# Questioning women's empowerment through tourism entrepreneurship opportunities:

# The case of Omani women

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# Abstract

This thesis adopts critical feminist theory, which is a combination of both critical theory and feminist theory, to explore the nature and experiences of Omani women involved in tourism entrepreneurship with particular regard to empowerment. Several studies have identified the potential role of tourism entrepreneurship to empower women due to the many benefits that it provides. However, this potential, and the extent that it empowers women, has been questioned. A review of the literature on women in tourism entrepreneurship reveals that there are several issues that have theoretical and practical implications for women's empowerment through this activity. Furthermore, a review of the development studies literature indicates that there are many prevailing issues and debates surrounding the concept of women's empowerment that merit further investigation.

The fieldwork for this research took place in Oman during 2013-2014 and included an examination of a hosting group, sewing group and a number of women tourism entrepreneurs. Participant observations and semi-structured/unstructured interviews were conducted to collect information about these women. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the collected information and to develop three ethnographic case studies. The findings of this research reveal that tourism entrepreneurship does not inevitably bring about empowerment for Omani women. It is far from being an activity for women's individual and collective empowerment, given that the scope for such remains dependent on the embedded environment and is influenced by the nature of tourism enterprise work. An empirically informed conceptual framework was developed from the data to present this phenomenon. A grounded conceptualisation was also developed from the data to conceptualise the process of women's empowerment for Omani women in tourism entrepreneurship. Theoretical implications of the findings are identified in relation to the appropriate use of the concept of women's empowerment in tourism research. Practical implications of the findings are also identified in relation to local and international tourism organisations that utilises tourism entrepreneurship opportunities for women's empowerment purposes.

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And, finally, I would like to thank the women who participated in my study for their time and for sharing their experiences with me; without them, this study would not have been possible.

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# List of abbreviations

DWET        Developing Women's Entrepreneurship in Tourism

UNWTO       United Nations World Tourism Organisation

UNDP        United Nations Development Program

UN          United Nations

WID         Women In Development

WAD         Women And Development

GAD         Gender And Development

WED         Women Entrepreneurship Development

NGOs        Non-Government Organisations

SMEs        Small and Medium Enterprises

GDP         Gross Domestic Product

OWA         Omani Women Association

CEDAW       Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women

# Chapter 1: Introduction

## 1.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to introduce the research that was completed for this PhD thesis. First I provide an outline of the importance of the research, then I present the aim and objectives of my study, followed by a guide to the structure of my thesis. I conclude with a recap of the main topics discussed in this chapter.

## 1.2 Importance of the research

A growing body of literature in the tourism discipline has been advocating the potential role of tourism entrepreneurship to empower women. Much emphasis has been placed on the benefits it provides for them. However, the challenges and barriers that it causes for women have yet to be addressed and critically analysed. Thus, in this thesis, I question and challenge the popular notion of women's empowerment through tourism entrepreneurship opportunities. Specifically, I question how helpful tourism entrepreneurship opportunities are for women's empowerment, and challenge whether this kind of work is good for women.

The notion of questioning and challenging the potential of tourism entrepreneurship to empower women is not new, and a few previous studies have attempted to analyse this (for example Annes and Wright, 2015; McMillan, O'Gorman and MacLaren, 2011; Moswete and Lacey, 2014; Pleno, 2006; Tran and Walter, 2014). However, what differentiates my research from this earlier work is that I make a deliberate effort to move beyond the simple notion of tourism entrepreneurship as a site of women's empowerment to critically analysing tourism entrepreneurship as a platform for women's empowerment. I also subject the idea of women's empowerment through this type of economic activity to rigorous assessment. Moreover, I expose and critique the limited and biased research of women in tourism entrepreneurship and its link to women's empowerment. In addition, I take a more critical approach in being open about the realities of women and their embedded environment. Furthermore, in order to really look at tourism

entrepreneurship as a whole for women, I look at all types of tourism businesses that women are involved in rather than just one type of tourism business, as many previous studies have done (Acharya and Halpenny, 2013; Bakas, 2015; Li, 2003; Swain, 1993). With women's empowerment being a subjective and abstract concept, I do not adopt a particular type of definition as previous researches usually do. Instead, I follow a natural manifestation of empowerment taken from the women who took part in this research. As a broad working definition for the reader at this stage, reference to empowerment in the thesis refers to the "authority or power given to someone to do something" (Oxford Dictionaries, 2017b). In the discussion chapter, meanings of empowerment grounded in the findings are provided. Overall, my research approach helped me to determine the potential and extent to which tourism entrepreneurship actually does empower women.

To conduct my research, I produce knowledge on the potential for tourism entrepreneurship to empower women by drawing together literature on women in tourism entrepreneurship and women's empowerment. I also focus on offering a new and context-specific experience of women in tourism entrepreneurship and its implications for women's empowerment. Research on women in tourism entrepreneurship has been conducted in both western and non-western contexts. Although Mathieson and Wall (1982) emphasise the importance of studying tourism entrepreneurial activities in different countries, there is scant research that has specifically looked at women tourism entrepreneurs in Arab/Muslim contexts (Alonso-Almedia, 2012; Haddad, 2013; Tucker, 2007, 2009b). This situation may be because there are limited examples or limited awareness of tourism entrepreneurship activities in such contexts, as well as researchers' limited accessibility to conduct research in these contexts. There is a common view in the literature that the status of women in Arab/Muslim contexts is determined by societal, cultural, and religious factors (Baden, 1992; Glasse, 1989; Gray and Finley-Hervey, 2005; Howard-Merriam, 1990), while others argue that it is the gender system, class, economic development, and state policies that largely determine this (Alvi, 2005; Hijab, 1988; Kandiyoti, 1991; Moghadam, 2003). Therefore, the

experiences of women tourism entrepreneurs in Arab/Muslim contexts may be different to the experiences of women in other contexts, in terms of their perceived benefits and challenges, due to the different factors that influence their status in society. Kinnaird, Kothari and Hall (1994) emphasise the need to look at various women's experiences in the tourism industry, rather than assuming all women have similar experiences. Therefore, my research has focused on women in Oman, which allows me to bring an Arab/Muslim perspective to the debate about women's empowerment through tourism entrepreneurship opportunities.

Oman was deemed to be an appropriate context for my research because tourism entrepreneurship is a fairly new activity in Oman and there are few Omani women involved in this activity. To date, there has been no published empirical research that has been conducted on women tourism entrepreneurs in Oman. It is important to understand and provide information on the experiences of Omani women who are involved in tourism entrepreneurship as it is an unknown phenomenon. Thus, my thesis is one of the first to conduct such research. As a result, my research contributes new knowledge to the conceptualisation of women's empowerment through tourism entrepreneurship opportunities. It also adds new knowledge to the literature on women in tourism entrepreneurship by looking at the experiences and empowerment of Omani women in tourism entrepreneurship.

## 1.3 Aim and objectives

With Oman being the primary context for my research, the main aim of this thesis is to explore the nature and experiences of Omani women involved in tourism entrepreneurship with regards to their empowerment. To achieve this aim, the objectives of the research are as follows:

- To present the lived experiences of Omani women involved in tourism entrepreneurship.

- To understand the challenges that Omani women encounter in tourism entrepreneurship due to cultural and gender constraints.

- To determine the benefits of tourism entrepreneurship for Omani women.

- To consider theoretical manifestations that emerge from the lived experiences of Omani women in tourism entrepreneurship.

- To assess the potential and the extent to which Omani women are empowered through tourism entrepreneurship.

## 1.4 Structure of the thesis

The structure of my thesis is organised into eleven chapters, including this introduction. Each of the ten following chapters covers an important component of study that was undertaken for this research. These are as follows:

### Chapter 2: Theoretical and philosophical underpinning

This chapter presents my background and research interests, as well as the theoretical and philosophical underpinning that guided my research. I provide a personal reflexive account of the journey that led me to use critical feminist theory for this study and I outline the importance of reflexivity in relation to critical feminist theory.

### Chapters 3-5: Literature review

These chapters provide the literature review that I conducted as part of this research. Chapter 3 provides an overview of the previous research conducted on women in tourism entrepreneurship. It also presents women's empowerment as the key emerging issue surrounding tourism entrepreneurship for women. A critical discussion of the potential and the extent that tourism entrepreneurship actually empowers women is provided in this chapter, followed by the identification of several issues surrounding women's empowerment through tourism entrepreneurship opportunities.

Chapter 4 presents the historical overview and current understanding of the concept of women's empowerment from the development studies discipline, followed by a discussion on measuring women's empowerment. It also provides a

critical discussion on the potential of women's empowerment through entrepreneurship opportunities.

As Oman is the primary context for my research, chapter 5 provides background information about the country and the position of women within it. It also provides information about the tourism industry in Oman.

**Chapter 6: Research methodology**

This chapter presents the overall research methodology that I used for my thesis. Firstly, it provides detailed information on the process I used to recruit a hosting group, a sewing group, and a number of Omani women tourism entrepreneurs. Next, it outlines the methodology that I adopted for my research, the methods that I used to collect information about the women, the ethical issues that I had to consider, and the approach that I took to analyse the collected information. Towards the end of this chapter, I provide a reflexive account of my experiences while in the field.

**Chapter 7-9: Findings**

These chapters present the findings that emerged from the analysis that I conducted on the collected information. The findings are based on a case study that was developed for the hosting group, the sewing group and women tourism entrepreneurs. Each case study includes a detailed description of the women and their enterprise, a thematic narrative and an emerging main concepts section.

**Chapter 10: Discussion**

In this chapter, I introduce and use a conceptual framework, which represents the overall Omani women's lived experience and empowerment in tourism entrepreneurship, to discuss the findings in relation to the existing literature. Towards the end of the discussion, I provide a conceptualisation of Omani women's empowerment in tourism entrepreneurship, followed by the theoretical and practical implications.

**Chapter 11: Conclusion**

This final chapter provides the overall conclusion of my thesis by revisiting the aim

and objectives of my research. I also identify my contributions to knowledge, followed by the limitations of this study. Finally, I make recommendations for future research and provide my final reflexive thoughts on my overall research journey.

## 1.5 Conclusion

The chapter presented an introduction for my PhD thesis research. I discussed the importance of my research in relation to the potential of women's empowerment through tourism entrepreneurship opportunities. I also introduced Oman as the main context for my research. Then I presented the aim and objectives of my research, followed by a description of the content in each chapter in my thesis.

The next chapter presents the theoretical and philosophical underpinning that I adopted for my study.

# Chapter 2: Theoretical and philosophical underpinning
## 2.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to discuss the theoretical and philosophical underpinning of my research. I introduce critical theory as the first theoretical and philosophical approach that I adopted for my research. Then I reflect on my journey to becoming a feminist and explain my use of feminist theory in broad terms, rather than labelling myself as a particular type of feminist. By discussing the benefits of using both critical and feminist theory together, I introduce critical feminist theory as the main theoretical and philosophical underpinning that guided my study. Next, I discuss the importance of reflexivity for both feminist theory and critical theory, as well as providing a brief reflexive account about my personal background and research interests. I conclude with a recap of the main topics discussed in this chapter.

## 2.2 Using critical theory

Critical theory is concerned with issues of power and justice and how the social system is constructed through the influence of the economy, race, gender, class, ideologies, discourses, education, religion, social institutions and culture (Kincheloe and McLaren, 2011). It focuses on real world situations, and values people's thoughts and opinions.  This is in comparison to positivism, which controls people through rules and procedures (Jennings, 2001). Thus, I adopted critical theory to help me identify interest, power, and ideological influence within the phenomenon being researched (Tribe, 2007). I found it to be appropriate for the overall aim of my study for several reasons. Ontologically, critical theorists believe there is indeed an actual reality out there, and they consider this apprehensible (Chambers, 2007) and shaped by social, political, cultural, economic, gender, and ethnic factors, amongst others (Ayikoru, 2009). They also consider reality as being complicated by issues of conflict, inequity and power struggles (Smith, 2010). Thus, critical theory allowed me to view the environments in which Omani women are embedded as politically, economically and culturally contested spaces. It prompted me to provide an analysis of the various interests operating in this environment and how the reality for Omani

women is socially constructed in order to suit those interests (Jamal and Everett, 2007).

## 2.3 Becoming a feminist and using feminist theory

While I interacted with the women and saw the realities of their experiences in tourism entrepreneurship and in reflecting on my own taken-for-granted reality as an Omani woman myself, I saw the important role that gender was playing in our lives. According to Kenway and Modra (1992), one of the main features of feminism is the recognition of gender as a phenomenon that shapes society. Feminist theory takes gender as the core of the analysis in order to understand and challenge all forms of contemporary subordination, domination and oppression (Weiner, 2004), while critical theory analyses societal institutions and power structures in order to reveal social domination and oppression (Fay, 1987).

Feminist concerns such as lack of opportunities for women in the public sphere, patriarchal institutions, the role of the family, | **Redacted:** Word removed due to sensitive information, | the burden of unpaid domestic work, childcare and religion (Aitchison, 2003; Badran, 2005; Mernissi, 1985) emerged in the narratives that I developed along with the women who took part in this research. The existence of various social institutions, such as the family and the community, and power structures, such as patriarchy and conservatism, were strongly evident in Oman and they influenced women's tourism entrepreneurial experiences and empowerment. Moreover, the importance of considering such feminist concerns, societal institutions, and power structures was strongly evident from my literature review on women's empowerment, which I conducted both while in the field and when analysing the gathered data. As I understood the realities of the women, I found myself becoming a feminist. Marine and Lewis (2014) find that one of the features of becoming a feminist among the young women they researched was that feminism was considered common sense and there was a gradual realisation of becoming one. They found that one "is not born but becomes a feminist. Through interactions with others, observations about what is valued in the culture at large and one's culture of origin, and in awareness of the

mounting evidence of the inequities faced by women in society" (p. 15). I must confess that I was hesitant and I shied away from the idea of becoming a feminist initially due to its historical radical nature. However, as I read more about feminist theory and researched the experiences of other women, I became more in tune with feminist theory, particularly as I realised that to do this research effectively, I had to become a feminist. Indeed, all the feminist concerns that emerged from my research reveal the significance of the different power relations that subordinate women (Aitchison, 2003). Thus, my feminism grew further as I saw the power structures that prevailed over women's lived experiences in the context to which I belong to myself. However, I found it difficult and limiting to assign myself as a particular type of feminist.

There are many different kinds of feminism, including liberal feminism, radical feminism, socialist feminism, Marxist feminism, black feminism, post-colonial feminism, post-structural feminism, post-modern feminism,

> **Redacted:** Word removed due to sensitive information,

eco-feminism, empiricist feminism, standpoint feminism, postmodern feminism, Islamic feminism and western feminism. Aitchison (2005) notes that the issue of assigning oneself overtly as one type of feminist "is that they tend to invoke fixed categories and are usually apportioned by readers of feminist research rather than by the writers themselves" (p. 211). As a result, Letherby (2003) emphasises that "many writers and thinkers are labelled in ways that they themselves challenge" (p. 58, cited in Aitchison, 2005, p. 211). The very act of categorising different types of feminism, according to Crotty (1998), could be seen as a male act, and various feminist thinkers have argued for or against such categories (for example, Stanley and Wise, 1983; Tong, 1995 cited in Crotty, 1998). Hoffman (2001) argues, "that there is both *one* feminism and *many* feminisms. Or, to put it less paradoxically, there is a feminism that can only be identified through its multiple forms" (p. 193).
He asserts that

To argue that there is no 'feminism' but only multiple feminisms is as unsatisfactory as contending that there is only one feminism and all the 'rest' are counterfeits or fraudulent. Posing the question in an either/or fashion represents a blind alley, which feminist theory should avoid if a coherent and viable theory of feminism is to be constructed.

(p. 193)

Thus, all types of feminism critique patriarchy or male domination and they all aim for the same goal, which is the movement towards freedom and equality of all women (Hoffman, 2001). Despite the various types of feminism, Jennings (2001) also notes that there are commonalities that are shared by all feminist types. These include:

- The view that the world is mediated by gendered constructions and these constructions have served to subjugate women and position them in the role of other.
- The dominant hegemony is patriarchy and women have been rendered invisible in the social construction of reality, primarily due to their association with the domestic sphere, rather than the public sphere.
- Power relations between men and women are subsequently unequal and as a result, women are oppressed by men.

(p. 46)

The main project for feminist theory is to deconstruct patriarchal forms of oppression in social structures and to reveal various types of oppression that transcend between governing and subordinated genders, identities, race and social worlds (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011). It also holds a strong ethical commitment in conducting research to reveal and improve the lives of women in society (Aitchison, 2003). Moreover, it constantly questions dominant societal institutions for the purpose of liberating, emancipating and empowering women (Dadds, 2011). In addition, it seeks to reveal the reality of social injustices and practices, and to seek change in larger social structures and institutions in order to make changes in

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women's personal lives (Code, 1991). Therefore, I found it sufficient to adopt feminist theory as a whole and not to label myself as a specific type of feminism due to the common shared goals that all types of feminists strive to achieve, which is to improve women's lives.

## 2.4 Using critical theory and feminist theory

Nevertheless, feminist theory alone was not sufficient for fulfilling the purpose of my study. Blackmore (2013) advocates that feminists need to pay attention to the social relations of gender and how these are produced/reproduced and constituted within the global system. They also need to consider the wider gender restructuring of the social, political and economic structures that produces women's unequal and limited position in society (Mabokela, 2007 cited in Blackmore, 2013). By doing so, we change the way we view women's challenges as a disadvantage individualised women problem (Blackmore, 2013). Thus, Marshall (1988) suggests that critical theory could help feminist theory "to articulate more clearly the role of human agency in both reproducing and transforming structures of domination, and to ground more firmly feminist values as a basis for socialist transformation" (p. 210).

Ontologically, Campbell and Bunting (1991) emphasise that both the feminist and critical theories see reality as "socially constructed and that it does not exist outside of the context in which it was created. Both believe that the understanding of patterns of human behavior involves the understanding of both the personal meanings of social structures and the communally agreed upon meanings of those structures" (p. 10). With regards to their epistemology, both theories take a subjective stance towards knowledge creation. In terms of methodology, they both explore reality and gain knowledge by using qualitative approaches (Creswell, 2013; Crotty, 1998; Jennings, 2010; Lincoln, Lynham and Guba, 2011). More specifically, they both "have extensively used critique to analyse prior knowledge and to create new knowledge" (Campbell and Bunting, 1991, p. 11). Indeed, Weiner (2004) notes other commonalities between the two theories such as being critical towards positivist research's focus on logicality, objectivity and truth; a focus on practice and

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lived experiences; an awareness that practice and lived understanding are historical and culturally rooted; a desire for social justice, asserts for transformative research that could result social change, and are just in their approach. Moreover, Martin (2003) notes that both critical theory and feminist theory focus on social and economic inequalities and both have an agenda of promoting social change. However, Martin (2003) also observes that their agenda for system change is weak, as "both traditions share a commitment to system change, and yet neither tradition offers a generally accepted solution to the problem of how to achieve system change. Both offer ideological critiques, and both–with some important exceptions–stop short of action plans and recommendations" (p. 69). To solve this issue, Martin (2003) suggests that when both theories integrate their work together "more interesting synergies may emerge" (p. 79).

## 2.5 Critical feminist theory

With the growing advocacy of using both critical theory and feminist theory to create an effective critical feminist movement, I chose to adopt critical feminist theory as the theoretical and philosophical underpinning for my study. Indeed, there is a wide and evolving historical body of research that has used this theory (for example, Angelique, 2012; Fuderer, 1988; Howell, Carter and Schied, 1999; Kincheloe and McLaren, 2005; Miller, 2000; Ray and Fine, 1999) and this thesis continues this practice.

By placing gender as its main point of analysis, critical feminist theory seeks to show structural domination, transform social systems, liberate women (Angelique, 2012; Breitkreuz, 2005; De Saxe, 2014; Kushner and Morrow, 2003; Mills, 1994), and to change practices that limit women (Rhode, 1990). It also works to improve women's invisible and distorted experiences in order to abolish women's unequal status in society (Lather, 1991 cited in Breitkreuz, 2005). As it shows the link between individual experiences and societal contexts, critical feminist theory offers the opportunity to analyse the link between structural subjugation and women's individual experiences (Bloom, 1998). Moreover, it allows for specific analysis that

challenges structural inequalities along with the assumptions that cause such inequalities (Rhode, 1990). This, in turn, helps to reveal social, institutional and power structures that sustain patriarchal and capitalist power (Angelique, 2012). This theory focuses on gender equality, with the belief that it cannot be attained within the existing ideologies and institutional arrangements (Rhode, 1990). It starts off with concern for women's place in society and looks empirically at the conditions that have shaped power in gender relations. Its inquiry is guided by historical relationships, as well as the wider social, economic, cultural, and political contextual factors, and the influence of gender in shaping women's lived experiences (Howell et al., 1999; Kushner and Morrow, 2003; Loftsdóttir, 2011). Thus, a critical feminist perspective helps to focus on gender, as well as other sources of social and cultural inequity.

With the need to have a wider consensus of women's experiences of empowerment, critical feminist theory considers various realities and avoids favouring a specific universal and ideal position (De Saxe, 2014; Rhode, 1990). As a result, it can help us balance an understanding of women's shared experiences while respecting diversity. This, in turn, helps to enrich our theoretical perspective and cooperation. Thus, critical feminist theory serves as an important theoretical and philosophical lens for my research. It helped me to provide a critical review of existing knowledge through reviewing literature on women in tourism entrepreneurship, women's empowerment, and women and tourism in Oman. It also allowed me to consider gender ideologies, as well as contextual-based societal institutions and embedded power structures affecting women in Oman. Moreover, it has aided me to be critical about the women's experiences in tourism entrepreneurship and the subsequent implications of their experiences to determine the potential and the extent of their empowerment. This helped me to challenge the notion of women's empowerment through tourism entrepreneurship opportunities.

By bringing both critical theory and feminist theory to the fore of my study through critical feminist theory, I rise to the call for tourism researchers to adopt critical theory in their research so as to include humanitarian issues and broaden tourism

enquiry beyond business and economic issues (Botterill, 2001; McLaren and Jaramillo, 2012; Pritchard, Morgan and Ateljevic, 2011). I also contribute to filling the gap in feminist research in tourism and promoting gender discourse in tourism more broadly (Figueroa-Domecq, Pritchard, Segovia-Pérez, Morgan and Villacé-Molinero, 2015; Hall, Swain and Kinnaird, 2003; Kinnaird and Hall, 2000, 1996; Swain, 1995). Moreover, I respond to the call for tourism researchers to declare our theoretical and philosophical position in our research (Tribe, 2008, 2006; Munar and Jamal, 2016). Throughout this thesis, I purposefully write in the first person to ensure my voice, along with the voices of the women that I researched, emerges.

## 2.6 Reflexivity

Reflexivity plays a major role in both critical theory and feminist theory. Being reflexive is essential in feminist theory for reflecting and being critical towards the research process being undertaken. It helps feminist researchers to engage effectively with their participants and to provide a critical reflection about women's lives (Kushner and Morrow, 2003). It also helps to foster criticality that is needed when conducting feminist research. To do so, Loftsdóttir (2011) suggests,

> The researcher has to position her or himself in relation to the subject matter right from the beginning, critically asking why she has selected that particular topic of investigation, as well as how relationships during the research process reveal particular dynamics in a wider global or local context. In addition, such an approach acknowledges the researcher and those subjected to research as being part of the same political and historical landscape.

(pp. 200-201)

Moreover, feminist researchers from the development studies discipline have emphasised the benefits of the feminist practice of reflexivity on knowledge production and its transformative and empowering potential for both the

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researcher and the research participants (Muhanna, 2014; Nazneen, Darkwah and Sultan, 2014).

Similarly, critical theory requires researchers to make explicit statements about their role with the aim of overcoming the status quo and to make sound judgements in order to expose misrepresentations about the world (Ayikoru, 2009). Thus, researchers adopting a critical theory perspective need to fully engage with their research, acknowledge their own power, participate in dialogues and use theory for action (Madison, 2012). They also must fully understand the issues surrounding the phenomenon being studied and attempt to bring change to the situation. In addition, they need to be critically reflexive and take action by looking at their own position in the research and to be aware that their own actions and assumptions can have an effect on the natural and social world (Jamal and Everett, 2007). Moreover, they need to position themselves fully within the research subject (Causevic and Lynch, 2012) and their values will have a major influence on their enquiry (Ayikoru, 2009; Jennings, 2001; Smith, 2010). Each person brings a baggage of subjective experiences that will have a major influence on the research, no matter how objective the researcher claims to be. It is also difficult to achieve objectivity, as the researcher subjectivity (gender, colour, age, ability, interests, and so on) affects the researcher gaze and influences the framing of the research (Tribe and Airey, 2007). Thus, I provide in the following section a reflexive account about my own background and research interest on women in tourism to help readers understand my own research motivations.

## 2.7 Researcher background and research interests

I am an Omani woman who was born and raised in Oman. However, I have also spent a large part of my life studying and living abroad since the age of 18. I am a wife and a mother to two boys. I have a strong passion for the tourism industry in general, which my education and work background largely revolves around.

My research interest in women's involvement in tourism began during my Master's research thesis, where I explored the experiences of Omani women employed in the

tourism industry. My research interest continued to evolve upon returning to Oman after completing my Master's degree, where I then spent two years working as a tourism researcher in the Ministry of Tourism in Oman. This experience provided me with the opportunity to meet and talk to local communities and to explore the different ways that they can be involved in tourism. The research work that I conducted was part of the planning that took place for the preparation of a tourism development plan across various areas in Oman.

During these fieldworks, I would often ask myself many questions, such as: How to involve women in tourism? How can women benefit from tourism? Is tourism employment the only way to involve women in tourism? How can we assist women to use their current skills to benefit from tourism? How will women's families and communities react to their involvement in tourism? I struggled to answer these questions, especially when it came to identifying suitable approaches to involve the women in tourism. Although I did not realise it at the time, I was seeking suitable tourism entrepreneurship opportunities for the women I encountered. Thus, with my emerging research interest and field experiences, I decided to pursue this PhD research. I wanted to know whether there were any Omani women involved in tourism entrepreneurship, as it is an emerging activity in Oman. I was also aware of the popular notion of tourism entrepreneurship's potential to empower women, although I was sceptical about this idea, particularly due to my awareness of the negative views towards tourism in Oman, as well as on the position of women in Omani society. Thus, I conducted this PhD research to critically investigate the potential for tourism entrepreneurship to empower women, particularly for women in Oman.

## 2.8 Conclusion

The chapter presented the theoretical and philosophical underpinning that I choose for my research. I discussed critical theory as the first theory I used to help me look at the social intuitions and power structures that influence Omani women's experiences in tourism entrepreneurship. I also revealed my own journey in

becoming a feminist due to the strong role of gender that was playing in our embedded environment and the feminist concerns that were emerging from my research. More specifically, I justified not labelling myself as a specific type of feminist and my adoption of feminist theory as a whole. Then I discussed how critical theory and feminist theory can complement each other when used together. As a result of this discussion, I presented critical feminist theory as the theoretical and philosophical underpinning for my study. I also discussed the importance of researchers being reflexive when using both theories for their research. Finally, I provided a reflexive account about my personal background and my research interests, and how these influenced the research topic I have undertaken for my PhD thesis research.

In the next chapter, I provide a literature review on women in tourism entrepreneurship.

# Chapter 3: Literature review: Women in tourism entrepreneurship

## 3.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to provide a review of the literature on women in tourism entrepreneurship. First I look at the research that has been conducted on tourism entrepreneurship, and specifically on women in this area. Then I present women's empowerment as a key emerging issue surrounding tourism entrepreneurship for women, as well as the potential and the extent that tourism entrepreneurship actually empowers women. Next, I critically identify and discuss key issues surrounding women's empowerment through tourism entrepreneurship, before I conclude with a recap of the main topics discussed and reveal the key points that are emerging from the literature review.

## 3.2 Research on women in tourism entrepreneurship

Tourism entrepreneurship is not a recent phenomenon (Ateljevic and Li, 2009) and there is an adequate body of literature that exists on this subject (for example, Ateljevic and Doorne, 2003; Lee-Rose and Lashley, 2009; McGehee and Kline, 2008; Morrison, Rimmington and Williams, 1999; Mykletun and Gyimóthy, 2010; Morrison, Carlsen and Weber, 2008; Page and Ateljevic, 2009; Russell and Faulkner, 2004; Thomas, 1998, 2004, 2007). However, some scholars have indicated that the research conducted on tourism entrepreneurship is limited (Koh, 2002; Koh and Hatten, 2002; Shaw and Williams, 2010; Thomas, 2004). It has also been suggested that entrepreneurship is not a subject that has been adequately addressed in tourism and hospitality research (Ateljevic and Li, 2009), and that our understanding of small tourism firms remains partial and is not up to date (Thomas, Shaw and Page, 2011).

Research on tourism entrepreneurship has been conducted around various themes. This has included rural tourism (Bosworth and Farrell, 2011; Saxena and Ilbery, 2008; Sharpley, 2002), economic development (Wanhill, 1996, 2000), destination development (Johns and Mattsson, 2005; Jones and Haven-Tang, 2005; Koh, 2002),

typologies of tourism entrepreneurs (Ateljevic and Doorne, 2003; Koh and Hatten, 2002; Tucker, 2010), sustainable tourism (Baytok, Agca and Kurt, 2009; Lordkipanidze, Brezet and Backman, 2005), and others. However, not all key themes have received the needed attention to progress research on tourism entrepreneurship (Thomas, 2004). The limited attention to certain themes reveals the lack of diversity and depth in tourism entrepreneurship research and the fact that many issues still require exploring. Indeed, this lack is apparent when it comes to the limited research available on the experiences of women in tourism entrepreneurship (Peeters and Ateljevic, 2009). Indeed, it has been emphasised that more studies need to be conducted on the nature of the entrepreneurial activities of minority groups in business start-ups (Ateljevic and Li, 2009). It has also been suggested that there is limited research on gender in small tourism firms, and there is a need for theoretical advancement and more empirical studies in this area (Thomas et al., 2011). Shaw and Williams (2010) review of the uneven progress in tourism SME research in the last 30 years suggests that it has been a period of missed opportunities in research, particularly regarding the experiences of women in tourism entrepreneurship. This paucity has made it difficult to identify the key emerging issues surrounding this phenomenon for women (Peeters and Ateljevic, 2009). Thus, further research is needed in this area.

## 3.3 Tourism entrepreneurship and women's empowerment

One key emerging issue surrounding women in tourism entrepreneurship is women's empowerment. In general, the tourism industry is seen as a potential source for gender equality and women's empowerment. Indeed, the United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) emphasises that "[tourism] has the potential to be a vehicle for empowerment of women in developing regions. Tourism provides better work opportunities for women's participation in the workforce, women's entrepreneurship, and women's leadership than other sector of the economy" (United Nations World Tourism Organisation and United Nations Women, 2011b p. ii). It has also been emphasised that the tourism industry has made major contributions to the eighth millennium development goal of promoting gender

equality and women's empowerment (United Nations World Tourism Organisation and United Nations Women, 2011a). In 2007, the UNWTO celebrated Tourism Day under the theme 'Tourism opens doors for women" (United Nations World Tourism Organisation, 2007). Tourism has indeed provided many employment and entrepreneurship opportunities for women, and, because of these, it can be argued that tourism is empowering women.

When looking at tourism entrepreneurship, it has been indicated that the number of women in tourism entrepreneurship has been increasing and that there are more women pursuing it as an economic activity. The table below reveals that the number of women entrepreneurs in the hotel and restaurant sector outweighs the number of general women entrepreneurs:

Table 1: Women employers in the hotel and restaurant sector, by region (%)

| Region | In general | In hotel and restaurant sector |
|--------|-----------|-------------------------------|
| Latin America | 23.2 | 51.3 |
| Caribbean | 26.4 | 32.8 |
| Africa | 20.8 | 30.5 |
| Asia | 17.4 | 29.7 |
| Oceania | n/a | n/a |
| Average | 21.95 | 36.08 |

(Source: United Nations World Tourism Organisation and United Nations Women, 2011a)

Women entrepreneurs are also now seen as the driving force in the tourism and hospitality industry through the number of businesses they own, the revenue generated, and the number of people they employ (Ateljevic and Li, 2009). As for the influence of tourism entrepreneurship on women's empowerment, a few studies, which I discuss further below, have identified the potential role for tourism entrepreneurship to empower women. This is due to the many benefits that tourism entrepreneurship provides for women by offering better economic opportunities and income in comparison to full-time tourism employment (Armstrong, 1997; Bras and Dahles, 1998; Gentry, 2007; Iakovidou, 1997; Kimbu and Ngoasong, 2016). It has also been shown to increase women's self-confidence and self-esteem (Acharya and Halpenny, 2013; Annes and Wright, 2015; Cone, 1995; Gentry, 2007; Iakovidou,

1997; McMillan et al., 2011; Moswete and Lacey, 2014; Pleno, 2006; Scheyvens, 2000; Tran and Walter, 2014; Walker, Valaoras, Gurung and Godde, 2001). Moreover, it has been shown to increase women status, respect and prestige (Alonso-Almedia, 2012; Castelberg-koulma, 1991; Chhetri and Lama, 2013; Cone, 1995; Dieke, 2001; Iakovidou, 1997; Long and Kindon, 1997; McMillan et al., 2011; Scheyvens, 2000; Walker et al., 2001). However, the potential and the extent that tourism entrepreneurship actually empowers women is questionable.

