

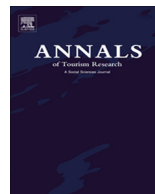


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## Women as vectors of social entrepreneurship



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### ABSTRACT

Drawing on the literature examining women in the tourism sector and social entrepreneurship, this article critically explores a theoretical framework for analyzing the role of women owner-managers of small tourism firms (STFs) as social entrepreneurs. Through a qualitative analysis of owner-managers of STFs, the article provides evidence of how women integrate social transformational and commercial goals in their business strategies, while serving defined communities around the tourism sector. By critically examining the operationalization of these goals and community needs, the development impacts of women-owned STFs and opportunities for women social entrepreneurship in the tourism sector are identified and discussed.

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### Introduction

This article critically explores a model of social entrepreneurship focusing on the nature of engagement and participation by women entrepreneurs in tourism. Research on social entrepreneurship defined as “entrepreneurial activity with an embedded social purpose” (Austin, Stevenson, & Wei-Skillern, 2006, p.2) has grown in the last decade (Christoph, Laeis, & Lemke, 2016; Kline, Shah, & Rubright, 2014; Mair & Marti, 2006; Von der Weppen & Cochrane, 2012; Zahra, Gedajlovic, Neubaum, & Shulman, 2009). Studies on social ventures in developed and developing economies suggests that social entrepreneurship is a key contributor to the creation and diversification of

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entrepreneurial activity, economic growth, emancipation and empowerment of women (Datta & Gailey, 2012). Limited research in the tourism sector in African destinations highlights successful female entrepreneurial activities (Kwaramba, Lovetta, Louwb, & Chipumuroc, 2012). However, entrepreneurship development studies suggest that more research is needed to understand how women who engage in social entrepreneurial activities support local development in the face of community traditions and social norms (Amine & Staub, 2009; Huysentruyt, 2014).

The focus on development is significant because tourism entrepreneurship has been identified as a potential vehicle for women empowerment (Kwaramba et al., 2012; Peeters & Ateljevic, 2009), for increasing gender equality (UNWTO, 2011) with economic and social benefits, especially in male-dominated emerging destinations (Acharya & Halpenny, 2014). Enterprises that pursue commercial approaches to achieving social and/or environmental aims are increasing in tourism with many expressing responsible tourism through contributing to poverty alleviation and environmental protection (Von der Weppen & Cochrane, 2012). With Africa's tourism sector experiencing the second fastest growth rate in the world (UNWTO, 2015), the role of women as social entrepreneurs through tourism can have particularly strong developmental impacts in this region. Although the role of women as social entrepreneurs is increasingly attracting attention (Datta & Gailey, 2012), there is a dearth of research on women social entrepreneurs in tourism in general and emerging destinations in particular. From this context, the study explores the following two research questions:

1. In what ways can women owner-managers of STFs in emerging destinations be considered as social entrepreneurs?
2. How do women overcome existing barriers to female participation in local development around tourism?

By answering the above questions this article provides two contributions to tourism social science research. First we integrate the theoretical lens of social entrepreneurship and the literature on women in tourism to critically analyze the role of women as vectors of social entrepreneurship in tourism. They are social entrepreneurs because they simultaneously pursue commercial and social goals (Ruebottom, 2013) by taking risks and making do of whatever resources they can access to fill a market need and contribute to local development (Di Domenico, Haugh, & Tracey, 2010) around the tourism sector or destination (Kline et al., 2014). Based on the empirical analysis we develop a theoretical framework depicting the role of women-owner managers of STFs in terms of the combination of commercial/economic goals they pursue, the social transformation that they seek to create in society and the associated impacts on the specific communities they serve (Di Domenico et al., 2010; Ruebottom, 2013; Zahra et al., 2009). This framework can be applied to analyze the circumstances under which women can be considered as social entrepreneurs and their associated impacts on local development around tourism. This significant contribution which has barely been explored, complements extant tourism research which emphasizes the economic benefits, opportunities and challenges associated with women-owned STFs in emerging destinations (Acharya & Halpenny, 2014; Desa, Johnson, & Ergul, 2012; Kline et al., 2014; Kwaramba et al., 2012).

Secondly, in studying women owner-managers of STFs in Cameroon, we complement the limited previous research (e.g. Von der Weppen & Cochrane, 2012) by uncovering how women as social entrepreneurs in an emerging destination, use their STFs as platforms to promote local development through training, employment/job creation, and poverty alleviation around tourism. Existing tourism social science research has focused on women as workers and their role in the tourism workforce, arguing that such roles have enabled women to create 'new' self-identities by securing economic and social independence in ways that impact other community members (Cone, 1995; Duffy, Kline, Mowatt, & Chancellor, 2015; Gentry, 2007). Though providing good prima facie understanding of the role of women in developments around tourism, little is known about the wider impacts of women involvement in the tourism sector beyond business creation for economic benefits (Acharya & Halpenny, 2014; Kwaramba et al., 2012).

To address the above gaps, we use Cameroon to empirically analyze the role of women as social entrepreneurs in emerging destinations that are under-researched (Kimbu & Ngoasong, 2013). We adopt a qualitative approach based on focus groups (Buzinde, Kalavar, Kohli, & Manuel-Navarrete,

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