



## Women managers in tourism: Associations for building a sustainable world

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### ABSTRACT

Women are strongly represented in the tourism workforce, albeit mainly in low-level, precarious positions. In management or on board of directors, on the other hand, women are seriously underrepresented. Interviews with female leaders from management associations in Catalonia (Spain) allowed us to identify the associations' goals and roles, the barriers women have encountered in their pursuit of high-level corporate positions, and the challenges to female leadership that lie ahead. Female associations support the UN's Sustainable Development Goal 5, creating awareness of gender barriers, enhancing social conscience on gender equality in decision-making bodies, and expanding professional networks and access to resources. Our findings show that these associations empower women by means of different strategies acting as active agents of change that help transform both their members and society.

### 1. Introduction

The tourism industry is a large, rapidly growing service sector that accounts for a significant part of the global economy: in 2017, it was responsible for 1 in 5 new jobs (WTTC, 2018). According to UNWTO (2019), tourism is an important source of employment for women. For instance, women make up over 60% of the labor force in the hotel industry (WTTC, 2018). This is also true in Spain, where most employees in the hospitality sector are women. Tourism offers a wide range of income generating opportunities for women in both formal and informal work. Tourism jobs are usually flexible and can be carried out in various places, such as at work, in the community or at home. It is widely accepted that the inclusion of women in the workplace is one of the positive impacts of tourism development.

However, profoundly negative consequences also emerge when analyzing women's role in the tourism sector. Gender inequality is a worldwide issue in all sectors, and the tourism industry is no exception. Due to the scale and deep entrenchment of gender inequality, addressing it is not an easy task (Guimarães & Silva, 2016). As existing literature shows, there is also evidence that women face wage disparity and vertical segregation, two critical issues that have not been resolved (Huete, Brotons, & Sigüenza, 2016; Kogovsek & Kogovsek, 2015). Women in the tourism industry often hold low level, low paying, precarious jobs (UNWTO, 2019; Hutchings, Moyle, Chai, Garofano, & Moore, 2020). Moreover, the numerical superiority of women in tourism positions is not reflected in the sector's technical leadership or management (Baum,

2013). In Spain, women employed in accommodation, travel agencies, tour operators and air transport account for 57% of the total number of workers in these three industries. However, only a third of high-ranking positions are held by women with only 3% becoming CEOs of tourism companies (Canalis, 2019).

The low representativeness of women in decision-making positions is a global phenomenon that impacts negatively on equality and social justice (Chambers, Munar, Khoo-Lattimore, & Biran, 2017). The existence of barriers to women's access to leadership roles has been demonstrated in prior studies (Villamil & Alonso, 2013). Globally, women face barriers such as family responsibilities, gender stereotypes and male-centric corporate cultures that make it difficult for them to be selected for top positions (ILO, 2016). In recent years, the business community has made significant progress in ensuring female representation in the highest spheres. The percentage of companies with at least one woman in top management has grown significantly, from 66% to 75%; this means that more companies have reached some level of gender balance (Grant Thornton, 2018). In the tourism industry the number of women on board of directors has also risen significantly. However, a growing number of women in top management positions does not ensure real gender equality. A global strategy based on diversity must determine the resources and actions plans needed to guarantee equality in tourism (Equality in Tourism, 2018). When women are underrepresented on corporate boards, companies cannot draw from a full range of talent. Boards are more effective in making decisions when women are included in mixed teams (Davies, 2011) as this means a wider variety of

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skills, knowledge and experiences are considered (Hoogendoorn, Oosterbeek, & Van Praag, 2013).

Existing literature suggests that there is an urgent need to translate the long-standing awareness of gender inequality in the hospitality industry into practical solutions and change in organizations (Chambers et al., 2017; Khoo-Lattimore, Chiao Ling Yang, & Je, 2019; Munar et al., 2015; Munar, Khoo-Lattimore, Chambers, & Biran, 2017). Prior studies have examined gender inequality on boards of directors and its characteristics. However, hospitality and gender studies barely converge in any constant or valid engagement (Khoo-Lattimore et al., 2019; Morgan & Pritchard, 2019). According to Figueroa-Domecq, Pritchard, Segovia-Perez, Morgan, and Villace-Molinero (2015), journals of feminist studies include less than 10% on hospitality and gender. Gender itself remains of minimal interest to scholars researching hospitality. In the Spanish tourism sector, little attention has been paid to the field of gender studies, despite its impact on the Spanish economy and the importance of women in tourism as entrepreneurs and employees (Segovia-Pérez & Figueroa-Domecq, 2014). If success in the tourism industry is tied to efficient and committed employees who ensure high-quality service, labor policies should promote greater equality in opportunities, pay and working conditions. Moreover, COVID-19 has dramatically impacted the industry, destroying jobs, and exacerbating gender inequality and the lack of female empowerment (Moreno Alarcón, 2020). As women are the majority in the tourism workforce, the current situation of this vulnerable sector is very worrying.

Women's associations are a clear strategy for facing gender issues. They help women reach their professional objectives, providing support on a local, national, and international level. Support networks are crucial for female professional development (ESADE, 2019). However, there is limited research on women's associations and their role in ensuring gender equality and female empowerment. This paper analyzed how women's associations in Catalonia (Spain) help eradicate barriers to gender equality, in line with Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) from the United Nations' 2030 Agenda. SDG 5 strives to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls, fighting any form of discrimination they face (United Nations, 2020). Our objectives were to identify the goals and roles of women's associations in Catalonia, the barriers women face when accessing corporate positions and the challenges that lie ahead for women in leadership. We sought in-depth knowledge of how the leading women's management associations in Catalonia help minimize gender inequality, provided practical recommendations for different stakeholders and a better understanding of to what degree the tourism industry is respectful of the SDGs (Saarinen, 2019). In these difficult post-COVID19 times, studies like these, which seek tools and initiatives to solve collective problems are more than necessary.

## 2. Theoretical framework

### 2.1. Women in the worldwide workforce

Gender inequality is a phenomenon that persists throughout the world stagnating social progress. Women's equality is not just an ideology; rather it can be considered one of the main paths towards social improvement (Berkovitch, 1999). In fact, such is the importance of gender equality to ensure and hasten sustainable development, that it is one of the crucial SDGs. SDG 5 strives to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls, fighting against any form of discrimination they face (United Nations, 2020). Although gender equality is specifically addressed in SDG 5, it must be a priority across all SDGs (Moreno Alarcón & Cole, 2019). All signatory governments have declared that the achievement of SDG 5 will contribute decisively to the other objectives. To achieve this goal and to implement the 2030 Agenda, governments request the support of both companies and civil society. Nevertheless, contradictions emerge when studying gender is-

ues under the sustainable development paradigm. On one hand, sustainable development can be associated with change, progress, and improvement, as in the effort to achieve gender equality and to promote women's empowerment. On the other, sustainability can also be related to continuity and the preservation of certain conditions, customs, and traditions. As a result, the debate on how women's issues are handled within sustainability in tourism is complex. For instance, cultural and contextual differences should be considered when analyzing women's empowerment and sustainable development to avoid inconsistencies (Tucker, 2020).

