



Agency, structures and women managers' views of their careers in tourism ^{☆, ☆ ☆}



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ABSTRACT

Tourism is an important employer for women in many countries. However, despite this seeming 'women-friendliness', women are still underrepresented at the top of tourism businesses. Previous research on women managers' careers in tourism has neglected the analysis of their careers in the light of new career concepts, such as the boundaryless career. Hence, in-depth semi-structured interviews were carried out with twenty-four female senior managers in Portuguese hotels and travel businesses, including entrepreneurs across a wide range of business sizes. The aim was to analyse these women's perspectives on how they have reached the top.

It is concluded that women regard their careers as an outcome of their inherent characteristics, agency and a desire to seize challenges that lead to intrinsic satisfaction. They downplay the role of both structural enablers and structural barriers. This article analyses these issues from a boundaryless career model perspective and with a gender lens.

Introduction

Tourism has opened many doors to women and it is a female-dominated sector in many countries (WTTC, 2013). However, studies have shown how the tourism industry remains highly gendered (Carvalho, Costa, Lykke, & Torres, 2014). Expectations towards what are 'female' and 'male' jobs in the sector still reflect deep-seated gendered stereotypes about men and women's supposed characteristics. This, together with gendered task divisions within the family, are great impediments to gender equality in the sector. Men still prevail at the top of the tourism hierarchy, and many studies have revealed the existence of a 'glass ceiling' or, better said, gendered constraints that block women from advancing to the top of organisations and progress in their careers on the same footing as men (Kattara, 2005; Li & Leung, 2001; Mooney & Ryan, 2009). This is a result of structural and cultural inequalities reflected in organisations, in the family and in the society at large.

In the tourism field, not many studies have researched women who successfully reached top positions (Boone et al., 2013; Brownell, 1993, 1994; Li & Leung, 2001; Maxwell, 1997; Ng & Pine, 2003; Remington & Kitterlin-Lynch, 2018; Segovia-Pérez, Figueroa-Domecq, Fuentes-Moraleda, & Muñoz-Mazón, 2018). These studies assume a traditional hierarchical and bureaucratic career model when analysing women's careers, when studies have shown that careers have become more flexible and marked by fast job rotation between organisations (Cassel, Thulemark, & Duncan, 2018; Mooney, 2014). Moreover, entrepreneurship has seldom been included in studies on these new patterns of career paths (Hytti, 2010). In this new context, it is important to analyse how these new careers are shaped, and to carry out this analysis from a gender perspective, considering both structures (enablers and obstacles) and individual agentic behaviour. Therefore, in the present study, a qualitative analysis was used to analyse women's discourses in depth and thus explicitly bring their interpretations of their own career paths to the centre stage.

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Hence, the main purpose of the research was to explore the perspectives of senior women on how they have reached the top from a critical perspective. In this study, 'being at the top' is not restricted to women climbing the corporate ladder in larger companies, but encompasses women in leading positions in SMEs, namely entrepreneurs, who have been left out of 'glass ceiling' literature (Mínguez-Vera & Martin, 2011). The following specific objectives were defined:

- To outline and analyse women senior managers' careers in tourism organisations;
- To identify facilitators and enablers of success; key career events; difficult moments and career obstacles.

Literature review

New career patterns, gender, agency and structures

Careers are no longer seen as long term and they may not always involve hierarchical movement (Mooney, 2014). New concepts of careers have appeared, such as the boundaryless career (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996), which is not constrained by the boundaries of an organisation and is primarily oriented towards career success (Mooney, 2014). Similarly, McCabe and Savery (2007) used the term 'butterflying' to describe how managers 'flutter' between companies to build up human capital and gather expert knowledge. High mobility has not only become accepted and normalised – individuals are expected to be mobile and change jobs frequently to work their way to the top within the industry (Cassel et al., 2018). Networks for facilitating promotion are also increasingly important assets for career-making (Mooney, 2014), as job security and career possibilities depend on individual skills and employability (Cassel et al., 2018). The hospitality industry is no exception to this trend (Mooney, 2014).

While individual skills and ambition are at the core of such career concepts, they do not provide the full picture. Careers are not only the result of individual behaviour, but also reflect different opportunity and power structures, which determine the extent to which agents are free to act as they wish (Kanter, 1977; Tomlinson, Muzio, Sommerlad, Webley, & Duff, 2013). Specific labour market outcomes are not necessarily the result of individual choices but reflect different opportunity structures (Kanter, 1977). While individuals may have agency whether to seek promotion or not at the micro-level, the possibility for agentic action is co-created at the meso-level by organisational norms, which limits the options available (Mooney, Ryan, & Harris, 2017).