Recent attempts have been made to look at the actual potential and extent of women's empowerment through tourism entrepreneurship opportunities. Moswete and Lacey (2014) look at the potential and the extent of women's empowerment through their involvement in cultural tourism employment and entrepreneurship opportunities in Botswana. They use multiple dimensions of empowerment to assess Botswana's women's empowerment through cultural tourism, including economic, political, social, psychological and educational dimensions and find empowering aspects in all of these dimensions. This includes receiving enhanced vocational training, having economic independence and financially supporting their families, increased confidence, enhanced social engagement with outsiders, and becoming positively productive with their social activities. They also reveal that the women had a sense of freedom in all aspects of their empowerment, and that it was the women who were self-employed who largely experienced these empowering aspects. However, they note that there remain barriers that needs to be addressed, including: a lack of formal educational opportunities for women; little financial support for their ventures; the requirement for entrepreneurial, management, empowerment (motivation/confidence), and leadership skills training; strong government control of tourist attractions; and the minimal involvement of women in policy formulation. Moreover, they do not determine whether men had positively or negatively affected the women's path to empowerment through their tourism enterprise. However, they do identify a conflict between male and female perspectives regarding women's involvement in the tourism business, noting that

Women did not feel that men had or would hinder their empowerment and many had been provided direct opportunities by men and regarded men as potential partners in their empowerment. Yet men were less positive about women's readiness to engage in tourism businesses, pointing out that they were generally poorly educated in tourism and business management.

(p. 614).

Thus, it is not clear whether the men had a positive or negative effect on the women's business. Similarly, McMillan et al. (2011) consider the potential of women's empowerment through commercial hospitality in Nepal and also find higher levels of empowerment for women in economic, social, political and psychological dimensions. This includes increased financial independence, having reduced workload in comparison to the traditional agriculture work, increased respect from the community, increased social status and autonomy, and increased confidence and happiness. They also found that women's political empowerment had improved by having representation in a local women's group, but further improvement was needed in representing the women in local and national political structures. They claim that by having empowerment in all four dimensions, this would ultimately lead to sustainable empowerment for the women. However, they do note that the sustainable empowerment of women depends on the removal of the barriers that currently limit them, including: reinforced traditional roles, lack of access to education, and limited representation at national and local political structures.

Pleno (2006) also looks at the potential of women's empowerment through ecotourism-related businesses in the Philippines by focusing on the socio-political conditions of the women. He found that ecotourism projects facilitated women's empowerment through various empowering outcomes, including: learning new skills; improving communication skills; increased self-confidence and self-esteem; opportunities to take up leadership roles and to be involved in decision-making processes; autonomy at the household level; and developing environmental

consciousness. He concluded that although ecotourism projects have the potential to empower women, there are prevailing challenges that hinder this potential for the women, including: making a limited income; lack of transparency in the project transactions; jealousy among the women; and the negative attitudes of husbands.

Tran and Walter (2014) find empowering aspects in their investigation of women's involvement in ecotourism-related businesses in Northern Vietnam. This empowerment included: better education; increased access to loans and credit to invest in their tourism enterprises; fair division of labour; better income for the women; control over income; increased self-confidence; more involvement in the community; and access to new leadership roles. However, the study found that there were prevailing issues that the project was not able to address, including: husbands' control over major family decisions; enforced subservient ideology on women; inequities of social class; lack of childcare; and violence against women.

Thus, when reviewing the overall findings of these studies as summarised in the table in appendix 1, they all reported findings of empowerment. However, at the same time, they all found prevailing barriers and challenges that needs to be addressed or removed in order further women's empowering potential through tourism entrepreneurship opportunities. Despite these prevailing barriers and challenges, these studies claim the potential of women's empowerment through tourism entrepreneurship opportunities. Therefore, this raises the question of why are we promoting the potential and the extent of women's empowerment through tourism entrepreneurship opportunities when clearly this potential is not fully possible, as there are always challenges and issues that limits this potential. These studies were not sufficiently critical towards the realities of women's lives, or the context and implications of their entrepreneurial activities. Annes and Wright (2015) offer a more critical perspective by questioning the reality of women's empowerment through tourism entrepreneurship opportunities. In their study on French women in farm tourism businesses, they found empowering outcomes for the women, including: having their own business; creating a "space of resistance" (p. 5); exercising their creativity; having a collective social cohesion with other farm

women in the agri-tourism network; having increased self-confidence and self-esteem; and challenging dominant cultural representations of farm women's roles as "incomplete farmers" (p. 7). However, they revealed that this process of empowerment is mitigated due to the perseverance of a patriarchal culture and agrarian ideology in rural France. As they explain,

> The women in this study demonstrate that their ability to pursue farm tourism is contingent upon male approval, recognition of the persistence of "power over" women. Male approval is contingent upon the lack of interference with primary farming activities controlled and managed by men. It is also contingent upon the main-tenance of traditional gender performances that reinforce the smooth functioning of primary agricultural work. In other words, the activity must refrain from disrupting men's work, family meal preparation, household work, or other farm chores assigned to women.

(p. 9)

Moreover, the women made limited income from their farm tourism. Therefore, it seems that the reality of women's empowerment through tourism entrepreneurship cannot be fully attained due to the inability for tourism entrepreneurship to deal, challenge and change these prevailing challenges and barriers, which are largely related to deeply embedded socio-cultural and gender issues, for women that affects their empowerment. Indeed, the prevailing barriers and challenges that were reported in the above studies could be considered as disempowering outcomes for women's involvement in tourism entrepreneurship. As Enloe (2014) recently cautioned,

> Still, as important as these women-run artisan and small business ventures are, especially for rural women, they open only small windows of opportunity for a limited number of women; they do not fundamentally alter the gendered politics of the massive globalized tourist industry. They

scarcely transform the industry's politics. Moreover, even women who succeed in launching craft, food, and guiding cooperatives can have a difficult time keeping control over them. Too often, especially if they are successful, middlemen move in to siphon off their profits.

<div align="right">(p. 72)</div>

Thus, a critical analysis of tourism entrepreneurship opportunities for women is needed to determine the potential and the extent to which tourism entrepreneurship actually empowers and disempowers women. Such an analysis should be conducted with consideration for the realities of women's lives, their context, and the implications of their entrepreneurial activities. As Manwa (2008) argues, we need to question the opportunities that are provided for women, and whether tourism is opening doors for them, or not.

## 3.4 Issues surrounding women's empowerment through tourism entrepreneurship opportunities

A review of the literature reveals that there are several issues that may have implications for women's empowerment through tourism entrepreneurship opportunities. These issues include: an emphasis on economic benefits; links to stereotypical women's work; implications with gender; a lack of definitions for women's empowerment in tourism, a lack of suitable conceptual frameworks for women's empowerment through tourism entrepreneurship; and the practical efforts of women's empowerment in tourism. A coherent overview of these issues has not yet been achieved and linked to women's empowerment through tourism entrepreneurship. These issues will be discussed in detail as follows:

### 3.4.1 Large emphasis on the economic benefits

One issue surrounding women's empowerment through tourism entrepreneurship is that much emphasis has been placed on the economic empowerment that tourism entrepreneurship can provide for women, at the expense of other important dimensions – such as cognitive, psychological and political (for example, Acharya

<div align="center">25</div>

and Halpenny, 2013; Chhetri and Lama, 2013; Dieke, 2001; Gentry, 2007; Ling, Wu, Park, Shu and Morrison, 2013; Wilkinson and Pratiwi, 1995). Although tourism entrepreneurship has provided many economic benefits for women, this empowering outcome raises the issue of only viewing tourism entrepreneurship as an economic opportunity for women. So there are perhaps broader issues regarding the nature of tourism entrepreneurship for women that tourism scholars have not tackled and deeply understood. More alarmingly, the perceived economic significance of tourism entrepreneurship for women is not always attained.

Evidence of lack of economic empowerment can be found in several existing studies. For example, agri-tourism businesses in Portugal and Spain were found to give limited financial autonomy to women because the work that the women did was not considered 'real' work or a profession. The women did not receive a salary for their work and instead achieved an unstable income from the business. Thus, the women continued to rely on their husbands as they produced the main income from the farm work. It was noted that other benefits such as social and enjoyment might replace the economic limitations for the women (Canoves and Perez, 2002). Although women that largely run silver and gold craft shops with their husbands in Bali, Indonesia gained status due to their entrepreneurial endeavours, the women had less economic security as purchased material goods remained under the control and ownership of their husbands and sons (Long and Kindon, 1997). In addition, women that run commercial homes in Ireland to supplement their family income did not attain the higher income that they expected to gain from their business (Mottiar and Laurincikova, 2009). Even though women may gain economic benefits from their tourism entrepreneurial endeavours, it does not also necessarily result in their empowerment. For example, research on women tourism entrepreneurs that sold beach merchandises and offered beauty services in Bali, Indonesia found that there was no indication that the women felt empowered, despite the income they made from their entrepreneurial activity (Bras and Dahles, 1998).

A sole focus on the economic benefits has also been found to be evident in tourism and poverty reduction projects that seek out women's economic empowerment through tourism entrepreneurship opportunities (Ferguson, 2010ab). It has been emphasised that claims made regarding women's economic empowerment through tourism and poverty-reduction projects need to be viewed cautiously and that there is a need to look beyond women's economic empowerment, "particularly in non-western contexts, and to consider more fully the cultural complexity and the shifting dynamics of how gender norms, roles and inequalities affect and are affected by development and poverty reduction outcomes" (Tucker and Boonabaana, 2012 p. 438). Similarly, Ferguson (2011) has advises that there is a need to go beyond the current narrow understanding of the economic empowerment of women in tourism policies. Katongole, Ahebwa and Kawere (2013) reveal that women tourism entrepreneurs in Uganda identified the success of their business in both economic and non-economic terms. These perspectives emphasise the need to move beyond women economic empowerment and to consider broader issues in order to achieve women's empowerment as a whole, rather than partially.

Hence, existing empirical evidence and arguments that have revealed the lack of women's empowerment through the economic benefits of tourism entrepreneurship raise questions regarding previous research's notions of women's empowerment through this activity. It also signifies the importance of considering other dimensions when exploring women's empowerment through tourism entrepreneurship. Thus, there is a need to move beyond the economic benefits of tourism entrepreneurship in order to discover broader issues that will help us to better understand the potential for tourism entrepreneurship to empower women.

### 3.4.2 Link to stereotypical women's work

When looking at tourism entrepreneurship opportunities available for women, many of these are linked to stereotypical women's work. This refers to traditional and typical work that women have been assigned to, involving domestic skills. There are various examples in the literature that reflect stereotypical women's work in tourism entrepreneurship opportunities for them, including homestays (Dahles,

1998; Di Domenico, 2008; Harris, McIntosh and Lewis, 2007; Kwaramaba, Lovett, Louw and Chipumuro, 2012; Long and Wall, 1995; Lynch, 1998; Osman, Ahmad, Ahmad, Husin, Abu Bakar and Tanwir, 2010), agriculture/rural tourism (Garcia-Ramon, Canoves and Valdovinos, 1995; Möller, 2012; Overbeek, 2003), handicrafts (Cone, 1995; Manwa, 2008; Robson, 2002; Swain, 1993), mountain tourism (Chhetri and Lama, 2013; Walker et al., 2001), restaurants (Khan, 1995), and so on.

In general, the nature of tourism work is "often gender specific and are based on Western perceived notions of sexual division of labour" (Kinnaird et al., 1994 p. 14). This link has been discussed extensively in the area of tourism employment. Tourism employment opportunities for women are viewed negatively due to the frequent association between women's domestic work and their typical positions in tourism employment (Kinnaird et al., 1994). Women in tourism employment are generally found working as clerks, cooks, cleaners, servers, handcrafters and even commercial sex workers (Enloe, 2014; Kibicho, 2016; Swain, 1995). The types of jobs that are available to women in tourism employment demand stereotypical domestic skills such as cleaning, cooking, so forth, which reflect patriarchal domestic divisions of labour (Swain, 1995). However, such link can be positive for women. It was noted that women could join tourism employment without any formal training, especially since they have experience from their domestic chores as wives and mothers, for example, serving meals, working in kitchens, making beds, and so forth (Riley, Ladkin and Szivas, 2002). Purcell (1997) also suggests that the fact that some roles are seen as women's work might even make them more attractive to some women.

Peeters and Ateljevic (2009) previously discussed the link between tourism entrepreneurship and stereotypical women's work, although they did not include a critical analysis of this issue. This link can be viewed negatively, where it can be argued that this gendering aspect of tourism entrepreneurship opportunities enforces patriarchal domestic division of labour, which may reduce the status of women and lead to their disempowerment. Alternatively, the link can be viewed positively, as there are several studies that seem to suggest that the link between

women's stereotypical work and tourism entrepreneurship is positive. For example, women's participation in agro-tourism cooperatives in Greece enabled them to use their traditional household skills for business purposes. The women rented out rooms and offered home hospitality to tourists, which provided the women with a source of independent income, increased their confidence, improved their status and opened new horizons for them from interacting with people from different cultures (Iakovidou and Turner, 1995). For women operating commercial homes in New Zealand (Harris et al., 2007), they saw their hosting ability as something they were naturally adept at. This included caring for the guests and carrying out the domestic operations of their home. Although it required a considerable amount of time and effort from the women, such labour was "described as a labour of love" (p. 400).

Case studies from Botswana, South Africa and Indonesia reveal that women used their traditional and exclusive female activities such as weaving for their economic advantage in tourism with the help of NGOs (Manwa, 2008). In Nepal, women were able to start up trekking tourism business, such as lodges and teahouses, as it was seen as an extension to their traditional roles and domestic skills, such as cooking, cleaning and hosting at their homes (Lama, 2000; MacLaren, McMillan and O'Gorman, 2013; Walker et al., 2001). Moreover, the household skills of women in Belize have helped them to own and operate guesthouses and restaurants (Gentry, 2007). In addition, Kuna women in Panama used their gender-specific work of ethnic arts for tourism purposes (Swain, 1993). Furthermore, women from highly patriarchy societies were able to pursue their tourism entrepreneurial activity because it was related to their domestic work and space (Tucker, 2009a). Similarly, running restaurants, homestays, inns provided for women in Bali, Indonesia a socially acceptable way to make income, because caring for tourists is seen as an extension of their gender nurturing roles (Long and Kindon, 1997). It has been recommended that stereotypical women's work in tourism entrepreneurship should be communicated and promoted in order to encourage women to pursue rural tourism ventures in India (Parsheera and Sood, 2011). Due to woman's important

role in maintaining the family and cultural traditions, it has been emphasised that it is vital to focus on using women to promote local tourism development, where they can use artisanship, handicraft, and cooking skills for entrepreneurial opportunities in tourism (Cudmore, Troshani and McCoy, 2009).

Hence, existing studies seem to favour the positive aspects of the link between women's stereotypical work and tourism entrepreneurship. It also seems to imply that tourism enterprise is easy work for women because of its link to domestic tasks. Moreover, the studies suggest that women may purposely be pursuing tourism entrepreneurship opportunities because they feel these opportunities are extensions of their domestic work and are less challenging to pursue in comparison to other types of ventures. This perspective contrasts with the general idea that entrepreneurship is largely seen as a male-gendered construct that often conflicts with women's gender role and responsibilities (Bruni, Gherardi and Poggio, 2004; Marlow and McAdam, 2013; McAdam, 2013). Thus, it could be argued that tourism entrepreneurship is a female-gendered construct because it is largely related to women's stereotypical work and allows them to maintain their domestic responsibilities. With the extensive evidence available on the positive aspects of stereotypical women's work in tourism entrepreneurship, it can also be argued that tourism entrepreneurship empowers women as it allows them to use their domestic and traditional skills to run an enterprise.

However, at the same time, I question whether women are unconsciously limiting their entrepreneurial ambitions and, in turn, limiting their ability to be empowered due to their pursuit of tourism entrepreneurial activities that are largely related to stereotypical women's work. Indeed, women pursuing such skills further reinforce these skills as being women's work, rather than challenging it. Moreover, there may be implications for women to pursue such skills for their tourism entrepreneurial ventures that are yet to be known in relation to their embedded environment. Kinnaird and Hall (2000) note that "the gender division of labour, with women's work as an extension of their assumed domestic role, generally remained unchallenged" (p. 75). It could be fairly said that this remains unchallenged to date.

Thus, further empirical evidence is needed to understand the link of stereotypical women's work to tourism entrepreneurship opportunities and its implications for women's empowerment.

### 3.4.3 Implications with gender

All the studies that explored the experiences of women in tourism entrepreneurship have used/or included gender relations to analyse their experiences. It has been argued that gender relations should be used to analyse tourism-related activities because "the activities and processes involved in tourism development are constructed out of gendered societies" (Kinnaird and Hall, 1996, p. 95). Also the involvement of women and men in tourism processes is different, and, as a result, their experiences in tourism will be gender-specific (Kinnaird et al., 1994), and such experiences will be site-specific (Swain, 2002), as well as ethnic-specific (Phommavong and Sörensson, 2014). Moreover, gender causes power struggles at all levels of society and is expressed in different forms (Swain, 1995). Fairbairn-dunlop (1994) emphasises that it is important when looking at women's experiences that dominant gender relations in a society are analysed. With previous studies placing gender at the centre of their research on women's involvement in tourism, this has helped to provide important information on the experiences of women's work in tourism and the different ways of expressing gender relations when it comes to different tourism activities (Kinnaird and Hall, 2000). Thus, gender plays an important role in understanding the experiences of women in tourism, particularly when looking at the relationship between women in tourism entrepreneurship and women's empowerment.

Many of the studies that explored the experiences of women in tourism entrepreneurship activities indicated that gender roles and relations are reinforced, rather than challenged. For example, for women tourism entrepreneurs in Bali, Indonesia, it was noted that informal tourism entrepreneurship, such as selling beach goods/souvenirs and providing massages to tourists, had reinforced, rather than transformed, their gender relations (Bras and Dahles, 1998). Similar results were found amongst women operating agri-tourism enterprises and rural

commercial homes (Bensemann and Hall, 2010; Canoves and Perez, 2002; Garcia-Ramon et al., 1995). Tourism entrepreneurial ventures, such as bed and breakfasts or guest houses, were also found to reinforce gender inequity in further reinforcing women's domestic responsibilities (Mottiar and Laurincikova, 2009).

The provision of a restaurant entrepreneurial programme for rural women in Bangladesh was found not to improve the women's situation in the male-dominated society, despite the programme success in getting the rural women to start a business. The programme seemed to make the women's conditions worse, and resulted in an increase in the division of labour dependence on men, gender discrimination, as well as the reinforcement of the traditional spaces of women's work (Khan, 1995). Castelberg-koulma (1991) argue that agro-tourist co-operatives operated by Greek women helped to reinforce, rather than challenge, division of labour because their entrepreneurial work was confined to their domestic work and had doubled their workload. Although they did have access to power outside the home related to the co-op work – such as business travel, interacting tourists, meetings, and so on – this was achieved "without upsetting any balance which can displace them from power in the home" (p. 200). The situation remains the same for women in agritourism cooperatives in Greece, where Stavroulakis, Karagiannis, Mitoula and Papagrigoriou (2013) record that the women's gender roles and status has not challenged, despite the income they contribute to their household. They concluded, "opportunities for a radical renegotiation of their role leading to concrete emancipation through their occupation in agritourism appear rather limited" (p. 135). Scott (1997) also argues that women's roles in small family-run hotels in Northern Cyprus were marginal and reinforced gender relations and the existing division of labour. This is due to the "gendered access to social space and management of social and business relationships" (p. 85-86).

Tucker's (2007) study on women's involvement in both tourism entrepreneurship and employment Goreme, Turkey concludes that "the extent to which women's earning is bringing change to gender relationships both within and outside the household is also open to question" (p. 101). Phommavong and Sörensson (2014)

further reveal that gender and ethnicity affects women's opportunities to benefit from community-based, pro-poor tourism initiatives, and that these categories result in inequities between men and women in the tourism division of labour. Moreover, Robson (2002) notes that the involvement of Maltese women in craft production did not challenge dominant gender roles and relations because it was seen as an extension of their domestic work.

In addition, Moller's (2012) study on women rural tourism entrepreneurs in Latvia found that tourism entrepreneurship provided greater flexibility for women to combine family and work than if they had a full-time job. However, the women in this study had to adjust their work according to their family needs and, thus, their domestic work came before their enterprise work. They also had the difficulty balance their enterprise work and family work, as they were still responsible for domestic work and the care of their children. Furthermore, case studies on mountain women running tourism enterprises by Walker et al. (2001) show "that while women balance their traditional domestic roles with public enterprises and while they adjust the traditional divisions of labour, mountain women are still often restricted by social boundaries common in rural mountain regions" (p. 214). Hence, there are mounting evidence of tourism entrepreneurship inability to challenge gender roles and relations for women.

There are few studies that found women challenging gender relations through their involvement in tourism entrepreneurship. Acharya and Halpenny (2013) claim that rural Nepali women running homestay businesses challenge their status as rural women in community development, as well as their traditional gender roles and responsibilities as homemakers and caregivers. Li (2003) also finds that women running Dai house-visiting businesses in Xishuang Banna, China improved their gender relations at the household. This improvement was because of the economic contributions the women make to their household and their husbands realising the value of their business work. Thus, when the women were busy with their business, the husbands were willing to help with the domestic responsibilities that are traditionally defined as women's work. Li (2003) asserts that this example "presents

an on-going process of constructing a more balanced gendered division of labour and gender relationships within the household. Women's capability for successfully surviving today's commodity economy makes it possible to mould women's traditional role into a relatively new and powerful one" (p. 58). Furthermore, Cone's (1995) anthropology study on two Mayan women handcrafters observes that "both women vigorously reject the traditional Mayan women's role for themselves" (p. 325) as they pursue with their tourism craft business. However, these women were unmarried for most of their adult lives, thus it was easier for them to challenge traditional embedded gender relations. Henry, Warren-Smith, Martin, Scott, Pettersson and Heldt Cassel (2014) provide a different perspective on gender in exploring women's farm tourism businesses in Sweden. Although they note that the women's entrepreneurial endeavours did not change the gendered division of labour, they suggest instead that it challenges gender roles by the women identifying themselves as entrepreneurs. This includes developing and starting their own business idea, to showcasing their farms to tourists, and being involved in local development projects and business networks. Kimbu and Ngoasong (2016) similarly suggest that women who run small tourism firms in Cameroon are able to change their traditional domestic roles by becoming the owners/managers of their own business in a male-dominated environment.

Thus, with tourism entrepreneurship opportunities largely reinforcing, rather than challenging, gender relations, I ask why we are promoting tourism entrepreneurship potential as a means of empowering women when clearly the issue of gender roles and relations is reinforced rather than challenged through tourism entrepreneurship opportunities, which in turn influences the empowerment of women. Such concern is raised by Kinnaird and Hall (2000), who note that providing tourism economic opportunities for women "has not provided a fundamental challenge to unequal gender relations. More often it has confirmed and reinforced gendered roles and relationships since the tourism industry is founded on notions of masculinity and femininity" (p. 72). This situation has not changed since this study was published. Perhaps this is because social change may not

always be possible due to strong gender ideologies that are embedded in environments. Indeed, social change may not also always be welcomed or needed. MacLaren et al. (2013) claims that "radical societal or cultural change is not required in order to bring about female empowerment in the developing world" (p. 204). Furthermore, women may not necessarily want major social changes occurring from their involvement in tourism entrepreneurship and they may simply be looking to make a meaningful contribution to their life. The women in case studies about Turkey and south-western Uganda had no intentions of challenging social and cultural norms, or to neglect their household and marital duties while being involved in tourism economic activities (Tucker and Boonabaana, 2012). The same was observed among the Maasai women that sold their beadwork to tourists, where it was noted,

> Maasai women don't want to radically change their culture. But they do want to create incomes of their own and to put more pressure on men if necessary, to cope with growing needs for income, health care and education for their children. Empowerment is a process to enable them to achieve these goals.

> (Van Der Cammen, 1997, p. 163)

Women from indigenous societies in Latin America and Southeast Asia were largely not empowered to change their societies through their ethnic arts productions and they instead conformed to their perceived roles within the society (Swain, 1993). Nevertheless, women not wanting any major social changes may help to further enforce social-cultural norms and the restrictions placed on them, affecting their potential to be empowered. In general, there is little effort made for social change from wider society when it comes to achieving gender equality. More predominantly, women and men are not yet willing to let go and challenge gender-role stereotypes and, resultantly, they are constantly being reinforced in society. Thus, it is important to consider and understand the general and bigger picture in which women (and men) operate in. As West and Zimmerman (1987) emphasise, "an understanding of how gender is produced in social situations will afford clarification of the

interactional scaffolding of social structure and the social control processes that sustain it" (p. 147). This, in turn, may help us to truly determine the potential and extent to which tourism entrepreneurship can empower women. Overall, there is a need to include socio-cultural issues in the analysis of women in tourism entrepreneurship activities along with gender if we are going to understand the potential for tourism entrepreneurship to empower women. It is also important to have a general holistic picture in which women and men operate. At the same time, it is important to consider the direct perspectives of women in assessing the extent of social change that they would want to result from their participation in tourism entrepreneurship activities, as these will have a major influence on women's empowerment through tourism entrepreneurship.

### 3.4.4 Lack of definitions for women's empowerment in tourism

When it comes to available definitions of women's empowerment in the tourism discipline, the focus has largely been on community development rather than on women (Cole, 2005b, 2006; Sofield, 2003)

From a community tourism development perspective, empowerment has been defined as

> A multidimensional process that provides the community with a consultative process often characterized by outside expertise; the opportunity to choose; the ability to make decisions; the capacity to implement/apply those decisions; acceptance of responsibility for those decisions and actions and their consequences; and outcomes directly benefiting the community and its members, not directed or channelled into other communities and/or their members.

> (Sofield, 2003, p. 112)

It has also been defined as

> The capacity of individuals or groups to determine their own affairs. It is a process to help people to exert control over factors that affect their lives. It represents the top end of the participation ladder where members of a community are active agent of change and they can find solutions to their problems, make decisions, implement actions and evaluate their solutions.

(Cole, 2005b, p. 97)

However, these current available definitions of empowerment from a community tourism development perspective cannot be applied to women's empowerment through tourism. Women's empowerment has its own unique characteristics and is different to the empowerment of other disadvantaged groups (Malhotra and Schuler, 2005). Thus, a clear definition of women's empowerment through tourism has not yet been developed. This may provide the reason for the vague and the loose use of the idea of women's empowerment through tourism entrepreneurship opportunities.

### 3.4.5 Lack of suitable conceptual frameworks to assess women's empowerment in tourism

As for conceptual frameworks to assess women's empowerment in tourism, the only available framework was originally developed to analyse the impacts of ecotourism ventures on local communities (Scheyvens, 1999). Four levels of empowerment dimensions are included in this framework: economic, social, psychological and political. The same framework was then applied to assess women's empowerment through their involvement in ecotourism ventures (Scheyvens, 2000, 2002). It has been argued that this framework can be applied to both western and non-western contexts. It has also been agreed that the same framework can be applied to analyse the involvement of women, and indeed any other group, in various tourism entrepreneurship activities (Scheyvens, 2002).

However, there are several issues surrounding Scheyvens framework for women's empowerment. One is that the framework was originally developed to assess community empowerment, rather than specifically for women's empowerment and, as mentioned above, women's empowerment is different from community empowerment. The framework was also theoretically informed, rather than empirically informed. Moreover, secondary data was used to illustrate the framework rather than first-hand empirical evidence. In addition, each of the four dimensions of empowerment were discussed separately and different examples were used to illustrate each dimension. For example, Scheyvens noted that the Massai women were economically empowered, although it is not clear whether they have also been socially, psychologically and politically empowered. Therefore, this seems to imply that only one dimension of empowerment can be achieved, rather than all the empowerment dimensions. Nevertheless, such a framework can help to explore the experiences of women in tourism entrepreneurship and become part of a mechanism in determining the potential and extent of women's empowerment through tourism entrepreneurship opportunities.

Recent research has either attempted to develop new frameworks or borrow existing frameworks, definitions or theories to assess women's empowerment through tourism entrepreneurship opportunities. McMillan et al. (2011) attempt to create a new framework to assess the empowerment of women teahouse owners/managers in Nepal. They create this by combining existing empowerment theories of power from Rowlands (1997), sustainable empowerment from Raj Pande, Sharma and Raj Khanal (2004) and Scheyvens's (2002) empowerment framework. However, their framework just combines existing theories together and, more importantly, it is not produced from actual data. Tran and Walter (2014) apply Longwe's (2002) and Scheyvens (2000) empowerment frameworks to investigate women's participation in a community-based ecotourism project in Northern Vietnam. They conclude, "there are no simple or universal connection between the various dimensions of these empowerment models" (p. 13). Thus, this raises

questions as to the authors' analysis approach and whether the women in their study were actually empowered or not.

There are many more examples of using existing frameworks, definitions and theories to assess women's empowerment through tourism entrepreneurship opportunities. Annes and Wright (2015) refer to the English writer Virginia Woolf's essay 'A room of one's own' (1929), as well as the popular power theory found in the development studies literature to explore French women's use of farm tourism as a vehicle of empowerment. Pleno (2006) uses Chigidu's (1992) definition of empowerment and Cercena's (1991) definition of participation guides his study on ecotourism projects and women's empowerment in the Philippines. Moswete and Lacey (2014) also refer to Scheyvens framework (2000) to assess women's empowerment in cultural tourism related activities in Botswana.

The problem with all of these studies is that they took existing frameworks, theories or definitions and imposed them on their own study, rather than using existing frameworks to help develop a new framework that emerges directly from the data, from the voices of the women. They also only provided an initial attempt to conceptualise the relationship between tourism entrepreneurship and women's empowerment. Thus, there is a lack of suitable conceptual frameworks that can help critically consider the potential and the extent that women can be empowered through tourism entrepreneurship opportunities. Therefore, more empirical research is needed to produce new and better frameworks for women's empowerment through tourism entrepreneurship opportunities.

### 3.4.6 Practical efforts of women's empowerment in tourism

Lastly, there are many international organisations that have developed projects, initiatives and policies to promote gender equality and women's empowerment through tourism. Most of these organisations use tourism entrepreneurship opportunities as a tool to help empower women. However, the practical efforts of these organisations are questionable. For example, a World Bank project in Copan, Honduras was shown to be unsuccessful in its efforts in redirecting Honduran

women towards productive activity in handicrafts through tourism microenterprise opportunities (Ferguson, 2010a, b). One of the reasons for this is due to the lack of clear understanding of local gender issues among the project staff, which leads to problems in policy making, programme design and project implementation (Ferguson, 2010a). The project workers and trainers also did not consider the barriers that indigenous women would face to become successful entrepreneurs. Moreover, the women felt that they were being manipulated and controlled by the project. Thus, many of these enterprises were either closed or struggled to survive. Ferguson (2010b) cautions that

> The outcomes of the project are a cautionary tale for tourism development projects which expect that indigenous women will somehow be able to run thriving businesses in a highly competitive global industry without understanding of the specific barriers they face and an overt empowerment dimension to the project rationale and operation.

(p. 5)

Indeed, Tucker and Boonabaana (2012) also express caution about the effectiveness of micro-enterprise tourism projects, noting that "the long term implications of these projects for women, men and the broader community are questionable" (p. 440). Furthermore, Ferguson (2011) critically analyses the efforts of UNWTO and the World Bank in assessing their contribution towards the millennium development goal on gender equality and women's empowerment. She notes that the UNWTO have not yet taken a leadership role on women's empowerment in tourism. She also criticises the World Bank for their gender equality and tourism policy in aiming to increase women's economic participation to promote women's empowerment, rather than properly addressing underlying issues for gender equality and women's empowerment through tourism. Moreover, the World Bank tourism micro-enterprise projects for women did not consider the barriers that women may face to participate in such projects. This included challenging gender power relations, disruption to traditional power relations and gender roles, and

women having increased dependence. She concludes that despite key tourism players' efforts in promoting their potential to address women's empowerment and gender equality, there is a lack of evidence that supports their claims. Thus, this reveals that the efforts to empower women are not yet well established on a large scale in tourism.

Similar issues were found with local organisations. For example, Henrici (2002) records many negative issues with a government-funded tourist craftwork project focused on women in Peru. She notes that the project provided business training for the women, but left the women to operate the production and sales independently. They also treated the skills of sewing as women's work. Moreover, they trained the women to make large quantities of products that were largely for local domestic use and were less attractive to tourists. Despite their efforts in setting up shops in the local airports to sell these products, the project instead displayed primarily products made by men, because these were considered of higher quality than those made by the women. Thus, she notes, "poorer women in Lima throughout this process have shared their socio-economic and gendered identities in a program set up to remove them from the one and reinforce the other, with a questionable degree of success in terms of either tourist art development or financial stability" (p. 129). Also Kwaramaba et al. (2012) investigate a home-stay project in South Africa, launched by the government to help disadvantaged women to become independent entrepreneurs. They found that the project only had partial success, despite running for more than five years. The project had set unrealistic expectations, as the women lacked confidence and self-determination in developing their own business and continued to rely on the government to fill the occupancy of their home-stay project. Thus, the project created a dependency habit for the women, rather than becoming an entrepreneurial project driven by the women.

Megarry (2008) discusses a women's empowerment scheme in Kerala, India, that encouraged women to develop their own enterprises in various industries including tourism (e.g. handicrafts production and restaurants), that was successful due to its

strong link from the grass roots to local government level. However, she cautions that "despite its empowering potential, within this highly organized structure key decisions remain under the control of several prominent figures within the organizing bodies. Whilst these are undoubtedly made following local consultations, they may not fully appreciate the realities of the everyday lives of the women involved" (p. 225). Indeed, she comments that the scheme did not help the women to challenge gender inequality. Nevertheless, she is still optimistic of the scheme's success in improving the status of individual women, which, in turn, may improve the collective status of women in the overall society. Besides the poor practical efforts of local organisations, Ateljevic (2009) notes that are a few national tourism bodies that include women's empowerment in their tourism development strategy. Most national tourism bodies include sustainable tourism in their strategy, within which some women's empowerment goals are addressed. Lenao and Basupi (2016) have recently revealed this issue as they reviewed Botswana's national tourism strategy and found a lack of women's empowerment intention through ecotourism development. Thus, there is a lack of focus on women's empowerment in national tourism strategies.