The status of SDG 5 varies widely across the globe. Even though many countries have reached parity between boys and girls in primary education, the cost of education seriously affects girls in developing countries (United Nations, 2020). While the number of children not being schooled has dropped since 2005, girls still make up a higher proportion of unschooled children than boys. Many low-income families choose to invest in sons rather than daughters. Often, sending girls off to school would mean lost labor. In contrast, in developed countries, girls and women have wider access to education. For example, recent research shows that in both the United States and several European countries, women's employment tends to be higher among those with a higher educational level (England, Gornick, & Fitzgibbons Shafer, 2012). Some studies also claim that girls and women obtain less encouragement, experience, and opportunities in some areas because teachers and school management consider education a "male" subject, for which women lack skills, understanding or aptitude. For instance, girls are discouraged from pursuing subjects such as science, engineering, technology, or math. Sometimes, teachers' attitudes, classroom atmosphere and approaches to learning help perpetuate gender stereotypes which are repeated by both teachers and students (Schulze, 2016). Thus, as ILO (2016) states, the definition of "gender equality" not only refers to the workplace: what takes place at the professional level is often a reflection of wider issues on a social level. Gender equality means that women and men have the same conditions and same rights when contributing to, and benefiting from, economic, social, cultural, and political development.

As a result of the growth in women's participation in the workforce from the 1960s to the 1990s and the number of women from the baby-boom generation entering the job market, the contribution of women to the labor pool has increased progressively. In 1950, 18.4 million women were present in the labor force, which accounted for about one-third of the total. In 2000, 66.3 million women in the labor force made up 46.5% of the total. Not only has this contribution been increasing, but it also continues to grow at a higher rate than the male labor force (Toossi & Morisi, 2017).

Nevertheless, while women represent two-thirds of the worldwide workforce, they still earn less than men (ILO, 2016). Although the number of female graduates in Europe rises year after year, once in the labor market women receive lower wages than their male colleagues with the same level of education, resulting in the so-called "gender wage gap" (Haasler, 2014; Triventi, 2013). Even if the gender wage gap has decreased, it is a continuing worldwide reality with complex causes (Brynin, 2017). The wage gap refers primarily to two things: women earn less money than men for performing a similar job or earn less because a job they do is not that valued (Moreno Alarcón & Cañada Mullor, 2018). If we focus on Europe, the gender pay gap remains high. Across the economy, women in the EU, earn on average 16% less per hour than men. Considerable differences exist among EU member states: the gender pay gap ranges from 5.2% in Romania to 25.3% in Estonia. In Spain, women also earn less than men: up to 76.1% of the male salary (Huete et al., 2016). Thus, even when women do participate in the labor market, they tend to work in lower-paying sectors, work fewer hours, and occupy lower-ranking positions than men; all this leads to considerable pay and earnings gaps (European Commission, 2016). Women are generously contributing to building the

world's economies, but are denied countless basic legal, political, economic, social, and educational rights in many countries and cultures around the world (UN Women, 2018).

In addition, women's careers tend to be interrupted, with women often driven to part-time work. They are successful at university and in their early careers, but as they rise through the ranks of an organization attrition rates increase (Davies, 2011). Women tend to be secondary wage earners within the family. Their careers usually slow down after some years of participation in the labor market, and once they have children, pauses in their professional career disadvantage them in future promotions (Haasler, 2014). It has traditionally been thought that the limitations women face in the development of their professional career are caused by internal psychological characteristics such as low self-esteem or fear of success (Tharenou, Latimer, & Conroy, 1994). However, findings obtained in recent years reveal that both the capacity and the motivation are similar in men and women (Sarrió, Barberá Heredia, Ramos, & Candela, 2002).

## 2.2. Women in the worldwide tourism workforce

In recent years, tourism has become one of the fastest-growing economic sectors in the world. In the last 5 years, one in five of all jobs generated worldwide were tied to the travel and tourism industry (WTTC, 2019). In many countries, tourism acts as an engine for sustainable development, contributing to the creation of both direct and indirect employment. As Saarinén (2019) suggests, the tourism industry has the potential to promote, drive and enforce the SDGs. If managed properly, tourism leads to the positive society. Tourism offers greater possibilities for women's participation in the workforce, entrepreneurship, and leadership, than any other sector. Nowadays, women make up a large percentage of the labor force in the formal tourism sector. UNWTO (2019) reports that 54% of people employed in tourism are women. Women's high participation in tourism was also confirmed by the World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC, 2014), making up 66% of the total tourism workforce in Australia, France, Germany, South Africa, and Turkey. Tourism is the third-largest sector in terms of female participation worldwide, after education, and health and social work. As Purcell (1996) states, tourism jobs are feminized; in other words, it is an economic sector that is largely sustained by women's work.

The above-mentioned context seems ideal, with great potential to generate the socio-economic empowerment of women and achieve gender equality. However, UNWTO issued a tourism-specific report in 2019 where opportunities were identified alongside challenges and barriers. Women in this industry receive less compensation than men (14.7% less) and do not reach the same levels of education (UNWTO, 2019). Different factors such as cultural values, training, labor environment and established policies impact on women's participation in the field (Almathami, Khoo-Lattimore, & Chiao Ling Yang, 2020). Their numerical predominance is not reflected in the roles they occupy in the industry (Figueroa-Domecq et al., 2015). They tend to occupy precarious, low-level, low-paying positions. In addition, stereotypes, and gender discrimination cause women to hold positions related to cooking, cleaning, and lodging (UNWTO & UN Women, 2010). Thus, studies have proven that gender plays a major role in employment in the tourism sector. For example, hotel staff, waiters and cooks are mostly female, while most tour guides, taxi drivers and maritime officers are men (Obadić & Marić, 2009). When domestic work is transferred to the market it is often assumed that it is an easy job to do and it is therefore undervalued (Moreno Alarcón & Cañada Mullor, 2018).

For years, academic and sector-specific literature has extensively explored these issues in the tourism industry. In recent years, interest in gender issues has grown rapidly in tourism literature (Figueroa-Domecq, Palomo, Flecha, Segovia-Perez, & Vico, 2017; Munar et al., 2017). Nevertheless, women in tourism still face the same difficulties, challenges, and oppression as their female counterparts in other sectors

(Hutchings et al., 2020). When analyzing scientific and industry research on gender issues, dissonances and contradictions emerge between theory and reality, such as "femwashing" (Je, Khoo-Lattimore, & Chiao Ling Yang, 2020). Although organizations often transmit positive discourses and images promoting gender equality, the reality demonstrates that they still perpetuate the gender gap (Khoo-Lattimore et al., 2019). Consistent and collaborative policies and strategies on gender issues should be defined collectively by all stakeholders and from a global perspective, to mainstream gender equality. The tourism industry, the public and private sector, academics, and practitioners must be seriously committed to achieving SDG 5 as a basis for contributing to the rest of the SDGs (Moreno Alarcón & Cole, 2019).