This possibility for agentic action is limited in the gendered context of organisations, where gender roles influence conceptualisations of who is perceived as an 'ideal worker' (Costa et al., 2017). The real worker that most closely resembles this 'ideal' worker is a man without imperatives outside the organisation or family responsibilities (Acker, 1990). Hence, it is important to consider such structural obstacles and adopt a gender-aware framework when analysing careers through the lens of boundaryless careers.

Top management, entrepreneurship and gender

Most of the studies which analyse women in top positions focus on the analysis of a 'glass ceiling' faced by women climbing the corporate career ladder. This presupposes stable careers in modern hierarchical organisations, while excluding other types of career involvement, including entrepreneurship. However, it is relevant to analyse female entrepreneurs' career paths when analysing gender and career progression. On the one hand, Gnan and Songini (2013) argue that there is a 'glass ceiling' even in family firms. On the other hand, female entrepreneurship is in many cases a response to the 'glass ceiling' and to inflexible work environments (Mattis, 2004; Winn, 2004). According to Hytti (2010), researching entrepreneurship from a career perspective implies analysing entrepreneurship as a career move like any other,

instead of as a singular unique event. This helps to contextualise the decision of entering entrepreneurship within one's individual work-life history.

Increasingly more women reach CEO (Chief Executive Officer) status as entrepreneurs (Winn, 2004), though studies have revealed that 'push' factors have been more explanatory of women's entrepreneurial decisions than 'pull' factors (Costa, Carvalho, Caçador, & Breda, 2012b). Pull factors are related with opportunities, and push factors with individuals being pushed to certain career decisions by necessity (Kirkwood, 2009). In fact, more and more women choose entrepreneurship due to frustration with demanding and inflexible work environments, and to escape the glass ceiling and gender prejudice in larger organisations and gain flexibility (Mattis, 2004). Hence, entrepreneurship can be regarded as a response to career barriers. However, although entrepreneurship can be a way out from under the glass ceiling, it should not be conceived as a panacea to achieve work-family balance (Mattis, 2004). In fact, women may have more constraints than anticipated, since even in entrepreneurship there is an expectation for 24/7 availability. The only difference is that while in larger organisations this may be an imposition from above or a requirement to remain competitive within the organisation, in small companies, constant availability is a means for survival (Winn, 2004). This means that gendered barriers are still felt by female entrepreneurs, and thus justifies their inclusion in the present study.

Tourism jobs open doors to women – but what kind of doors?

Tourism is an important job creator and an expanding sector, and a key Gross Domestic Product contributor in many countries, including Portugal, where it is celebrated as a vehicle for economic development. It is also regarded as a sector that opens doors for women. However, gendered patterns of employment and poor employment conditions have been identified in the tourism industry (UNWTO, 2011).

In fact, tourism tends to provide low pay, low status and low-skilled jobs in typically female occupations with few development opportunities (Gentry, 2007). The argument that tourism work allows women to accommodate their traditional responsibilities with paid work does not acknowledge that this type of work often reinforces gender inequalities at home (Ferguson, 2010). Besides, due to the seasonality of tourist activity, tourism jobs often fail to provide workers with regular income the entire year. Due to their precarious nature, these jobs are also more likely to offer less employment rights (Purcell, 1997). Several studies have reported that there is a marked gender pay gap in the tourism industry that remains even after controlling for several variables (García-Pozo, Campos-Soria, & Sánchez-Ollero, 2015; Santos & Varejão, 2007). Moreover, Santero-Sanchez, Segovia-Pérez, Castro-Núñez, Figueroa-Domecq, and Talón-Ballester (2015) analysed several dimensions of job quality besides salary. They concluded that on average women hold lower quality jobs than men in hospitality, and that this quality gap widens with age. Hence, tourism employment is sharply segregated along gender lines. The typical gender pyramid is present in the tourism sector, and it is underpinned by traditional gender roles and sociocultural barriers. While women are usually employed in typically female areas, or 'pink ghetto' jobs (Woods & Viehland, 2000), with worse employment conditions and lower wages, men are over-represented in managerial positions, particularly in top-management (Carvalho et al., 2014; Jordan, 1997).

Despite the persisting vertical segregation, the number of women in management positions in tourism organisations has increased, due to the growth of the sector, women's increasing qualifications and further erosion of stereotypes about women's skills and characteristics (Costa, Caçador, Carvalho, Breda, & Costa, 2013). Women aspire to reach positions with significant management responsibility upon graduation (Costa, Carvalho, Caçador, & Breda, 2012a). However, several studies have shown that highly qualified women are still less likely to be recruited and promoted as staff with potential for senior management

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