



Women's empowerment and tourism development: A cross-country study

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ABSTRACT

Women's empowerment has become a crucial component of sustainable tourism development in tourist destinations. Meanwhile, achieving gender equality and empowering women constitutes the fifth goal of the United Nations sustainable development agenda (UN-SDGs). The present study aims to investigate the influence of women's empowerment on tourism development across three different Arab countries: Egypt, the United Arab Emirates, and Oman. With partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) employed to analyse the perceptions of 784 respondents across the three countries, the findings reveal that perceptions of women's work in tourism and women's entrepreneurship are significant predictors of women's empowerment in the tourism sector. Furthermore, the results show significantly different effects of women's empowerment on tourism development in the three countries. Among the three Arab countries included in the current study, the United Arab Emirates ranks first for the impact of women's empowerment on tourism development, followed by Egypt and then Oman. The findings hold significant implications for women's empowerment in Arab and Muslim countries. Limitations and directions for future research are also addressed.

1. Introduction

The United Nations sustainable development goals (UN-SDGs) address the global challenges facing the world, including poverty, gender inequality, climate change, environmental destruction, peace and justice. Achieving gender equality and empowering women constitutes the fifth UN-SDG. This goal is not only an essential human right, but also a crucial foundation for a world of peace, affluence, and sustainability (UN, 2020).

The UN has set some targets for achieving women's empowerment. One of them is to ensure the efficient involvement of women in society and to give them equitable prospects for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic, and public life. The second target is to give women fair access to economic resources as well as rights to ownership. The final target is to implement sound policies and enforceable laws to foster gender equality and empower women at all levels (UN, 2020).

Tourism is believed to be one of the key sectors that can help in the achievement of these targets and the attainment of gender equality and women's empowerment (The World Bank, 2018). A study by Tinker

(2006) claimed that tourism could strongly contribute to women's empowerment and enhance their economic status. Thus, if women, particularly in developed countries, were given more opportunities to work in the tourism sector and promoted to higher levels of management, this would certainly fulfil the fifth UN-SDG by providing gender equality in economic aspects, and promoting the concept of granting women equal access to economic resources and equal opportunities for decision-making (The World Bank, 2018). According to the European Institute for Gender Equality (2016), however, women have low representation in managerial and supervisory positions in tourism and hospitality.

Empowerment is a multi-dimensional concept. Boley and McGehee (2014) used social exchange theory to measure the impact of empowerment on residents' attitudes towards tourism development. Afterwards, Boley, Maruyama, and Woosnam (2015) developed a tourism empowerment scale to measure the empowerment of residents in tourism destinations. The developed scale includes three main dimensions of empowerment: psychological, social, and political. Psychological empowerment relates to people's feelings of pride and self-esteem due to having unique attractions and heritage assets in their

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