## 2.3. Women in top management positions

Gender inequalities have also been detected among global top management. As SDG 5 states, supporting female leadership will help to reinforce gender equality policies (United Nations, 2020). Companies from around the world have taken one step forward and one step back in terms of gender diversity in leadership. In 2017, although the number of companies with at least one woman in senior management increased, the proportion of senior positions held by women decreased marginally (Thornton, 2018). Indeed, the 2018 Global Gender Gap Report, released by the World Economic Forum (WEF, 2018), estimates that it will take 202 years to achieve gender balance in boardrooms. In general, men still dominate most company boards worldwide. However, women's participation in boards of directors varies from country to country.

According to Thornton (2018), the percentage of companies with at least one woman in senior management and the percentage of companies where senior positions are held by women, Africa tops the list of regions in terms of gender diversity. Eastern Europe is in second place when it comes to female participation in leadership. Poland and Russia follow their tradition of strong female participation, with 93% and 91% of companies having at least one woman in top management, respectively. In the third position in the ranking, we find North America. The United States experienced significant growth in the percentage of companies with at least one woman in senior management, increasing from 69% in 2017 to 81% in 2018. Meanwhile, in Canada, this figure climbed from 23% to 25%. However, North America is at the bottom of the ranking of companies in terms of companies with senior positions held by women. In the European Union, the United Kingdom reached a historic record, with 75% of companies with at least one woman in senior management. It also achieved a slight increase in the proportion of senior positions held by women, which rose from 19% to 22%. Likewise, France registered the highest figure not only in the percentage of companies with at least one woman in senior management (79%), but also in the proportion of senior positions held by women (33%). Finally, at the bottom of the ranking are Asia Pacific and Latin America.

The situation in the tourism industry mirrors the situation worldwide. Vertically, the gender pyramid is changeless: there is significant gender segregation in the labor market. Lower positions with fewer career development opportunities were occupied by women, while managerial positions were dominated by men (Hemmati, 1999). Even though it seems that discrimination in access to management positions has decreased in the tourism industry, different situations of inequality still occur (Sigüenza, Brotons, & Huete, 2013). Women are underrepresented in top management positions in the tourism industry (Do Le, 2017; Equality in Tourism, 2018; Nyaruwata & Nyaruwata, 2013) for example in executive roles at cruise and tour operators in the UK (Glover & O'Reilly, 2016). In the Spanish hotel industry, only 5% of women manage hotel chains, while only 15% become hotel managers (Canalis, 2019).

Several studies show positive relationships between gender and financial performance (Lückerath-Rovers, 2013; Terjesen, Sealy, &

Singh, 2009), with companies with strong female representation on boards in top management positions performing better than those without women (Turban, Wu, & Zhang, 2019). Diversity in management teams enriches daily decision-making processes and provides a competitive advantage. Women contribute to decision-making as more diverse insights are considered. In other words, boards make better decisions when a range of voices can be heard, and when this mix of voices includes women (Davies, 2011). This does not mean that women's leadership abilities are needed to improve financial results, or that services demanded by clients are better developed by men; rather, it means that corporate boards perform better when a range of different skills, knowledge and experiences from both men and women are considered (Hoogendoorn et al., 2013). Companies with senior management teams made up only of men are encouraged to act quickly if they want to remain competitive. The current COVID-19 pandemic, the volatility of the world's economy, ongoing technological innovations and the disruptive effects of these innovations make this issue even more important (Grant Thornton, 2018). The main objective should be that top management positions be occupied by the most talented, with gender being neither a barrier nor a limitation.

#### 2.4. Barriers women face when reaching top management positions

The lack of gender equality in management positions is a global phenomenon and the barriers women face when accessing leadership positions are proven by research (Villamil & Alonso, 2013). According to ILO (2016) in Asia, for example, 30% of business leaders surveyed mentioned that most of the mid-career or senior women who left their jobs voluntarily did so due to family commitments. If we focus on Japan, despite anti-discrimination legislation, only 43% of women who tried to rejoin the workforce after childbirth found jobs, suggesting this is a major cause for the leaky talent pipeline. The study also shows that two-thirds of senior women from companies and professional firms across Europe have highlighted the stereotypes and preconceptions of women's roles and skills as the most important barrier to their career progression. Usually, a segregating organizational culture also determines imbalances and limitations (Huete et al., 2016) when it comes to being promoted to high positions (Figueroa-Domecq, Segovia-Perez, Flecha Barrio, & Palomo, 2018). According to the theory of human capital, smaller investment in human capital is one of the factors that complicates women's job promotion. This theory claims that individuals succeed in increasing their production capacity by investing in themselves, and that the main sources of investment are education, training, and work experience (Barberá Heredia, Ramos, Sarrió, & Candela, 2002). This approach suggests that many women, lack time outside working hours to invest in training, and as a result are excluded from promotion opportunities.

Huete et al. (2016) described several invisible barriers encountered by women such as the "glass ceiling", "diamond ceiling", "cement ceiling" and "sticky floor". Firstly, "glass ceiling", a term made popular by an article published in the Wall Street Journal on female executives in 1986, describes barriers that prevent women with high qualifications and personal and professional capacity from accessing the highest management positions and being promoted in the same conditions as men (Segerman-Peck, 1991). According to this concept, women face a set of invisible, impenetrable barriers as they approach the top positions in the corporate hierarchy (U.S. Glass Ceiling Commission, 1995). Secondly, "diamond ceiling" is related to the prejudice that prevents women from being evaluated according to strictly professional criteria (Valcárcel, 1997). In the third place, "cement ceiling" refers to women's own prejudices, which prevent them from growing in any public sphere because of gender roles and a lack of role models. This barrier is due to much higher pressure on women in managerial positions than on men, which sometimes even drives women to leave their positions (Chinchilla, Poelmans, & León, 2005). Finally, "sticky floor" refers to

tasks from the private sphere that patriarchal culture assigns to women and that hinder a balance between work and family life (Tandrayen-Ragoobur, 2014). Specifically, the task of looking after dependent family members is largely borne by women and is still not equally shared (De Luis Carnicer, Martinez, Perez, & Vela, 2007). Far more women than men choose to take parental leave. This fact, together with the lack of facilities for childcare and elder care, means that women usually interrupt their careers or work part-time to care for their families, which means that they get fewer years of work experience and face more interruptions, which slows their professional progress (Baum, 2013; Eagly & Carli, 2007; Eagly & Karau, 2002; Hoyt, 2010; Keith & McWilliams, 1999; Pons Peregrort, Calvet Puig, Tura Solvas, & Muñoz Illescas, 2013). This unequal division of labor due to household work also causes the wage gap (Polachek, Zhang, & Zhou, 2015). Along the same lines, Sánchez Sellero and Sánchez Sellero (2013) confirm that the increase in the number of family members reduces the likelihood of women being employed, while men's likelihood for employment remains unchanged.