Despite the negative aspects of local bodies and international organisations attempts to empower women, there is some positive evidence of their efforts. Koutsou, Notta, Samathrakis and Partalidou (2009) found that the development of women's agro-tourism cooperatives in Greece, by national and European initiatives, were beneficial for the rural women. This was due to a lack of job opportunities and the women's lack of qualifications to enter the job market. Many women were unable to start up their own private tourism enterprise, with the likelihood of this depending on factors such as age, education and personality. Pleno (2006) also notes that NGOs helped to facilitate women's involvement in ecotourism projects and provided them with political power through leadership roles. In addition, Manwa's study (2008) of tourism entrepreneurial related activities for women in Botswana, South Africa and Indonesia shows that these were successful due to public-private sector partnerships, as "these were in the forms of private operators

facilitating business linkages with women's organisations through outsourcing of some of their services, marketing and acting as a wholesaler of their products. Women's products were guaranteed markets with high return on investments" (p. 119). Moreover, the Developing Women's Entrepreneurship in Tourism (DWET) programme for the Annapurna Conservation Area Project in Nepal was found to be positive in helping women to be involved in tourism entrepreneurship. The program provided flexible loans for the women, who were involved in the program on a participatory and intensive consultation basis. However, the program was found to be weak in linking training and follow-up activities (Gurung, 1995 cited in Shah and Gupta, 2000). Similarly, Castelberg-koulma (1991) found that the government introduction of women's agro-tourist co-operatives in Greece to be positive in setting up the cooperatives, and providing training and funding for the women. However, she found that the project future unstable due to its reliance on the government and conflicting views of different ruling parties towards the project. Overall, better practical efforts are needed to improve the facilitation of women's empowerment through tourism entrepreneurship opportunities.

## 3.5 Conclusion

The chapter presented a literature review on women in tourism entrepreneurship. I revealed that research on tourism entrepreneurship is limited and inadequate and making uneven progress. I also identified women's empowerment as a key emerging issue surrounding women in tourism entrepreneurship. Next, I critically discussed the potential and the extent to which tourism entrepreneurship empowers women. A number of issues surrounding women's empowerment through tourism entrepreneurship were discussed in detail, including a comprehensive evaluation of the economic benefits, the link to stereotypical women's work, implications with gender, the lack of definitions for women's empowerment in tourism, lack of suitable conceptual frameworks for women's empowerment in tourism, and the practical efforts of women's empowerment in tourism.

Therefore, from the literature review on women in tourism entrepreneurship, it appears that women's participation in tourism entrepreneurship does not automatically lead to their empowerment. Thus, we need to be cautious about promoting women's empowerment through tourism entrepreneurship. More specifically, we need to be more critical about the opportunities that are provided for women through tourism entrepreneurship and the subsequent implications of these opportunities to further determine the potential for tourism entrepreneurship to empower women. The idea of women's empowerment through tourism entrepreneurship is not simple or straightforward and should not be taken lightly, due to the number of issues that have been raised that need to be further and properly addressed. Thus, more research is needed on women in tourism entrepreneurship, specifically in relation to women's empowerment. Indeed, this idea has often been overly stated, misused, or under-theorized. Perhaps this is because the concept of women's empowerment is not yet well understood in the tourism discipline, particularly in relation to tourism entrepreneurship, despite previous studies briefly addressing the concept in their papers (Annes and Wright, 2015; McMillan et al., 2011; Moswete and Lacey, 2014; Pleno, 2006; Tran and Walter, 2014). In the next chapter, I provide a literature review on women's empowerment in an attempt to provide a better understanding of this concept. This, in turn, will help me to critically analyse the idea of empowerment through tourism entrepreneurship opportunities.

# Chapter 4: Literature review: Women's empowerment

## 4.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to provide a literature review on women's empowerment. First I introduce the concept of women's empowerment by looking at its origins and historical development. Then I look at current understandings of women's empowerment, followed by the issue of how to measure women's empowerment. Next, I reveal the potential of women's empowerment through their economic participation by focusing specifically on their entrepreneurship opportunities. I conclude with a recap of the main topics discussed and reveal the key points that emerged from this literature review that have major implications on the promotion of women's empowerment through tourism entrepreneurship opportunities.

I largely compiled this review by referring to development studies literature and to the available general entrepreneurship literature. While an exhaustive literature review of women's empowerment is not possible, due to the quantity of texts, I instead analyse and refer to what is most relevant and applicable to my thesis topic, which helped me to understand the concept better. More importantly, it also allowed me to strengthen my critical analysis of women's empowerment through tourism entrepreneurship opportunities.

## 4.2 The history of women's empowerment

Women's empowerment is not a recent concept and it has evolved in development studies literature over the past few decades. It originated from the works of the feminist movement during the 1970s (for example Boserup, 1970) for the emancipation of women from poverty (Lairap-Fonderson, 2002; Mosedale, 2005). The General Assembly for United Nations (UN) declared 1975 as International Women's Year and the first world conference for women took place in Mexico City. As a result of the conference, the years 1976-1985 were declared as the UN Decade for Women (United Nations, 2013). Thus, various theories concerning women, development and gender began to emerge in development studies literature.

The first was the Women in Development (WID) theory that emerged during the 1970s, which focused on addressing gender inequalities present in western thinking. Liberal feminists critiqued development theories that focused only on men and ignored women. The WID theory was established along with development agencies to help bring women into development through development projects and programmes. The idea behind the theory is that as long as women are made visible and included in the development process, the marginalisation of women will no longer exist and that everyone will benefit from development. This inclusion of women into development was done through economic opportunities. However, feminists then started to concentrate on the existing social structures that produced gender inequalities to transform the structural conditions for gender equality and the reasons for women's subordination. Thus, it was no longer enough to simply focus on women and to include them in development projects, and it was realised that there was more to women's subordination in society that was not yet understood. As a result, the next theory that emerged was the Women and Development (WAD) theory, which was based on Marxist feminism, followed then by the Gender and Development (GAD) theory in the 1980s. The GAD theory revealed the complexity of gender relations in various aspects of women's lives, such as in the home, the workplace, education, health, and so on, which lead to the sexual division of labour. It also revealed the patriarchal structure of society and the unequal power relations between men and women. Thus, this theory was helpful in promoting the focus on gender equality and the need to consider the socio-cultural construction of gender (Landig, 2011; Rowlands, 1997; Singh, 2007).

By the late 1980s and early 1990s, a focus on women's empowerment emerged from the debate on gender and development. The concept of women's empowerment was not only formed from theoretical debate, but also by looking at women's practical experiences all over the world. The concept received further attention when it became the third out of eight Millennium Development Goals (MDG) set by the United Nations at the Millennium Summit in 2000, which were accepted as a priority over a decade ago by all countries (United Nations, 2012). Hence, women's

empowerment became an important international priority that many countries strive to achieve and it has been placed at the forefront of their development agendas.

Most of the discussions and debates behind the idea of women's empowerment emerged primarily from feminist scholars and activists from developing countries, notably in Asia during the 1980s and 1990s (for example, Batliwala, 1993; Kabeer, 1994; Sen and Grown, 1987) and to a lesser extent from the West (for example, Mayoux, 1998; Moser, 1989, 1993; Rowlands, 1995, 1997; Wieringa, 1992, 1994). As a result, it has been suggested that the concept of women's empowerment originated from Asia rather than from the West (Rowlands, 1998; Stromquist, 2002). Notably, the debate on women's empowerment was influenced by a book by Sen and Grown 'Development, crisis and alternative visions: Third world women's perspectives' (1987) (cited in Stromquist, 1995), and this is where the concept was first introduced (cited in Parpart, Rai and Staudt, 2002). Kabeer (1994) emphasises that empowerment as a separate approach within gender and development discourse emerged as a direct result of the frustration of feminists, activists and development practitioners about the concentration of power in the hands of western development planners. Feminists were concerned at the ways that poor women in developing countries were integrated into development projects that would lead to positive changes in women's lives (Erman, Kalaycıoğlu and Rittersberger-Tılıç, 2002). Feminists also rejected the idea that a standard universal criteria of empowerment can always be used (Chant, 2006).

A diverse body of literature on women's empowerment in the development studies discipline has emerged from these debates and discussions, and continues to do so. However, a review of this literature reveals that there are many prevailing issues surrounding the concept, which will be discussed in detail in the following sections.

## 4.3 Understanding women's empowerment

With the growing phenomenon of women's empowerment, the concept became popular and was often used by development agencies as a indicator of success for their programmes targeted towards women's development (Rowlands, 1997). However, the actual meaning of women's empowerment was not yet clear. Parpart et al. (2002) argue that any discussion regarding women's empowerment must have a clear definition and understanding of this concept, because women's empowerment has its own unique characteristics. One is that women taken together form a group of individuals that encompasses all levels of society, including poor people, ethnic minorities, and so on. Household and family relations are also major sources of disempowerment for women, more so than they are for other disadvantaged groups. Furthermore, women's empowerment specifically requires systematic transformation from institutions that support patriarchal structures (Malhotra and Schuler, 2005).

A review of developmental studies literature on women's empowerment reveals that there is no singular, universal and agreed definition or understanding of the concept, and that definitions and understandings vary considerably. Although not exhaustive, the table in appendix 2 provides an overview of the available definitions and understandings of women's empowerment. However, the commonalities and differences between these definitions and understandings of women's empowerment have scarcely been addressed (Torri and Martinez, 2014). Nonetheless, definitions and understandings seem to include common terms when discussing women's empowerment, such as community action, choice, agency, autonomy, self-direction, self-determination, liberation, participation, mobilisation, self-confidence, self-esteem, personal, collective, and so on.

The diversity of available definitions and understandings is a product of the on-going debate over women's empowerment (Afshar, 1998). The different meanings of empowerment may relate to the concept being built around the idea of power, which is highly contested and takes on different forms: power over, power to, power

with and power from within (Mason, 2005; Parpart et al., 2002; Rowlands, 1997, 1998). The concept also means different things to different people and understandings of the term vary widely among differing societies and cultures (Lairap-Fonderson, 2002). Moreover, it is an abstract concept and it can be interpreted in different ways and it may hold different meanings in different languages (Dawson, 1998). Nevertheless, it is still important to give the concept a clear meaning. Rowlands (1997) cautions that "the failure to define and explore the practical details of how empowerment can be achieved considerably weakens the value of the concept as a tool for analysis or as part of a strategy for change" (p. 8). Thus, identifying the meaning of women's empowerment is paramount.

However, a growing number of development studies feminists have been emphasising the need to incorporate ideas from non-Western contexts in order to expand our understanding of women's empowerment. Chant (2006) argues that the current western ideas of women's empowerment are not universal and women's experiences of empowerment will be different in certain contexts. Kabeer (1999) emphasises that these ideas are based on an ideal model of gender relations and that we should focus instead on the reality of gender relations in certain contexts. Similarly, Syed (2010) argues that the dominant western idea of women's empowerment does not recognise that gender relations will vary in different contexts, and, thus, it fails to consider the issue in a non-relational and holistic manner. Singh (2007) explains that although gender equality is a primary goal for western women's empowerment, such a goal is unrealistic for women in certain contexts due to their reliance, for example, on their families' support for fulfilling their social, psychosocial and economic needs. Women may also still be expected to conform to social and cultural restrictions (Desai, 2002). Women in patriarchal societies have a significant lack of empowerment when it comes to equal decision-making processes within their household or society (Osmani, 1998). Thus, it is difficult to apply ideas of formal equality when seeking empowerment for women in a diverse world (Ali, 2002). Indeed, owing to the traditional patriarchal structure that governs many women's lives, women may not want to dramatically alter their

situations, as Wieringa (1994) affirm, "for although the old may be painful and uncomfortable, it still provides the security of tradition and of the consent of one's social surrounding" (p. 834). Thus, "to empower women to critically and creatively reshape their worlds, women's own concept of themselves has to be decoded and reinscribed" (p.834). Further to this, Erman et al. (2002) suggest,

> If we want to understand the empowerment of women in a particular society, we should look at both the structural conditions under which women live their lives and the ideological/cultural constructions of women in society, as well how women perceive themselves in their relations with other people, particularly with men in their families (husbands, fathers, fathers-in-law). It is also important to understand what empowerment means to individual women in the context of their experiences, and to contextualize women in the social and cultural realities of society in the attempt to investigate women empowerment experiences and strategies.

> (p. 396)

Thus, it is important to consider women's own direct views and the conditions they live in. Indeed, not only do we need to consider contexts in terms of social structures and women's own views, but also the ways in which women use to improve their lives. Scheyvens (1998) argues "that in certain contexts, it is more effective to use subtle strategies than confrontational ones" (p. 235) to feel empowered. As she describes, subtle strategies are "attempts to achieve profound, positive changes in women's lives without stirring up wide-scale dissent" (p. 237). Thus, she emphasises that it is important to consider the different subtle strategies that women may employ to improve their lives by looking at the reasons and the extent to which they are effective, rather than see these strategies as "conservative or as 'politically immature'" (p. 240). In her study on women in the Solomon Islands, she reveals that the women were able to challenge customary norms and traditional roles through subtle strategies. Desai (2002) agrees that these strategies are more effective than confrontational ones in her study on women and grassroots NGOs in

Bombay. She shows that these strategies helped to improve the women's lives and their gender relations more appropriately than the confrontational ones. Similarly, Ali (2014) explores Muslim women's experiences of empowerment in Pakistan. She found

> that empowerment is not always exhibiting absolute power over others or open defiance against standard norms; neither it is resistance against coercion at all times. Instead, it is also about strategically acting in a way that makes women feel more secure within particular circumstances. Importantly, since the process of being empowered involved constant personal labour, pain of being denied respect and dignity, it is not as glorious as depicted in the dominant development discourse.

> (p. 119)

Thus, women can feel empowered and disempowered at the same time due to the barriers that they go through to improve their lives. Indeed, Nazneen et al. (2014) note that "in conventional research on women empowerment in development, researchers tend to overlook that a woman can be empowered and disempowered simultaneously" (p. 60). Hence, although the arguments made by these scholars could be considered conservative, and they risk facing backlash from western scholars, this issue is less about east versus west and more concerned with a lack of researchers' cognition and reflexivity around their research subjects. More importantly, it is about western ideas falling short of achieving women's empowerment and gender equality. Therefore, the above discussion raises important points that need to be considered, including the importance of the context being researched, socio-cultural issues and power structures that influence women lives, the direct perspectives of women, and the ways that women's empowerment will occur according to the realities of women' lives and their embedded environment. At the same time, it could be argued that western ideas of women's empowerment cannot be completely ignored as women, regardless of the context that they are based in, want the same rights that other women have gained from

their increasing participation in society. More importantly, one cannot deny the fact that existing social structures in certain contexts continue to disempower women regardless of the ways they seek to improve their lives. With the importance of considering the contextual differences of women's empowerment, Kabeer (2011) emphasises that the research challenge in this is "to identify commonalities while remaining sensitive to difference" (p. 2). Thus, western and non-western perspectives are both important when exploring women's empowerment.

## 4.4 Measuring women's empowerment

Regardless of the on-going debates and lack of consensus in understanding women's empowerment, overall, development studies scholars mostly agree that it is difficult to measure women's empowerment, because it is a complex phenomenon that occurs in different forms in various spaces within women's lives. It is shaped by cultural, ethnic, historical, economic, geographic, political and social situations, as well as according to women's unique experiences and their interactions with those close to them (Rowlands, 1998). It is also an on-going process and not just an outcome. The process of empowerment is not fixed and stable and it is always changing, although the nature and direction of change cannot be predicted. Human agency is indeterminate and, hence, unpredictable in a manner that is not accommodating to the requirements of measurement. In reality, the process and outcomes of empowerment are not tidy or clear (Kabeer, 1999; Parpart et al., 2002). Moreover, empowerment is multidimensional. Thus, it is challenging to consider which dimension of empowerment to focus on when it comes to measuring it (Narayan, 2005). Measuring only one dimension of women's empowerment does not necessarily mean there will be empowerment in other dimensions as well (Malhotra and Schuler, 2005). Many studies that have attempted to measure empowerment focused on only one dimension, which makes it difficult to establish meanings as all of these factors are interrelated (Kabeer, 1999). In addition, as empowerment is about power, it is difficult to observe the flow of power in comparison to other tangible factors, such as money and goods, in addition to the hidden realities of power in some institutions. This, in turn, makes it difficult to

measure power relations, which is one of the main concerns of women's empowerment (Mason, 2005). Thus, the above characteristics of women's empowerment make it methodologically difficult to measure.

It has been noted that any attempts to measure women's empowerment will not effectively address its complex characteristics (Alsop, Bertelsen and Holland, 2006). Narayan (2005) notes that there are a number of methodological issues associated with measuring empowerment that scholars and practitioners need to address. This includes deciding on whether to measure empowerment as: a means, an end, or both; universally or context specifically; individually or collectively; according to levels of application; objectively or subjectively; and using quantitative or qualitative methods. It also includes considering all dimensions of empowerment, ascertaining the origin of empowerment, the process of acquiring that empowerment and the extent of change, establishing causality, and linking the framework used for measurement with clear concepts. However, many of the available frameworks that have been developed to measure empowerment have been criticised for not being feasible and for failing to take into account the various issues discussed above. Malhotra and Schuler (2005) review 45 empirical studies to assess their ability to handle the challenges of measuring empowerment. They conclude that most of these studies did not properly measure empowerment, which limited their ability to provide authoritative evidence regarding the factors that empower women. The majority of such studies were found "to capture only a slice of empowerment – they do not even come close to measuring all potentially relevant dimensions" (p. 80). Development organisations and NGOs have also produced various systems and procedures to measure women's empowerment, although the effectiveness of these systems and procedures is questionable. Dawson (1998) notes that NGOs face several constraints in measuring empowerment. Besides the technical and operational constraints (such as, limited time and resources, short project life cycle, and so on), the most challenging is the difficulty to measure the intangible benefits associated with women's empowerment and what this means to women due to the abstract nature of the concept, as discussed above.

Various suggestions have been provided about how to best measure women's empowerment. Deshmukh-Ranadive (2005) suggest that in order to measure and promote women's empowerment, it is important to look at all levels of the domestic sphere, including the family, household, husband, and so on. Indeed, these factors are pivotal in gender-based discrimination and to achieving women's empowerment. Similarly, Hall (1992) suggests measuring women's empowerment by looking at the impacts of family, religion, work, world conditions and ideologies of feminism on women's lives. Hall affirms that these aspects influence women's thought, feelings, decisions and actions, as well as historically limiting women's roles and abilities. This focus is important in order to see the real picture of women's lives. Many authors also stated that any measure of empowerment should be context-specific and that qualitative research is more appropriate for measuring women's empowerment (Alsop et al., 2006; Mason, 2005; Rowlands, 1998). There has been an increasing call to measure women's empowerment from the direct perspectives of women and to look at their lived experiences as the basis of analysis, rather than deducing their experiences into particular indicators. This, in turn, can help to provide a better understanding of women's empowerment (Erman et al., 2002; Gill and Ganesh, 2007; Kabeer, 2001).

## 4.5 Women's empowerment and entrepreneurship

When it comes to actually empowering women, efforts have largely focused on their economic participation. Women's increased participation in the economy is seen as a sign of their empowerment by many governments and international organisations. It is believed that women's participation in the economy provides better employment opportunities for women, stimulates the economy in terms of production and assets, reduces poverty and helps to sustain economic growth. On a more personal level, it is generally assumed that women's ability to earn an income helps them to become more independent. This, in turn, should result in an increase in self-esteem and self-confidence, and give them power and voice in the household (Lairap-Fonderson, 2002). It is also generally assumed that women's access to economic opportunities and having control over their income implies that they are

empowered and this will lead to their empowerment in other dimensions, besides the economic dimension (Kabeer, 2011).

While there is some truth to these economic benefits, there is a growing debate in the development studies literature that women's economic participation does not necessarily lead to their empowerment. This is due to several factors that make this potential difficult to achieve. One is that existing patriarchal power structures and traditional gender roles in many contexts make it difficult for women to challenge power relations, despite their economic participation (Beşpınar, 2010; Erman et al., 2002). The type of economic opportunities that are offered to women will also have a major influence on their empowerment (Kantor, 2003). Moreover, women's economic participation doubles their workload with their domestic responsibilities and adds more burdens to them (Batliwala, 1993; Kabeer, 2000; Pearson, 2004). In addition, global forces of power and local social practices and political institutions influence women's ability to be empowered through economic opportunities (Koggel, 2003). More profoundly, the facilitation of women's economic participation through the efforts of donors and NGOs has not been properly implemented (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2012). Other issues include community traditions, tax, and employers' practices (Mason, 2005).

Entrepreneurship is a popular economic activity used to assess and promote women's empowerment (Chitsike, 2000), and it is seen as a source of women's empowerment (McAdam, 2013). It has a long historical use in international development and is considered as a favourable economic opportunity to empower women (United Nations Development Programme, 2008). The link between entrepreneurship and women's empowerment has been studied in its various forms, such as micro-finance, micro enterprise; self-help groups, self-employment, and so on. However, in line with the debate on the empowerment of women through their economic participation, as discussed above, this debate has extensively been focused on entrepreneurship opportunities.

For example, Kantor (2003) assesses home-based garment micro-enterprises in order to determine the extent to which they empower women in India based on their gender relations in the household. She reveals that such economic opportunities are not sufficient for empowering women in the household, due to social norms that limit women's ability to turn these opportunities into power, as well as women's reduced control over the income they earned and the burden of women's domestic unpaid work in their homes. The actual work environment was also found to limit the women's ability to share their experiences with other women and to build their identities.

Landig (2011) explores the effectiveness and success of the EU-funded women's empowerment projects in Turkey that focused on increasing the number of women in the workforce and promoting entrepreneurship opportunities for women. Despite the progress women have been able to make through such projects breaking down barriers, Landig reveals that Turkish women still faced social challenges, such as existing patriarchal beliefs towards women, and that the women still lacked self-confidence. They also faced structural challenges, such as a lack of education, legal discrimination, lack of economic and political power, and limited regional government support. Thus, these projects did not improve the women's lives and prevailing challenges still existed.

Abdo and Kerbage (2012) examine the Women Entrepreneurship Development (WED) initiative undertaken by international organisations, the government and locals NGOs in Lebanon to economically empower women. They found many structural gaps that characterised the support services that were provided to women entrepreneurs through the initiative. One is that they did not integrate gender issues into their services and they did not help to challenge the gendered division of labour. The women were largely directed to conduct their entrepreneurial activities in feminised, service-related and low productive sectors, instead of in the male-dominated, non-traditional and high productive sectors. The services were also limited in that they only supported the women to open small businesses, which could not provide adequate income for their household expenses

and had limited potential for economic growth. The advocacy for promoting small businesses for women was based on providing the flexibility for women to maintain their domestic responsibilities while running their business, thus, reinforcing the domestic division of labour. Moreover, they provided limited services to respond only to women's basic needs by providing micro-credit loans and training. Such services reinforced informality and vulnerability for women's entrepreneurial activities. In addition, the interventions provided through these organisations were mostly supply led, as they largely focused on improving women entrepreneurial skills without paying attention to the business environment. Furthermore, they neglected external factors that may limit the development of the women's business, such as governmental policies and cultural norms. Thus, such initiatives limited women's entrepreneurial capacity, which, in turn, limited their empowerment.

Chitsike (2000) argues that it is culture and institutional structure that acts as a barrier to women's empowerment through entrepreneurship opportunities. In reviewing the experiences of women entrepreneurs in Zimbabwe, she reveals several cultural barriers that influenced women's views towards entrepreneurship, such as the taboo around women making large profits, being judged for being strong and decisive as these are considered as male standards, needing to have a male family member involved in the enterprise, and so on. She also revealed several structural barriers that defined the size, scale and type of enterprises that the women developed, such as the lack of marketable products and service, limited time and access to travel due to the cultural expectation that they should care for their families, lack of ownership and control of assets and lack of education. Such barriers limited the women's entrepreneurial endeavour and success, which, in turn, limited their empowerment.

With the growing evidence on entrepreneurship's lack of ability to empower women, Kabeer (2012) questions the possibility of entrepreneurship to empower women. From reviewing the development studies literature on women entrepreneurship, she found that women's enterprises had a slower growth and made little income in comparison to men's enterprises. This was mostly evident for women with smaller

enterprises and who pursued them for their survival. She also finds that gender was the main factor that influenced the women entrepreneurs, with issues including: the challenge of separating business and family decisions, balancing their enterprise and domestic responsibilities, having limited time and mobility, experiencing discrimination in accessing needed resources for their enterprise, lack of education, lack of self-confidence, and so on.

While there are scholars that have critiqued the ability of entrepreneurship opportunities to empower women and there is mounting evidence to support their claims that it does not, on the other hand, there are scholars that found positive empowering evidence in entrepreneurship opportunities for women. In responding to the critiques of entrepreneurship activities inability to empower women, Torri and Martinez (2011, 2014) opt for a more positive outlook as they explore a collective female community enterprise in India working in the herbal sector. They found that the women were economically empowered through their enterprise by having increased revenue, which helped them with their household expenses and to invest their income in agricultural materials and livestock to attain better direct sales. They were also socially empowered in having increased access to power and resources in the community and on their homes. This, in turn, increased their self-confidence, pride and communication skills. They also gained social recognition for the work they did through their enterprise. Moreover, there were positive effects for their family and children, as they gained access to basic health services because of the women's enterprise. The authors note that such enterprises were successful in empowering the women because the project took a holistic approach in considering the different needs of the women.

However, despite their optimistic positive outlook on the economic and social empowerment of the women through this enterprise, Torri and Martinez highlight several issues surrounding the enterprise that could have implications for women's empowerment, which are not emphasised enough in their conclusion. They note that the enterprise did not address the situation of women's subordination as a result of the existing patriarchal power in the embedded environment.  They also

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reveal that the women faced mobility constraints in working outside their homes, which, in turn, constrained their freedom. Moreover, they question the sustainability of the enterprise in the long term, as it was still at its beginning stage when they researched it. In addition, they caution that the participation of women in this enterprise is not an indicator of success for achieving women's empowerment, as the women's reasons to join the enterprise was diverse. Many joined the enterprise to increase their family revenue, while few joined for reasons of economic independence, to challenge gender norms, or to improve their social position.

Moyle, Dollard and Biswas (2006) also report positive findings for entrepreneurship approaches in empowering women from their study on rural Indian women's participation in self-help groups creating applique patchwork. They note that self-help groups assist women in achieving personal and economic empowerment in terms of collective efficacy, self-efficacy, positive attitudes, self-esteem and reduced psychological distress, and increased income. However, there were negative effects associated with the self-help groups, where some women experienced pressure, strain and stress due to the work conditions and demands. Similar positive results were also reported by researchers that have published in local journals in their home countries (Basargekar, 2009; Nawaz, 2010; Sharma and Varma, 2008; Sharma, 2007).

Positive evidence of entrepreneurship ability to empower women was also found in a few studies conducted in the general entrepreneurship discipline. However, women's empowerment is not a noticeable theme found in the women entrepreneurship discourse and most of these discussions were typically formed around motivations, barriers, opportunities and the entrepreneurial character of women's entrepreneurship (Al-Dajani and Marlow, 2013a). Thus, the relationship between entrepreneurship and women's empowerment is considered to be a new research area within the general entrepreneurship literature, which has arisen due to the call for entrepreneurship scholars to explore new sites of research for women's entrepreneurship (Ahl, 2006; Brush, De Bruin and Welter, 2009; Calas, Smircich and Bourne, 2009; Hughes, Jennings, Brush, Carter and Welter, 2012). For

example, Scott, Dolan, Johnstone - Louis, Sugden and Wu (2012) examine the potential for entrepreneurship to empower women by looking at women's participation in the Avon enterprise system in South Africa. Avon is an international organisation that develops a network of women entrepreneurs to distribute its products. They found in their study that the Avon system supported the entrepreneurial ability of the women through training, networking, mentoring and capitalisation. They emphasised that this support helped to foster women's empowerment through having better incomes, reducing poverty, experiencing changes in family dynamics and improving their self-perceptions.

Abbasian and Bildt (2009) also advocate entrepreneurship's ability to empower women by exploring the experiences of immigrant women entrepreneurs in Sweden. They found that the women were able to integrate into Swedish working life through their enterprises. The women also felt that they had important careers as entrepreneurs and were able to make use of their experiences and qualifications when starting their own businesses. This is because it was difficult for the women to find jobs that matched their qualifications and experiences. Thus, the women were able to gain economic independence, status in society, strong self-confidence and well-being as a result of their enterprise. More profoundly, Özkazanç-Pan (2015) promotes women entrepreneurship's ability to achieve women's empowerment in Turkey, a Muslim majority country that is deeply divided between Islamic and secular ideologies. She examined two women's organisations that are based on secular and Islamic feminist ideologies and that promote entrepreneurship opportunities for women. Despite their ideological differences, she notes that both organisations "allow for praxis and represent an ethico-political commitment to dismantling neo-liberal development ideologies in the Turkish context that perpetuate gender inequality" (p. 45). However, this study is based on descriptive secondary data from the two organisations and does not include the direct voices and perspectives of the women involved in entrepreneurial activities.

Similar to the studies that reported positive empowering results for collective entrepreneurship in the development studies literature, collective social entrepreneurship has also been shown to empower women in the entrepreneurship literature. In their study on women's social collective cooperative in India, Datta and Gailey (2012) reveal that collective social entrepreneurship had empowered women in three different ways: economic security in terms of having life-long self-employment as members and owners of the cooperative; development of entrepreneurial behaviour; and increased contributions to the family through the income they earned.

Gill and Ganesh (2007) offer a different critical perspective from many other scholars on women's empowerment and entrepreneurship. By exploring the experiences of white women entrepreneurs in the United States through discourse-centred perspectives, they reveal that the experiences of empowerment for these women relied on their negotiation with the challenges of entrepreneurship. Such negotiating approaches included mental stimulation, determination, pioneering frontier attitude, and seeking and using supportive outlets. Thus, the women experienced daily personal struggles with their enterprise in order to achieve their goals and passions. As a result of the women experiencing empowerment and constraints, Gill and Ganesh emphasise that the women's empowerment through their enterprise was flawed and fluctuating, in comparison to other studies that advocate only the empowering results of entrepreneurship. They suggested that entrepreneurship for women should be seen as a form of bounded empowerment, "one that is radically intersected by context and experience, cannot be considered in absolute terms and does not necessarily imply or result in radical democracy" (p. 286). Thus, their study suggests that women's empowerment through entrepreneurship opportunities is not easily attainable.

A longitudinal study (1999-2009) by Al-Dajani and Marlow (2013b) analyses the empowerment of ethnic Palestinian women living in poverty in Amman, Jordan through their home-based craft enterprises, offering a critical and balanced perspective on entrepreneurship's ability to empower women. The women used

their traditional craft skills to create their own home-based feminised enterprise opportunity within the patriarchal environment that they lived in. The study reveals that the women's home-based enterprise helped to facilitate and enhance their empowerment process, where multiple empowerment outcomes were evident for the women. This included: economic establishment, reduced poverty, accountability and responsibility, increased awareness and knowledge, leadership, making decisions and having choices, and self-identity. However, despite the empowerment outcomes that the women were able to gain from their enterprise, there were still some issues surrounding their enterprise. Al Dajani notes that the women were only able to achieve economic establishment within the boundaries of their homes and communities. This is due to the displaced conditions that these Palestinian women lived in, which made it impossible for them to have a formal and legal enterprise. More importantly, the women's enterprise did not help to challenge the existing patriarchal power in the embedded environment. Thus, although entrepreneurship has empowering potential, its "scope for such remains embedded within particular situated environments, and as such is not a panacea to challenge patriarchy or a solution to inherent subordination" (Al-Dajani and Marlow, 2013a, p. 518). It is also "not a magic individualised solution to address embedded patriarchal systems of disadvantage" (Al-Dajani and Marlow, 2013b, p. 92). Instead, collective action is needed to improve the status of women in patriarchal societies and to challenge embedded subordination. In addition, as entrepreneurial opportunities are embedded according to existing institutional norms, they can only provide a partial solution to the existing challenges that women undergo in such environments (Al-Dajani and Marlow, 2013a).

The discourse on entrepreneurship and women's empowerment can also be found in studies that focused on micro-credit schemes. Various micro-credit schemes have been developed to help women develop their own individual enterprises or collective micro-enterprises. It is a popular economic scheme provided by many local and international donors and development agencies to promote economic empowerment for women in developing countries. The topic of micro-credit is

frequently cited in the development studies discourse and there is also extensive literature debating and critiquing its effectiveness to empower women. Opinions are spilt on this debate, with some reporting positive results and affirming that it improves women's lives (Keating, Rasmussen and Rishi, 2010; Moodie, 2008), while others report negative results and suggest that it makes women's lives worse than before (Ashe, Treanor and Mahmood, 2011; Kabeer, 2005; Lingam, 2008; Parmar, 2003; Selinger, 2008).

For example, Osmani's (1998) study looks at the experiences of poor rural women in Bangladesh using micro-credit from the Grameen Bank, that lends almost exclusively to women for their economic development. She revealed that access to micro-credit did not completely empower the women. There was improvement in the women's domestic bargaining power, status and independence, but their perceived self-interest did not improve much. There were also no significant differences between borrowers and non-borrowers when it came to increased autonomy in decision-making and access to food and health care. Reasons for this incomplete empowerment was the result of prevailing cultural conditions in the embedded environment, as well as the women's limited ability to access large amounts of credit, which forced them to rely on their husbands. Lairap-Fonderson's (2002) study reveals more extreme results when it came to micro-credit projects for women in Kenya and Cameroon. It shows that micro-credits for women seem to "act more like a disciplinary power, turning them into 'efficient economic actors' to be inserted in the market economy, rather than a tool for their empowerment" (p. 182). Such projects have been linked to the poor economic situations of these countries, where women's access to the job market has been increased in order to expand the wider economy.

On the contrary, Ahmed, Siwar and Idris (2011) find that rural women that accessed Grameen Bank micro-credit programmes in Bangladesh were empowered in comparison to women with no credit when it came to family decision making and freedom. This could be due to the training and skills development provided through the programme. Mayoux (2001) suggests that it is the collective group effort, rather

than the individual woman entrepreneur or women in family businesses, who often access micro-credit for the development of micro-collective enterprises.

