

Women's Leadership Development, Learning Opportunities and the Connection to Educational Travel: Theoretical Perspectives, Analysis and Related Research

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Introduction

Theorizing the potential relationship between educational tourism [travel] and women's leadership and learning development is a relatively unexplored territory. In brief, I define Educational tourism as travel for education and learning. The role of travel in leadership development and learning opportunities is not a topic that has a large body of work or theoretical perspectives about this issue. This gap in knowledge or research is concerning when we consider that women as important socio-economic development contributors in the tourism industry and in building a nation.

What we do know is that questions related to this topic are not likely to be answered without including a discussion about the role of women in the development of a nation. Both issues are important because while business and social travel are often an open to all opportunity, there are many women who do not receive support or the freedom to travel outside their homes, schools or communities and especially international travel because travel is often primarily a male activity in some business and societal cultures. For example, the number of women from Middle Eastern cultures and closed societies or information about women's travel activities is an area of research generally untapped in the educational tourism world.

Importance of the Issue

The importance of exploring this situation is that women are a great economic and social force in the development of a nation's greatest resources on all levels beginning with the production of human resources—people. The paucity of information about women's travel makes it difficult to fully understand the role that tourism or educational travel has on their leadership development and learning opportunities. Theoretical perspectives in this article emerge from personal experiences, observations and existent literature that offer information about the travel culture of women and the importance of travel for women to explore, develop and spread knowledge. I theorize that educational travel or tourism is necessary to enhance women's self-efficacy, potential and ability to be informed contributors in the building of their leadership skills to take on projects that inform building better homes, schools, communities and the nations they serve. The discussion focuses on two questions.

- What is the role of travel in women's educational leadership development and learning opportunities? And
- What is the role of women in the development of any nation?

Theoretical Concepts

The inspiration for this editorial comes from my interest in the presence of gender differences in power positions that are often not assigned or reserved for women in the educational tourism industry, educational leadership environments or in world society, pending the region of residence for many women. Research shows that women have dynamic roles in tourism development, which includes leaders, consumers and producers of educational projects. Women's engagement in these roles has brought to the forefront issues such as "sustainable development, socioeconomic inequality, marginalization of people [especially girls and women], gender development, prostitution and tourism, restructuring and globalization, tourist migration and health related issues are just a few areas that women leaders who travel are able to gather and share knowledge [1].

Analysis

An analysis if research reveals that many theories that provide ways of explaining this phenomenon center on race, class, gender or social economic status, which call for social action to bring about change in inequitable or questionable practices related to the treatment and valuing of women in various environments including the tourism industry, especially in education. The following concepts are a few examples that represent ways of thinking related to gender equality and women empowerment.

- When most people think about social action and women, they focus on changes in laws and the advancement of women in politics, business or their professions. Yet, for the majority of women, the struggle for change, leadership, education, equality or inclusion does not begin in tourism industry or education boardrooms or government courtrooms, but in their homes, communities, worship places, schools and workplaces. Critical issues include low-income resistance, cultural diversity among women, and childcare for women working, health, education and training to transform knowledge, violence against women and more generational problems.
- Current research identifies factors necessary to support effective mentoring for women and girls as solutions to address their need to understand how and why they must be persistent and resilient to empower themselves to develop their leadership skills and participation in educational tourism to expand opportunities to learn. For example, to enact social and political change to improve conditions for women, women must understand the difference between getting "help" and "empowerment". When women are simply "helped", often experts or outsiders define the problem, analyze the causes, propose or design solutions, which often lead to yet another level of dependency vs. independence for women.

- On the contrary, when an “empowerment” model is put in use to enact social change, women define their problems; draw up on their own insights and possibly those of outsiders and experts to analyze the source of their problems. In result, women are empowered to determine the course of action or solution most appropriate for their circumstances rather than a one size fit all model. Women empowerment in the educational or tourism industry must begin with women really talking to other women and exploring issues and opportunities to identify commonalities and differences.

Related Research

Despite the paucity of current research, a number of social activists researchers have made unique contributions to understanding the role of women in educational tourism, their leadership development or learning. Historical research on this issue by Chambers, (1997) reports “anthropological research has tended to focus on international aspects of tourism, often as another kind of expression of the guest/host relationship”.

However, today in modern tourism lines are often blurry between host/guest and are more a collaborative exchange in tourism development allowing women more opportunity than in the past for inclusion. For example, although leadership and employment opportunities for women have legitimized the existence of gender inequalities—those same opportunities have empowered or enabled

women to travel or work outside their homes, communities and schools [3]. Other studies cited in this editorial focus on a mix of tourism, educational tourism and tourism as a culture.

Recommendation and Conclusion

Programs, projects and funding for global initiative are required to encourage, train and develop women and girls to empower them to “not quit but face up to the challenges” that threaten women pursuits of empowerment in education, government, business, tourism, home and community leadership.

I strongly believe that if the educational and tourism industry is to strengthen its position in improving educational tourism, communication and services to nations worldwide, attention must be given to how more women can be empowered and included in leadership development and learning opportunities to expand women's dynamic roles in both educational and social tourism development.

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