Thus, it can be affirmed that the differences in working behavior stem from the maintenance of stereotypical gender roles and functions (Barberá Heredia et al., 2002). As a result, perceptions of who is more capable of successful leadership can also be difficult to change (Grant Thornton, 2018). Stereotypes reinforce the view that women take care of people and help them, while men take control and focus on the task (Heilman, 1997; Hoyt, 2012). Generally, for leadership positions, the traits associated with men are more highly valued. Nonetheless, many authors indicate that adequate leadership requires a combination of characteristics associated with men and women, such as emotional intelligence, risk-taking, empathy, integrity, or the ability to persuade, motivate and inspire (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Eagly & Karau, 2002; Fernández Palacín, López Fernández, Ma eztu, Martín Prius, & A., 2010; Hoyt, 2010; Powell, 1990; Vecchio, 2002). Several authors claim that women and men demonstrate the same degree of commitment to their jobs and the same motivation to seek leadership positions (Bielby & Bielby, 1988; Eagly & Carli, 2007; Hoyt, 2010; Thoits, 1992). However, unfortunately, people in business, in the workplace, in the family sphere and among friends still strengthen stereotypes. These patriarchal notions permeate many of our ways of acting and thinking and should be challenged and transformed (Chambers et al., 2017).

Inclusion is key to eradicating these invisible barriers. Inclusion incorporates all forms of diversity, recognizing that in addition to aspects such as gender, age, or ethnic origin, it is also important to build on people with different backgrounds, experiences, behavioral styles and skills to increase the effectiveness of a team (Thornton, 2018). Some measures companies implement include ensuring top level commitment, driving gender intelligent actions such as analyzing specific gender barriers within the company and removing them through targeted action or promoting flexible working arrangements. Flexible work-life practices are key to retaining women leaders. Finally, companies should create an enabling environment by creating programs to identify, nurture and value talented female employees (ILO, 2016).

#### 2.5. The contribution of female managers' associations to eradicating barriers

An association can be defined as a group of people with common interests and motivations that deal with different shared issues (Puñal, 2001). Associations and networks in the tourism industry, are a complex phenomenon as the sector is composed of many different businesses and different types of relationships are established between its multiple stakeholders. Existing literature suggests that networks in tourism might not only benefit destinations or companies, but also participants. Some initiatives promote innovation, competitiveness, and development for their members. Most of them increase the flow of information, knowledge, and resources, promoting the creation of al-

liances to enhance competitiveness and resilience (Van der Zee & Vanneste, 2015).

Associations and networks play a significant role in legitimating change, endorsing innovations, and encouraging their spread, managing debate within the sector, redefining practices, and representing members in the field (Greenwood, Suddaby, & Hinings, 2002).

For example in Spain, we find networks and associations in the tourism sector that operate at an international, national or local level, representing different stakeholders such as EXCELTUR (non-profit group formed by managers of Spanish tourism sub-sectors: airlines, hotels, transportation, etc.), CEHAT (independent hotels and chain hotels, apartments and resorts in Spain), ACAVE (specialized travel agencies), APARTUR (tourism apartments association in Barcelona), NECSTOUR (network of European regions for sustainable tourism), KELLY's (national hotel housekeepers' association), or TRINET (academic network in tourism and hospitality), to mention a few.

Ever since the 19th century, women's associations have defended collective ideas and promoted them in society, raising awareness and sensitivity on gender-based concerns and encouraging a fair society. Women's associations were considered a channel for making demands on complex issues such as gender equality and women's emancipation (Puñal, 2001). Many historical, international initiatives fighting for the rights of women came from associated, organized, groups of women representing a global mobilizing force (Berkovitch, 1999). Thus, female collective initiatives have played an essential role in the economic, social, and political transformation of societies (Guérin & Nobre, 2014). From their origins until today, women's associations have multiplied and diversified to find answers to specific issues. Many of these associations attempt to solve problems neglected by the private or public sectors, alleviating women of daily concerns and improving their lives. However, associations also have a societal role that cannot be left in the background. They should reflect and rethink the role of women in the community and the job market, promoting social welfare and women's rights in all sectors (Guérin & Nobre, 2014; Puñal, 2001). These women's initiatives, through their ability to challenge barriers, have a huge reforming potential (Guérin & Nobre, 2014).

Women's associations and networks help specifically women reach their collective and individual objectives. They contribute to the process of empowerment, understood as the process of gender awareness and capacity building (Madaha, 2011), where both elements contribute to participation in decision-making and the potential to transform reality (Pini, Brown, & Ryan, 2004). They are a vehicle for shaping opinions and raising awareness of the need to implement gender equality at all levels of society. Women's networks and associations help overcome difficulties and encourage women to express their goals and motivations for professional development (ESADE, 2019). According to ESADE's gender monitoring report (2019), 75.35% of Spanish female managers consulted stated that informal support networks are important for the development of their professional and personal careers. A large percentage of respondents (58.62%) were members of at least one women's association, although 60.19% recognized that they were not able to spend as much time as they would like as members of these associations. 20% of the rest was interested in joining one in the future.

Existing literature explains that one of the barriers women face in their careers is the exclusion from organizational networks (O'Neil, Hopkins, & Sullivan, 2011). Thus, networking not only helps women meet other women with the same interests and problems, but also helps them in their professional growth (Segovia-Pérez, Figueroa-Domecq, Fuentes-Moraleda, & Munoz-Mazon, 2019). Deeper studies within the field of tourism on women's associations and networks are needed to achieve a greater understanding of the sector on this issue. There is a lack of studies on the role of associations and how they can help women eradicate barriers in their access to executive positions in tourism. Women play a key role in the tourism industry at all levels and

specific associations that address their needs can be relevant for their individual and collective progress.

### 3. Methodology

In Catalonia (Spain), there are approximately 40 registered women's associations. Of these, 12 are managers' associations with two associations specifically focused on the tourism and hospitality sector. It is important to note though that generic associations include members that are active leaders at tourism companies. To explore how women's associations in Catalonia (Spain) helped women by eradicating barriers to gender equality (SDG 5), we chose a qualitative approach with an essentialist focus, reporting the experiences of participants. As the literature suggests, qualitative methodologies provide flexibility and facilitate a rich and detailed account of data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This approach supports researchers that warn of a decrease in these types of studies on gender and tourism (Figueroa-Domecq et al., 2017) and that suggest that qualitative studies help create a robust and stable base for research on gender in tourism (Pritchard, 2018). The qualitative methodology chosen highlights the knowledge derived from women's experiences, although it by no means reflects a single voice or vision for women. In depth semi-structured interviews, in which participants are given the floor to talk about their experiences, views, and perceptions, were considered an appropriate research tool for this study.

