



Women in Tourism

In 1995, the World Conference on Women took place in Beijing. Twenty years later, the time frame for achieving the UN Millennium Development Goals is coming to an end. The goals were set up in 2000, one of them aimed to “promote gender equality and empower women”¹. Especially tourism can also play a vital role in achieving this target.

But which role do women have in tourism? And how can tourism help to empower women and promote gender equality? We will have a look at real life and present regional and international initiatives which endeavour to empower women in tourism.

Women in Tourism – the Facts

According to the “Economic Impact Report 2013” by the World Travel Tourism Council (WTTC)², the tourism sector provides 101 million jobs worldwide, amounting to 3.4% of all jobs and 10% of the global economy. Taking into account all jobs indirectly related to tourism, this sector provides one in eleven jobs – and rising: experts estimate 24 million additional jobs to be created in tourism until 2023.

Women are strongly represented in the tourism labour market. In many countries, the employment rate of women in tourism is above the average rate in other sectors. The International Labour Organization (ILO) reports that the global share of women in tourism was at 55.5% in 2013; in specific regions, this share even amounts to 70%.³

However, many women are employed in service (which is often low-paid) and in administration and they are often poorly qualified. Women are underrepresented in management and in higher positions, as shown by the UNWTO/UN Women “Global Report on Women in Tourism” (2010)⁴. Nevertheless, the report concludes that the tourism sector can pave the way for women’s professional success. The WTTC sees tourism as an opportunity for groups that are under-represented in the labour market, primarily women and young people.

At the same time, the risks women run in the tourism industry must not be neglected. Many women are exposed to discrimination, poor payment and insecure jobs or fall victim to sexual exploitation (“sex tourism”). The focus needs to be on the sustainable development of tourism, in which those involved interact on an equal footing, benefit similarly, have equal op-



portunities in their jobs and receive fair wages. In order to guarantee this, action has to be taken on different levels. First of all, the appropriate legal measures have to be created. Public awareness also needs to be raised, and the work situation of women in tourism has to be brought into focus, because in many cases, the discrimination of women is based on social and cultural norms. However, women also have to be motivated, supported and empowered to claim their legitimate rights and to actively participate in tourism. In this respect, adequate training for women and girls is one of the most important aspects.

International Initiatives

In 2010, UN Women and the UN Global Compact launched the “**Women’s Empowerment Principles**” (WEPs)⁵. Subtitled “Equality Means Business”, these principles aim to raise the awareness of businesses in particular. The WEPs comprise seven principles to empower women at work, on the labour market and within society:

1. Establish high-level corporate leadership for gender equality.
2. Treat all women and men fairly at work – respect and support human rights and nondiscrimination.
3. Ensure the health, safety and well-being of all women and men workers.
4. Promote education, training and professional development for women.
5. Implement enterprise development, supply chain and marketing practices that empower women.
6. Promote equality through community initiatives and advocacy.
7. Measure and publicly report on progress to achieve gender equality.

The platform “Gender Responsible Tourism” aims to empower women in tourism worldwide. The programme was launched in 2013 with the presentation of “The Six Pillars of Gender Responsible Tourism”⁶ within the World Tourism Market.

The focus is on raising the awareness for quality and quantity of women’s work in tourism, fair labour conditions and fair wages, and participation and promotion of women in executive positions. GRT relies on communication: it displays

Good Practice examples, puts projects from real life in the focus and thus enables others to implement such projects as well. “We want more tourists to visit places where women are deservedly the ones who receive them, sell artisan products, cook, offer tours, educate them about their culture, manage, and are involved in decision making at all levels of tourism processes” – this is the vision of GRT, as it can be found on their website.

Women’s Power in Real Life

Women in management positions ...

Several hotel groups, such as the Accor group, also pledge themselves to the “Women’s Empowerment Principles” (WEPs) mentioned above. **Accor** runs 3,500 hotels in 92 countries and employs over 160,000 people. In 2011, the group drew up the “Diversity Charter”, a statement for professional equality and the fight against stereotypes. At the end of 2012, the international women’s network “Women at Accor Generation” (WAAG)⁷ was established. At that time, the employment rate of women within the group was at 50% (according to their Annual Report 2012); however, only 27% of the hotel managers and only 13% of the Directors of Operations were women. In Austria, 8 of the 30 Accor hotels are run by women.

Accor has the objective to fight against stereotypes and promote gender equality. By means of mentoring, training and exchange of experience through the participation in special working groups, women are to have better access to management positions. Men are also strongly involved in this network. The aim is that the proportion of women in hotel management reaches 35% by the end of 2015. Sophie Stabile, Chairwomen of “Women at Accor Generation” and Global Chief Financial Officer explains, “We know that more women graduate from top universities than men, yet they hold fewer positions of responsibility in companies. We also know that mixed teams are more innovative and more efficient. „Women at Accor Generation“ aims to give women confidence in their potential, to embolden them, and to accompany them as they take this approach.” In spring 2015, Accor signed the “Women’s Empowerment Principles”. Besides empowering women within the enterprise, they also aim to put a



stronger focus on women as clients. A working group develops new products and services to meet the expectations of businesswomen.