In reviewing the studies that reported either positive and negative results regarding micro credit programs, Kabeer (2001) notes that such studies reported conflicting conclusions due to the type of methodologies used (quantitative and qualitative), the type of questions asked, the different findings reported, and the interpretation of the findings. The prime reason for the conflicting conclusions was due to the different understandings of domestic power relations that the studies draw on. Therefore, it seem that the research approach influences such results and that the potential empowerment of women through micro-credit is very subjective.

Thus, when reviewing the studies that advocated women's empowerment through entrepreneurship opportunities, as summarised in the table in appendix 3, they all seem to concentrate on entrepreneurship opportunities' ability to provide benefits of economic viability and personal development, and to some extent in providing good working conditions as well as collective development, if it is a group enterprise. As for the studies that critique women's empowerment through entrepreneurship opportunities, as summarised in the table in appendix 4, these revealed the inability of entrepreneurship opportunities to empower women due to issues of socio-cultural restrictions and gender ideologies, which the other studies did not address. Therefore, when considering these studies as a whole, it seems that entrepreneurship opportunities have some potential to empower women when it comes to economic viability, personal development, collective development, and work conditions and demands. However, they are unable to empower women when it comes to issues of socio-cultural restrictions and gender ideologies, as is revealed in figure 1 below.

Figure 1: Levels of empowerment through entrepreneurship opportunities

Socio-cultural restrictions
Gender ideologies

Personal development
Collective development
Work conditions and demands
Economic viability
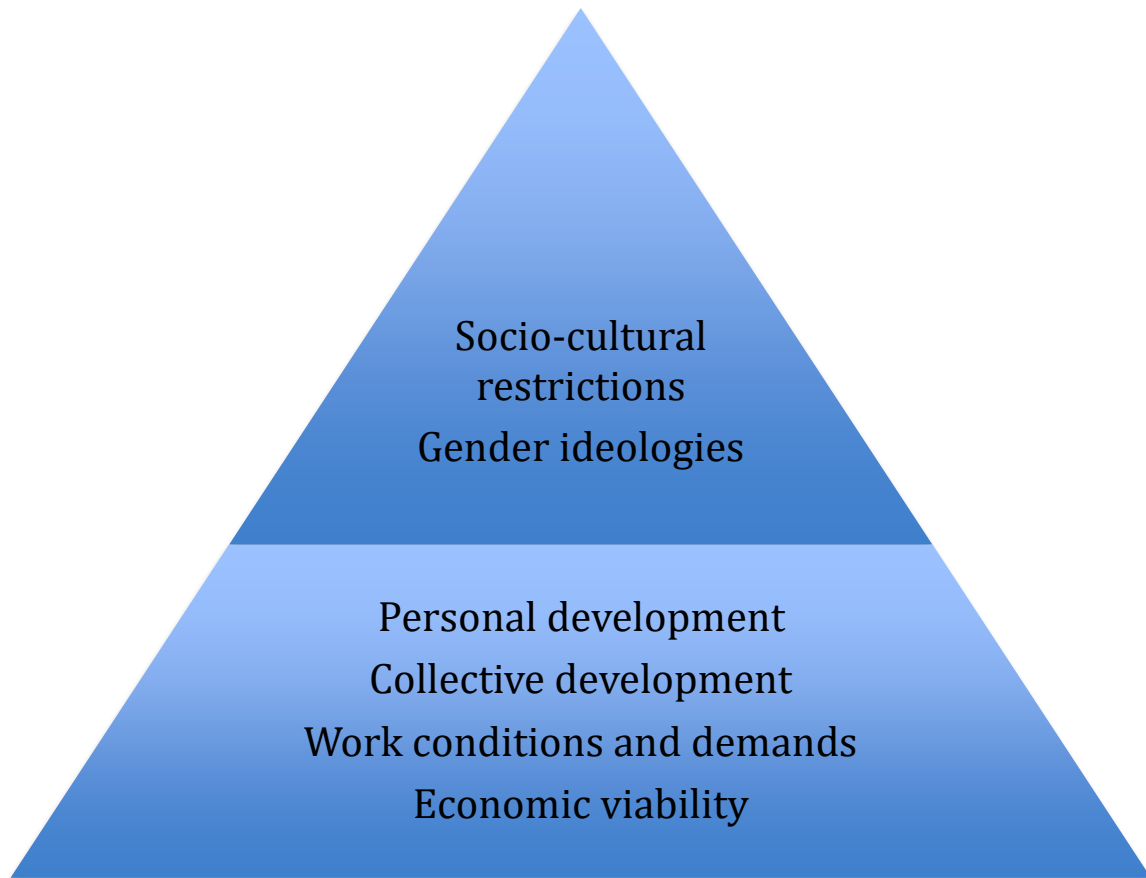
Overall, it seems that the link between women's empowerment and entrepreneurship is not strong and convincing. Most of those that have critiqued the potential for entrepreneurship to empower women seem to suggest that entrepreneurship opportunities with micro-credit schemes are unable to address and deal with the deeply rooted issues women face in their embedded environments, which are key to the empowerment of women. These included socio-cultural restrictions and gender ideologies. These issues as a whole represent the influence of gender and culture in constructing women's entrepreneurial experiences, which, in turn, influences their empowerment. Critics also suggest that entrepreneurship seems to make the situation worse for women rather than improving it when it comes to the work conditions and demands provided through entrepreneurship opportunities. In addition, as the studies revealed, the simple elements of empowerment, such as economic viability and personal development, are not

always attained through entrepreneurship opportunities. Thus, it seems that entrepreneurship opportunities are not as empowering as they seem and they fail to make any significant impact on prevailing issues for women. Nevertheless, such opportunities continue to be used for the fulfilment of women's empowerment. Cornwall and Anyidoho (2010) criticise this, arguing "that the narrative of women's empowerment that has become so dominant in recent years focuses so heavily on the individual female entrepreneurs and fails to address broader structural issues" (p. 147). Therefore, more needs to take place to ensure the empowering effects of entrepreneurship for women. As Rowlands (1995) notes, "an empowerment approach centred on economic activity must pay attention to more than the activity itself. The processes and structures through which an economic activity operates need to be deliberately designed to create opportunities for an empowerment process to happen" (p. 105). Thus, proper planning needs to take place for entrepreneurship opportunities in order to foster women's empowerment.

Despite those advocating the positive results for entrepreneurship to empower women, whether from the development studies literature or women entrepreneurship literature, such studies were not sufficiently critical in considering the realities of women's lives, or the context and implications of their entrepreneurial activities. It also raises concerns over claims made regarding the empowerment of women through entrepreneurship opportunities, where the particulars regarding the women's individual circumstances are not carefully considered. Indeed, Kantor (2005) cautions that

> Often those promoting entrepreneurship do not recognize that opportunities for success may differ across groups and contexts, meaning that evaluating success solely on the basis of economic indictors can lead to a partial view of success that ignored the effects of power and control, which are relevant to success across many contexts where gender inequalities in access to and operation within the market are common.

(pp. 63-64)

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However, it seems that those that are reporting the positive empowerment findings of entrepreneurship opportunities are largely referring to the collective forms of entrepreneurship, rather than individual entrepreneurship. It has been emphasised that this type of entrepreneurship can act as a tool for women's empowerment in helping women to become economically self-efficient (Bunch and Carrillo, 1990; Donahoe, 1999). Thus, there is some potential for the collective form of entrepreneurship to empower women.

## 4.6 Conclusion

The chapter has presented the literature review that I conducted on women's empowerment. I demonstrated that woman's empowerment is not a recent phenomenon, and that frustrations and concerns have emerged from non-western feminist scholars towards western development ideas and approaches used on women from developing countries. I also revealed that current understandings and definitions of women's empowerment are diverse due to the subjective nature of the concept. More specifically, I discussed the on-going arguments from non-western scholars about the importance of considering the context as the main basis for fostering and understanding women's empowerment. Moreover, I showed that measuring women's empowerment is methodologically challenging due to the complex nature of the concept. Then I exposed the potential of women's empowerment through entrepreneurship opportunities, which is limited due to prevailing gender and cultural issues that entrepreneurship does not address. Therefore, when looking at the overall women's empowerment concept, it is clear that the actual understanding and use of the concept is not yet well established and there are still many on-going debates regarding its definition, particularly in terms of entrepreneurship opportunities to empower women. Indeed, it seems that the concept needs a serious revamp and overhaul to help address important underlying issues for women.

In reflecting on the topics discussed in this chapter in relation to tourism, it is concerning that the discipline has taken significant responsibility for borrowing and applying the concept of women's empowerment to tourism entrepreneurship opportunities for women, which has not even been properly distinguished from its use in developmental studies, from which it originally arose. Yet, many studies have made claims regarding the empowerment of women through tourism entrepreneurship opportunities, as I revealed in the previous chapter. The concept has also not been properly applied and used due a number of issues surrounding women's empowerment through tourism entrepreneurship. Thus, to affirm that tourism entrepreneurship fosters women's empowerment is very naïve given the various issues surrounding women's empowerment that were raised in this chapter. Indeed, Rowlands (1995) cautions against such an approach, noting that "the concept of empowerment, if it is used precisely and deliberately, can help to focus thought, planning and action in development. However, when its use is careless, deliberately vague, or sloganizing, it risks becoming degraded and valueless" (p. 106). Hence, the tourism discipline needs to be cautious with its use of the concept of women's empowerment through tourism entrepreneurship opportunities.

I next provide a literature review on women and tourism in Oman in order to better understand the position of women and the state of tourism in Oman. This, in turn, will help explore the experiences of Omani women in tourism entrepreneurship and its potential to empower Omani women.

# Chapter 5: Literature review: Women and the tourism industry in Oman

## 5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents information about women and the tourism industry in Oman, which was the research site for this study. Firstly, I present background information about Oman, and then I discuss the position of women in Oman in relation to their participation in the economy, education, politics and society. Next, I provide information about the tourism industry in Oman in terms of the history and development of the industry in the country, as well as employment and entrepreneurship opportunities within the industry. I conclude with a recap of the main topics discussed, and identify important issues and implications surrounding women and tourism in Oman.

## 5.2 Background information about Oman

Picture 1: Map of Oman



Oman is located on the southern tip of the Arabia Peninsula and is surrounded by the Arabian Sea to the east. The country has land borders with the United Arab

Emirates, Saudi Arabia and Yemen. In 2013, it had a population of 3,855 million, which includes both Omanis and expatriates (National Centre for Statistices and Information, 2014a). Omani women make up 49% of the population, while Omani men make up 51%. Most of the population resides in Muscat, which is the capital of Oman and is the main commercial hub of the country. Oman is a Muslim country and is considered to have a moderate approach to religion. It was one of the first countries to accept Islam during the lifetime of the Prophet Mohamed in 630 AD, and hence, Islam influences all aspects of Omani life. It has a diverse and multicultural society due to the country's history of overseas empires in East Africa and Pakistan, as well as merchant trading in the Indian subcontinent (Peterson, 2004). The main industries in Oman are oil and gas, industry and mining, services, agriculture, fishing and tourism, and the currency is the Omani rial (1 Omani rial=1.60 British pounds).

Oman was briefly occupied by the Persians and the Portuguese around the 16th century, but since 1744 it has been under the rule of the same royal family, the Al Bu Said monarchy. The current leader, Sultan Qaboos bin Said, is the fourteenth in this royal line and has been the Sultan of Oman since 1970. All the country's policy decisions are made by him (Katzman, 2013; McBrierty and Al Zubair, 2004). Before the 1970s, Oman was politically, economically and socially isolated. It was considered an underdeveloped country, and it lacked basic infrastructure and facilities, such as hospitals, schools, roads, electricity, water, and so on. The country was able to transform itself following the discovery of oil in 1964 and the modern development of Oman began in 1970, under the rule of the current Sultan. This helped to bring stability, economic improvements and led to major infrastructure development (Al-Lamki, 1999; Deeb, 2005). These changes under the rule of the Sultan had a major impact on women's position win the country.

## 5.3 Women's position in Oman

A new era for Omani women began with the ascension of the Sultan Qaboos in the 1970s. The Sultan's vision of including Omani women in the country's development

has played a major role in the progress achieved to date in this area (Al Mahrooqi, 2010; Al-Lamki, 2000). There are many examples of his support for women. He introduced a number of laws to promote gender equality and women's rights, such as social security laws to assist vulnerable women (1972), labour laws to ensure gender equality in the work place (1973; 2003), and the primary basic law (1996) that guarantees equality for all citizens regardless of their gender, country of origion, colour, language, religion, sect, domicile or social status in all rights and public duties (Al Amarbi and Al Farsi, 2013; National Centre for Statistics and Information, 2013; The Supreme Council for Planning, 2013). The Sultan has also frequently made statements in his speeches on the inclusion of women in all aspects of the country's development, as well as their empowerment and gender equality (Al Amarbi and Al Farsi, 2013; Al Mahrooqi, 2010; Katzman, 2013). Moreover, he declared 1994 as the year of women (Ministry of National Economy, 2003), and introduced Omani Women's Day in 2010, which is celebrated on the 17th October of each year to recognise the contributions that Omani women make to the country's development.

Since the inclusion of women in the country's development, the country has taken great strides towards strengthening gender equality in all aspects, including human rights, social life, education, politics and the economy. It has also been officially reported that the country has been able to achieve its contribution to the third millennium goal of women's empowerment and gender equality before its deadline of 2015 (Ministry of National Economy, 2010). Thus, one can presume that Omani women have increased participation in society visible in all areas. A more through analysis of women's position in Oman follows, which focuses on four key areas: economy, education, politics and society.

### 5.3.1 Economy
Although there was gradual inclusion of Omani women in the country's development from the 1970s, their labour force participation was initially low. Traditionally, Omani women's main roles were based on being a wife and a mother, and they were largely concentrated in undertaking domestic work and childcare

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responsibilities, including sewing, agriculture, animal husbandry and handicraft (Al Mahrooqi, 2010). They did not also traditionally work outside their homes (Inskeep, 1994). Chatty (2000) notes that women were less economically represented as many of them were not registered as economically active, particularly rural women who oversaw agriculture and animal-husbandry work, because the government did not see this as work, instead considering it part of housewifery. The limited participation of Omani women in the labour force also revealed that there was a male-dominated labour force, due to various social and economic factors. This included conflicting views regarding the role of women in society between liberals and conservatives, the types of employment available in the labour force, and the lack of suitable positions for women that fell in line with social customs and traditions (Al-Lamki, 2000).

For those women who could find work, they were largely focused in certain culturally acceptable occupations during the 1970s and 1980s, such as health and education (Chatty, 2000). They were also largely concentrated in the public sector rather than the private sector, because women employed in the public sector were less likely to be in public view. Public sector jobs also provided equal pay for men and women, as well as good maternity leave benefits that included two months of paid leave and one to two years of unpaid leave. By the late 1990s, it was estimated that women made up about 13% of Oman's governmental employees and they were usually found in traditional female fields (Riphenburgh, 1998). However, women from elite and middle class families, as well as women who were educated abroad, mostly filled these positions. Thus, women's employment in Oman seems to be influenced by class, income and education about job opportunities for women. Social attitudes were more conservative towards women employed in the private sector, and, therefore, women held few administrative and managerial occupations in this sector (Riphenburgh, 1998).

A study on Omani women in management positions found that resisting cultural forces offset the driving forces for Omani women opportunities for management positions. Such resisting forces included: cultural and traditional values towards

women, traditional stereotypes of women's role as wives and mothers, negative views of women's capabilities as managers, limited opportunities for higher education, promotion discrimination, unreported discrimination against women at work, traditional attitudes of male managers, male-dominated domains, and others (Al-Lamki, 1999). For those Omani women who were able to occupy senior managerial and professional positions, they were not seen as a threat as long as they first took up traditional roles and responsibilities as wives and mothers, adhered to gender segregation in their work place, and were rewarded for their work performance based on tolerance and sometimes respect (Chatty, 2000).

However, despite the initial low number of Omani women in the labour force, their participation in the labour force has increased over the years. Omani women's increased participation in the labour force has been attributed to a number of factors, including development policy, education, the availability of employment opportunities for women in both the public and private sector, equal paid salaries, availability of women development centres in various parts of the country, favourable labour law towards working women in protecting their rights and equality (such as maternity, widowhood and breast-feeding arrangements), availability of family support and paid child care services, and change of attitudes towards Omani women engagement with employment (Ministry of National Economy, 2011). Omani women can also be found working in various areas of the private sector, such as banks, hotels, and oil and gas companies.

Nevertheless, the number of Omani women in the labour force is still low in comparison to Omani men, as can be seen in table 2 below:

Table 2: Level of economic activity by gender (%)

|  | 1993 | 2003 | 2010 |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Males** | 70.49 | 65.01 | 70.80 |
| **Females** | 7.04 | 19.13 | 26.61 |

(Source: Ministry of National Economy, 2011)

This is because Omani women continue to face a number of challenges in employment. One is that they often withdraw early from the job market, particularly between the age of 29-34 years old, due to long working hours, work conditions, inappropriate work environment and family obligations. Also, the number of job seekers/unemployed has risen considerably for Omanis in general, which makes it more challenging for Omani women to find work. Moreover, the nature and type of jobs available makes it challenging for Omani women to access the job market, particularly in the private sector. This challenge is associated with low salaries, inappropriate female work, society views towards available jobs, cultural and traditional factors, long hours, shift work and qualifications mismatch (Ministry of National Economy, 2011; National Centre for Statistics and Information, 2013). In addition, Omani women's career choices are often made in consultation and negotiation with male family members, and they may encounter challenges regarding their choice of career (Deeb, 2005). The influence of gender-role stereotyping and expectations – such as gender integration in the workplace and a lack of confidence in women holding decision-making positions – limits Omani women's participation in employment. Such influences have led to women's horizontal segregation in the workplace, as they have been largely placed in low status and culturally acceptable jobs. It has also led to women's vertical segregation in the workplace, in that they have limited promotion opportunities and do not hold high-ranking decision-making jobs (Al Mashrifi, 2012; Al Shanfari, 2011).

Omani women continue to still prefer public sector employment over private sector employment, as was revealed in a recent study by Bontenbal (2014). The study seeks to understand this pattern by studying the perceptions and expectations of Omani women towards future employment. Information for the study was collected through a survey with 400 female job seekers and group interviews with female graduates from BSc programmes. The study found that female job seekers had no negative perceptions towards private sector employment, but they still preferred to work in the public sector because of their families' views. They also felt that society prescribed public sector employment as the preferred employment for women, due

to the perception that it was safe, respectable and suitable, particularly for married women with children. Therefore, it is clear that cultural factors imposed on Omani women by their families and society, as well as gender-biased structural factors in the job market, play a major role in dictating their employment patterns, despite the efforts of policies to promote women's development and their increasing access to the job market.

Besides their participation in the labour force, Omani women are part of the growing number of locals who are pursuing and competing for entrepreneurial opportunities. Entrepreneurship in Oman has recently become an important strategy for the country's economic development in providing alternative economic opportunities for locals. The government and the private sector have developed several Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) resources in order to stimulate entrepreneurship activities, such as loans, incubator facilities, equity funds, training, and micro-business development. SMEs contribute 16% of Oman's Gross Domestic Product (GDP), with most operating in the wholesale trade, retail, foodstuffs, industry and contracting areas (Al Riyamiya, 2012).

Omani women can freely enter and participate in entrepreneurship. This is officially specified in the commerce law (1990), which states that all those who are over 18 years old and have no legal problems are allowed or welcomed to practice business. Also, many of the available entrepreneurship training opportunities and initiatives are open to both men and women. However, there is no specific policy or programme to encourage women's entrepreneurship in Oman. Furthermore, the number of Omani women participating in entrepreneurship is low. In 2009, Omani women formed only 12% of the total number of active business establishments in the country (Ministry of Social Development, 2009). A more recent statistic has indicated that Omani women's share has slightly increased to 15.7% of the total number of active businesses establishments (Oman chamber of commerce and industry, 2011). However, it has been noted that female entrepreneurship has not been equally developed across different regions of Oman, and is particularly lacking in rural areas (Belwal, Belwal and Al Saidi, 2014).

A few studies have been conducted to analyse the entrepreneurial activities of Omani women. McElwee and Al-Riyami's (2003) study explores the experiences of 25 Omani women entrepreneurs in the capital city of Oman. They note that most of these women's businesses were small and concentrated in the service sector, so the women entrepreneurs had required only a little initial investment and they had been able to use their life experiences and hobbies as the basis of their business idea. The women's main motivation for starting a business was for enjoyment. Family, and particularly their husbands', support had also played a major factor in motivating the women to pursue their business. Most of the women could balance their business and domestic responsibilities due to the assistance of paid domestic help, but this was not the case for them all. The barriers that they faced included market competition, lack of formal networks, gender discrimination and difficult bureaucracy in the business environment.

Dechant and Al Lamky (2005) look at the business start-up experiences of five Bahraini and five Omani women. Their study found that the women were motivated to become entrepreneurs due to opportunity, their need for achievement and self-fulfilment, and to help others in society. Similar to McElwee and Al-Riyami's (2003) study, they also record that the women owned small businesses and were largely concentrated in the service sector, due to economic and cultural forces that made such businesses more suitable for them. When it came to domestic responsibilities, the women in this study did not have to manage the conflict of balancing their business and domestic responsibilities, primarily due to paid help. Nonetheless, the study did indicate that the women encountered a number of other obstacles, which included: a lack of networks and professional support, difficult bureaucratic regulations, as well as standards and requirements in the business environment. However, interestingly, none of these women mentioned gender discrimination as an obstacle for their business. They also did not feel they were competing with men when it came to access to resources for their business. Rather, "the women view their circumstances as part of the fabric of culture influenced by legitimate spoken and unspoken rules and practices that shape family and business relations in their

countries" (Dechant and Al Lamky, 2005, p. 136). The authors conclude that in comparing the experiences of Omani and Bahraini entrepreneurs with other women in the world, they observe that the barriers are similar but the reasons for these are different, due to differing socio-cultural contexts.

Al-Sadi, Belwal and Al-Badi (2013) consider the factors that limit women entrepreneurship in Oman by looking at the experiences of Omani women entrepreneurs in one specific region. Like the previous two studies discussed, they record that many of the enterprises that were operated by the women were small and largely focused in the service and retail sectors. Examples of such enterprises included: sewing Omani male caps, running traditional retail outlets, manufacturing handicrafts, tailoring, and operating beauty parlours. They also found the barriers that the women most frequently encountered were: lack of financial support from institutions, poor access to technology, little industrial support, pressure to achieve, difficulty combining family and work life, issues with family structure, interactions with men, few training opportunities, and limited information on opportunities. Other barriers, such as traditional restrictions, society's value system, and gender bias were barriers that have less effect on the women.

Belwal et al. (2014) consider the characteristics, motivations and challenges of Omani women entrepreneurs in another region of Oman. They also note that the women they studied were largely concentrated in service-related sectors, and that they had few years of past work experience and had received some form of informal/formal mentoring prior to pursuing their business. In addition, the women in this research had various motivations to become entrepreneurs, ranging from confidence in their capabilities, acceptance in society, difficulty finding jobs, a desire to balance work and life, and in search of stability. Thus, they did not find a single common motivation among the women they surveyed. Instead, they remark that the women encountered various barriers with their entrepreneurial pursuits, including a lack of financial resources and difficulty accessing funding. As a result, most of the women had used their own funds or received funding support from their families in order to establish their businesses. They also faced difficulty in setting up their

business due to their low levels of education. In addition, they had to adhere to the social and cultural expectations of the family and society while undertaking their entrepreneurial work.

Overall, these studies reveal important points in regards to the nature and experiences of Omani women in entrepreneurship. One is that Omani women entrepreneurs are limited in terms of the size of their businesses and the sectors that they can pursue businesses in. However, their concentration in the service and retail sectors also reveals that these are accessible sectors for women to start a businesses in. Perhaps this is due to their ability to use their existing hobbies, skills and interests in these sectors, which makes it more culturally acceptable for them to start a business. Moreover, the ability to balance business and domestic responsibilities was an expectation that the women had to maintain, which was a challenge for some of the women and easier for those with access to paid help. In addition, the business environment in Oman does not seem to be easy, supportive and gender friendly when it comes to the various barriers that women encounter, as socio-cultural norms and restrictions appear to dictate the way Omani women entrepreneurs pursue their businesses goals. Hence, such findings help to explain the low numbers of Omani women in active in entrepreneurship.

### 5.3.2 Education

In the past, there were only three primary schools in Oman, that enrolled boys only, and there were no education facilities provided for girls. Since the ascension of the Sultan in 1970, education has been made available to both boys and girls at all levels and schools have been opened in various regions throughout Oman (Al Amarbi and Al Farsi, 2013; Khan, Ghosh and Myers, 2005). With education having been made available to both boys and girls, there are a number of significant changes that can be observed, as revealed in table 3 below.

Table 3: Total distribution of Omanis (15 years old and older) according to level of education

| | 2003 | | | 2010 | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Level of education | Male (%) | Females (%) | The gender gap (%) | Males (%) | Females (%) | The gender gap (%) |
| Illiterate | 14.5 | 29.4 | -102 | 8.90 | 19.40 | -117 |
| Able to read and write only | 12.3 | 9.48 | 22.9 | 7.20 | 7.00 | 2.7 |
| Primary class | 22.1 | 14 | 36.6 | 7.90 | 10.4 | 15.3 |
| Preparatory class | 20.6 | 17.4 | 15.5 | 13.60 | 15.7 | 20.7 |
| Secondary class | 21.8 | 23 | -5.5 | 37.5 | 33.6 | 10.4 |
| Diploma | 3.5 | 2.8 | 20 | 5.91 | 5.78 | 5.85 |
| University | 4.43 | 3.43 | 22.5 | 7.00 | 7.50 | 7.14 |
| Masters | 0.48 | 0.12 | 75 | 1.00 | 0.40 | 60 |
| Doctorate | 0.08 | 0.02 | 75 | 0.20 | 0.10 | 50 |

(Source: National Centre for Statistices and Information, 2014c)

This table shows that the number of illiterate Omani females dropped during this period, as more learnt to read and write through access to education. There are also more Omani females completing school up to secondary class level and pursuing higher education up to doctorate level. In addition, the percentage of Omani females in all levels of education is close to that of Omani males. Thus, Omani females are making gradual progress in education in general, and their increased access to education has helped to address the gender gap in education and to change social and cultural views towards their education (The Supreme Council for Planning, 2013).

When looking specifically at higher education, Omani women can be found undertaking courses in various disciplines, including engineering and science. They also account for many admissions to colleges and universities in Oman, and they outperform men when it comes to their education performance (The Supreme

Council for Planning, 2013). Moreover, women can pursue higher education overseas with the support of the government and their families (Al Omairi and Amzat, 2012). However, gender-role stereotyping and expectations do influence Omani women's access to higher education, similarly to their participation in employment, as discussed earlier. Such stereotypes and expectations include higher educational entry requirements for females, limited scholarships available for overseas studies, child bearing, and the lack of graduate education in Oman (Al Shanfari, 2011). Thus, although Omani women have increased access to education in general, their participation in higher education is still somewhat challenged and limited.

### 5.3.3 Politics

Oman was one of the first countries in the Gulf region to appoint women to senior public positions. This included ministers, deputy ministries and ambassadors. Omani women are also members in the consultative and state council, which are the main supreme legislative bodies in Oman. In general, the consultative council focuses on constituency issues, where it provides representations for all regions in Oman; it researches public needs and makes suggestions based on this to the state council. The state council focuses on the financial priorities of the country, where it looks at the state and reviews recommendations made by the consultative council (Rabi, 2002). Omani women and men can vote, and can stand as candidates for the consultative council. As for the state council, the Sultan appoints both Omani men and women as members in the council. Nevertheless, despite the inclusion of Omani women in the main supreme legislative bodies and senior public positions, they remain underrepresented in politics.

Currently, there are three Omani women that hold the minister grade, which includes the minister of higher education, the minister of education, and the chairwoman of the public authority for craft industries. There are also two Omani women that hold government undersecretary positions, which includes tourism and manpower. Moreover, there are three Omani women ambassadors that are based in the United States of America, Germany and Holland. However, the numbers of

Omani women that hold such positions is still low in comparison to Omani men, as can be seen in table 4 below:

Table 4: Number of Omani civil employees in ministers, undersecretaries and ambassadors positions

|  | 2012 | | 2013 | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Males** | **Females** | **Males** | **Females** |
| **Ministers** | 27 | 2 | 27 | 3 |
| **Undersecretaries** | 32 | 2 | 37 | 2 |
| **Ambassadors** | 38 | 3 | 34 | 2 |

(Source: National Centre for Statistices and Information, 2014c)

Omani women also hold limited seats in the consultative and state council, as revealed in tables 5 and 6 below:

Table 5: Distribution of members Consultative Council according to gender and the seven durations

| Duration | Total number of members | Males | Females | Percentage of females (%) |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **First (1991-1994)** | 59 | 59 | 0 | 0,00 |
| **Second (1994-1997)** | 80 | 78 | 2 | 2.50 |
| **Third (1997-2000)** | 82 | 80 | 2 | 2.40 |
| **Fourth (2000-2003)** | 83 | 81 | 2 | 2.4 |
| **Fifth (2003-2007)** | 83 | 81 | 2 | 2.4 |
| **Sixth (2007-2011)** | 84 | 84 | 0 | 0 |
| **Seventh (2011-2015)** | 84 | 83 | 1 | 1.2 |

(Source: National Centre for Statistices and Information, 2014c)

Table 6: Distribution of members of State Council according to gender and the five durations

| Duration | Total number of members | Males | Females | Percentage of females (%) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| First (1997-2000) | 41 | 37 | 4 | 9.70 |
| Second (2000-2003) | 55 | 50 | 5 | 12.70 |
| Third (2003-2007) | 58 | 49 | 9 | 15.50 |
| Fourth (2007-2011) | 76 | 62 | 14 | 19.7 |
| Fifth (2011-2015) | 84 | 69 | 15 | 18 |

(Source: National Centre for Statistices and Information, 2014c)

The experiences of Omani women in senior public positions and as members in the main supreme legislative bodies was previously analysed in a study that looked at Omani women's leadership roles. The study included the narratives of 10 Omani women who were senior executives, politicians, educationalists or in policy maker positions (Al-Lamky, 2007). The women's ability to attain leadership positions was achieved by a number of factors, such as the vision of the Sultan for women's development, family support, education, high motivation and assertiveness. The study did reveal some of the challenges that the women encountered when it came to their leadership roles. One is that their motivations had to be limited to a certain extent in order to not threaten the male dominance found in the work environment. It was noted that such challenge is an "insightful light of the cultural baggage that women ought not be perceived as too ambitious or too motivated in comparison to men" (Al-Lamky, 2007, pp. 58-59). Also, the women experienced pressure when it came to maintaining cultural expectations in balancing home and work responsibilities, as well as making time to spend with their spouse and children. Moreover, they struggled to maintain their roles in the private and public sphere

when it came to being a leader, a mother and a wife. The women asserted the need of other Omani women to challenge negative social views towards women, to build their self-confidence and to have the support of the families as they felt that a glass ceiling did exist despite the achievements they made in leadership positions. Thus, the above study and the current statistics on Omani women in politics reveals that the political arena in Oman is still dominated by men, despite the placement of a few Omani women in senior public positions. Also, traditional roles and responsibilities are still strongly placed on women in maintaining their roles as wives and mother.

### 5.3.4 Society

With Omani women's ability to pursue economic, education and political opportunities, one could argue that they play an important role in society and are now more socially valued due to the contributions they make. However, despite the progress that Omani women have made and their official inclusion in the country's development, it is evident from the above economic, educational and political analysis of women's position in Oman that gender ideologies, and socio-cultural norms and restrictions still prevail and affect their participation in society. This has been long evident in the literature. Barths' (1983) anthropological study focuses on the culture and society of a town in Oman, and she notes that the men in Omani families, which includes fathers, older sons and husbands, held the ultimate power when it came to all daily matters and decision making, including for their wives and children. The study also shows that gender roles were seen more to be complementary rather than a division of labour, where women would normally do household work and that men would do outside work. Moreover, women and young girls' freedom of movement was limited and they could only interact with people of their own gender. In the same town, Wikan (1982) found that gender segregation was a prominent practice in both the public and private sphere.

Riphenburgh's (1998) analysis of changing gender relations in Oman reveals that the gender dynamics in Oman "are often pronatalist, emphasize sex differences and complementary roles rather than legal equality, and serve to perpetuate stratification based on gender" (p. 146). Despite the Sultan's policies regarding

women's development, Riphenburgh observes that these policies have helped to meet "women's practical gender needs rather than advance their strategic gender needs, preserving existing gender relations rather than transforming them" (p. 160). Besides the gender dynamics, the lives of Omani women remained under the control of their husbands, fathers and brothers, as was emphasised earlier by Barth (1983). Riphenburgh describes that the common Omani family as having a patriarchal structure, where men act as the main heads of the family. Family honour is dependent on the conduct of the women in the family, who must be modest, respectable and worthy. Moreover, the gender system found in Oman places high emphasis on women's need to maintain their roles as wives and mothers, which, in turn, has limited their participation in society. Thus, as Riphenburg concludes, "traditional habits, including those shaping gender relations, have great staying power and are firmly embedded in Omani society" (p. 166). Indeed, traditional habits continue to prevail to this day.

Like Riphenburgh's (1998) early arguments regarding the position of women in Oman, Al-Azri (2013) argues that the new government post-1970 has made limited effort to reform traditional gender relations in Omani society. This has meant that Omani tribal and religious traditions continue to be maintained, and that men continue to dominate the public sphere. Thus, the traditional roles of Omani women continue to be enforced in order to maintain the country's patriarchal arrangement. Al-Azri provides several examples of the continuing traditional roles and social control on women, despite their inclusion in society. One is that despite the increasing role that women play in the economy along with men, the expectations of women's proper good conduct in the workplace continues to evolve. Also, men continue to maintain their right to make decisions for women, which is embedded in the existing social system and reinforced in the personal status law and traditional religious codes. Moreover, gender discrimination resulting from traditional cultural reasons continues to exist in Oman. Al Azri (2013) reaffirms that "the patriarchal nature of Omani politics and society has not weakened during the last 40 years of absolutism and sex segregation, strict social codes, and laws that discriminate

against women have persisted" (p.136). Thus, the existing patriarchal system can be seen to have greater staying power in Omani society.