As women researchers and practitioners in tourism we believe that there is an urgent need to promote gender equality and empowerment in the industry. Our beliefs, values and interpretations on gender and tourism are socially constructed and may have influenced the research design, data collection and analysis we decided to apply. It is important to note that we share similar experiences and backgrounds as the participants that could have impacted the research. To minimize potential bias and ensure credibility and accuracy in the research process two strategies were implemented. On the one hand, we ensured that the participants were selected independently of their point of view towards the topic. On the other hand, to secure that the data analysis was a trustworthy representation of the themes in the narratives rather than reflection of our biases, the co-researchers constantly consulted one another to consider the accuracy of the analysis.

All associations were contacted directly by the researchers via email or telephone. We conducted a total of 15 face-to-face interviews with leaders of women's associations between March and June 2019, with each lasting approximately 60–80 min. The interviews were conducted in Catalan or Spanish - the interviewees' native language - and were recorded and transcribed in full. Participants signed consent forms, gave permission to be identified and were informed of the objectives of the study. The ethical procedures established by Universitat Ramon Llull were followed and it was approved by the ethics committee of the School of tourism and hospitality Management Sant Ignasi. The participants' names will not be disclosed to ensure confidentiality.

Decision-makers of the following associations (in alphabetical order) were interviewed: Associació de Dones Directives, Empresàries i Professionals (ADE Vallès), Agima, ASODAME Dones Emprenedores/BPW Barcelona (ASODAME/BPW Barcelona), Círculo de Mujeres de Negocio (CMN), Asociación Española de Ejecutivas y Consejeras (EJE&CON), Fundació Internacional de la Dona Emprenedora (Fidem), Lean In Barcelona, Professional Women's Network/Barcelona (PWN/Barcelona), Women in eTravel (WieT), Women in Hospitality & Travel Tech (WHTT) and 50a50. The scope of the associations varied, with some local, some national, and others as chapters of international associations. We ensured that interviewees were decision-makers at their respective associations as it was important to gain insights from leading individuals. In four specific cases (WieT, WHTT, EJE&CON and 50a50), we interviewed two decision-makers from each association. In the case of WieT and WHTT, as our focus was on the tourism industry, we deemed it convenient to obtain more detailed insights from these

tourism-related associations. Eje&Con is the leading association supporting top managers, while 50a50 is the leading association for the public administration, so further interviews with these two institutions were arranged. The description of the sample's profile is summarized in Table 1.

The script of the interview (see Appendix 1 for the original version and Appendix 2 for a version translated into English) was composed of three parts: the first contained a personal profile and the individual's trajectory in women's associations. The second focused on the goals, the role of the association, its contribution to associates and barriers encountered by women pursuing executive positions. The final part addressed the current situation of women and future challenges and strategies for ensuring female leadership. The quotations were translated from Spanish or Catalan into English by the researchers to their best of knowledge, so some inaccuracies might be expected from translation or interpretation. Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) with the support of Nvivo software. We identified, analyzed, and reported themes across the data collected to find repeated patterns or meaning. Firstly, we familiarized ourselves with the data by generating initial codes. During a second phase, we reviewed the themes, refining and analyzing them.

#### 4. Findings and discussion

To analyze how women's associations in Catalonia (Spain) contributed to eradicating barriers to gender equality, we first identified the goals and roles of women's associations in Catalonia. Second, we discussed the barriers to women pursuing corporate-level positions that these associations encountered. Finally, future challenges to women in leadership were presented.

##### 4.1. Goals and roles of women's associations in Catalonia

The women's associations consulted differed in sizes, focused on a range of action areas, and had diverse objectives. For a description of those objectives and the activities offered by the associations, see Table 2. However, although each association consulted was different, they all shared the common goal of achieving gender equality in the workplace. All participants, whether from consolidated or recently created associations, mentioned that they are somehow involved in the fight against

**Table 1**  
Description of the sample's profile (own elaboration).

Association	Start Year	Scope	Members	Profile of interviewee	Interview date
ASODAME BPW Barcelona	1994	Chapter	80	President	27.03.2019
EJE&CON	2015	Chapter	200	Vice-president Board member	28.03.2019 29.03.2019
ADE Vallès	2012	Local	60	President	03.04.2019
Fidem	1996	Local	100	President	12.04.2019
50a50	2017	Local	111	Vice-president Board member	15.04.2019 16.04.2019
WieT	2018	Chapter	200	Co-founder Co-founder	18.04.2019 19.04.2019
CMN	2005	Chapter	4500	President	27.04.2019
PWN/Barcelona	2007	Chapter	150	Executive team	27.05.2019
WHTT	2019	Chapter	200	Founder Chapter leader	30.05.2019 03.06.2019
Lean In Barcelona	2016	Chapter	1000	Co-leader	04.06.2019
Agima	2008	Local		President	14.06.2019

**Table 2**

Objectives and activities offered by associations (own elaboration based on official websites and information from interviews).

Association	Objectives	Activities
ASODAME BPW Barcelona	Publish studies that contribute to consolidating companies founded by women. Identify the initiatives of freelancers and startups. Collaborate with public and private institutions to promote economic development. Enhance and exchange knowledge and experiences related to business creation. Participate in local, regional, and international conferences, symposiums, or meetings. Promote activities organized by the association. Organize conferences that help members gain effectiveness in their professional endeavors. Promote social and economic activities in developing countries with a special focus on training.	Consultancy Mentoring Discounts Excellence groups Entrepreneur mothers' program Networking
EJE&CON	Promote the access of female managers to senior management positions and boards of directors of both public and private entities, proactively enhancing their visibility with the aim of becoming a think-tank. Generate social awareness that prioritizes talent and diversity in its broadest sense, promoting the competitiveness and sustainability of organizations.	Conferences Managers in transition Genderless talent award Code of best practices Board of directors' program Leadership Mentoring Engagemen Networking Reports
ADE Vallès	Act as a point of reference and meeting point to promote talent and female leadership. Create of knowledge and professional opportunities Generate opportunities and best practices to share and influence the business and social world.	Training program Visits Networking ADE Vallès Awards
Fidem	Serve as a tool to enhance the influence and visibility of women in the main decision-making spaces in society, ensuring the equitable presence of women and men in all institutions. Share personal and professional knowledge to achieve economic independence for women and effective equality.	Fidem Awards Internationalization advice Networking Entrepreneurship mentoring Legal observatory Communication Discounts
50a50	Advance in the fulfillment of SDG 5 of the UN's 2030 Agenda, both personally and professionally. Influence our environment to raise awareness of the importance and benefits of living in a fairer, more equal, more ethical, and more transparent world. Promote lobbying actions with women from all areas of society to achieve 50 to 50 female representation in Catalan public institutions and public and private organizations.	Promote female candidacies in election processes. Promote women in technology. Improve the professional conditions of freelance women. Advocate for women in decision-making positions.
WieT	Encourage a more balanced female presence in the online travel sector. Encourage female participation in events, tradeshows, and meetings. Create a community to support and inspire women.	Networking Calendar of industry events Visibility of members