The **Hilton group** – operating 3,800 hotels in 88 countries – also signed the “Women’s Empowerment Principles” on the International Women’s Day in 2014. This commitment is in line with the internal programme “Travel to Purpose” which defines the values of the Hilton group⁸.

The promotion of equal opportunities for women is based on three pillars:

- **Women in Leadership:**
As part of talent promotion, which is a major issue within the group, mentors assist women in particular to assess and address their unique strengths and talents and to network.
- **Women as Business Partners:**
For 40 years, the group has been cultivating relationships with businesses run by women or minorities. Recently, they also started to offer “Entrepreneurship Skills Trainings”: women in rural regions (the focus is on China for the time being) who run or plan to start small businesses receive training on entrepreneurship skills.
- Furthermore, the Hilton group partners with organisations that fund training and education of women and girls.

Within the **Radisson Blu hotel group**, which is operated by the Carlson Rezidor Hotel Group, more than 60% of the people working in middle management are women, but only 16% of the top managers (General Managers and higher) are female. An internal survey among women aimed to find out the reasons for this inequality. The result: it is not the reconciliation of family and working life which plays the decisive role, but the women’s self-confidence and their reluctance to compete with men. The group has now set up the programme “Women in Leadership”, which focuses on the individual career plans of female employees and aims to promote personal strengths and reduce barriers. An important element is the possibility of flexible working arrangements. The objective of the group is to raise the average women’s rate in top management positions to 30% by the end of 2016, which would amount to a doubling of the figure within one and a half years⁹.

... tourism as a source of income

Women in many places have found appropriate work in or through tourism and have thus gained income and economic independence – especially in rural areas.

Example „Holidays on the farm“ in Austria

In rural areas, many farmers face the problem that the income from agricultural production alone does not suffice. So many agricultural farms have turned to tourism as another source of income. In Austria, around 10,000 farms offer accommodation (Statistik Austria 2015, agricultural structure survey), of which approximately 2,500 are members of the association „Holidays on the farm“ („Urlaub am Bauernhof“)¹⁰. Women are especially active in this area – it gives them the opportunity of combining gainful employment and family work and earn money independently.

Female commitment to sustainability

In November 2009, the first zero-energy balance hotel opened in Vienna. This was the vision of a woman: Michaela Reitterer, the owner and manager of the hotel, who bought the hotel “Zur Stadthalle” from her parents in 2002 and, step by step, changed it into a showcase project for sustainability which is also profitable. The hotel has 82 rooms and generates the energy for these rooms over solar and photovoltaic panels and a heat pump. It was awarded numerous prizes, amongst them the “Green Hotelier Award 2015 Europe” and is internationally renowned as a pioneer hotel.¹¹

Independence

Change of location: Senegal. Naturefriends have been offering guided tours through this African country for years, accompanied by Ingeborg Pint, an expert with profound insight into this country. She says, „Contrary to the preconceived opinion we Europeans often hold, the strength and independence of Senegalese women is impressive. Many have started their own business with minimum resources.“¹²

This is true for tourism as well; one example for this is Léontine. In her accommodation „Campement le Bédick“¹³, she offers tourists huts for the night and food in a little restaurant. Léontine has had only little education, but she always wanted to be self-employed and fulfilled this dream despite difficult living conditions, with two children and little money.



With the income from her accommodation, Léontine also frequently supports the activities of the women in her village and thus her community.

Women as Tourists

An increasing number of women travels, for pleasure or for business. Some hotels compete for these clients with special offers for businesswomen and women travelling alone – and often use clichés in doing so. They offer spa and beauty packages and advertise their rooms boasting luxury bathrooms and other conveniences – or even have entire floors reserved for women, such as the Bella Sky Comwell in Copenhagen. In 2011, the hotel with 812 rooms declared the 17th floor “Bella Donna Floor”, to which men were not allowed to access, not even male staff. After a lost lawsuit – legal decision: discrimination against men – they still offer a women’s floor, but they had to lift the access ban for men.

Uta Brandes, a professor at the International School of Design in Cologne, has done research on the wishes of fe-

male business travellers. In a publication on this subject¹⁴, she gives advice on communication with and offers for female guests. She concludes that there are three main areas which are important to (business) women as guests: sensuality (e.g. the rooms’ design, well-equipped rooms – especially concerning the bathroom), safety (e.g. good orientation within the hotel) and sociality (e.g. personal address by hotel staff).

Tour operators also offer special “women’s holidays”, arguing that women have other demands and wishes for their journeys or tours than men, ranging from accommodation over sports and activities to cultural interests. Another argument often brought forward is that women travelling alone often report bad experiences such as poor hotel rooms, harassment and ignorance. By choosing the hotels, tour guides, activities and offers accordingly, tour operators try to respond to women’s needs. Such journeys often have a programme that include spa offers, fitness, culture, education and creativity. Several tour operators also try to consciously support women in the destinations, e.g. by cooperating with accommodations, restaurants and shops that are run by women or by hiring women as guides and contact persons in the destination.



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5