Traditional gender ideas seem to continue to prevail amongst younger Omanis, as is evident from a study that explored the attitudes of Omani adolescents towards gender roles and women's empowerment when it comes to household decisions and perceived attitudes towards women (Jaffer and Afifi, 2005). The study focused on secondary school students in various governorates in Oman, and it found that male students were less likely to hold egalitarian attitudes towards gender roles and women's empowerment than female students. Similarly, Al Omairi and Amzat's (2012) study on current attitudes and perceptions of women's status in Oman society from male and female university students reveals that Omani males viewed the home as the preferable place for women, and they preferred that their wives cared for the family. Also, Omani males preferred to not have a woman as their boss in the workplace.

Besides the continuous existence of gender ideologies, and socio-cultural norms and restrictions towards Omani women, certain social rights for women are still lacking in Oman. For example, Oman has ratified the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) since 2006. However, Oman rejects all articles on citizenship, movement of persons and right to choose residence, and equality in marriage and family life, as well as all other aspects of CEDAW that are not in accordance with Islamic Law (Thomson Reuters Foundation, 2013). There are also low levels of protection for women in the family law, no special law for violence against women, and limited civil liberties for women (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2010). It has been noted that domestic abuse and violence are quite common in Oman and are not reported in the media. In these cases, women usually seek assistance and protection from their families rather than from the police or the courts (Deeb, 2005).

When it comes to marriage, Omani women do have the right to choose the husband of their choice without force. However, they are unable to pass their nationality to their children if they marry a non-Omani, while Omani men have this privilege if they marry a non-Omani (Debb, 2005; Katzman, 2013). Moreover, Omani women face problems with the legislation system when it comes to their rights. Such problems relate to forced marriage or marriage courts, divorce proceedings, child custody, inheritance, abuse, social security and social insurance (The Supreme Council for Planning, 2013). In addition, there are limited NGOs in Oman and the government forbids the formation of NGOs related to human and women's rights. The Ministry of Social Development in Oman is the main government body that supervises women's issues and affairs. The ministry has set up a network of women development centres, known as Omani Women Association (OWA), throughout Oman to help deal with women-related issues and development. Besides the government controlled OWAs, there are other government approved local women's associations that are either self-funded or receive financial assistance from the government (Deeb, 2005). According to Chatty (2000), "women in formal groups are acceptable only when they conform to the cultural ideas established by the state, which places women in caring and nurturing roles and perpetuates the ideals of circumspect public behaviour, modesty, family honour and generosity" (p.247). Such examples include charity organisations that are concerned with the welfare of the needy, disabled or handicapped. Other groups, such as self-help groups, income-generating cooperatives and professional skilled volunteer teams are often not allowed by law because they are seen as a risk to the male-dominated power structure of the country.

Thus, when looking at the overall social status of Omani women, it is clear that their growing participation in society is not perfect and that there are still many prevailing issues related to their equality and empowerment. However, Al-Barwani and Albeely (2007) provide a hopeful view of the future of Omani women. They note that due to globalisation and the modernisation movement that is taking place in Oman, many of the traditional roles prescribed to men and women are becoming

more loosely defined. Resultantly, both men and women are becoming equal partners in marriage, where both contribute financially and have equal say in household decisions. They described the modern Omani woman as,

> Becoming more confident and independent in her opinion about things that affect her life. Accessibility to the job market has given her economic independence that is changing her position from a dependent consumer to an independent co-provider. Education has given the Omani women spending power and therefore exposure to the material world. Driving licences, mobile telephones, shopping malls and wider mobility have all contributed to breaking the walls of tradition and exposing the women to the external arena that was traditionally men's domain.

> (p.136)

Although Riphenburgh (1998) was not optimistic about the potential for an emerging feminist movement in Oman that will include "the concept of the liberation of the individual, quest for self-fulfilment or 'self-indulgence' or the definition of 'one's' own identity" (p. 166), such a movement would need to come directly from the Omani women themselves, through marking their position in society.

## 5.4 Oman's tourism industry

Tourism in Oman is a new phenomenon (Mershen, 2007). Due to Oman's previous isolation, which was enforced by the current Sultan's father, tourism hardly existed in Oman before the 1970s. Indeed, tourism development was discouraged and the government did not yet allow tourists to enter the country. Although the ruling of the current Sultan of Oman started in 1970s, which, as discussed earlier, resulted in major socio-economic development plans being introduced to Oman, tourism did not exist during this decade (Ritter, 1986; Winckler, 2007). Some believe this was the case because Oman was preparing the environment for tourism development (Carpentier, 2003). Others note that there was a fear of major socio-cultural change

that could result from mass tourism (Arnold, 1997). During this time, the country's earlier economic development had come mainly from the production and export of oil (Inskeep, 1994). However, the country's attitudes towards tourism started to change in the mid-1980s due to the economic difficulties that resulted from low oil resources, awareness of income and employment opportunities through tourism, and the need to diversify the economy.

The government then looked to tourism as an area for future economic growth, employment and a major source of foreign exchange. The importance of tourism was first reflected in the country' third five-year development plan (1986-1990) and it has continued to be appear in subsequent years. This was then followed with the establishment of a department of tourism within the Ministry of Industry and Commerce. Tourism received further attention in 1995, when it was included in the long-term socio-economic development plan entitled "The vision for Oman's economy: Oman 2020". The plan focused on diversification, privatisation and Omanisation, as the Omani authorities came to realise the potential contribution that tourism could make to the country's long-term socio-economic goals (Winckler, 2007). Thus, the plan set the target growth for tourism to contribute 9.2% to the country's GDP (Oxford Business Group, 2015). Moreover, the Ministry of Tourism was then established in June 2004 to further strengthen efforts for tourism development in Oman. Several private tourism companies and tourism education establishments were also established. Today, tourism makes a major contribution to the economy of Oman and is considered an important pillar for Oman's economic diversification from oil, as reflected in table 7 below:

Table 7: Oman's main tourism indicators (2007-2013)

| | 2007 | 2008 | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Tourism value added (000) RO** | 411,994 | 538,333 | 509,066 | 553,618 | 609,730 | 719,342 | 626,240 |
| **Tourism share in the GDP (%)** | 2.6 | 2.3 | 2.8 | 2.4 | 2.2 | 2.4 | 2.0 |
| **Inbound tourists (000)** | 1,359 | 1,614 | 1,586 | 1,502 | 1,395 | 1,714 | 1,961 |
| **Inbound tourism expenditure (000) R.O.** | 167,654 | 178,655 | 144,367 | 140,548 | 158,674 | - | - |
| **No. of hotel establishments** | 190 | 196 | 224 | 229 | 248 | 258 | 282 |

(Source: Ministry of Tourism, 2013b)

The Omani government has approached tourism carefully by adopting a policy to encourage quality tourism. Its main objective is to maximise the potential economic benefits of tourism within some limitations, based on the desire to protect socio-cultural traditions and the environment (Sadek, 2000). Accordingly, the country's tourism development focus is based on promoting its natural, cultural and historic features to high-end tourists that seeks an authentic cultural experience, rather than creating a mass tourism market (El Amrousi and Biln, 2010; Inskeep, 1994; Shachmurove, 2009).

As part of the national tourism plan for Oman that was prepared in 1991 by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and the UNWTO, attention was paid to the issue of manpower planning. This was deemed important because, due to cultural, religious and social concerns, people's views of the tourism industry's image as a source of employment were poor. Traditionally, tourism had not been viewed as a possible employment area in Oman. Nonetheless, the plan was successful in that Omani nationals took many new jobs in tourism and this included a sizable proportion of women, as traditional attitudes towards tourism had begun to change, as noted earlier (Inskeep, 1994). Omani nationals can be found working

in various tourism sectors, including in hotels, restaurants, airlines, tour guides companies, and so on. Nevertheless, the country still struggles to attract enough Omani nationals for the tourism industry. The level of nationals employed in the industry is well below the targets set by the authorities, as displayed in table 8 below.

Table 8: Accommodation services-number of employees by nationality (2005-2013)

| | 2005 | 2006 | 2007 | 2008 | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Employees number** | 5,562 | 7,353 | 8,009 | 9,245 | 9,172 | 9,142 | 9,481 | 9,557 | 9,893 |
| **Omanis** | 2,661 | 3,336 | 3,773 | 3,993 | 4,141 | 3,952 | 3,861 | 3,332 | 3,195 |
| **Non-Omani** | 2,901 | 3,987 | 4,236 | 5,252 | 5,031 | 5,190 | 5,621 | 6,225 | 6,698 |

(Source: National Centre for Statistices and Information, 2014b)

Employing Omani nationals in the tourism industry is a major challenge that the authorities continue to deal with for various reasons. This includes the low salaries offered by the industry, existing negative attitudes towards the tourism industry due to cultural, religious and social concerns, locals lack of awareness and knowledge of career opportunities in the tourism industry, and a lack of efficient tourism education and training provision in Oman (Ministry of Tourism and United Nations World Tourism Organisation, 2011; Oxford Business Group, 2015).

The challenge of employing locals in the tourism industry also relates to local perceptions and attitudes towards tourism as an education and career choice. Many colleges and universities that offer tourism and hospitality programmes in Oman recruit below the maximum capacity. A recent study explored the perceptions and attitudes of Omani students on a tourism and hospitality programme in a local tourism college (Bontenbal and Aziz, 2013) and reported that studying tourism and hospitality was not the first choice for half of its participants, while more than a third of the participants claimed that their parents had preferred they had studied something else. The study also found that societal negative views towards tourism employment might influence the students' participation in tourism and hospitality

employment, despite the students themselves not having cultural or religious concerns about this form of employment. Moreover, the study found that the students lacked awareness of the types of work available and the work conditions in the tourism industry, and that they held unrealistic expectations about working in tourism.

The issue of employing Omani nationals in tourism is more challenging for Omani women. A previous study of the experiences of Omani women employed in the tourism industry revealed that they encountered negatives attitudes for doing work in this industry. Such negative attitudes came from employers, society, family members, husbands and other women. They also faced a number of challenges in relation to the nature of tourism work. This included work conditions and demands, promotions, balancing work and domestic responsibilities, discrimination and being in the front line (Almazro'ei, 2010). Further studies that have been conducted reveal similar challenges for Omani women in tourism employment (Afifi and Al-Sherif, 2014; Alsawafi, 2016).

When it comes to entrepreneurship opportunities in Oman's tourism industry, this is a recent development in Oman and there are a growing number of locals, including women, who are involved in tourism entrepreneurship. Although tourism entrepreneurship was not previously officially promoted and encouraged, it has recently been receiving recognition and encouragement along with the general encouragement for entrepreneurship in Oman, as mentioned earlier. The tourism authorities have recently attached great importance to the role that SMEs can play in the country's tourism development and their abilities to provide many of the missing tourism products and services in Oman (Oxford Business Group, 2015). For example, the Ministry of Tourism included the promotion of tourism entrepreneurship activities in its eighth national tourism strategy (2011-2015), and a number of seminars and meetings have recently been taking place to support and develop tourism SMEs in Oman (Ministry of Tourism, 2013a, 2015a, b). More recently, a new tourism policy has been launched to allow locals to turn their

properties into tourist accommodation, such as farms or traditional Omani houses. Thus, tourism entrepreneurship in Oman is gradually gaining important attention with the tourism authorities and other government officials.

Nevertheless, the experiences of Omanis in tourism entrepreneurship have not been researched to date. Local perceptions and attitudes towards tourism entrepreneurship opportunities are also not yet clear. A recent study assessed tourism and hospitality students' interest towards entrepreneurship and the factors that may affect their entrepreneurial ambitions (Atef and Al-Balushi, 2015). The study found that tourism and hospitality students preferred self-employment to public and private sector employment. These results were higher for the male students in comparison to the female students. The study further showed that income, entrepreneurship education and job stability were the top potential motivators for students to pursue entrepreneurship opportunities in tourism and hospitality. However, inadequate bank support procedures, lack of start-up capital and little entrepreneurial experience may affect students' motivations to pursue entrepreneurial opportunities in this field. Therefore, this study provides some indication of local perceptions and attitudes towards tourism entrepreneurship, and the potential barriers that may limit locals' ambitions to pursue entrepreneurship opportunities in tourism.

Besides the lack of research and awareness of local perceptions and attitudes towards tourism entrepreneurship, there is a lack of official statistics that show the number of Omanis running a tourism-related enterprise. Table 9 below provides some indication of the number of Omanis that have started up a tourism enterprise, based on loans borrowed from the Oman Development Bank:

Table 9: Number of Omanis that benefited from Oman Development Banks loans for tourism service projects (2003-2008)

| Sector | Number of males | Number of females | Total |
|---|---|---|---|
| Tourism services | 113 | 7 | 120 |

(Source: Ministry of Social Development, 2013)

The table reveals that there are few Omanis pursuing tourism entrepreneurship. More importantly, the table shows that there is a significant gap between the number of Omani males and females that borrowed loans to start up a tourism enterprise, meaning that there are fewer Omani women that are pursuing tourism entrepreneurship in comparison to Omani men.

When it comes to encouraging and supporting tourism entrepreneurship opportunities for Omani women, there is not yet a clear policy in regards to promoting tourism entrepreneurship opportunities specifically for women in Oman. Also, there has been no research to date that has been conducted to understand the experiences of Omani women in tourism entrepreneurship, meaning that its potential to empower Omani women remain unclear.

## 5.5 Conclusion

The chapter has presented information about women and the tourism industry in Oman. I provided important background information about the general setting of Oman in terms of its geographical location, population, religion, history, economy and development. I also displayed the past and present position of women in Oman, and discussed the on-going existence of gender ideologies, and socio-cultural norms and restrictions that influence women's position in Oman. These included patriarchy, conservatism, male dominance, and gender discrimination. Next, I revealed that the tourism industry is a fairly new industry in Oman and the major role the industry plays in the country's economy. Moreover, I explained that there are on-going issues and challenges with tourism in Oman, as is illustrated from the information regarding tourism employment opportunities. Such issues and challenges include cultural, social and religious concerns towards the tourism industry, as well as local

attitudes and perceptions towards the industry. In addition, I also mentioned the growing phenomenon of tourism entrepreneurship activities in Oman and the tourism authorities' interest in developing this economic activity. Nevertheless, I also showed that there is a lack of information and research regarding tourism entrepreneurship opportunities in Oman, particularly for women. Overall, I provided information that is essential to understanding the experiences of Omani women in tourism entrepreneurship opportunities in relation to their empowerment.

The next chapter presents the research methodology that I adopted for this thesis.

# Chapter 6: Research methodology

## 6.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to discuss the research methodology that I used to carry out the research for this thesis. The research philosophy that I adopted for my research is discussed in chapter 2. Thus, in this chapter, I first introduce the women that I identified for my study and the process that took place to recruit them. I decided to start off this chapter with participant recruitment because I discuss in the upcoming sections the methodological approach and methods I used by referring to my participants in detail. Thus, I felt it was important to first introduce the women that I recruited to the reader. Next, I introduce the methodology that I adopted for my study, including the research methods that I used and the ethical issues that I had to consider when collecting information from the women. I explain in detail the process that I undertook to analyse the collected data, before providing a continued reflexive account of my research experiences while in the field. Finally, I conclude with a recap of the main topics discussed in this chapter.

## 6.2 Participant recruitment

As mentioned in chapter 5, tourism entrepreneurship is an emerging activity in Oman and there are few Omani women that are involved in it. Although this paucity made the recruitment process easy, I still needed to have an adequate sample size to conduct my research properly and to provide a good representation of different Omani women's experiences in tourism entrepreneurship. Nonetheless, having a large number of participants is not important for qualitative research (Creswell, 2013; Merriam and Tisdell, 2015; Patton, 2015), as this approach does not focus on the number of participants, but rather the relevance of the participants to the research. While the focus on Oman as the research site may seem to restrict the research and limit it generalisability, its purpose is to provide insights, rich details and copious descriptions (Geertz, 1973) of Omani women in tourism entrepreneurship, rather than to draw general conclusions that can necessarily be applied in different contexts.

The criteria I used to identify the women was that their enterprise had to have a direct relationship to tourism, in that it had to involve dealing directly with tourists and being involved in activities that are common in tourism entrepreneurship. These activities included businesses involving handicrafts, accommodation, food, souvenirs, tours, and so on. This criteria was important in order to develop rich and diverse knowledge about the experiences of Omani women in tourism entrepreneurship. Therefore, an initial fieldwork investigation took place during the first year of my PhD studies to recruit potential participants and to make arrangements to get into the field. During that time, I identified and recruited the hosting group, the sewing group and a few women tourism entrepreneurs. The recruitment process for each of these participants is discussed in detail below:

**6.2.1 The hosting group and sewing group**

I was able to identify and recruit the two groups through my existing industry experience and networks in Oman. I used the same gatekeeper to introduce me and set up access to these two groups of women. The gatekeeper worked for the tourism development company that had developed the hosting group and they had a personal long-term relationship with the sewing group. Thus, the two groups were selected and recruited through the use of convenience sampling. Veal (2011) describes convenience sampling as a technique that conveniently uses already located persons or organisations (for example, friends or colleagues). Creswell (2013) also defines convenience sampling as using "sites or individuals from which the researcher can access and easily collect data" (p. 157). Although this sampling strategy helped me to easily recruit the two groups for my research, due to the lack of women entrepreneurs in Oman, these were the only two potential groups running a tourism-related enterprise that I could have included in my research.

With the sewing group, the gatekeeper first contacted the team leader of the group over the phone to inform her of my research intentions and arranged for me to meet her directly. When I met the team leader and some other women from the group in their workshop, I had a one-to-one conversation with the team leader who gave me some brief information about the history, success and challenges of their enterprise.

I explained the purpose of my research to the team leader and stated that I would like to learn about the nature of their enterprise and to collect information about their experiences. I also emphasised that I wanted to participate in their enterprise and to help them wherever I could. As the women solely relied on volunteers to run their enterprise, they were pleased to receive any help. Thus, when the team leader was happy with my research intentions regarding their group, we agreed on a start date for my participation.

As for the hosting group, the gatekeeper arranged for me to become a participant in a women's development training session that was being arranged for the group. This was a good way for me to meet and get to know the women. I travelled to their town and I spent one week with the group while we took part in the training. Similar to the sewing group, I explained to the hosting group's team leader about the purpose of my research, and my desire to participate in and help them with their enterprise. The team leader also informed me about their involvement in the hosting enterprise, and the challenges that they were encountering. Thus, a start date for my participation with the hosting group was also confirmed. Therefore, I did not encounter any significant issues or barriers in accessing and recruiting the two groups.

## 6.2.2 Women tourism entrepreneurs

I initially identified a few potential women tourism entrepreneurs through desk research. Upon starting the second year of my PhD studies and embarking on my fieldwork, I continued to search for further potential participants through desk research and other sources. As women tourism entrepreneurs in Oman do not clearly identify themselves with these labels and there are no databases, lists or statistics of the number of women involved in tourism entrepreneurship, this compilation exercise required a large effort to search and enquire about the availability of such entrepreneurs in tourism that I could recruit for my research. As I lived in Oman and worked in the tourism industry, I was already aware of some potential women that I could recruit, so I also personally visited women at their enterprise locations to speak with them. In addition, I attended several SME-related

industry events and seminars to search for and recruit further potential women. Moreover, my work colleagues and friends helped me to identify and recruit a few potential women that they knew. Thus, convenience sampling was also used to select and recruit the women tourism entrepreneurs (Veal, 2011; Creswell, 2013).

Once I had complied a list of potential women tourism entrepreneurs that I could research, I contacted the women through telephone calls or by meeting them face-to-face. When contacting the women, I first informed them where I had got their contact details from and introduced myself as a PhD researcher. I explained the purpose of my research and asked if they would be willing to participate. Most of the women that I contacted were happy to meet and talk with me about their enterprise. I only had two rejections: one woman was not comfortable sharing her experience because she was running an unregistered tourism enterprise, and another had too hectic a work schedule with her enterprise to meet me, despite initially agreeing to do so. Next, I arranged a time, date and place to meet with the women that had agreed to take part in my research. I met the women in various locations, including in their enterprise locations, homes and local coffee shops. Some of the women that I interviewed referred me to other women tourism entrepreneurs that they knew. They first contacted the referrals to inform them of my research and then I followed this up by arranging a meeting with them. This procedure turned out to be very successful. Thus, I used snowball technique to meet further women tourism entrepreneurs as well as convenience sampling. According to Patton (2015), the snowball technique is described as an approach where participants are asked to suggest other people who might participate in the study. Altogether, I managed to interview 15 women tourism entrepreneurs for my research. Detailed information about the women that I researched is contained in the upcoming findings chapters 7-9.

## 6.3 Methodology

The methodology that I adopted for my study is case study. In general, case study is a popular methodology used in tourism research (Beeton, 2005; Botterill and

Platenkamp, 2012; Dredge and Hales, 2012; Hyde, Ryan and Woodside, 2012; Veal, 2011). Due to the high usage of case study research in the tourism field, Xiao and Smith (2006) note that "tourism research is often criticized as being dominated by case studies, which are stereotypically perceived as a theoretical, area-specific, one time, and not following methodological procedures" (p. 747). They argue that such views are not correct and emphasize that case study research has made major contributions to tourism research in addressing various areas of tourism.

Although Stake (1995) does not view case study as a methodology, others believe it can be used successfully (Creswell, 2013; Flyvbjerg, 2011; Merriam, 1988; Yin, 2014). Beeton (2005) notes that often case study is criticised for being too specific, unreliable, and for producing results that cannot be generalised. However, she also emphasises that it does not need to be too specific, as case studies have "the capability to take into consideration the effect of numerous study foci by encompassing several groups of individuals within the boundaries of the case" (Beeton, 2005, p. 39). Willis (2007) further contends that "researchers do not seek to find universals in their case studies. They seek, instead, a full, rich understanding (verstehen) of the context they are studying" (p. 240). Moreover, case study has been criticised for often including the bias of the researcher, i.e. the value system of the researcher (Beeton, 2005). However, as will be revealed in the last section of this chapter, adopting a reflexive approach helped me to reduce the bias that I could have had towards the women that I researched.

As mentioned in chapter 1 and 5, there is scant information about the experiences of women tourism entrepreneurs in Arab/Muslim contexts. More specifically, there has been no research conducted to date on the experiences of Omani women in tourism entrepreneurship. The involvement of Omani women in this activity is a fairly new phenomenon that has yet to be studied in the real-life context of Oman. Case study research "investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context" (Yin, 2009, p. 18). Therefore, it allows researchers to focus on a case and to provide a complete and real worldview of the case being researched (Yin,

2014). It is a methodology that is frequently used by both critical and interpretive researchers due to the following attributes:

1. It allows you to gather rich, detailed data in an authentic setting.

2. It is holistic and thus supports the idea that much of what we can know about human behaviour is best understood as lived experience in the social context.

3. Unlike experimental research, case studies can be conducted without predetermined hypotheses and goals.

(Willis, 2007, p. 239)

Thus, the case study helped me to provide rich detailed information and descriptions of the experiences of Omani women in tourism entrepreneurship. This is consistent with critical feminist theory because it helped to present and conceptualise the lived experiences of the women that I researched, which is important for this theory, as discussed in chapter 2. This approach helped me to illustrate the complex relationship between tourism entrepreneurship and women's empowerment, while revealing the experiences of Omani women in this activity and its impact on their empowerment. According to Creswell (2013), case study research helps to investigate an issue by using a specific case to illustrate the issue. Hence, case study will help bring value in refining theories surrounding women's empowerment through tourism entrepreneurship and it should suggest complexities for future research (Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1995). With my research being focused on Omani women in tourism entrepreneurship, I conducted a ethnographic case study, where the cultural context is the main concern of the study (Merriam, 1998).

The case study methodology requires researchers to identify a specific case or cases. A case study can be based on an individual, several individuals, a group, an event, a program, an organization or an activity (Merriam, 1988; Yin, 2014). According to Creswell (2013), "the key here is to define a case that can be bounded or described

within certain parameters, such as a specific place and time" (p. 98). As I researched the hosting group, the sewing group and 15 women tourism entrepreneurs in Oman, I developed three case studies to present each of their lived experiences with clearly defined boundaries. Previous studies have developed a case study on a group enterprise (for example, Harper and Roy, 2000; Mair and Marti, 2009; Memmott, 2010) and on several entrepreneurs in one case study (for example, Dechant and Al Lamky, 2005; Komppula, 2014; Loannides and Petersen, 2003; Saarinen and Tervo, 2006).

Multiple case studies have greater advantages and are favoured over single case studies due to their analytic and representative benefits (Creswell, 2013). A single case study will also not do justice to the participants of a new phenomenon. Due to the great effort and time that I put into developing these three case studies, I believe that they make a meaningful contribution to knowledge about women in tourism entrepreneurship. Nevertheless, developing several case studies can limit the depth that one can develop from each individual case study and this may affect the overall analysis of a study (Creswell, 2013). However, I believe in-depth information was still provided for each of my case studies, as will be revealed in the findings chapter. In addition, I have not gone over the recommended maximum number of multiple case studies, which is five (Creswell, 2013; Yin, 2014).

## 6.4 Methods

When conducting case study research, the use of only one source of data is not sufficient due to the need to provide in-depth information (Yin, 2009, 2014; Creswell, 2013) and to reduce bias (Eisenhardt, 1989; Migliaccio and Rivetti, 2012). Yin (2014) argues that "the use of multiple sources of evidence in case study research allows a researcher to address a broader range of historical and behavioral issues" (p. 121). He also remarks that using multiple sources of information helps to make case study findings and conclusions more credible and precise. Hence, I used two main qualitative methods to collect information about the women in order to develop the three holistic case studies: participant observation and interviews.

Although these research methods are mostly associated with the western world, it has been noted that these methods have become widely used and accepted due to globalisation, internationalisation, the spread of the knowledge economy, and western research practices (Adams, 2012; Ribeiro and Foemmel, 2012). More specifically, although Arab/Muslim societies are known to be private, they are also sociable and interactive (Altorki and El-Solh, 1988). Therefore, the use of participant observations and interviews is culturally appropriate for Oman and I did not encounter any major issues in this respect.

I used these methods to conduct my fieldwork in Oman for about 8 months, from November 2013 to June 2014. Using qualitative methods helped me to draw out the meanings that the women attach to their actions and experiences with their tourism enterprise. It also helped me to explore and capture the lived experiences of Omani women in tourism entrepreneurship in relation to their empowerment. As the process of empowerment is a continuous journey, which evolves over time and reflects changes at individual and societal institutional levels, Nazneen et al (2014) emphasise that qualitative methods can help capture this process of empowerment.

### 6.4.1 Participant observation

I used participant observation to research the hosting and sewing group. Participant observation was originally developed in the work of the anthropologist Malinowski (1961) (cited in Adams, 2012). It is defined as "a method in which an observer takes part in the daily activities, rituals, interactions, and events of the people being studied as one of the means of learning the explicit and tacit aspects of their culture" (DeWalt and DeWalt, 2011, p. 1). Although participant observation is the main method used for anthropology and ethnography, it is also used for case study research (Creswell, 2013; Stake, 1995, 2006; Yin, 2009, 2014) and other qualitative research methodologies (Adams, 2012; De Walt and DeWalt, 2011). It is also a popular method used in tourism research (for example, see Bowen, 2002; Cole, 2005a; Hartmann, 1988; Mcmorran, 2010; Veal, 2011). Moreover, it has been suggested that observational methods are appropriate to measure empowerment due to the ability to reveal its various aspects (Mason, 2005).

I found participant observation to be an appropriate method to research the two groups of women for several reasons. One is that it allowed me to immerse myself in the everyday life of the women and to be part of their world while they were conducting their tourism entrepreneurship activity (Spradley, 1980). This, in turn, helped me to contextualise the data I collected from the interviews. It also gave me the opportunity to spend a considerable amount of time with the women, to be part of their group, to understand their perspectives, beliefs, and attitudes, and observe the ways that they behaved individually, among themselves, and in their dealings with other people (Ribeiro and Foemmel, 2012; Riley and Love, 2000). Moreover, it helped me to obtain personal important information about their lives at the enterprise level, domestic level and their relations with others. In addition, it helped me to gather information regarding emerging issues that I was only able to identify by observing and participating with them for a considerable time in the field. For example, I was able to identify the role of tourists in empowering and disempowering the two groups. I was also able to understand and appreciate the difficulty of the sewing work that the sewing group conducted. Such information is difficult to gain through interviews and other methods, such as surveys. As DeWalt and DeWalt (2011) emphasise, "the insight gained from direct observation has often provided a paradigm twisting experience for the researcher. In part, the observation of rare events is a function of the length of time in field research" (p. 14). Thus, spending time in the field helped me to observe rare events and collect rich data.

Significantly, participant observation allowed me to focus my research on the gender dynamics that emerged when I observed the women in relation to their family, societal institutions, and the embedded power structures in Oman. This, in turn, prompted me to take up a more critical feminist theory approach in my research, as was discussed earlier. Overall, participant observation helped me to provide a unique overview of the nature and experience of the two groups in tourism entrepreneurship, where rich embedded meanings and copious descriptions based on locally produced information (Geertz, 1973; Ribeiro and

Foemmel, 2012) were developed for the case studies of the two groups through the use of participant observations.

As I had already made arrangements with the two groups to participate in their enterprise, my research with the two groups mainly involved taking part in their activities and helping them with the production and operation of their enterprises. This, in turn, allowed me to observe the women while I took part in their activities. Spradley (1980) notes that there are five main types of participant observation that a researcher can undertake: non-participation, passive, moderate, active and complete. Due to the nature of the research that I conducted with the two groups, I took a moderate approach. According to Spradley (1980), "moderation participation occurs when the ethnographer seeks to maintain a balance between being an insider and an outsider, between participation and observation" (p. 60). Although my access to the groups was negotiated directly with the team leaders, I had no issue interacting with the women that I worked with and observed. This interaction was possible due to the setting of the group, where the team leader was a part of the group rather than an authoritative leader. Thus, there was no conflict of power between the team leaders and the other women in the groups that I studied.

For the sewing group, my participation with them included learning to sew, packaging sewing products, preparing materials for sewing, selling sewing products, hosting groups of tourists at their workshop, and attending events with the group. I participated with the group around two to three times a week for a couple of hours, depending on the activities and events taking place either at their workshop or at other locations accordingly. While I was participating with the sewing group, I lived in my house and would commute to the field to participate with the women. As for the hosting group, my participation with them included preparing their tent for hosting, welcoming tourists to their tent, helping to attract the tourists, providing Omani coffee and dates to tourists, helping tourists dress in traditional Omani garments for photo taking, selling souvenirs, interacting with tourists, taking pictures with the tourists, and so on. Due to the long distance between the group's town and the city that I live in and the travel expenses to get between the two, I

made five monthly visits to their town and spent about 4-5 days there on each visit. When I visited the hosting group, I stayed twice in the home of the team leader, who invited me and insisted that I stayed with her. This invitation gave me a great opportunity to bond with the team leader and to gain valuable insights into the social interactions that often took place at the team leader's home with the other women in the group. However, after my first two visits, I felt that I was being a burden and intruding in the private life of the team leader, especially as only she and her husband stayed in their home. As I felt uncomfortable continuing to stay at the team leader's home for my other visits, I stayed at a hotel for my last three visits.

While I was participating with the two groups, I wrote field notes during each visit in a specific small notebook that I assigned for each group to record my observations and experiences. Writing field notes is the main activity and source of information for participant observation (DeWalt and DeWalt, 2011; Jorgensen, 1989; Spradley, 1980). In order to write proper field notes, I largely followed the guidelines set by Emerson, Fretz and Shaw (2011). Although their guidelines are mainly for ethnographers, they emphasise that they are also relevant for researchers using participant observation as a method, regardless of their methodological approach. The field notes were written in English to ease the analysis process for my study, although I interacted with the women in Arabic. I wrote 50 notes for the sewing group and 16 for the hosting group, which was influenced by the differing length of time I participated with each group.

As my study focuses on exploring the experiences of Omani women in tourism entrepreneurship, I sought to capture the meanings that they attach to their experiences in tourism entrepreneurship not only through my participation, interactions and observations with the women but also in my writing of the field notes. Emerson et al. (2011) emphasises that the key to pursuing members' meanings "lies in sensitivity representing in written texts what local people consider meaningful and important" (p. 129), along with observing and interacting. As well as being interested in exploring the women's lived experiences and understanding the benefits and challenges of their tourism enterprise, I was open minded around what

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could be discovered from my participation with the women and I allowed the women's perspectives and their overall embedded environment to deeply inform me of their experiences in tourism entrepreneurship. Thus, my written observations included interactions, conversations and situations that either I had directly with the women, or that occurred among the women, and with outsiders, such as tourists.

Observations also included the women's habits, customs and daily routines, as well as descriptions and explanations of certain activities, events and people, their stories, and also terms and phrases regularly used in interactions. More specifically, they included the women's encounters with gender issues in specific interactions. However, these matters were not easy to tease out, as such issues are fabricated as part of the women's daily lives. Thus, I related such observations to social intuitions and power structures, and wrote my field notes accordingly, to reveal that patterns of gender inequality are socially constructed in the women's lives. Besides including my observations in the field notes, I also included my own interpretations of the data in parallel with the women's experiences. Thus, the field notes captured more than just a record of my observations. Emerson et al. (2011) emphasise that field notes are,

> Never a simple matter of inscribing the world, field notes do more than record observations. In a fundamental sense, they constitute a way of life through the very writing choices that the ethnographer makes and the stories that she tells; for through her writing, she conveys her understandings and insights to future readers unacquainted with these lives, people and events. In writing a field note, then, the ethnographer does not simply put happenings into words. Rather, such writing is an interpretive process: it is the very first act of textualization.