(continued on next page)

Table 2 (continued)

Association	Objectives	Activities
CMN	Promote systematic and effective cooperation between women's businesses. Increase visibility and recognition of women, as business creators and economy producers. Facilitate the search, identification, analysis, and execution of projects that improve their competitive capacity. Collaborate with the competent public bodies, in promoting the image of professional and business women. Mentor professional and business women. Encourage studies that promote the stability and promotion of companies led by women. Improve training, communication, competitiveness, and international projection of its associates. Maintain contact with other related organizations from any territorial scope. Represent and promote the interests of women.	Networking Mentoring E-learning Sharing of best practices for the reconciliation of work and personal life Promote a network of private investors Marketplace environment CMN Awards
PWN/ Barcelona	Create a movement of people who aspire to accelerate the current pace of change towards gender-balanced leadership. Connect people with a global network, inspiring the leaders of today to create exemplary leaders of tomorrow. Create an environment where members support one another, embrace new skills, learn to speak out on important issues and create sustainable action plans. Strategic partnerships with other networks and events.	Networking Learning events and webinars Mentorship programs Building alliances Interactive forums Content generation Access to research Network of male allies Volunteer program
WHTT	Advocate for a more diverse culture in hospitality and travel-tech organizations. Enable the professional growth of women and underrepresented groups through education, mentorship, and career development.	Training Mentorship Career upgrade Networking
Lean In Barcelona	Inspire and support female professionals in Barcelona. Assist women in their professional development. Create the largest community of connected women in the city.	Monographic sessions Panel of experts Women's circles Mentoring
Agima	Promote the visibility of women in complicity with men and in co-responsibility with the environment. Contribute to a society where people can choose their own ideal life within a framework of universal values. Promote all spheres of members' lives with complicity between men and women.	Networking Panel of experts Cultural and well-being events Learning activities Public forum

gender inequality and the barriers women face when pursuing top management positions.

Associations clearly play a relevant role in society. They are a vehicle for generating opinions and awareness on issues like gender equality at all levels of society (Díez Herrero, 2016). As participant 6 stated: "I don't want to be favored, I'm not asking for favors. I'm asking to be treated as an equal." Some participants agreed that women mostly join associations to realize that what is true for them is also for many other women, and that it does not happen to them alone. Rather, they share concerns with an entire collective. Participant 3 explained that she was aware of gender discrimination and that she looked for an association to help change this situation. Meanwhile, Participant 2 stated that she used to think there were no structural problems related to gender, but after attending courses organized by the associations, she realized that discrimination did indeed exist. This example shows how these organizations can help women increase their awareness of gender discrimination.

As respondents explained, associations also serve as a "place to share". Within the group, women share their experiences, frustrations, opinions, and fears, as well as means of overcoming difficulties and of developing their careers. For example, Participant 5 explained that thanks to her women's associations she realized that a small number of women were giving speeches about technology and tourism: "I asked myself: aren't there any women capable of speaking publicly about technology and tourism? I doubt it. If there are, who are they and why aren't they present in public spheres today?". According to this participant, most women are not willing to speak publicly because they fear the exposure, because it is not their area of expertise or because they believe that they are not knowledgeable enough about the topic. This is closely related with what Chinchilla et al. (2005) introduced about the "cement roof": women's own prejudices prevent them from growing in public spheres because of gender roles and the lack of role models. Therefore, when women have spaces where they can share their experiences and doubts with others, a more critical perception of reality emerges.

Moreover, associations give visibility to female leaders, entrepreneurs, and professionals, helping to create alliances among them. Associations promote the exchange of information, experiences, and resources, while encouraging professional and business collaboration. As the president of one of the organizations expressed "associates benefit from the support they give one another and the friendship and professional ties they eventually develop..." Participant 12 explained that she helps support business cooperation among members. She stated that "women aren't expected to be granted benefits just for being women, but also aren't willing to have opportunities taken away from them because of their gender." Associations help women establish collaborative alliances and enhance their visibility in society so that other women can see themselves in leadership positions and roles. That way, future generations will look up to them, and become empowered by following their example.

#### 4.2. Barriers to women accessing corporate-level positions encountered by associations

As our analysis showed, one of the key roles of some of the associations consulted is to help women challenge the barriers they face when pursuing corporate-level positions. Why some women fail to reach leadership and executive positions is a complex issue influenced by several barriers that can determine or limit their career progress. Participants 5 and 3 agreed that in addition to networking opportunities, associations provided them with greater self-knowledge: "what happens to me, happens to us all. You can network, but at the same time you can learn new skills and content with things like the training sessions or talks that associations organize." Thus, we can see how these initiatives helped women challenge barriers such as a lack of motivation, training, or contacts.

Women's associations have also helped women challenge barriers related to a lack of support when aiming for top management positions. According to Participant 1, the biggest challenge was believing in her value as a woman: "we need to position ourselves, reinforce our desires and simply achieve what corresponds to us." Shared professional and personal spaces, and trust based on mutual support, allowed members to move forward more rapidly in their careers (Hicks, 2020). Participants 13 and 15 mentioned that belonging to a women's association helped them reflect on social stereotypes and discriminatory organizational cultures. As Segovia-Pérez et al. (2019) explain, policies that ensure gender equality in senior management positions are key to social development. When women participate in conferences, symposiums or meetings, awareness of certain issues increased, but ideas and initiatives for promoting social change also emerged. For example, Participant 4 pointed out that one of the issues that worries her most is technology. Her concern is that if women are not present where artificial in-

telligence is manufactured, this will create a new gender bias. She explained that society should be preparing young girls for technological careers. Associations have helped promote this view. However, being part of a women's association also has its drawbacks. Several participants agreed that one disadvantage being part of an association is how time consuming it can be. As participant 10 mentioned "when you're in a top position in a company, time is scarce". However, all interviewees saw that the results of participation are rewarding and enriching, so their commitment and sacrifice were deemed worthwhile.

Even the leaders of women's association faced barriers of their own, although their answers regarding these barriers differed. Some of the challenges mentioned were enrolling more associates, seeking the welfare of members, and getting women to achieve professional promotion in a much more equal way. Along these lines, Participant 8 stated that the greatest challenge was taking care of her associates and working on projects that go beyond networking. According to [ESADE's Gender Monitor study \(2019\)](#), 49.11% of women indicated that associations provide no benefits beyond networking. Participant 7 disagreed with this view: "this is not just networking; this is a community. Some women within the association have offered each other job opportunities, have supported each other. Somehow, they have created a family, an environment of trust that can give them ideas on how to face constraints." Participant 12 explained that her personal challenge was working hand-in-hand with other associations in a collaborative way. Women's associations need to weave many alliances to change society ([San José, 2002](#)). The respondent supported the idea that cooperation and mutual benefits are the way to accelerate progress. As [Guérin and Nobre \(2014\)](#) explain, these women's initiatives can go through different phases of trial and error in trying to achieve their goals and accomplish their mission. Time, resources, and individual and collective commitment are key to achieving significant results.

