight is given here in regard to how the growth of platforms, such as Airbnb, generate adverse effects within particular geographical areas, such as through gentrification and displacement (Quattrone et al., 2016).

Gender, education and leadership

Recommendations identified in the second edition of the *Global Report on Women in Tourism* overlapped considerably with those put forth in the report's first edition. For example, both reports framed actions through five thematic areas ('Employment', 'Entrepreneurship', 'Education and Training', 'Leadership, Policy and Decision-Making', and 'Community and Civil Society'), with both identifying a number of coinciding actions, such as developing and promoting targeted education and training for women, addressing the underrepresentation of women in leadership and improving gendered divisions concerning unpaid work. Within this context, there was limited discussion concerning the effectiveness of the proposed actions of the first edition, nor why these actions might be deemed somehow more effective in 2019. Given it has now been a decade since the recommendations set out in the first edition were proposed, it seems pertinent to provide transparent insight regarding what has, and has not, been achieved, as well as reflection regarding the challenges in not having achieved measured impacts. Importantly, there were areas whereby the proposed actions in the report's second edition aimed to extend and broaden the foundations established in the report's first edition. Notable here was the recognition of the gender pay gap, sexual harassment, networking and digitization. Overall, however, proposed actions were broad, with minimal detail provided regarding how actions might be taken forward by stakeholders. Actions also did not follow a 'SMART' (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, time-bound) framework, meaning there was inadequate insight regarding how actions would be monitored and reviewed within a designated timeframe, in order to assess the extent to which social impact might be achieved.

In presenting recommendations, the *Global Report on Women in Tourism's* Action Plan identifies education as a way through which to respond to a perceived lack in women's high-level and soft skills training, which is required to perform successfully and reach leadership and management positions within the tourism industry. Following previous feminist concern (Figueroa-Domecq et al., 2020a), we caution against the framing of education as providing an all-encompassing solution. Such a positioning fails to recognize that women remain underrepresented in tourism leadership and management positions, despite already constituting 53% of bachelor's and master's tourism and hospitality graduates globally (United Nations World Tourism Organization, 2019). This contradiction suggests that the issue of tourism's gendered inequalities does not solely align with education, and that there are broader structural concerns that are overshadowed through the positioning of education as a solution. We are not suggesting that education is not an important element. Rather, we preface the need to remain cautious in such claims. Education is too often presented as an all-encompassing solution, notwithstanding Figueroa-Domecq et al.'s (2020a) recent identification that there is limited research focusing on the outcomes of women's educational programmes within tourism.

In suggesting education as an all-encompassing solution, the onus is once again placed on women to respond to their own subordination, even though it is unknown whether such educational programmes are likely to be effective in deconstructing tourism's gendered inequalities. All of this ensures that there is a likelihood that women may continue to 'fail' to obtain the high-level and soft skills that they are assumed to lack, and will consequently, consistently be found at a disadvantage, compared to men, even when undertaking such recommended education (Marlow, 2020).

Further to this, the all-embracing potential of education does not acknowledge that tourism is not a monolithic industry, and rather seems to problematically suggest anyone entering the industry has capacity to move into leadership and management positions, no matter their starting point. By contrast, it is important in such debates to acknowledge tourism as complex, made up of numerous segments, that do not necessarily intersect in ways that allow opportunity for progression. In taking tourism as complex, we can begin to understand how those in leadership and management positions are less likely to be those having started in the micro, small and medium sized enterprises, of which the latter constitute the majority of the industry, whilst also exhibiting an overrepresentation of women (United Nations World Tourism Organization, 2019).

It is also not made clear within the report how women might negotiate training, and any consequential employment, alongside the requirements of home and familial management. Nor is there recognition of the consequences that may unfold for individual women if they choose to undertake training against the expectations of other family members. This once more places the struggles and challenges of gendered inequalities on women. We thus argue for the need to look beyond tourism as a monolith, to rather understand the various pathways women undertake through the tourism industry. This brings to question the very capability of tourism as a universalized way through which to account for gendered inequalities.

We make one final point, before moving to the conclusion. Consistent prioritization of women's education fails to recognize men, and their role in tackling gendered inequalities and championing women in tourism. This aspect is only briefly mentioned within the *Global Report on Women in Tourism,* notwithstanding feminist tourist scholars having identified the crucial role men play as allies within the context of gendered inequalities, and that the enhanced educational attainment of men can lead to men's openness to deconstruct gendered inequalities (Sayira, 2015).

Conclusions: Where to now?

There are three leading responses that arise from the critical evaluation of the *Global Report on Women in Tourism*, that we suggest ought to be incorporated into future considerations of tourism and gender equality reporting, if social impacts are to be identified. First, tourism should not be positioned as a panacea for the omission of gendered inequalities. Tourism cannot be understood as a world saviour of gender inequality just because women's participation is higher than in other sectors. Far from being a panacea, tourism has its own structural issues to contend with (specifically, low quality jobs, long and casual working hours and gender stereotyping) that ensure the industry, for the most part, does not present a unique opportunity to 'empower' women. To overlook such issues is counterproductive in attempts to account for the gendered inequalities that prevail within the tourism industry.

Second, and relatedly, to understand the possibilities and limitations of tourism in relation to gender equality and empowerment we need to give greater recognition to cultural and geographical specificities. In doing so, universalized positionings of tourism will be deconstructed, whilst intersectional issues will be brought to the fore. We are far from the first feminist tourist scholars to call for the need for greater regional specifities in

understanding the gendered dimensions in tourism (see the review from Figueroa-Domecq et al. (2020a) for further detail here). However, given the continued omission of meaningful regional approaches – such as that presented in the UNWTO's report – it remains pivotal to reinforce this line of argument. The UNWTO's *Global Report on Women in Tourism* made a positive advance in structuring discussion through the 'World Regions' approach. And yet in taking such large geographical areas, regional specifities informed by cultural structures remained lacking.

Third, and finally, subsequent reports conducted by the UNWTO ought to incorporate SMART measures that enable critical assessment of progress. If tourism stakeholders are to take on responsibility and support the SDGs, either voluntarily or through government regulation, they will require tools to implement, manage and measure progress. The impetus for SMART actions plans is particularly pertinent for tourism because gender-focused assessment tools have not been adapted for the industry (Moreno, 2019). Unlike the action plan put forth by the UNWTO, there is a need for plans to be defined according to specific outcomes, with clear identification regarding how change might be measured, both qualitatively and quantitatively. Without this, accountability and transparency remain limited, rendering challenges in assessing change and a tendency to overstate the abilities of the industry to enhance the social status of women. There is a unique opportunity here for the UNWTO, as an internationally recognized specialist organization in tourism to serve as a productive example, by further developing its reporting and action plan to better account for change. We recognize, however, that it is not the policy itself that does the work of gender equality. Rather, it merely represents one aspect of the process involved in the formation of gender equality work. Future research thus needs to turn attention to the ways the *Global Report on Women in Tourism* has been formulated by the UNWTO and the ways it has been taken up within the industry. This will lead to broader comprehension of its potential, as well as identify what still needs to be achieved.

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