(p. 20)

As I participated and observed the two groups, I was sensitive about taking notes in front of the women in order to be less distractive. Emerson et al. (2011) suggests that researchers should try to keep writing field notes from interrupting the

interactions they have with those being researched in order not to affect their lived experiences. Thus, I largely wrote my notes immediately after I left the field. Firstly, I would jot down key words and short notes upon leaving the field either in my car or in my hotel room in order to remind myself of what to write later on. Fuller, typed field notes would then be written at my home either the same day or during the following days, according to scheduled field visits to the two groups. Emerson et al. (2011) remark that these jottings are

> A brief written record of events and impressions captured in key words and phrases. Jottings translate to-be-remembered observations into writing on paper as quickly rendered scribbles about actions and dialogue. A word or two written at the moment or soon afterward will jog the memory later in the day when she attempts to recall the details of significant actions and to construct evocative descriptions of the scene.

(p. 29)

I would occasionally jot down key words and short notes either in front of the women or in another area in the observed environment, i.e. in the kitchen, toilet, depending on the need to immediately capture a significant situation, interaction or conversation. Although I had some experience in writing field notes from my work experience, I initially found it challenging to remember everything and it took me a considerable amount of time to write proper field notes. I strived to observe and capture as much information as possible while I participated with the women, however, as I continued to participate with the two groups, my observations gradually became more focused on my main research issues. By focusing my observations in this way, I was able to write the field notes more efficiently. According to Emerson et al. (2011),

> No writing techniques enable an ethnographer to write up life exactly as it happened or even precisely as she remembers it. At best, the ethnographer "re-creates" her memories as written scenes that authentically depict people's lives through selected, integrated details. But in mastering certain

descriptive and narrating techniques, she can write up her notes more easily in that first dash of getting everything down; and she can depict more effectively those scenes that she intuitively selects as especially significant.

(p. 47)

Besides the field notes, I also took photographs of the enterprises and of certain activities/events that took place with the permission of the women. I also collected documents that were related to the enterprises, such as leaflets, newspaper articles, etc. Towards the end of my participant observation, I did not have an issue disengaging from the field and withdraw from the hosting group. This was due to my arranged participation ending the same time as the cruise season that the hosting group caters to. However, I did have an issue withdrawing from the sewing group despite the time line arrangement I had made with the team leader for my participation with the group. The women continued to expect me to come to their workshop and to help with their enterprise. Indeed, I did occasionally continue to participate with the sewing group after the agreed participation timeline due to the growing friendship I had developed with the women. However, I eventually ended my participation with the sewing group and withdrew from it gradually by excusing myself with my study commitments but still maintaining occasional contact with them. Overall, I enjoyed participating with the two groups and it was an enriching experience for me.

### 6.4.2 Interviews

I also used interviews to collect further information about the two groups and this was the main method used to collect information from the women tourism entrepreneurs. Interviews are one of the main methods used to gather data for case studies (Yin, 2014). It is also a method that has been extensively used in tourism research over the past 20 years (Phillimore and Goodson, 2004). In general, "interviews are used to make sense of and understand on a daily basis the world in which we live, at either the informal or formal level" (Jennings, 2005, p. 99). It has also been described as "a social interaction/interchange. It is a two-way exchange.

Knowledge, understanding and learning are at the roots of qualitative interview engagements" (Jennings, 2005, p. 102). The interview technique is useful when the research questions require in-depth information and for capturing "the perspectives and complexities of marginalized groups normally excluded from the conversation" (McGehee, 2012, p. 368), in this case, the women. Thus, the use of interviews helped me to approach issues in the field in a deeper way, which may not have been possible through quantitative methods (McGehee, 2012). It also helped me gain a better understanding of women tourism entrepreneur's experiences in Oman by allowing the women to express their own perceptions of reality.

Nonetheless, Jennings (2005) cautions that "the very nature, diversity and complexity amongst qualitative interview forms and the resulting complex, dynamic and indeterminate nature of social interaction inherent in such interviews become problematic in attempting to capture that which is socially constructed and contextualized as well as historically situated in time" (p.103). Although I had some experience in conducting qualitative interviews, which was gained from my master's degree research and work experience, I initially used a guide to help me to carry out the interviews successfully. However, as I conducted more interviews and became more confident, over time I found that I used this interview guide less. I also made sure I established rapport with the women, and used humour and free expression in the conversations that I had with them, in order to improve the value of the information that they shared in the interviews. I will discuss further about my use of the interview guides in the upcoming sections.

I used informal interviews and semi-structured interviews for this research, as is discussed in more detail below.

*Informal interviews*

I used informal interviews while I was participating with the two groups. Informal interviews "are more open and more conversation like with no questions, just a theme" (Jennings, 2005, p. 104). I found informal interviews to be beneficial with the two groups, due to the nature of their work and the interactions that took place

in the group settings. I got to know the women well and to hear about their personal backgrounds, about their enterprise and about their involvement in the enterprise through informal conversations. The women were comfortable talking to me through these informal conversations as I immersed had myself in their world. Moreover, this type of interview allowed me to enquire and probe into situations and issues that arose and to get the women's perspectives during my participation with them. Overall, informal interviews helped to complement and support my participant observation, particularly in terms of my field notes (Jorgensen, 1989).

I conducted these interviews individually and collectively, according to the scenarios and events that took place during each field visit. Details from these interviews were written down at the same time as I completed the field notes, with the exception of two informal conversations that I had with the hosting group at the beginning and towards the end of my participation with the group. These were tape- recorded, with the consent of the women, due to the significance of the conversations' content in relation to the start-up phase and the future of their hosting enterprise.

*Semi-structured interviews*

I used semi-structured interviews with both the hosting and sewing groups, as well as with the women tourism entrepreneurs. A semi-structured interview format gave me the ability to "combine the flexibility of the unstructured interview with comparability of key questions" (Finn, Elliott-White and Walton, 2000, p. 74). It also allowed me to probe to seek clarification and elaboration when a particular idea or concept emerged during the interviews (Finn et al. 2000). On the other hand, the disadvantage of this type of interview is that "bias may increase as the interviewer selects questions to probe and may inhibit comparability of responses" (Finn et al. 2000, p.74). Therefore, I was careful to raise the same issues with all of the women in a similar way while remaining open any new ideas and topics they suggested. I also encouraged the women to talk freely about their experiences and perspectives, and to view these discussions more like informal conversations, despite using an

interview guide. This proved to be beneficial and helped to make the interviews positive and comfortable for the women.

A number of important issues emerged while I participated with and observed the two groups in relation to the challenges and benefits of their tourism enterprise. I used semi-structured interviews towards the end of my participation with the two groups to probe further on these issues and to get their direct perspectives before leaving the field. I also used semi-structured interviews to get further information about the women's involvement in their enterprise. An interview guide for each of the two groups was developed to conduct these interviews (see appendix 5 and 6). The questions I used in the interview guide were general, broad and open-ended in order to cover all the relevant topics and to provide copious rich descriptions for each case. Furthermore, the interview questions were constructed carefully, so as to allow each woman the option of whether or not to respond, and how to respond. Nevertheless, none of the women seemed to be uncomfortable and no one declined to answer any of the questions. Information about the women's involvement in their enterprise was collected at the beginning of the interviews – such as their motivations for joining the enterprise, how they used their existing skills, what training they had received, and so on – which provided a good start to the discussion before it proceeded onto the issues that I had observed with the two groups.

For the hosting group, examples of the areas discussed included the limited income they were making from their enterprise, balancing the workload of their enterprise and full-time employment, issues with tourists' reluctance towards their hosting services, and others. As for the sewing group, examples of the areas discussed included the limited income they were making from their enterprise, the difficulty of their sewing work, the lack of cooperation among women in the group, and their opinion about the services they provide to tourists, and so on. I conducted these interviews individually with each woman from the two groups. All these interviews were conducted in Arabic, which is the native language of both the researcher and the participants.

For the women tourism entrepreneurs, I also developed an interview guide to conduct the interviews with them (see appendix 7). Similar to my participant observations and interviews with the two groups, the questions that I developed were based on my study objectives, which was to present their lived experiences and to understand the challenges and benefits of their tourism enterprise. I also followed the same guidelines that I used for the two group's interview questions to develop the interview questions for the women tourism entrepreneurs and there were no issues with these. Basic background information about the women was collected at the beginning of the interviews, such as their marital status, number and ages of children, educational background and past work experience to provide initial information about each woman's life. Following this introductory part of the interview, questions related to specific issues and topics with a list of probes were then raised for discussion. This included questions about becoming a tourism entrepreneur, setting up their tourism enterprise and the challenges they faced, benefits they gained from their tourism enterprise, societal and their family views and attitudes towards their tourism enterprise, and so on. As I pursued my interviews with the women tourism entrepreneurs, I continued to recruit more potential interviewees. Despite my effort to recruit as many women as possible, the number of interviews was guided through theoretical sampling. According to Ritchie, Lewis and Elam (2003), theoretical sampling

> Is a particular kind of purposive sampling in which the researcher samples incidents, people or units on the basis of their potential contribution to the development and testing of theoretical constructs. The process is iterative: the researcher picks an initial sample, analyses the data, and then selects a further sample in order to refine his or her emerging categories and theories. This process is continued until the researcher reaches 'data saturation', or a point when no new insights would be obtained from expanding the sample further.

(p. 80)

In the final interviews, I sensed the collected interviews were sufficient for the analysis and I felt that saturation was reached because I was getting similar responses from the women. Thus, I decided to stop sampling. The interviews were conducted either in English and Arabic, according to the preferred language of the women. Among the 15 women that I interviewed, 10 were conducted in English and 5 were conducted in Arabic. In general, speaking English is common in Oman. Also, English is a formal subject in Oman's education system, and speaking and writing in English is required in order to work in the tourism industry in Oman. Thus, most of women tourism entrepreneurs preferred and were comfortable to be interviewed in English.

The entire semi-structured interviews that I conducted with the two groups and the women tourism entrepreneurs were recorded with the consent of the participants, except for one woman. She asked that the interview not be recorded due to her insecurity in speaking about her enterprise, despite me reassuring her regarding the confidentiality and security of the information being collected. Recording the interviews was beneficial in allowing the social interaction to be take place naturally during the interviews (Silverman, 1993) and to record the interviews authentically (Patton, 2015), but in the case of this particular women entrepreneur I took notes rather than recording the interview. The interviews lasted from 40 minutes to over an hour. Then I translated and transcribed all the semi-structured interviews, as well as the two informal conversations that I had with the hosting group, to produce interview transcripts. Translating and transcribing these interviews took me a considerable amount of time, about three months in total. I strived to translate and transcribe to the best of my ability in order not to lose the meaning embedded in the women's experiences that they had shared with me. To deal with such situations, I followed Simon's (1996) recommendation,

> The solutions to many of the translator's dilemmas are not to be found in dictionaries, but rather in an understanding of the way language is tied to local realities, to literary forms and to changing identities. Translators must constantly make decisions about the cultural meanings which language

carries, and evaluate the degree to which the two different worlds they inhibit are the "same". There are not technical difficulties; they are not the domains of specialists in obscure or quaint vocabularies. They demand the exercise of a wide range of intelligence. In fact, the process of meaning transfer has less to do with finding the cultural inscription of a term than in reconstructing its value.

(pp. 130-131)

As I am from the research context and I speak fluent Arabic and English, I was able to adequately capture the conversations that I had with the women, and to translate and transcribe them accordingly as I listened to the recordings. Once I had translated and transcribed the interviews, I cross-checked the transcripts by listening to the interviews again.

Overall, these are the methods that I used to conduct my research on Omani women in tourism entrepreneurship. These approaches offered me key insights into understanding the experiences of Omani women in tourism entrepreneurship and relating these to women's empowerment, which may have not been possible through other methods. Throughout the fieldwork, I maintained a research journal to record my on-going interpretations and analytical notes as I collected information.

## 6.5 Ethical considerations

Upon formally starting my research, an information letter about my study written in Arabic was provided to the team leader of each of my two research groups (see appendix 8). For all the other women in the two groups, I verbally provided them with information about my study and informed them of my research intentions when I initially met them and introduced myself. I also used a consent form written in Arabic to confirm the group's voluntary participation in my research, to inform them that they could withdraw from the research at any time, and to receive confirmation for my participation with the group (see appendix 9). I obtained a signed consent form only from the team leaders on behalf of the groups, while I

received verbal consent from the other women in the two groups. I found this approach to be more appropriate for this study, as obtaining a signed formal consent form from each woman in the two groups may have formalised my research and effected the immersion that I wanted to obtain with the women. Indeed, they might have considered it strange that I asked for their signed formal consent, and felt pressured to sign papers and to participate in my research. However, conducting participant observations and conversations does not necessarily require signed formal consent forms and it is sufficient to verbally provide information about the study in some cases (Dewalt and Dewalt, 2011; Jorgensen, 1989). Thus, I believe my approach to consent helped me to successfully conduct my research with the two groups. As for the women tourism entrepreneurs, I provided them with a letter of information about my study either during the recruitment process or before starting the interview (see appendix 10). I also obtained a signed informed consent form from each of the women prior to the interview (see appendix 11). I used the consent form to confirm their voluntary participation in my research, as well as to inform them of their right to decline to answer any questions and to withdraw from my research at any time. I found the use of consent forms with each of these women more appropriate and important, as I was researching them more formally through single semi-structured interviews (Jennings, 2005; McGhee, 2012). The information letter and consent form were written in both English and Arabic to suit their preferred language.

The confidentiality and security of the collected information was affirmed to all the women that I researched, both verbally and on the consent forms. I also informed them that their names and the name of their enterprise would not be used in the study. Instead, I used pseudonyms to protect their identities and referred to only the general nature of their enterprise rather than its real name to protect their identities.

## 6.6 Analysis

After completing my fieldwork, I undertook a thorough analysis of the collected data to develop an entire holistic case study for the hosting group, sewing group and women tourism entrepreneurs. Due to the issues of measuring women's empowerment discussed in chapter 4, I did not use pre-set criteria or an existing framework to deduce their experiences and empowerment, nor did I draw my analysis from pre-identified assumptions of women's empowerment. Instead, I let the women's direct discourses of their lived experiences and manifestations of empowerment inform me as they discussed the challenges they faced with their enterprise and the benefits they gained. Hence, I was able to reveal a more grounded and emergent conception of empowerment from the women. I also followed this approach when I participated with and observed the women. Gill and Ganesh (2007) affirm that "discourse-centred perspectives are well suited for studying contradictions and tensions in the experience of empowerment" (p. 286). Similarly, Beşpınar (2010) remark that it is best to focus on the manifestation of women's empowerment in research due to the concept being abstract in many ways. Kabeer (2001) also notes that it is best "to rely on personal testimonies because empowerment contains an irreducibly subjective element" (p. 79). With regards to the theoretical and philosophical underpinning of my study, Rhode (1990) highlights that critical feminist theorists build their analysis from the ground up rather than imposing abstract criteria and frameworks on the data. They also suggest that researchers use a narrative approach to present their findings in order to express women's personal struggles with societal institutions and power structures. Similarly, Shaw (2004) emphasises that critical feminist theorists "rely primarily on data collected on the lived experiences of women, as told by the women themselves, and they also utilize discourse analysis to uncover the ideologies and assumptions" (p. 59). Thus, I adopted an inductive strategy to analyse my data by working on my data from the "ground up", as is recommended for case study analysis (Yin, 2014, p. 136). Moreover, as case study research focuses on inductive

understanding (Merriam, 1988), this approach helped to identify themes that were strongly connected to the data (Patton 2015).

In selecting case study as the methodology of my study, the analysis was broken down into two main stages: within-case analysis and across-case analysis.

**6.6.1 Within-case analysis**

As I planned to develop three case studies, I first analysed the data for each of my participants individually. This is called within-case analysis (Creswell, 2013). According to Creswell (2013), a good case study includes a description of a case and of the themes/issues that were revealed. The detailed description for each case study included background information about the enterprise and the participating women. These descriptions were developed from the interview transcripts and collected secondary data. Then I used thematic analysis to identify themes and sub-themes from the field notes and interview transcripts for each of my participants. Thematic analysis "is a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data" (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 79) and it is frequently used in tourism research (for example, Bakas, 2015; Blackstock, 2005; Blum, 1997; Jauhari, Rishi, Rishi and Gaur, 2012). Despite it sharing the same approach with other analytic methods in searching for specific themes throughout the whole data, it does not need comprehensive theoretical and technological knowledge like some other analytic approaches, such as grounded theory. Thus, it offers an accessible and flexible approach to analysing qualitative data. It is also not tied to a specific theoretical structure (Braun and Clarke, 2006) and, thus, it works well with my critical feminist theory approach. Although thematic analysis is not as frequently acknowledged as other major analytical approaches, Braun and Clarke (2006) argue that it should be considered as a method of analysis "in its own right" (p. 78). Overall, I found thematic analysis appropriate for analysing the data for each of my participants.

I did consider using the software NVivo to conduct my thematic analysis. According to Basit (2003), the choice to manually or electronically conduct qualitative research analysis will depend "on the size of the project, the funds and time available and the inclination and expertise of the researcher" (p. 152). Thus, due to my lack of experience of using NVivo, I opted to analyse my data manually to save time. More importantly, manually conducting my analysis allowed me to understand and connect deeply with my data for, as Saldaña (2016) described, "there is something about manipulating qualitative data on paper and writing codes in pencil that gives you more control over and ownership of the work" (p. 29). So I used Microsoft Word to conduct and organise my analysis along with hard copies of the field notes and interview transcripts. I adopted the guidelines set out by Braun and Clarke (2006) to properly conduct a thematic analysis on my collected data. The thematic analysis process that I undertook was broken down into the following three steps, which are the same steps that I undertook for considering each of my participant's data, as outlined below.

*Step 1: Reading the data*

I read through the entire data set a few times for each of my participant to fully familiarise myself and understand the data, as well as to initially search for potential meanings, patterns, and so on. Then I recorded further analytic notes and ideas to my research journal.

*Step 2: Coding the data*

Then I coded the field notes and interviews transcripts accordingly for each of my participants. I coded extracts of the data according to its relevance and significance to my study (see appendix 12 for an example). After coding all of the data, I transferred the codes from the hard copies to a Word document in a table format (see appendix 13 for an example). I inserted the participant's name at the head of the column for each of the interview transcript codes or a chronological number for field notes according to the field visit date. This allowed me to view the codes clearly as a whole.

*Step 3: Developing categories and themes*

While I was conducting the coding, I was able to sense emerging important common patterns as many of the codes that I developed reappeared in the interviews and field notes for each of my participants. Thus, I developed a table of categories and I inserted the woman's name under each category to organise my codes according to the common and variable patterns in the data. Then I went through a hard copy of my coding table and I transferred the codes to the categories table to assign the codes to the applicable categories I had developed (see appendix 14 for an example). I did have a few codes that did not appropriately fit any of the developed categories, which I kept aside and revisited at the end of the analysis process to see if they had any relevance. I needed to narrow, focus and define the several categories that I developed in order to make more sense of the data and to consider the relationship between the categories. This was done by looking at the commonalities of the categories, as well as the codes that were assigned to each. Some of the developed categories were combined, while some codes were moved from one category to the other in order to ensure their relevancy. This led to the development of themes and sub-themes with similar meanings, linked in a logical progression (Beeton, 2005), as well as helping me to understand the data for each participant.

The themes and their sub-themes were organised to present an overall analytic thematic narrative under a number of main headings. Stakes (1995) sees the process of preparing a case study as involving shaping sections of it "into a narrative that makes the case comprehensible. It sometimes takes on a story quality" (p. 124), so appropriate working titles were given to each theme and sub-theme. A detailed analytic description was also written for each theme and sub-theme in order "to provide a concise, coherent, logical, non-repetitive, and interesting account of the story the data tell" (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 93). Relevant coded data extracts assigned under the categories were selected from a number of women to support the written analytic descriptions provided under each sub-theme. The data extracts included selected quotes from interview transcripts and vignettes from the field notes. Vignettes are "briefly described episodes to illustrate an aspect of the case,

perhaps one of the issues. A vignette often is an extreme representation, quite atypical" (Stakes, 1995, p. 128). Where such references are made to selected quotes or vignettes, this does not imply that only those women provided an example of a point but rather indicates only that these selected women were chosen as the best examples. At the same time, the written analytic descriptions may or may not be relevant to all the women in each case study. Nevertheless, many of these descriptions are relevant to either most or some of the women. Overall, a fair representation of the women was aimed to in order to ensure that all of their experiences were presented equally.

I carefully reviewed, inspected and revised the themes and sub-themes several times to ensure the meanings and relationships between them were clearly captured and defined. By returning to the codes and categories that I developed frequently, I also ensured that I created an accurate representation of the data set and did not leave anything important out. In addition, I revisited the analytical notes that I made in my research journal to compare my notes with the emerging themes and sub-themes as they emerged. Moreover, I inspected and revised the selected coded data extracts to ensure they were clear for the reader and appropriate for their assigned sub-theme. Thus, to improve readability, I had to lightly edit most of the interview quotes and a few of the vignettes by adding occasional words and clarifying comments to them. These edits are displayed in square brackets, which I also used to signify the women's behaviour (for example, if someone was laughing). Capitalisation and punctuation marks have also been added accordingly to clearly display the original recorded observations and interviews. I have also used ellipsis (…) to indicate the women's pauses and hesitations during our conservations.

In order to help strengthen the validity of my thematic narrative, I used participant validation/member checking (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2014). While researching the women, I offered them the option to receive information about my study for their review and feedback. All of the women were interested in receiving information about my study's findings. Thus, I provided a feedback letter and a brief summary of the thematic narrative to inform them of the study's findings in relation to their

respective tourism enterprise (see appendix 15). These documents were written in English and Arabic to suit the preferred language of the women. I personally delivered copies of the letter and a summary of the results to each of the participants to ensure they received it and to hear their feedback immediately. When I visited the women, I also verbally communicated and explained the results to them, which was important as three women from the sewing group were illiterate. Overall, the women were happy and supportive of my study results as it reflected their lived experiences that they shared with me.

The background information and descriptive thematic narrative that I developed for each case study was then taken to the next level to identify the key underlying emerging theoretical concepts and assumptions that shaped and informed the background information and descriptive thematic narrative. This was achieved by reading the background information and thematic narrative several times. As a result, I identified a number of factors along with their positive and negative effects on the women's lived experiences and empowerment through their tourism enterprise. These were identified and progressively revised several times. I was able to identify and trace the factors and their effects from the responses of the women in the thematic narrative, where they discussed the challenges and benefits of their tourism enterprise. The positive and negative effects of each factor were also influenced by my understanding of women's empowerment, which I developed from my literature review of the concept. As I discussed each factor, I cross-referenced the effects of each factor to the background information and thematic narrative as evidence. This information is included in the emerging main concept section at the end of each case study. Overall, towards the end of the within-case analysis, I developed an entire case study for each participant, which included a detailed description of the women and their enterprise, a thematic narrative and an emerging main concepts section. As a result, this information formed the key findings of my research.

### 6.6.2 Cross-case analysis

After completing the within-case analysis, I conducted an analysis across the three cases to identify commonalities and differences and to draw cross-case conclusions. This is called cross-case analysis (Creswell, 2013). This was achieved by reviewing the emergent main concepts section of each case study several times.

As I conducted the cross-case analysis, I realised that the factors I identified earlier for each case study commonly appeared across all three case studies. I also realised that there were empowering outcomes that emerged from specific positive effects for each factor. Moreover, I realised that there are disempowering outcomes that were emerging from specific negative effects for each factor. Furthermore, the emerging empowering and disempowering outcomes were identified and progressively revised several times. These outcomes represent the women's overall empowerment at a specific time in their lives that they shared with me during my research time with them. To capture and present these theoretical manifestations, I prepared and progressively revised several conceptual framework drafts in order to come up with an appropriate overarching empirically informed conceptual framework. According to Pearce (2012), "clean conceptual frameworks can help situate the research being undertaken and communicate how the researcher conceives tourism or particular forms of tourism" (p. 29). Thus, the developed conceptual framework presents the overall experiences of Omani women in tourism entrepreneurship. It also reveals the potential and extent that Omani women are empowered through their tourism enterprises.

Next, I used the conceptual framework in the discussion chapter to discuss the components of the framework in relation to existing literature, in order to determine commonalities and discrepancies as well as to make broader analytic statements about the experiences and empowerment of Omani women in tourism entrepreneurship. More specifically, I displayed the cross-references I made in the emerging main concepts sections of each case study accordingly as evidence as I discussed about the empowering and disempowering components of the framework.

Although, in general, the conclusion of case studies research commonly includes the overall meaning constructed from the researcher's point of view (Stakes, 1995; Yin, 2009; Creswell, 2013), I formed my research conclusion based on the voices and perspectives of the women along with my own voice. Thus, this approach allowed me to provide a fully meaningful interpretation of the phenomena being studied. Overall, this is the analysis approach that I used for my research, which helped me to meet the aims and objectives of my study. The trail of evidence that resulted from my analysis is presented in figure 2 below.

Figure 2: Trail of evidence

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┌─────────────────────────┐  ┌─────────────────────────┐  ┌─────────────────────────┐
│  Hosting group case     │  │  Sewing group case      │  │  Women tourism          │
│       study             │  │       study             │  │  entrepreneurs case     │
│                         │  │                         │  │       study             │
│  Information about the  │  │  Information about       │  │  Information about the   │
│  women and their        │  │  the women and their    │  │  women and their        │
│  enterprise             │  │  enterprise             │  │  enterprise             │
│         ↓               │  │         ↓               │  │         ↓               │
│  Thematic narrative     │  │  Thematic narrative     │  │  Thematic narrative     │
│         ↓               │  │         ↓               │  │         ↓               │
│  Emerging main          │  │  Emerging main          │  │  Emerging main          │
│  concepts               │  │  concepts               │  │  concepts               │
└─────────────────────────┘  └─────────────────────────┘  └─────────────────────────┘
              ↘                          ↓                          ↙
              ┌─────────────────────────────────────────────────┐
              │           Conceptual framework                  │
              │  The lived experiences and empowerment of Omani  │
              │      women in tourism entrepreneurship          │
              └─────────────────────────────────────────────────┘
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I strived here to be transparent, upfront and clear about the analysis process that I undertook for my research. Nevertheless, qualitative research analysis in general is untidy and rigorous, particularly when it is conducted manually (Basit, 2003).

## 6.7 Reflexivity while in the field

In continuing to be reflexive about my research, I reflect here on my experiences with the women while in the field and how I dealt with the different issues and concerns that I encountered. According to Ali (2014), "Narrating these events clarifies the significance of reflexivity and of defining one's positionality in relation to the informants while researching women's empowerment" (p. 119). These, in turn, influenced the process of creating knowledge about the nature and experiences of Omani women in tourism entrepreneurship and relating it to women's empowerment.

As I entered the field and researched the women, I was concerned about the women's reactions towards my interest in conducting research on them. Despite my awareness of the existence of the sewing and hosting group, and some of the women tourism entrepreneurs due to my industry experience, I had not personally known or met any of my participants prior to beginning my PhD research. In reflecting on his own experiences of conducting research regarding social and gender equality in Oman, Al-Azri (2013) notes, "Omanis display a general suspicion about research being conducted at Western universities" (p. 6). With tourism entrepreneurship being an emerging activity in Oman (particularly for women), the women in the hosting and sewing group did initially question my enthusiastic interest in researching them and were surprised at my desire to participate in their enterprise activity. As I mentioned in the participant recruitment section, I informed them openly that I was researching them to collect information about their experiences as tourism entrepreneurs for my doctoral research and that I was participating in their enterprise to learn about it and to help them. In general, I am aware from my work experience that there is a high level of respect for Omanis pursuing doctoral studies. Thus, this helped me to gain the women's agreement and trust to be part of my research. Over time, the women gradually got used to seeing me and I grew closer to them as I gradually immersed myself in their lives and got to know them. I also speak fluent Arabic and this was the main language used by both groups, with a few women speaking basic English. This language advantage helped me to develop an

open dialogue with the women and allowed them to openly share their experiences with me, as well as for us to develop friendships together.

A similar issue regarding my interest in my research topic was also evident with the women tourism entrepreneurs. I was often asked about my research interest in the topic of the study at the beginning of the interviews, which they all found relevant because no such research had been conducted before in Oman. Thus, they were open and happy to talk to me and share their experiences, as I also openly informed them that I am conducting the research for my doctoral studies. My ability to fluently speak Arabic and English also helped me to interact naturally with them in either language, according to their preference.

Besides the women's concerns towards my research intentions, I was also anxious about the women's reactions towards me and how they might perceive me due to our different backgrounds, class, education and life approaches, although we were all Omanis (Shami, 1988). Nazneen et al. (2014) notes that power relations can cause ethical dilemmas and be complex when researching women's empowerment, even for insiders. This, in turn, could limit the opportunities to develop shared knowledge with our research participants as one of the feminist principles of reflexivity. Due to this challenge, Nazneen et al. (2014) suggest that it is best to have "realistic expectations about bridging the power relations and also the limits of erasing the differences between researchers and participants based on feminist principles of negotiation and sharing" (p. 57). Naples and Sachs (2000) also comment that researchers should acknowledge the power that they have over those they research, and that "researchers can be self-conscious about the ways in which they reproduce power through their work, and that sustained attention to these dynamics will enrich ethnographic accounts" (196). Thus, I was conscious that these differences could have an influence on my interaction with the women. Accordingly, I used my insider knowledge and my awareness of the local ways of life to adapt my approach and presentation towards them. For example, I was sensitive to the way I dressed while I participated with the two groups as I knew the two groups largely dressed modestly. The hosting group wore abayas when they hosted the cruise

tourists, while the sewing group wore abayas as they commuted to their workshop and wore a maxi-dress and scarf when in the workshop. The abaya dress is a long-sleeved coat with a headscarf worn by many Muslim women for religious modesty. Thus, abayas, maxi-dresses and scarfs are common clothing worn by women in Oman. Wearing these clothes was not a major issue for me, as in 2010 I made the conscious self-decision to start wearing the headscarf and to maintain a modest dress code as my identity and journey as a Muslim woman evolved. Accordingly, I was already dressed suitably to fit into the women's environment.

Besides being sensitive about my approach and presentation, I also adopted a neutral non-directive casual self (Cole, 2005a) with all the women I researched, despite their different backgrounds. For example, two of the women tourism entrepreneurs that I interviewed came from a high-class and a well-known family in Oman. Despite knowing about their higher status, I maintained the same approach in recruiting and researching them as I did with all the other women tourism entrepreneurs to be fair and unbiased in my research approach. I admit that I was intimated by their higher class and I was unsure how they would react to me during interviews, although in the end the two women were very down-to-earth and openly discussed their experiences with me, particularly as they had encountered similar challenges to the other women that I interviewed, despite their different backgrounds.

I believe being a woman myself played a major role in allowing my interactions with my participants to be comfortable, and it certainly helped us to relate to each other. As most of the women that I researched were wives and mothers, being a wife and a mother myself helped me to interact with them, gain their trust, and encourage them to share their stories and struggles with me. Indeed, our shared gender roles helped the women to feel comfortable when discussing delicate and sensitive issues with me, such as family, marriage and gender roles, and we could relate to each other. It also further helped me to develop friendships and warm relationships with the women. This, in turn, made it possible for me to understand the effects of their tourism entrepreneurship activity on their personal lives. According to Jennings

(2012), "background commonality facilitates the interpretive processes of the research act and adds to the depth and diversity of interpretations" (p. 309). Hence, gender commonality helped to enrich the research that I was conducting on the women.

However, although I felt my research was not disadvantaged by differences in our social status, what was more challenging for the women was my current employment with Oman's Ministry of Tourism. Before starting this research, I was conscious that my employment could influence my interactions with the women. The Ministry of Tourism is not always viewed favourably, particularly due to the difficulties that local entrepreneurs encounter, especially women, when they attempt to set up and run a tourism enterprise, as is revealed in the findings chapter. The two groups were aware of my existing employment, as the gatekeeper introduced me as a PhD researcher and a Ministry of Tourism employee. Thankfully, the two groups were happy to interact with me, especially as the gatekeeper had asked the women to be open with me in order to share their experiences with the world. The women tourism entrepreneurs were also aware of my current employment and were happy to talk to me. Being open about my employment helped me in to gain knowledge about the challenges that the women encounter in the current tourism business environment. The women were also happy to provide me with recommendations to foster tourism entrepreneurship opportunities for women in Oman. Again, adopting a neutral non-directive casual self helped my interactions with the women, particularly as I informed them that I take neutral position to my research and that they could talk to me freely and in confidence without feeling vulnerable and concerned about what they shared with me.

**Redaction:** paragraph removed due to confidential information.

As I gathered and analysed the women's experiences, I was conscious of the potential influence that my privileged background could have in interpreting and presenting the women's lived experiences. Although I was born and raised in Oman, I have spent a large portion of my life overseas, where I pursued higher education and gained work experience. My western experiences have had an influence on my approach to life, which could have potentially obscured my interpretation of the women experiences. Lazreg (1988) and Mohanty (1988) criticise western feminists for their approach to researching women in the Middle East and North Africa for focusing largely on religion/tradition or patriarchy while ignoring the socio-economic and political context, the institutional structure and the historical relations that they emerge from. They also criticise them for misrepresenting women from third world countries as a powerless group of women, and enforcing power over the women being researched. Moreover, they critique them for imposing a single universal feminism ideology for gender equality and social change over all women. Thus, they emphasise that it is important for all feminists, whether western or eastern, to be reflective on our roles as researchers. They also emphasise that it is important to consider the women's embedded context in relation to the local culture and historical ideological power structures that construct women's lives. By doing so, we can then properly address feminists' concerns. Similar concerns were also raised by non-western feminists from the development studies discourse on the need to include ideas from non-western contexts in order to expand our understanding of women's empowerment, as discussed in chapter 4. Thus, I was sensitive not to impose my western feminist experiences as I explored and analysed the women's lived experiences in tourism entrepreneurship.

Instead, I focused on the issues that are important to the women that I researched in reference to their embedded environment. As I am myself part of this context, this helped me to understand and to consider what is important to them, as these issues that are important to me as well as an Omani woman. According to Nazneen et al. (2014), "shared spatial and subjective contexts between the researcher and the participants may allow a more nuanced understanding of women's own assessment of risks and opportunities and help make sense of their exercise of agency and empowerment" (p. 60). The shared spatial history that I had with the women also helped to create close relationships with the women, which helped the women share their life experiences with me. Yet I ensured that I did not loose touch with my research aim in critically exploring their experiences in tourism entrepreneurship.