#### 4.3. Future challenges for ensuring female leadership

As for the situation of female managers in Spain, Participant 5 found it worrying: "we estimate that only 15% of women have a presence on executive boards in Spain. The main challenge is to change this situation as soon as possible". In the Spanish tourism sector, several studies also indicated that the number of women in corporate management positions is disproportionately low if we consider the total representation of women in the labor force, even when women and men have proven to be equally efficient when it comes to taking on management responsibilities. They have also noted, as mentioned before, that women's wages are lower ([Marco-Lajara & Úbeda-García, 2013](#); [Mooney & Ryan, 2009](#); [Obadić & Marić, 2009](#)). Associations have raised awareness of how society is losing economic resources when subjecting women to invisible barriers. Participant 6 stated: "if companies are not convinced by ethical or moral arguments, they should implement changes based on business profitability, they should look at the numbers." Associations help raise awareness of the benefits of including women in managerial positions not just for social purposes, but also for economic progress. It is not only companies that need to improve in this sense so, should the public administration. Participant 11 supported the idea that extra pressure on the public administration is required to promote diversity and a balanced presence of women and men.

As the existing literature explains, the hospitality sector faces the same situation as other industries: women are under-represented on boards of directors, and the sector further perpetuates the problem ([Do Le, 2017](#); [Equality in Tourism, 2018](#); [Nyaruwata & Nyaruwata, 2013](#)). Some respondents believed that every industry has peculiarities regarding gender issues that are difficult to cover with a general approach. For example, they mentioned that a widespread issue such as the "glass ceiling" is common to all sectors, but that each sector then has its own characteristics. Participants agreed that inclusion is key to eradicating invisible barriers. Inclusion incorporates all forms of diversity, recog-

nizing that in addition to aspects such as gender, age, or ethnic origin, it is also important to include people with different backgrounds, experiences, behavior styles and skills to increase the effectiveness of a team ([Grant Thornton, 2018](#)).

According to the [ESADE Gender Monitor Report \(2019\)](#), in Spain the number of female managers who perceive gender barriers in their companies has increased. Mainly they mentioned difficulty reconciling work and family life, wage inequality and a lack of recognition for their tasks. The number of women who suffered mobbing from colleagues or bosses has also increased. Furthermore, 63.41% of female managers believed that gender balance was not seen as a priority in their companies. The future is not promising, but respondents agreed that working together helps in many ways. Along the same line, Participant 1 believes it is essential to work together with men if the goal is to break barriers such as the invisible "glass ceiling". These barriers prevent many women with high qualifications and personal and professional capacity from accessing the highest levels of management and responsibility in the same conditions as men ([Segerman-Peck, 1991](#)). Participant 7 also agreed that the commitment of men in this fight for equality is key to achieving strategic objectives in organizations and the political sphere. As existing literature explains, men are crucial agents of change and ought to be involved in gender equality issues ([Connell, 2003](#)). Finally, Participant 3 felt that to have a real impact, we need to educate society in general on these issues: "when you educate children, nephews or friends, please educate them on equality." Women's associations accomplish a relevant role in the transmission of these values within society. Women must remain firm on gender issues in different contexts and organizations while demanding women's rights from their collectives and associations ([Puñal, 2001](#)).

## 5. Conclusions

Women still have a long way to go to achieve gender equality in executive-level positions, with many barriers to overcome and many constraints to face. Despite companies making efforts to achieve gender balance, the situation on boards of directors is still not equitable. Achieving equal rights for men and women is still a big challenge for many organizations. However, solidarity, cooperation and commitment among equals do make the journey easier. Existing women's associations seem to be capable of impacting the future of gender. They play the key role of providing visibility for collective problems, reflecting on them, and seeking solutions. Women's associations serve as essential elements that encourage women to participate actively while also developing initiatives on what institutions and companies do. They are the driving force behind women's progress, allowing them to join forces and make themselves heard ([San José, 2002](#)). Women associations have the potential to transform both their members and society. As a recommendation, it would be advisable for associations in Catalonia (Spain) to join forces and support one another more than they currently do. The information collected in interviews made clear that when women work together, they achieve outstanding results. In this sense, there is room for improvement. In Catalonia, efforts are scattered even though joint strategies would be beneficial to associations, their members, and women in general.

This paper has reviewed gender issues and has discussed the importance of women's associations in facing gender inequality, especially when pursuing leadership positions. This study contributes to the growing body of research on tourism and gender and has especially increased knowledge of how women's associations empower women and help them progress professionally. The findings of this research provide remarkable knowledge on how women's associations help accomplish SDG 5 of the UN's 2030 Agenda, which defends gender equality as a critical objective on the path to sustainability. In addition to playing many other roles, the women's associations in this sample, empower women using a range of strategies. They enhance social conscience on



gender equality in the workplace, support women with training, courses, and meetings, give visibility to gender issues and actions, and expand professional networks and access to resources. According to respondents, women's associations helped them overcome constraints in their lives and contributed to their personal and professional growth.

Each of the consulted associations has its own way of supporting women based on their size, objectives, the profiles of associates and their areas of action. Most help members be aware of the barriers they face when pursuing management positions. Participants explained that their level of awareness and self-reflection increased when members shared insights and experiences with other women or attended courses and training on these issues. Also, associations provided their members with constant support which allowed them to develop both professional and personal connections with others. However, associations contributed to both individual and group welfare. They inspired women to reach their goals and offered role models. Associations contributed to a cultural change, regarding issues like equal access to top management positions. Therefore, associations pursued a shared goal achieving gender equality in the workplace and contributing to progress in women's professional development. These collective initiatives find into innovative ways of overcoming barriers and turning them into advantages. They are vital to improving women's current professional circumstances and achieving gender parity in corporate management in Spain, an area that has moved at a very slow pace so far.

In fact, at present it is developing much too slowly in most countries. With the current rate of change, most governmental bodies agree that more than 200 years are needed to achieve parity in top management positions. This is a major issue for the tourism industry. The percentage of women working in tourism is very high, but women are still not equitably represented on decision-making bodies. Associations help speed up this process. The training these associations provide, the studies published, support from other women, role models and mentors are valuable aids on the path to management (Freund, 2019). Although a range of different associations were interviewed, the female leaders consulted agreed that gender equality ought to be a priority for companies, although this is rarely the case for companies in Spain. In recent months, with the increase of telecommuting caused by COVID-19, although three out of four women acknowledge that their employer has adapted to their family situation, 19.4% indicate that they have had a harder time balancing work and family than their male colleagues, with 28.4%, having a harder time than their partners (ESADE, 2020). Therefore, this is a current, pressing issue.