Despite my western background, I am still very much connected to my culture and understand the complexities of being a woman in Oman. Although I was away from Oman for many years, due to education and residence abroad, I returned to Oman in 2010 and socialised myself back into my society before embarking on my PhD in 2012. Thus, this period allowed me to reconnect with my culture, particularly through my work at the Ministry of Tourism. Furthermore, my pursuit of this research has made me aware of the taken-for-granted assumptions that I had about my country's attitude towards women and critical towards these attitudes, particularly as I wrote and reflected about women in Oman in chapter 5. As I have adopted critical feminist theory, this has helped me to critically place the feminist concerns that were emerging from the women's experiences in relation to the societal institutions and power structures of Oman. Thus, I see myself as an indigenous-insider, who is "someone from the community, who is seen as a legitimate member, and encourages the well-being of the community through the research" (Tran and Walter, 2014, p. 122). Altorki and El-Solh (1988) emphasise in their publication 'Arab women in the field: Studying your own society' that female indigenous field workers enjoy many advantages in contrast to female non-indigenous field workers:

The conscious or unconscious knowledge, however partial, that researchers can be expected to have of their own wider society, constitutes a particular asset in the sense that they may require relatively fewer cues to grasp how the participants view their own culture. Indigenous field workers may also be quicker in comprehending the implications of the social situation under study.

(pp. 15-16)

Therefore, I used my familiarity with the wider social setting of Oman, along with my western experiences, to provide a more balanced analysis of the experiences of Omani women in tourism entrepreneurship. Finally, with my research being focused on questioning women's empowerment through tourism entrepreneurship opportunities, I was conscious of properly conceptualising Omani women's empowerment according to their lived experiences in tourism entrepreneurship. As discussed in chapter 4, women's empowerment is not a straightforward concept, as it is rather abstract and subjective. Thus, I ensured that I conceptualised their experiences and empowerment from their direct voices and perspectives. This required me to constantly review and question my data. By doing so, the women's voices were naturally in line with my feminist concerns of women's involvement in tourism. This, in turn, helped me to be critical about women's empowerment through tourism entrepreneurship.

Overall, these are my experiences and conscious concerns that I had to constantly reflect on while conducting my research. Reflexivity involves "constantly looking back on the researcher's roles and presence in the field and the research process" (Jennings, 2012, p. 317). By doing so, I strived to the best of my ability to reduce possible bias on the knowledge I created about the women.

## 6.8 Conclusion

This chapter has presented the research methodology that I used for my study. I introduced the hosting group, the sewing group and the women tourism

entrepreneurs as the main participants of my study, and explained that I used my industry experiences and networks as well as desktop research and other sources to recruit each one of them. Then I introduced the case study as the main methodology for my study in developing a case study for each of my participants. Later, I presented participant observations and interviews as the main methods that I used to collect information from the women. I also explained the main ethical issues that I considered when researching the women, which included providing them with information about my study, obtaining their informed consent, and ensuring the security and confidentiality of the information that I obtained from them. Next, I explained in detail the two-stage process that I undertook to conduct a thorough analysis of the collected information in relation to case study research. This included within-case analysis and cross-case analysis. Finally, I reflected on my research experiences with the women and the various issues and concerns that I had to manage in relation to my research interest, our different backgrounds, my existing employment, my privileged western experiences and conceptualising the women's empowerment.

The next chapter presents the findings of my research and includes the case studies that I developed for the hosting group, the sewing group and the women tourism entrepreneurs.

# Chapter 7: Findings: The hosting group

## 7.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to present the hosting group case study. First, I present background information about the hosting enterprise and the women in the hosting group. Next, I provide a thematic narrative based on the lived experiences of the women, before identifying and discussing the main concepts that emerge from the thematic narrative. Finally, I conclude with a recap of the main topics discussed in this chapter.

## 7.2 Background information about the hosting enterprise

The hosting enterprise is based in a small fishing town in Oman. A tourism development company, owned by the government of Oman, originally launched the hosting enterprise in 2012. The tourism development company is a leading tourism-related investment, development and management company.  It manages a number of tourism assets and projects in Oman, which includes a number of luxury hotels and resorts, and large joint venture developments. The company launched the hosting enterprise as an Omani-based corporate social responsibility project in association with [**Redaction:** Name of organization removed due to confidential information.] due to the construction of one their hotels in the town. With the recent emergence of the cruise ship market that visits the town, the launch of such project is important due to the lack of tourist attractions in the town, as well as the locals are not economically benefiting from the cruise market. Interestingly, the project is specifically targeted towards the local women only. The main purpose of the project is to empower the local women by helping them to become economically self-sufficient and self-employed. Thus, the hosting enterprise can be seen as an intervention project for the local women, introduced through a partnership between the public and private sector.

The company covered most of the necessary costs to launch and set up the enterprise, plus funding was provided by a private oil company to cover other expenses such as building and decorating the tent, provision of an electric generator,

and so on. During the launch of the project in the first year, the tourism development company recruited 30 women from the town in order to form a women-led collective group that would potentially run the hosting enterprise. However, most of the women withdrew from the project and only four from the current group were present from the outset, as is explained further below. **Redacted:** Sentence removed due to confidential information. They received various free training from the tourism development company to help them develop the necessary skills to operate and manage the enterprise, including hospitality training, English and Italian language, business skills, and so on. The company handed the enterprise to the group to run it independently during the second year.

The hosting group targets the cruise ships that arrive at the town port for the day, where they receive and greet cruise tourists on arrival and host them in their traditional Omani tent that is set up at the deck of the port.

Picture 2: Hosting group tent on the deck of the port

**Redaction:** Picture removed due to confidential reasons.
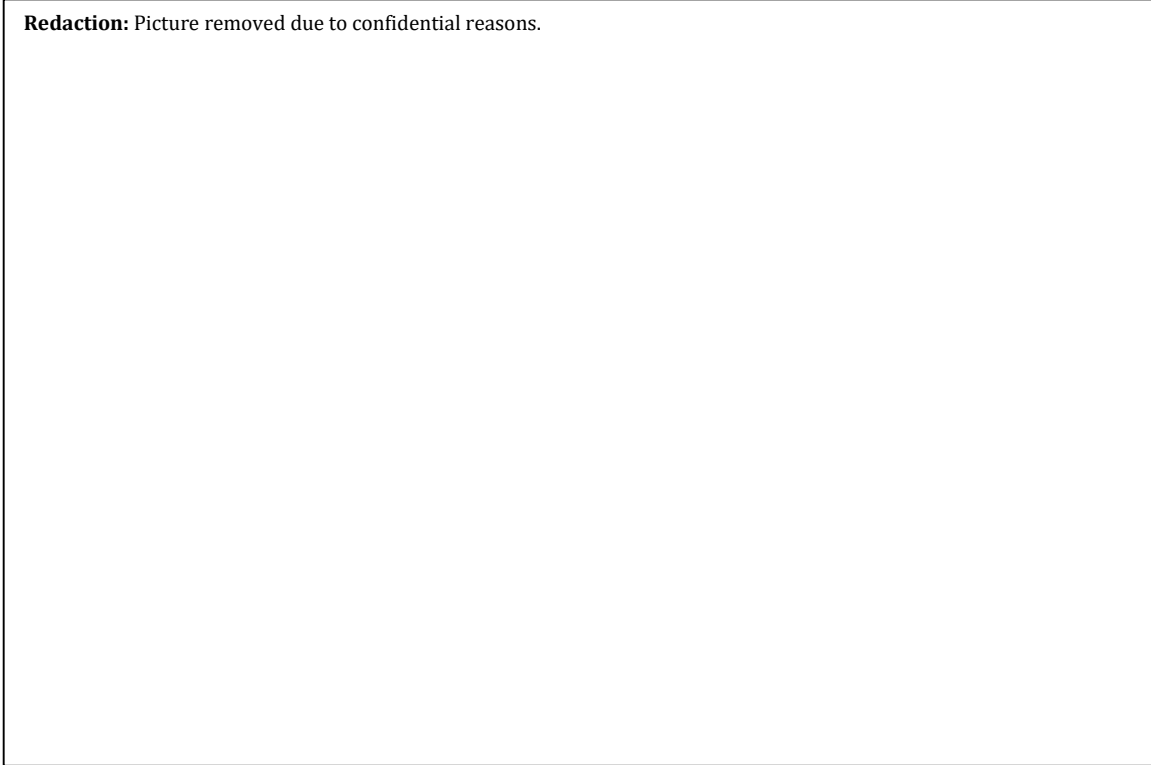
The cruise season typically runs from November-April, with the cruise ships visiting the town about twice a week during this period. The nature of the hosting enterprise involves the women providing a unique cultural experience and traditional Omani hospitality to the cruise tourists in the tent. This includes serving Omani coffee and dates, trying on traditional Omani garments for photographs, and applying henna tattoos. There is a fee for each of the services, except for the Omani coffee and dates, but there are no fees for entering the tent. The women also display traditional handicrafts made by locals in the town for the cruise tourists to purchase as souvenirs.

**Redacted:** Sentence removed due to confidential information. In terms of language, the women would communicate with the cruise tourists in basic English.

Picture 3: Photo taking with tourists

**Redaction:** Picture removed due to confidential reasons.

Picture 4:  Tourist trying on traditional Omani garment

**Redaction:** Picture removed due to confidential reasons.

Picture 5: Tourists being served Omani coffee and dates

**Redaction:** Picture removed due to confidential reasons.

Picture 6: Applying henna for a tourists



**Redaction:** Picture removed due to confidential reasons.
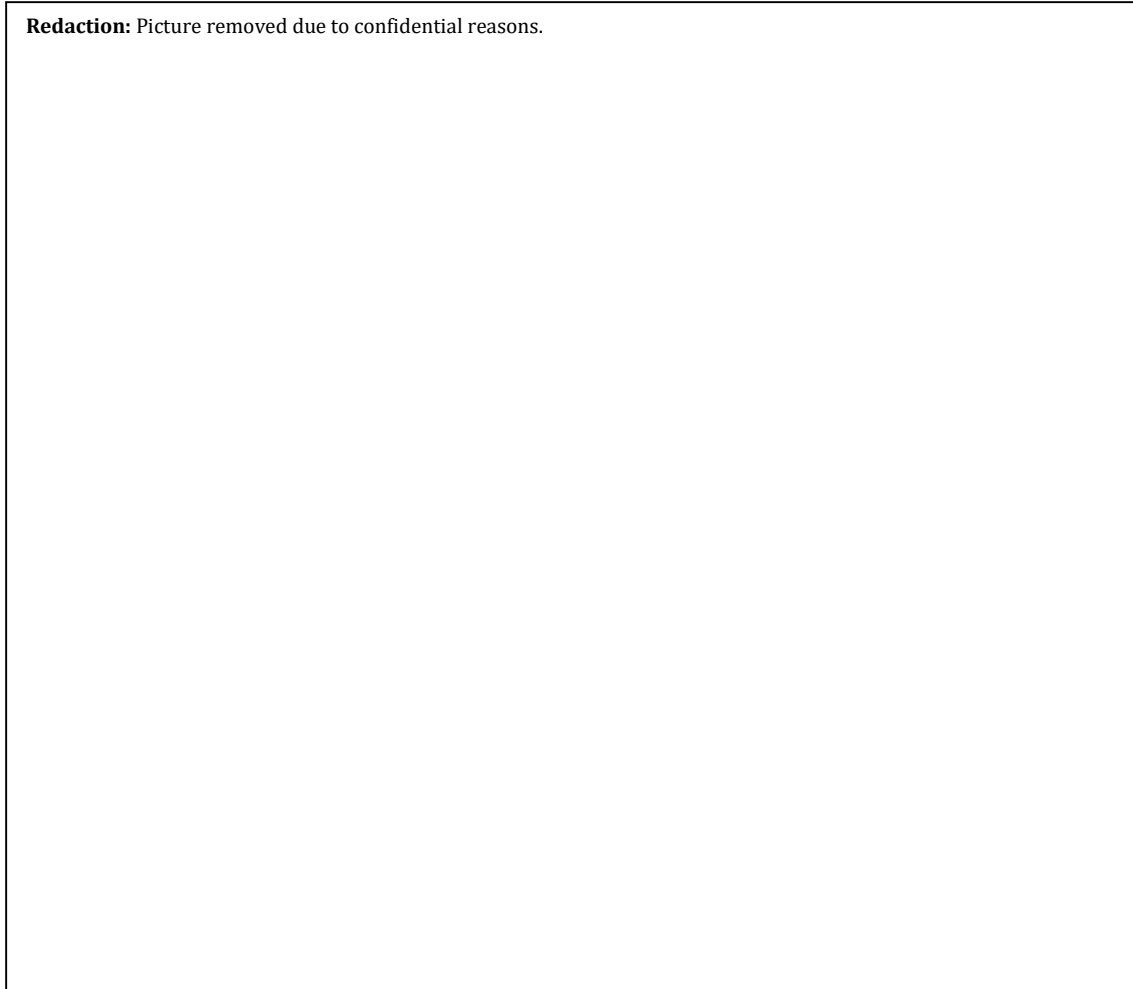
This project is the first of its kind to be brought to Oman, and perhaps also in the Middle East. With the high expectations that have been placed on the hosting enterprise, it has been envisioned that the enterprise will include hosting tourists at the hotels in the town and that similar hosting enterprises could be launched in other regions of Oman in the future.

## 7.3 Information about the women

The following table is a summary of background information about the women in the group that I got to know and participated with during my fieldwork. The women's names are not given, to protect their identity and privacy, and pseudonyms are assigned instead.

Table 10: Information about the women in the hosting group

| Redaction: Table information removed due to confidential reasons. |
|---|
| |

## 7.4 Thematic narrative

The following narrative illustrates the lived experiences of the hosting group by using themes and sub-themes, as displayed in table 11 below.

Table 11: Hosting group themes and sub-themes

| Themes | Subthemes |
|---|---|
| 1. Getting into the hosting enterprise | 1.1 Taking up a new opportunity |
| | 1.2 Using existing skills and personal interests |
| 2. Operating within a patriarchal and conservative environment | 2.1 Family acceptance and strictness |
| | 2.2 Community negative views |
| | 2.3 Other women negative views |
| 3. Operating in a difficult tourism business environment | 3.1 Developing networks |
| | 3.2 Lack of industry cooperation |
| 4. Hosting the cruise tourist | 4.1 Cruise tourists' reluctance and hesitancy |
| | 4.2 Becoming the object of attraction |
| | 4.3 Cruise tourists' curiosity |
| 5. Economic stress and burden | 5.1 Making unstable and limited income |
| | 5.2 Continuing to work |
| 6. Collective work effort | 6.1 One-women show |
| | 6.2 Having less time for the hosting enterprise |
| 7. Importance of the hosting enterprise to the women | 7.1 Passion for the hosting enterprise |
| | 7.2 Developing new skills |
| | 7.3 Building a stronger personality |
| | 7.4 Developing a strong sisterhood |
| | 7.5 Becoming popular and famous |
| | 7.6 Benefiting country and community |
| 8. Developing cultural exchange | 8.1 Interacting with cruise tourists |
| | 8.2 Learning from cruise tourists |
| | 8.3 Educating cruise tourists |
| 9. Promoting the identity of a modern Omani woman | 9.1 Rectifying general stereotypes about Muslim women |
| | 9.2 Taking deliberate actions |
| | 9.3 Maintaining Muslim women's stance |
| 10. Seeking sustainability | 10.1 Gaining community and other women's acceptance |
| | 10.2 Gaining industry support |
| | 10.3 Attracting cruise tourists |
| | 10.4 Achieving economic viability |

**The beginning**

**Theme 1: Getting into the hosting enterprise**

The women's involvement in the hosting enterprise was influenced by two main motivating factors that resulted in their participation.

*1.1 Taking up a new opportunity*

Initially, when the enterprise was launched in the community, there was a search for women who would be willing to participate and run the enterprise. The women were initially unsure about the enterprise, as they did not know what to expect or how it might progress. Their involvement in the enterprise was primarily to try something new and to explore a new opportunity, as they explain:

> They [the tourism development company] suggested the idea [of the enterprise] to me, but originally I was not meant to be in the enterprise, I was just working, doing my job elsewhere.

> (Fatma)

> To be honest, first I was like, no, I was [not sure], I didn't know, maybe I thought, in honesty, I thought it was [not going to work]… I mean I said no [I was not sure], I felt there was nothing, but later on when I saw, for example, that the enterprise developed and it became important, I felt the importance of the enterprise, I felt sure, I mean that I got attached to it more.

> (Leila)

Hence, the women decided to pursue the hosting enterprise opportunity despite their initial doubt and hesitancy of this new and one-of-a-kind tourism entrepreneurial opportunity in Oman.

*1.2 Using existing skills and personal interests*

It was also attractive and easy for the women to get involved in the enterprise because they could use their existing skills and personal interests. For example, Khadija's existing henna skills helped her become the henna artist in the group

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and to provide henna tattoos for female tourists. In Oman, women culturally apply henna to each other:

> I ask her where she learned to do the henna. She said it is something that she learned by herself and it was a hobby and interest that she liked at a young age. And with joining the hosting enterprise, she worked to perfect her henna skills.

> (Field Note 6, 15 January 2014)

For Aisha, it was mostly the heritage and cultural aspect that motivated her to join the enterprise, as she had a personal interest in the country's heritage and tradition,

> Because I like something called heritage, I like something called tradition, I like the old things, that is why I like the enterprise, this is what motivated me.

> (Aisha)

Thus, the women's individual and unique skills and interests helped and motivated them to get involved in the enterprise.

**Challenges**

However, throughout their business journey, the women encountered a number of challenges associated with their enterprise and the environment that they operated within.

**Theme 2: Operating within a patriarchal and conservative environment**

The first challenge that the women encountered was operating their enterprise within a patriarchal and conservative environment. Aspects of patriarchism and conservatism were encountered from various people within the environment that they are embedded in. This included their families, the community and other women.

*2.1 Family acceptance and strictness*

The women had to first gain their families' acceptance to participate in the hosting enterprise. The women were able to get this by convincing their families of the

enterprise's potential and the benefits that they could gain from being involved in something so unique. However, aspects of guilt were evident among the women as they described their families' stances towards their decision to get involved in the enterprise. For example, Fatma, [Redacted: information removed due to confidentially.] emphasised that her husband was convinced about her involvement in the enterprise and that he often helped the group. Indeed, she repeatedly reaffirmed her husband's trust in her involvement in the enterprise.

> As for my husband, he is very convinced about the hosting enterprise idea, I mean he knows about it and trusts us. I mean he trusts me and the girls, and sometimes he himself comes to help us with the enterprise.

> (Fatma)

Thus, the women's guiltiness displayed the challenge they encountered in convincing their families of their involvement in the hosting enterprise. Besides feeling guilty, Khadija and Aisha also experienced early family strictness in receiving acceptance and support to join the enterprise. The following conversation reveals the situation with Khadija's family:

> Lubna: Did they [their families] accept your enterprise or did they ask you why you had to do the enterprise?

> Khadija: First of all, listen, if they did not accept our enterprise, I would be the first one who would have not been able to come out of the house. You understand, they would not have let me go [join] the enterprise.

> Fatma: Khadija's family is not easy to convince, you understand, they are the strict type.

> Khadija: [This] means I [cannot] go out from the tent and go around [elsewhere in the town], this is not allowed.

> Lubna: Yes, because this is a weekly thing you have to do. Every week a cruise ship comes for you to host?

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Khadija: Yes, if they were not convinced about the enterprise, they would not have allowed me to go.

Despite all of the women gaining their families' acceptance of their involvement in the enterprise, there were still certain boundaries, conditions and restrictions placed on them. For example, for Aisha, that meant not being photographed with tourists.

Like I told you, the [town] people are a bit [referring to the town people strictness], so my family you feel that they are [referring to her family strictness], "don't be photographed, especially [with] the foreigners, you don't know where they will put the photos".

(Aisha)

Therefore, although they had been successful in gaining their family's acceptance of their involvement in the hosting venture, some aspects of family strictness still prevailed over the women as they participated in it.

*2.2 Community negative views*

The women also deal with negative views from their community towards their involvement in the enterprise. This was due to the nature of the enterprise, which requires the women to deal with both male and female foreign tourists. Also, the enterprise was something new and it was still unfamiliar to the community. Fatma explained:

And from the challenges we dealt with was that the enterprise was still new and nobody knew about it, especially as we are a women-led group enterprise. The view of the community, that how can a women's group host men, host women and like this on their own. So, it was a difficult year.

(Fatma)

Due to the community's negative views towards their enterprise, the women felt that they had to meet certain community expectations in order to continue to be

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involved in the enterprise. One was that they feel obliged to educate tourists properly about their culture and tradition. They feel that this was important to prove the importance of their enterprise and the role it plays in maintaining their culture and tradition to the community. Also, there was an expectation placed on the women when it came to their proper dealings with the tourists. The women felt that that they had to be careful about their public image and conduct, so that the community did not get the wrong idea about their enterprise. Below is an account of an incident that arose from a social media comment that alerted the women to the importance of their conduct and proper cultural education with the tourists.

**Redaction:** paragraph removed due to sensitive information.

(Field Note 1, 10 December 2013)

Thus, dealing with the community's negative views and meeting their expectations was challenging for the women.

*2.3 Other women's negative views*

Although the women I spoke to were able to gain their families' acceptance and support to be involved in the enterprise, this was not the case for the other women in the community. This was due to the nature of the enterprise, which required them to host and interact with foreign cruise tourists. As Aisha explained:

> You feel that their [the other women's] families, the families in the community are a bit strict. I mean they didn't like the idea of [the women] being photographed, and they didn't like the idea [of them] talking [to the cruise tourists] and like this, so because of this, this is why they [the other women] came out [i.e. did not join the enterprise].
>
> (Aisha)

However, the other women also held negative views towards the enterprise, also due to its nature and because they did not believe in the potential of the enterprise. This, in turn, resulted in the group's members having to deal with other women's negative views and their lack of support towards involvement in the enterprise. This made it difficult for the women to convince other women to join the enterprise. The following vignette displays an encounter that Khadija had with a female relative regarding her involvement in the enterprise:

> **Redaction:** paragraph removed due to sensitive information.

(Field Note 7, 16 January 2014)

Hence, the women experienced negative views from other women along with their community's negative views towards their enterprise.

**Theme 3: Operating in a difficult tourism business environment**

The other challenge that the women encountered is operating their enterprise in a difficult tourism business environment. The difficulty of the tourism business environment is found with various players that are already operating and embedded in it, including tour operators, cruise companies, the tourism development company and the

*3.1 Developing networks*

The women found it difficult to develop networks with local tour operators and international cruise companies to help them sell their hosting services to the cruise tourists. There was a potential opportunity for the women to team up with local tour operators to combine their hosting services with the tour operators' services that were provided for the cruise ships docked at the town's port. However, teaming up with the local tour operators was challenging for the women. As Khadija explained,

> The major challenge that we are currently facing with our enterprise is the bad attitudes of tour operators towards our hosting enterprise, they don't like to include our project in their program, and this is the challenge.

(Khadija)

The women believed that this was the case because the tour operators did not want to share the cruise ship market with them. The following vignette displays a scene of the women's attempt to capture a share of the cruise market with the tour operators by selling excursion tours directly to the cruise tourists,

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**Redaction:** vignette removed due to sensitive information.

(Field Note 7, 16 January 2014)

The women also believed that this was case because of the tour operator's lack of trust and confidence in the women's ability to deliver the hosting packages. Eventually, the women were able to team up with one of the local tour operators to offer their hosting package during the second year of their operation. However, the women still had to prove their abilities to the local tour operator. According to Fatma,

> Because there is still fear, they [tour operators] maybe had bad experiences with Omani entrepreneurs and I don't know what. I noticed that, for example, with this tour operator, if he books with us, he calls me, I mean the day before the cruise ship arrival, he calls me a thousand times to make sure that we will be there to provide the hosting. So maybe they don't have confidence in us.

> (Fatma)

Besides the local tour operators, there is also a great potential for the women to work directly with the international cruise companies in making package contracts to provide their hosting services to the cruise tourists. However, working directly with the cruise ships was challenging for the women, due to the lack of responses from the cruise companies to the women's proposals. As Fatma explained,

> There was no reply, I sent more than 20 emails, sorry to 20 companies, the same email, really I never got any reply at all from any company. There is no reply and there is no interest.

> (Fatma)

Therefore, the tour operators and the cruise ship companies were not interested in developing potential networks with the women

### 3.2 Lack of industry cooperation

The women also felt that there was a lack of industry cooperation from the tourism development company and [Redaction: Name of organization removed due to confidential information.] in helping them to deal with the

challenges that they were encountering with local tour operators and international cruise companies. The following discussion within the group reveals this challenge,

**Redaction:** information removed due to sensitive information.

Thus, the women did not receive the help they needed from these two main governing tourism bodies.

**Theme 4: Hosting the cruise tourists**

Besides the challenge of operating their enterprise in a difficult tourism business environment, hosting the cruise tourists also proved to be challenging for the women.

*4.1 Cruise tourist's reluctance and hesitancy*

As the women welcomed the cruise tourists as they docked off from the cruise ships, many of the cruise tourists were reluctant and hesitant as the women attempted to sell their hosting services to them. Examples of the cruise tourists' reluctance and hesitancy included not entering the tent and refusing or ignoring the women's hosting offerings. The women believed that the cruise tourists were reluctant and hesitant towards their hosting services due to having the wrong impression of their tent and its purpose, as the following vignette displays:

As Aisha and myself stood outside and chatted, a female European tourist walked by the tent and noticed Aisha sitting on the pavement outside the tent. The female tourist seemed to be puzzled and confused about Aisha's sitting location, as she approached and asked her in English if she was OK and said to her that she didn't look OK. Aisha replied that she was fine and laughed at the female tourist's concern for her. She then commented to me in Arabic that her sitting location was giving the wrong impression of her, as the female tourist may have thought that she was a beggar or a homeless person. A short while later, another European female tourist came near the tent and seemed to be very curious about the purpose of the tent, and she asked Aisha, "is this your house?". Aisha laughed at the female tourist's question and explained to her that it is an Omani hospitality tent for the cruise tourists. She then invited her to come in to view the tent. The female tourist seemed hesitant at first, but eventually went in and walked around, amazed and curious about the tent. I stood aside as I watched the female tourist curiously looking around the tent. She then approached me and asked me, "what is this tent for?". I explained to her that the tent was to welcome the cruise tourists to the town and to provide them with Omani hospitality. I ask the female tourist if she would like to have Omani coffee, but she refused and left the tent. We were surprised at her behaviour, but, at the same time, Aisha and Khadija were used to such situations. They commented to me, "she is scared, she is scared". Khadija told Aisha that they need to hang their banner outside, as the cruise tourists are getting the wrong impression that their tent is a house.

(Field Note 11, 25 March 2014)

They also believed that the cruise tourists were reluctant and hesitant due to being afraid to experience their hosting services, which depended largely on the nationality of the tourists, as some nationalities were easy to sell to while others are difficult. Aisha explained:

Some tourists you feel that they are scared, sometimes you find tourists, if they are Italians, you feel they are more accepting [of the hosting services]. As for the Germans, you feel… the Norwegians as well, you feel that they are afraid, and because of this, when we see there is a ship that has Norwegians, it has Germans, you feel disappointed, if you see Italians, you would see them come out [to our tent] so we could welcome them.

<div align="right">(Aisha)</div>

The cruise tourists' reluctance and hesitancy was frustrating for the women, as they struggled to sell their hosting services to the cruise tourists, which the following example displays:

As we sat in the tent, several tourists approached it, curious about what was inside. They peeked through the window and the entrance door to see inside. The women attempted to welcome them but they didn't come in. The on-going hesitancy and reluctance of the cruise tourists was getting on Khadija nerves, as she complained about their hesitancy and reluctance to come inside the tent. A male cruise tourist then peeked through the window of the tent. Khadija noticed the tourist and was sarcastic to him, although we were not sure if he spoke English. She commented to him in frustration, "this is a window, and this is the door, what's wrong with this people", in order to tell him that the window was not the entrance to the tent. We laughed at Khadija's sarcastic comment. The male tourist just walked away with no comment, confused by Khadija's angry comment. Fatma commented that she will seal/close the window to encourage the tourists to come straight to the door, rather than to peek through the windows of the tent. Khadija then goes to stand at the tent door, as she noticed several tourists returning to the ship. She calls to them, "bonjourana, bonsairna, arivdiencia… what's wrong with these people, why are they not coming?" Despite her attempts to welcome the tourists to the tent, they continued to walk on.

<div align="right">(Field Note 5, 14 January 2014)</div>

<div align="center">152</div>

Nonetheless, the women understood that they could not force the tourists to try and buy their hosting services especially as the general concept of hosting guests is free.

*4.2 Becoming the object of attraction*
Due to the nature of the hosting enterprise, the women presented themselves as rare types of hostesses that welcomed both male and female cruise tourists, and used their traditions and customs along with their personal identities as part of the hosting provision. As a result, this led to the women unconsciously becoming the object of attraction to the cruise tourists in the enterprise space, rather than the hosting services that they provide. The hosting enterprise provided the cruise tourists with a rare opportunity to interact with local women from the town. This was largely evident from the popular photo taking that the cruise tourists took with the women, as revealed below,

> We sat on the sofa and waited for the tourists to come into the tent. An Italian couple approached the tent and peaked through the door, as they were curious about what was inside the tent. Khadija welcomed them to the tent and asked them if they would like Omani coffee. To try to convince them to try the coffee, she tells them there is no sugar in it, as adding sugar to the coffee seemed to be a common concern for the cruise tourists invited to try Omani coffee. They were unsure about having the coffee and declined her offer. The female partner then signalled to Aisha and me with her hands, making round shapes with her fingers and placing them on her eyes, to indicate that she would like to take our picture. I told Leila and Aisha that the female partner wanted to take our picture, as they didn't pay attention to her gesture for a picture request. Leila was fine to take a picture with the lady and invited her to sit next to her. Aisha quickly stood up and left her seat on the sofa, commenting in Arabic that she didn't want her picture to be taken. Although the female partner didn't seem to speak English, she somehow understood from Aisha's reaction that she didn't want her picture to be taken and she seemed surprised at her reaction. I then sat beside the female partner and she gestured to her male partner to take her picture with Leila

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and myself. The couple left the tent and thanked the ladies for the picture in Italian.

(Field Note 9, 11 February 2014)

**Redaction:** paragraphs removed due to sensitive information.

The women experienced such encounters on a regular basis as I observed and participated in their hosting entrepreneurial endeavour.

*4.3 Cruise tourists' curiosity*

Not only did the women become objects of attraction to the cruise tourists, but because the cruise tourists were curious about the women being Muslim, they were often asked questions relating to their status in society. For example:

> Yes, there was one day, one guy [a male tourist] asked me if it was OK for me to talk to him. I said to him, "I am talking to you now". He replied that it was his first time to talk to me only [to a Muslim woman], he said, "I have been to be many places, but I only saw you to talk to". I told him it was normal for us to talk, that there is nothing wrong with it.
>
> (Khadija)

> That they [the cruise tourists] have the idea that the woman, a Muslim, Omani, that she is restricted, that she doesn't come out, only [stays] at home and I don't know what else [other stereotypes].
>
> (Aisha)

Thus, the women had to deal with difficult and unexpected encounters with the cruise tourists.

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**Theme 5: Economic stress and burden**

The difficulty the women had selling their hosting services to the cruise tourists and forming networks with local tour operators and international cruise companies created a major economic stress and burden for them.

*5.1 Making unstable and limited income*

Much of this distress was due to the unstable and limited income that they make from the enterprise. Leila said:

> I mean, for example, we made 20 [rials], 30 [rials], it is not stable, you understand me. You have seen sometimes there is nothing [no income], there is nothing at all, and sometimes there is an income, there are days there are no income.

> (Leila)

Although the women had limited costs from running the enterprise, the unstable limited income caused on-going frustration and concern for the women, as they struggled to make sufficient income from the enterprise. Fatma narrated here a discussion she had with Khadija regarding their income:

> Sometimes someone gets disturbed about it. Maybe I don't get disturbed about it as much in comparison with Khadija. So she always, for example, at the end of the [hosting] day, she calls me at night and tells me, "Fatma, today there was no profit, today was like this". I let her speak and speak, and I tell her, "Don't worry, Khadija, this is how it is sometimes, the most important thing is that we like the place [the tent], and I don't know what", so it's like this.

> (Fatma)

The majority of the income that the women made came largely from the popular henna tattoos that were frequently requested by the cruise tourists. However, the

women felt that they could not only rely on the limited henna income and that they needed to diversify their income from different sources, as Aisha reaffirms:

> No, of course, so that's why we kept the selling, there are things that we are selling, souvenirs that we are selling and like this, so it becomes one of our sources of income besides the henna, as well as the traditional Omani garment dressing and the photo taking.

> (Aisha)

The women had attempted, on their own, to find other ways to make income from the cruise tourists, such as selling excursions, providing Wi-Fi in the tent, and having entrance fees, but this had been a great struggle. Below is an example of their attempt to charge entrance fees to the tent:

> At the beginning of the enterprise launch, I mean when we first brought the tent, we told ourselves we would have entrance fees. We saw that one [cruise tourist] was scared of this, I mean you tell them to enter [the tent] and pay, but they are not sure what's inside [the tent]. We tried it, but it was not successful. I mean, it [the response] was, "No, no, I don't want it", and that's it.

> (Fatma)

Thus, the women struggled to make good and stable income from their hosting enterprise.

*5.2 Continuing to work*

Due to the unstable and limited income that the women made from the enterprise, Fatima, Aisha and Leila continued working elsewhere due to their need for a reliable income. Fatma explained her need to continue with her full-time job while running the hosting enterprise:

> As for my job, one's income comes from their job, no matter what you open [in terms of an enterprise]. Ah, you feel that a full-time job opens for you, the opportunity to have an enterprise, but you cannot give up your full-time job

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because it is, you know, it is the thing that is stable, guaranteed income. This enterprise work, it is something [that is not stable], I mean today you may get [income], tomorrow you may not get [income].