The findings of this study open several courses of action for stakeholders in the tourism sector. In Catalonia, private businesses, the public administration, educational institutions, and civil society should collaborate in adopting gender equality measures to drive a noticeable change in both their own parity indicators and in gender equality across the sector. If agents work together and network, promote these objectives and defend them without reservation, all the accumulated knowledge on gender and sustainability can be implemented exponentially in the post-COVID19 period. In our view, tourism universities should work closely with women's associations to increase the visibility of women as role models. At least in Catalonia, there is a pool of women willing to collaborate that would be of added value as guest professionals, for example. Most students of tourism and hospitality in Catalonia are women, yet female role models are scarce. The protagonists of most case studies, guest speakers or relevant tourism authorities are men. Furthermore, educational institutions need to support companies, destinations, and public bodies by offering training, research and debate on gender and sustainability in tourism. Another stakeholder, tourism businesses, might also contribute to female empowerment and equal opportunities by working with associations. For example, they

could provide internal training sessions, sponsor initiatives launched by associations, share reports and material, ensure fair promotion systems, and minimize gender bias in their selection and salary processes. Tourism is a people's sector, and people are diverse. An inclusive business culture that fosters diversity will strengthen companies. We need inclusive values, promoted by a corporate culture, that enhance equal opportunities and does not discriminate by either gender, culture, age, religion, or special needs. Companies with diverse and inclusive DNA are not only more sustainable, but also more attractive and profitable. Diversity increases the creativity of teams and the profitability of companies. While social justice and legal compliance are often the initial triggers, many successful companies understand diversity as the source of a competitive advantage, and specifically as a key facilitator of growth. The public sector should also actively promote equality and support and broaden the impact of their strategies and campaigns with the help of women's associations. A close relationship and representation of women's associations in the corresponding public committees is therefore highly advisable.

This study was limited by using qualitative data, which increases the probability of the information obtained being biased. Additionally, the fact that the interviews were not conducted in English may have led to misunderstandings or translation inaccuracies. Furthermore, the associations consulted were diverse and not strictly focused on tourism. This research has shown that more precise data is needed to evaluate and understand the situation of women's associations in Catalonia (Spain). An additional study should assess which barriers prevent associations from working together using shared strategies. Further work is needed to fully understand the situation of other associations in other locations, so replicating the study elsewhere in Spain or abroad to consider cultural differences is advisable. Further research could explore the views of female associates. This would add their view and perceptions to the analysis. Moreover, as Boluk, Cavaliere, and Higgins-Desbiolles (2017) suggest, to ensure effective sustainable development, critical thinking and multiple points of view should be fostered on how to achieve the SDGs in different communities and realities. In this sense, a more holistic view of the SDGs and tourism is needed that also analyses the role of associations, the views of female associates and the dynamics of power. Lastly, barriers to female entrepreneurs in the tourism industry were scarcely analyzed in this study; it seems advisable to encourage further research on the role of women's associations in supporting female entrepreneurs.

To conclude, if we were only to count the number of men and women, we might be satisfied, as the tourism industry currently employs more women. However, our objective is more ambitious: to pursue inclusive and co-responsible models (Freund, 2018). Only then we will achieve a greater presence of women in leadership positions. This is not about counting women and men, but about the men and women leading responsible tourism initiatives and contributing to a better world. Laura Liswood, the general secretary of the Council of Women World Leaders, affirmed: "women are like snowflakes; one alone may melt, but together we can stop traffic." Gender diversity generates greater gender diversity. The more snowflakes, the more things change. Associations' contributions to female managers are crucial. To put it one way, they serve as valuable "snow machines."

#### CRediT authorship contribution statement

**Daniela Freund:** Conceptualization, Methodology, Data curation, Formal analysis, Writing - review & editing. **Gilda Hernandez-Maskivker:** Conceptualization, Formal analysis, Writing - review & editing.

## Appendix A. Appendix 1. Interview script (Spanish version)

### A.1. Parte 1: Personal

Para comenzar, nos interesaría conocer su recorrido/trayectoria en asociaciones de mujeres.

1. ¿Desde cuándo forma parte de la asociación(es) de mujeres?
2. ¿Cuál fue su motivación para incorporarse? ¿Qué beneficios le ha aportado y le aporta ser parte de una asociación de mujeres?
3. ¿Se ha encontrado con desventajas en las asociaciones?
4. ¿Cuál es su mayor reto en la asociación que lidera?

### A.2. Parte 2: Objetivos, rol de la asociación y aportaciones a las asociadas

1. ¿Cuáles son los ámbitos de actuación en los que son más activos desde la asociación?
2. ¿Cuáles son los mayores logros, cambios o aportaciones que habéis conseguido, tanto para las asociadas como para la sociedad en los últimos años?
3. ¿Qué objetivos os planteáis a corto, medio y largo plazo?
4. ¿Qué acciones estratégicas estáis contemplando en vuestra asociación a futuro?

### A.3. Parte 3: Retos de futuro para potencial el liderazgo femenino

1. En uno de los estudios analizados (ESADE Gender monitor), mujeres que están en asociaciones indican que éstas no les benefician más allá del networking.

¿Está de acuerdo con esta afirmación? ¿Cree usted que a las asociaciones les falta estrategia? En caso de respuesta afirmativa: ¿Cómo podría hacerse mejor? En caso de respuesta negativa: ¿Por qué no está de acuerdo?

2. Desde su perspectiva, ¿cómo valoraría la situación de la mujer directiva en España?
3. ¿Cuáles creen que son los mayores retos en los que habría que trabajar actualmente?
4. ¿Cómo creen que podemos crear acciones estratégicas de impacto entre todas las mujeres para que haya cambios en positivo?

## Appendix B. Appendix 2. Interview script (English translation)

### B.1. Section 1.: Personal profile

To begin, we would like to hear about your trajectory in women's associations.

1. How long have you been part of your women's association(s)?
2. What was your motivation for joining? What benefits have the women's association brought you?
3. Have you encountered disadvantages in associations?
4. What is your biggest challenge at the association you lead?

### B.2. Section 2: Goals and roles of the association and contributions to members

1. What are the areas of action in which you are most active?
2. What have your greatest achievements, changes, or contributions been in recent years, both for members and society in general?
3. What objectives do you have in the short, medium, and long term?
4. What strategic actions is your association considering for the future?

### B.3. Section 3: Future challenges to ensuring female leadership

1. In one of the studies analyzed (ESADE Gender monitor), women who are in associations indicate that these do not benefit them beyond networking. Do you agree with this statement? Do you think that associations lack a strategy? If the answer is yes: how could this be improved? If the answer is no: why do you disagree?
2. From your perspective, how would you assess the situation of female managers in Spain?
3. What do you think are the biggest challenges to focus on today?
4. How do you think women can work together to create strategic actions that drive positive change?

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For an extended CV and a list of research publications check the following [link](#)