(Fatma)

When asked if they had to choose between their job and the enterprise, it was difficult for them to decide, as they needed their jobs for stable income although they were also convinced of the potential of the enterprise. For example, Leila said:

I still can't, I still can't [leave my job]... maybe, in God's grace, some changes will happen [she will be able to eventually leave her job], you don't know, but I won't leave the enterprise.

(Leila)

Hence, the hosting enterprise did not provide stable income for the women in comparison to their full-time jobs.

**Theme 6: Collective work effort**

As the hosting enterprise project was developed for the purpose of being collectively run by a group of women, the women found it challenging to work collectively when it came to the different aspects of their hosting enterprise.

*6.1 One-women show*

With Fatma, Aisha and Leila continuing to work, they placed a large dependence and reliance on Khadija to run the hosting enterprise mostly on her own. Fatma explains:

Khadija is the one who is sitting [at the tent]. So we are relying all of it [the enterprise] on Khadija. Poor Khadija can't go anywhere, she has to host.

(Fatma)

The group had equally decided to give Khadija a monthly salary as she did most of the hosting and relied solely on the hosting enterprise for income, while the others

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receive a small share depending on the amount of income made. Aisha justifies the group's income distribution decision:

> She [Khadija] is the one who mostly get tired [works hard]. She is the one who applies the henna, and because of this, it is supposed [to be fair]… we aren't equal [with the income] and I don't know what. She has to have the most and, of course, with the agreement of us all, and, of course, all of us are understanding and in agreement.

> (Aisha)

Nevertheless, this caused tensions in the group as Khadija felt that she did most of the hosting work herself as displayed in the following situation:

> As we greeted Khadija, she scolded Leila for disappearing and for not hearing from her for a while, and for not coming to the tent for nearly three weeks to help her with the hosting. Leila defended herself by arguing that she had still maintained contact with the group through their private WhatsApp group account.  Khadija didn't seem pleased with Leila's long absence from the hosting, especially as it seems that she was doing most of the hosting herself.

> (Field Note 12, 27 March 2014)

Khadija added:

> What can we do, this one is at work [referring to Fatma], this one is at work [referring to Aisha], this one is at work [referring to Laila], I cannot sit under the sun [referring to hosting] at the tent, you saw my situation today (Khadija).

Thus, it is clear that Khadija was frustrated with hosting mostly on her own.

*6.2 Having less time for the hosting enterprise*

Besides placing a large reliance and dependence on Khadija to run the hosting enterprise, the other women were also not always available to host and had less time for the enterprise due to their jobs. Comments on this included:

> To be honest, yes. Like I told you, I explained to you, I told you that it's been three weeks I couldn't coordinate between my job and this [the enterprise], but sometimes maybe for a certain period only, I don't know, and, you know, [Redaction: sentence removed due to confidential information.] you cannot just go out [to the enterprise], it does not make sense you attend work and do a shift and then go out [to the enterprise], this is difficult.
>
> (Leila)

> OK, so sometime... yesterday you saw me, I didn't come back to the tent, after 12 o clock I didn't come back [to the tent] cause I got busy [at work], but I cannot neglect my job and neglect the enterprise at the same time. So, for me, I try to be balanced, some hours here [at the enterprise], some hours there [at her job]. Yes, sometimes... before yesterday, for example, I didn't come to the enterprise, but generally I used to come out [from work] from 8 or 9 o clock until 12 o clock in the afternoon, at 12 I come back here [to work], 3 or 4 I go again [to the tent].
>
> (Aisha)

Hence, the overall challenge of the collective effort risked the collective purpose and viability of the hosting enterprise.

**Benefits**

Despite the various challenges that the women encountered with the hosting enterprise, they were determined to continue. The women felt that there was more to the enterprise than just being a commercial business, and that it was something that provides them with a number of benefits.

**Theme 7: Importance of hosting enterprise to the women**

One is that the enterprise was perceived as having become an important part of the women's lives in various ways.

*7.1 Passion for hosting enterprise*

The women had developed a great passion for their hosting enterprise and emphasised the love that they had for the hosting work, despite the various challenges that they encountered. The hosting enterprise had turned into their own personal venture and it was providing them with a new sense of the need to achieve success. As they described:

> Like I told you previously, it is loving the place, the enterprise, that you started something and found it difficult and you strived for it, it is a shame to lose it [give it up] at the end because, I mean, the money, you get money and tomorrow you don't get money, so as I told you, it is the spirit of the enterprise, and loving the enterprise idea, loving what you do.
>
> (Fatma)

> The opposite, because for me, this is something I love, this is something that comes from inside the human [passion], if you are... see if you love to reach to something [a goal], you will have to see [face] challenges, but the most important thing is how you can deal with these challenges.
>
> (Leila)

Thus, the women were passionate for the hosting work that they did as it provided a fulfilling and enriching experience to their life.

*7.2 Developing new skills*

The women were also able to develop new skills through the various training that they received from the tourism development company, which helped them to develop the necessary skills to run their hosting enterprise. This included learning Italian, hospitality training, as well as management and business skills. For example:

Yes, there were things that we implemented on the enterprise, the training that we took, thank God, we implemented a lot of things [from the training], like the Italian language, this was good to learn, we speak now Italian, thank God.

(Khadija)

The training that we took, the one on business management, it benefited us a lot. The training about how to start an enterprise benefited us as well. The training that we took on Italian language benefited us a lot, it was very helpful. So these is the training that I feel I benefited a lot from and didn't forget about.

(Fatma)

In particular, the women developed new social skills as they interacted with the tourists and learnt how to talk to them. This helped them to develop their English language skills. Leila explained,

Here I learned something simple, but here you get to practice the language [English]. At the enterprise, I welcome the cruise tourists, I mean you can say, for example, you will welcome them with talk and like this. So I felt that this one [language skill], I benefited a lot from it to be honest, I mean as my work, I benefited a lot from it. Also it taught me, for example, the things that are specifically for me [social skills that I lacked] I mean when I [now] go places and like this, I began to understand why it is like this [how to socialise], you understand me, I mean [social] words I used to hear of, I didn't know about it [before], simple words, at the beginning when I used to hear them [these words], I ignored them cause I didn't know their meaning but now I know about it [social words].

(Leila)

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Hence, the women gained valuable skills from the hosting enterprise, which helped to improve their professional development.

*7.3 Building a stronger personality*

The women also felt that their enterprise helped them to build a stronger personality from being able to run the enterprise on their own and taking up important roles, to encountering difficult situations and proving their abilities. Examples included:

> For me from before, I used to not be shy, to be honest, but now, with the enterprise, it has increased me [my personality], it gave me things, I learned some things, it is the first time I am leading a team.

> (Fatma)

> Well, it changed me a lot to be honest, a lot of things, as an enterprise, as my work, I mean for me at the beginning, I used to be very shy, and I didn't... I mean, for example, I used to feel when I used to do something, I used to feel very shy, I mean, for example, I used to feel that people were laughing at me but the opposite now, it increased... I mean as your personality, you feel the opposite... you understand me?

> (Leila)

Having gained stronger personalities, the hosting enterprise opened a path for the women to confidently achieve more in their lives, and to believe in themselves and their abilities.

*7.4 Developing a strong sisterhood*

Despite the challenges the women experienced running the hosting enterprise collectively, it helped to socially bring the women together. Thus, the women were able to develop a strong sisterhood from helping and supporting each other, and being understanding about each other's situations. Aisha described the bond they have between them:

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You have seen it for yourself, there is no sadness between us, there is no anger between us, we are very understanding among us, if one has work, the other covers for her, I mean there is nothing [no misunderstanding] between us that so and so work is for her only, that this is your own work and you will do it whether you like it or not, no, we are very understanding.

(Aisha)

Fatma described the inspiration she gets from Khadija to continue with the enterprise:

It is tiring but it is enjoyable, I mean, like I told you, I always see… what I like is that I have somebody [referring to Khadija] who loves the enterprise and loves to continue [with the enterprise]. She is the type who loves the enterprise and is attached to the enterprise so much, in comparison to me as the team leader. So always I get my enthusiasm/passion [for the enterprise] from her. I am always learning from her and I get my passion from her.

(Fatma)

Such valuable unity helped to enrich the women's personal lives collectively and provided an important social aspect that they did not have before. More importantly, this unity helped the women to continue running the enterprise as they endured the challenges they encountered.

*7.5 Becoming popular and famous*

As the women pursued and progressed with the hosting enterprise, they became popular and famous for their hosting enterprise on a local and international basis as displayed below:

We arrived at the port and made our way through to the secured port entrance, where there was a guard standing at the port gate entrance. Leila stopped her car at the gate and opened her window. She told the guard that we are here for the hosting project. The guard nodded his head and signalled

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with his hand for Leila to drive through. She thanked the guard and drove on. She told me that the port staff knew them well. She has a port card entrance, but they rarely ask to see it because they are well known.

<div align="right">(Field Note 2, 11 December 2013)</div>

Comments on this also included:

> To be honest, when someone introduce me as a girl from the group, I mean they don't introduce me as [myself], they don't say this is Aisha and like this, [they say] this is a girl from the hosting group, so you always feel that it is a big enterprise, so thank God.

<div align="right">(Aisha).</div>

> Our pictures have reached as far as Hong Kong.

<div align="right">(Leila)</div>

Thus, the women became well known as a unique group that offered hosting services as they pursued their enterprise and more people got to know about their hosting work.

### 7.6 Benefiting my country and community

However, there is more to the enterprise for the women than just benefiting themselves individually and collectively, in that they are running the enterprise for the benefit of the country and their community as well. For their country, this meant representing it, and promoting its heritage and tradition to the cruise tourists through their hosting services. Leila reaffirmed that her involvement in the enterprise was about representing Oman. As she described:

> I mean, for example, as an enterprise, you understand me, also if there are people who view it in a particular view [negatively], it doesn't bother me, it doesn't... I don't feel for myself that I am doing anything wrong, the opposite,

<div align="center">165</div>

I am doing something... for Oman, I feel that I am lifting... my country, I represent my country, I talk [promote] about my country.

<div align="right">(Leila)</div>

As for the women's community, they believed that the enterprise had had a major tourism development impact on their community by helping to make the town an important tourist destination to visit and providing an important tourist attraction. Fatma provided an example for this:

> For example, the thing that is lost [tourists attractions missing in the area], you can find it in our enterprise, I mean these [tourist attractions] is what is missing for the town, I like to have a thing that can be found, I mean something lost [missing] can be found in the enterprise. Also from this angle, when the tourist disembarks from the ship, you can tell them, even if they didn't come inside the tent, you can tell them go right, you can find the town. From this angle, this is a service we are providing, you didn't provide the service for your own benefit but for the benefit of the community. You provided a service that may lead the tourist to go see and buy from another shop [in the community], they don't have to buy from me. They don't necessarily have to sit in the tent to get this service from us.

<div align="right">(Fatma)</div>

They also helped to promote the community's local handicrafts by displaying and selling the handicrafts in their tent as Aisha explains,

> So... it's marketing also for the women [handicrafters], I mean they [the cruise tourists] ask for palm leaves handicrafts. Of course, you don't find palm leaves handicrafts here [in the town] because there is actually no handicraft market in the town, so we market for these women that sell [handicrafts]. We tell them [the cruise tourists] that there are women that make like this and like this [handicrafts], there is one woman that makes barqa [traditional face covering], there is another woman that makes lasso

<div align="center">166</div>

[traditional Omani head scarf material], there is one lady that makes the palm leaves handicrafts, so we are also marketing for the local women in order for the community to benefit [from the enterprise].

(Aisha)

Hence, the women ensure that their local community and the country as a whole benefit from their hosting enterprise.

**Theme 8: Developing cultural exchange**
Another important benefit that the women gained was the opportunity to develop strong cultural exchanges with the cruise tourists.

*8.1 Interacting with cruise tourists*
The women could develop strong cultural exchanges by interacting with the cruise tourists, and the women enjoyed meeting and talking with them. The same also applied for the cruise tourists, who had the opportunity to interact with the women. Leila explains this interaction:

> When I am interacting with the tourists, you get to know the tourists and you see for example… also you saw yourself with… the tourists, you feel that they are… they want to talk to us about…I mean about their traditions from outside and like this and others, and you develop friendships [with the tourists].

(Leila)

Such interactions took place while the women offered their hosting services to the cruise tourists in the tent. The women also took great pleasure in helping and guiding the tourists on the area and for places to visit, as the following vignette displays:

> Aisha and Khadija arrived at the tent with the coffee for the hosting and with some snacks for a late breakfast. As we sat on the floor and ate, an Italian lady peaked into the tent while her partner stood outside waiting for her. We

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greeted her and welcomed her into the tent. She then asked us if she could catch a dhow cruise outside the port. She explained that the cruise ship sold the dhow tours very expensively. We reassured the Italian lady that she would find many tour companies outside the port that are selling dhow tours. She replied that she had a group of 25 people from the cruise ship that wanted to go on a dhow tour. Leila than described to her a dhow tour representative that she had dealt with previously, whom she could find outside the port to help her with the dhow cruise arrangement, as a thin Asian man. She particularly warned the lady to not go to the fat Indian man that she would find outside the port. The Italian lady then asked if there is a shuttle she could catch that would take her to the town. We reassured the lady that she would find the cruise ship shuttle outside the port that makes regular trips to the town. The lady seemed relieved of all the reassured information she was able to get from the group and thanked the ladies for their help.

(Field Note 10, 13 February 2014)

Therefore, the women provided important tour guide information to the cruise tourists as they interacted with them.

*8.2 Learning from cruise tourists*

The women were also able to learn and understand about different cultures, heritages and traditions as they interacted with cruise tourists from different countries. Comments on this included:

I get to know about their heritage, a lot of things about them [the cruise tourists], I get to know people. In particular, meeting tourists and sitting with them, through this you benefit, you get to know them [the cruise tourists], you learn from them, they learn from you, so this alone is a benefit.

(Fatma)

I got to know different people [cruise tourists], I talk better, I have improved my ways [socialising]. I mean, we got to know people, they got to know us, we made a good impression of our country, we got an impression about them [the cruise tourists], this is what its about [cultural exchange].

(Khadija)

Thus, these learning opportunities helped to widen the women's knowledge about the world and the lifestyles of people from different nationalities.

*8.3 Educating cruise tourists*

Not only did the women learn about the different cultures of the cruise tourists, but they also took the opportunity to educate tourists about their local traditions, cultural habits and customs, religion and about their country, as Aisha explains,

Yes, about our tradition and culture, of course, this is through our hosting and chatting with them. It's one of the services that we provide to them, we chat with the tourists, we introduce them to our Omani tradition and culture.

(Aisha)

These simple teachings varied from removing their shoes before entering the tent, to eating on the floor, using their hands to eat, and learning about Omani food. The following vignette displays an incident that took place in teaching the tourists about a cultural habit.

As we were eating our lunch, a group of five European cruise tourists came into the tent. There were three males and two females. They entered the tent but did not sit down immediately. Leila and myself were sat on the floor and eating our lunch on the floor mat. There was some remaining fish and rice left on the plate and Leila invited the tourists to join us to eat lunch. The tourists seem to be surprised to see us sitting on the floor and eating from the same plate. Leila then talked to the tourists. One of the male tourists asked for our names. Leila introduced herself and I did the same. The male

tourist then told us his name and the other tourists did the same. As Leila and myself were finishing eating, she invited them again to try the remaining fish and rice, but they were hesitant. Then one of the female tourist came to sit with us on the floor and tried the fish. After taking a bit of the fish, her eyes widened and she spoke to the other tourists in German and held her thumb up (she seemed to tell them that the fish was good). She then continued to eat some more fish. One of the male tourists also came to sit on the floor and tried the fish as well.

(Field Note 2, 11 December 2013)

It was important for the women to educate the tourists in order to increase their knowledge and awareness about Oman's heritage, culture, traditions and religion, which most tourists did not have before.

**Theme 9: Promoting the identity of a modern Omani woman**

However, the cultural exchange that is taking place between the women and the cruise tourists goes beyond simply providing hosting services to the cruise tourists and exchanging cultural ideas, it also allowed the women the opportunity to promote their identities as modern Omani women.

*9.1 Rectifying general stereotypes about Muslim women*

With the cruise tourists' curiosity about the women, as mentioned earlier, the women used the opportunity for cultural exchange with the cruise tourists as an opportunity to rectify the general stereotypes that are held about Muslim women. Such stereotypes include being weak, oppressed, submissive, restricted, and so on. The women were very aware of the existence of such stereotypes and misconceptions as they interacted with the cruise tourists. Therefore, they were eager to correct these stereotypes and improve the cruise tourist's views of Muslim women by revealing their modernity to them. Aisha reaffirmed her eagerness to correct the cruise tourists' negative perceptions of Muslim women:

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Because we tell them no matter what we have [referring to religious obligations and social norms], I mean, for example, that we don't wear like this [open clothes] and that we don't [do other forbidden things], but we are still able to do things [have inspiration/achievements] for ourselves. We tell them that [Omani] women are working and they can reach for something [aspire to achieve], for example, she can have a business. It doesn't mean that when she wears an abaya when she is going out that she is not open-minded. We also tell them that what used to happen before [past oppression for Muslim women] is still the same, no, the opposite, I mean maybe our culture and traditions doesn't allow us to wear this type of clothing [western clothing], but we can still reach [have inspirations/achieve goals].

(Leila)

Khadija also did the same, as was displayed in the following encounter:

A group of three Italian middle-aged female tourists came to the tent. They didn't speak a word of English and they talked to us in Italian only. The ladies seem to be very curious about our abayas, and they stared at us and touched the abayas to feel the material. They then asked us if we feel hot wearing the abaya. Khadija explained to them that we don't and that the material is light. She unbuttons her abaya and shows them the clothing she is wearing underneath, which was wearing jeans and a t-shirt. She tells the ladies, "see we wear normal", as the female tourists got closer to see her clothing and were surprised that she was wearing normal clothes. I was initially surprised by her action but later I understood that she wanted to show them that we dressed normally like everyone one else, despite us wearing abayas and covering our hair with scarves. The female tourists were surprised and sighed "oh…" and chatted among themselves in Italian. Khadija asked me to also show them how I was dressed underneath my abaya. As I was wearing a closed abaya, I lifted my abaya to show them that I was wearing trousers and a t-shirt. Aisha then did the same. The female tourist with the shorts used her

hands to gesture to her face and she said, "Bella, bella", and we understood that she was telling us that we were beautiful, and she gestured a kiss with her hands to signify how beautiful we were.

(Field Note 11, 25 March 2014)

Besides properly educating tourists about their country overall, it was also important to the women that they provided correct information about themselves to the cruise tourists, in order to rectify existing stereotypes of Muslim women.

*9.2 Taking deliberate actions*

However, these stereotypes were not only rectified through the cultural exchange that they had with the cruise tourists, but also through some of the actions that the women deliberately choose to take. Such actions included

> **Redaction:** sentence removed due to sensitive information.

seeking attention and agreeing to be photographed. For example,

> **Redaction:** paragraph removed due to sensitive information.

(Field Note 7, 16 January 2014)

Another example:

> We stood up and went outside the tent to see the cruise ship. We tried to make out where the ship was originally from. Leila tried to remember the company name of the cruise ship. I managed to find the name and told her it was "Deutschland" and that it was probably from Germany. Leila commented that it was a small ship in comparison to other ships that usually dock at the port. As the ship slowly parked at the deck, the passengers stood outside on the ship's balcony. Leila then remarked to me, "Watch me, what I do". She went closer to the deck and waved at the passengers. Some of the passengers waved back to her, while others just watched with amazement as Leila weaved at them.

> (Field Note 2, 11 December 2013)

Thus, the women were eager and willing to show and promote their modernity to the cruise tourists.

*9.3 Maintaining Muslim women stance*

Nevertheless, despite the women's eagerness to promote their modernity to the cruise tourists, they still had to maintain their stance as Muslim women when it came to modesty and proper conduct. This included not putting themselves out there completely from the deliberate actions that they chose to take. For example, Khadija maintained her stance by asking the tourists not to place her picture on Facebook, as is displayed in the following vignette:

> While Khadija was applying henna for a British women tourist and chatting with her Iraqi husband, a couple of tourists come in to the tent. As they looked around the tent, they noticed Khadija and asked her if they could take her picture. She asked them to wait a minute while she covered her face with her veil and prepared to pose. After they took her picture, she told the

tourists, "don't put in Facebook, no Facebook". The tourist promised not to put her picture on Facebook.

> **Redaction:** paragraph removed due to sensitive information.

(Aisha)

It also included taking care of each other and watching over each other as they hosted the cruise tourists,

> **Redaction:** paragraph removed due to sensitive information.

This kind of self-monitoring was especially important, as all members of the group had to meet to their families' boundaries, conditions and restrictions, as well as the community's expectations when it comes to their image, conduct and reputation.

**The Future**

**Theme 10: Seeking sustainability**

With the enterprise still being in its early stages, the women were aware of the needed effort and work that they had to put in, especially as the existing challenges still persisted. Thus, the women were seeking to gain sustainability in various areas in order to ensure the future viability of their enterprise.

*10.1 Gaining community and other women's acceptance*

When it came to the conservative environment, the women did noted that it took time for the community to accept their enterprise, but they believed that there was now a better acceptance. Therefore, community acceptance of the enterprise was gradually gained and it continued to be gained as they operated their enterprise. Aisha explained,

> I had a concern, at the beginning there was not much acceptance [from the community] but we calmed the situation, they felt that it was something new and anything that is new you don't expect there will be acceptance from the beginning, but later on there was then a better acceptance.

> (Aisha)

The same also applied for other women in the community, who gradually came to accept their enterprise. Leila said:

> So there are some women have caught their attention [about the positive aspects of the enterprise], that it is good like this [doing well] and that this gave encouragement for people to have a different view about [the enterprise], they [the community] are watching us, where we have reached with our enterprise. I mean, for example, when they come to us and say,

"They got a prize in this or they come out in the first place for this", so this, the opposite, proves that we are not doing something wrong.

(Leila)

The women did focus on the need to recruit other women to the group, which, in turn, would help develop the enterprise. However, recruiting other women to the group remained an on-going challenge for the women, due to the existence of patriarchal and conservatism found in the embedded environment. Fatma described her efforts to recruit other women by visiting high schools in the town:

It is actually difficult to find someone to work like the work that we are doing [agreeing to host and defying conservatism/patriarchism], I have proposed this idea [hosting], I went to the schools, I told them, "Those who like to join the group, we are ready [to accept other women], and talk to your sisters, and see". I told them we are a group, I also told them that we don't have a monthly salary and like this, so I gave them an idea.

(Fatma)

Therefore, the women will need to continue pursuing the acceptance of the community and other women in order to potentially recruit other women in their group.

*10.2 Gaining industry support*

As for industry support, the women emphasised the need to gain the support of local tour operators and international cruise companies in establishing hosting package contracts, which, in turn, would help guarantee stable income for the women.

Yes, if God wills, this is what we wish for but it depends on the agreements/contracts that we will have with the cruise ships, if the cruise ships be with us [work with us], our situation will be different.

(Khadija)

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The women also emphasised the need to receive support from the tourism development company and the Ministry of Tourism in marketing their enterprise locally and internationally. This would help them gain contracts with local tour operators and international cruise companies, but

> it requires as you say more marketing. I feel we need it more, it is correct that we have won like awards this year, in the first year we took awards, and thank God, God will give us more but you feel it still requires marketing.

> (Aisha)

Hence, having the industry support was important for the women in order to progress with their hosting enterprise and to have a successful business.

*10.3 Attracting cruise tourists*

With the difficulty of hosting the cruise tourists, the women emphasised the need to increase cruise tourists' awareness of their hosting enterprise and to find different ways to attract the cruise tourists to buy their hosting services,

> We have to do things to attract them, things that they like and that basically they are aware of [know of], they don't know what's inside the tent, because definitely there are people that come and don't know what's inside the tent.

> (Leila)

> Of course for this [attracting cruise tourists], we need advertising, have a notice [outside the tent], have things [services] to make the enterprise stand out more.

> (Aisha)

Thus, the women felt that more effort and work was needed, as it was not easy to lure the tourists to their tent. This, in turn, would potentially lead the tourists to spend more money on their hosting services.

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*10.4 Achieving economic viability*

Finally, with the on-going economic stress and burden of the enterprise on the women, they emphasised the need to make steady and increasing income in order to achieve economic viability. There was a realisation about the reality of the little income that they made and the need to face up to this reality as Leila asserted,

> You saw me, it does not make sense… also if I am not thinking of it from an economic perspective but as long as I started an enterprise, that means I have to make an income, until when we would sit [rely] on 5 rials, 10 rials, we have to develop our enterprise more than this, for our enterprise I mean we want there to be more benefits, I mean like this, it's not going to work out.

> (Leila)

Nevertheless, all the women believed that the enterprise had the potential in future to become their main source of income and that they would then be prepared to quit their jobs in order to focus solely on the enterprise if it did well.

> No, I would never [quit the enterprise], but if God wills, and I see the enterprise is successful and like this, of course I don't, I don't want to work anymore.

> (Aisha)

With Khadija relying solely on the hosting work, she was content and convinced with the hosting enterprise only and did not want a job, saying "I feel it is a thing that I am convinced of and comfortable with. I don't want a manager to be on my head all the time" (Khadija).

Overall, all of the women were keen to continue with the enterprise and were hopeful for its future.

## 7.5 Emerging main concepts

When reviewing the thematic narrative of the hosting group, I identified a number of factors that had both positive and negative effects on the women's lived

experiences and their potential to be empowered through their hosting enterprise. As I discuss each factor below, I cross reference the effects of each factor to the background information and thematic narrative presented above to illustrate its embedded evidence from the data, as displayed in square brackets. I have also indicated the positive and negative effects in italic to clearly highlight them, as well as providing a figure for each factor to display these.

The first factor is the family. The family played a major role and influence in providing a support structure for the women to pursue their hosting enterprise, which the women first had to gain. The women's need to gain their families' acceptance and manage family strictness could be considered a norm, due to the cultural and social role that the family plays in women's general lives in the embedded environment. However, these approaches reveal the *existing patriarchal power* of their families and that the women were already in a disempowered state within them. Although the women were able to then gain their families' acceptance and support, they were also controlled them by boundaries, conditions and restrictions that they needed to follow while being involved in the enterprise. The existing patriarchal power of the women's families was not only evident with their own families, but also with the families of other women. The other women's families prevented them from joining the enterprise at the outset and they continue to prevent them from taking part. Thus, the patriarchal power of the families was already in existence in the embedded environment and it strongly controlled the lives of the women (theme 2, sub-theme 2.1/2.3; theme 9, sub-theme 9.3; theme 10, sub-theme 10.1).

Figure 3: The family factor effects (the hosting group)

The Family

(-)
Enforces existing patriarchal power

(+)
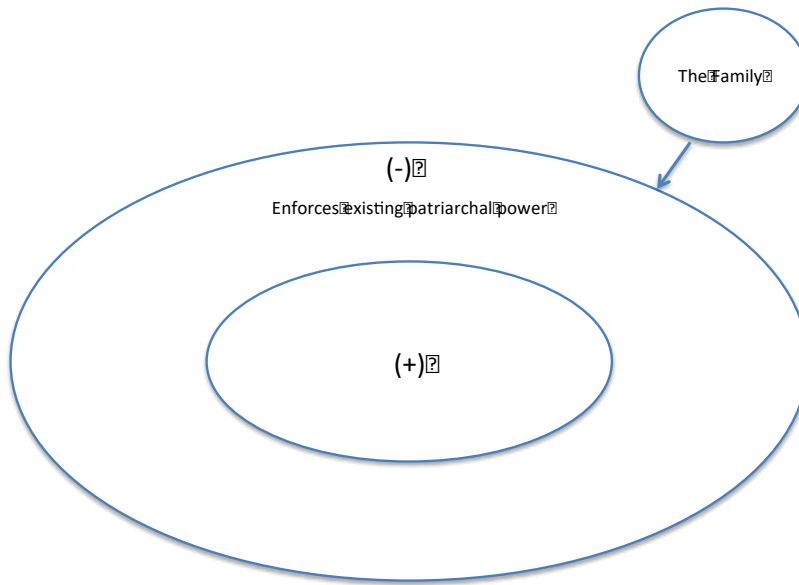
Similar issues were also found with the community, which is the second factor that affected the women's lived experiences and empowerment. The community played a major role in providing a support structure for the women involved in the enterprise. The negative views of the community could be seen as the norm, as it could be argued that such views should be expected, due to the strong cultural and social role that the community plays in women's general lives in Oman. Thus, when new changes are introduced, it leads the community to be sceptical of these changes. This is especially true when it comes to the involvement of the local women and the need to protect them. However, the negative views of the community reveal the *existing conservative power* of the community and that the women are already in a disempowered state within the community. The community did not support new changes, like the tourism entrepreneurship, being sought by the women, especially when it came to potentially empowering them. Although the women were able to gradually gain community acceptance, the community also controlled them. This was evident when it came to the community setting expectations that the women needed to follow while being involved in the enterprise.  The existing conservative

power was not only evident within the men in the community, but with other women from the area as well. The other women did not want to join the group and held negative views towards the enterprise, they were also not supportive of the hosting enterprise's potential to empower the women of the community. Moreover, the community as a whole continued to hold negative views towards the hosting enterprise while the women still sought community acceptance. Thus, the conservative power of the community was already in existence in the embedded environment as a whole (theme 2, sub-theme 2.2/2.3; theme 9, sub-theme 9.3; theme 10, sub-theme 10.1).

Figure 4: The community factor effects (the hosting group)
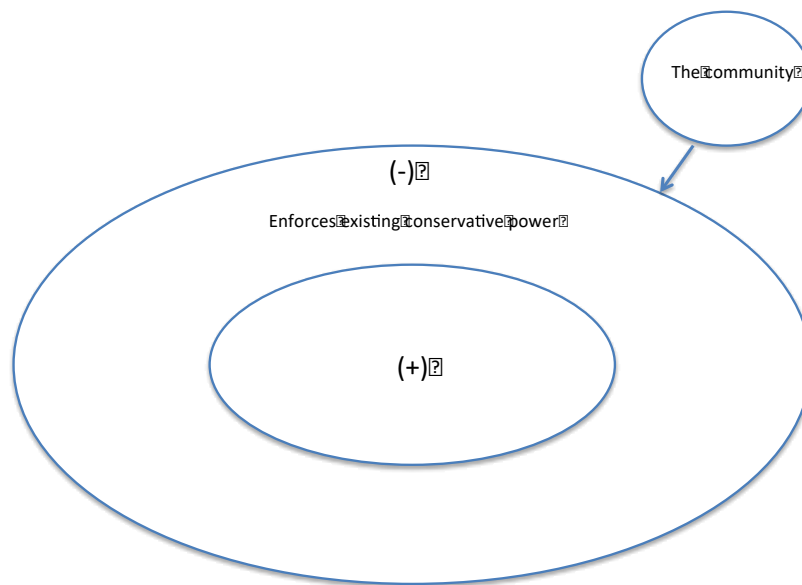
The third factor is the nature of the tourism enterprise work, which in this case was based on hosting. On a positive note, the nature of the tourism enterprise work gave the women the ability to *strengthen their own individual agency*. This was evident when it came to using their existing skills and personal interests for the enterprise (theme 1, sub-theme 1.2). It also gave the women *increased self-confidence and self-esteem.* This was a result of the women developing a passion for their hosting enterprise, building a stronger personality, and interacting, learning and educating

the cruise tourists (theme 7, sub-themes 7.1/7.3; theme 8, sub-themes 8.1/8.2/8.3). In addition, it provided them with the venue to *create collective social cohesion* as they developed a strong sisterhood (theme 7, sub-theme 7.4). It also provided the women with a feeling of *increased status, respect and prestige.* This was achieved through becoming popular and famous for their hosting work, as well as by being able to benefit their country and community through their hosting enterprise (theme 7, sub-themes 7.5/7.6).

However, there were various significant negative effects from the nature of the tourism enterprise work, which had implications on the potential empowerment of the women. As the nature of the hosting enterprise required the women to host both male and female cruise tourists, this could be seen as transforming the existing gender segregation that was found in the embedded environment. Traditionally, males host males and females host females in Arab/Muslim contexts. Thus, this transformation may help the women to resist existing gender ideologies in doing something abnormal by hosting both male and female cruise tourists. However, this led to challenges that the women had to face with their families and the community in choosing to host both male and female tourists. Thus, the nature of their tourism enterprise work actually *enforces existing gender segregation*, as the families, community and other women resisted the hosting enterprise concept (theme 2, sub-themes 2.1/2.2/2.3). With the nature of the enterprise work focusing on the women providing traditional Omani hosting experiences to cruise tourists, this results in *promoting stereotypes of Muslim women.* This was evident from the tourist's curiosity about the women's place in Oman's society (theme 4, sub-theme 4.3; theme 9, sub-theme 9.1). Although the nature of the hosting enterprise provided the women the opportunity to rectifying these stereotypes, it also led to the *objectification of the women*. This is evident from them largely becoming the object of attraction to the cruise tourists rather than their hosting services (theme 4, sub-theme 4.2). Hence, the promotion of Muslim women stereotypes and the objectification of the women comprised their image, identity and reputation. Moreover, the nature of the tourism enterprise work *imposes laborious work on the*

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*women.* This was evident when the women had to deal with the tourists' reluctance and hesitancy towards their hosting services, and continued to struggle with this challenge (theme 4, sub-theme 4.1; theme 10, sub-theme 10.3). In addition, there was *a lack of economic viability* for the women, due to the unstable and limited income that they made from their enterprise. This, in turn, resulted in the women having to continue working while running their enterprise (theme 5, sub-themes 5.1/5.2; theme 10, sub-theme 10.4).

Figure 5: The nature of tourism enterprise work effects (the hosting group)

The nature of tourism enterprise work

(-)

Promotes stereotypes of Muslim women

Enforces existing gender segregation

Strengthens Individual agency

Increases self-confidence and self- esteem

(+)

Increases status, respect and prestige

Creates collective social cohesion

Imposes laborious work on the women

Objectifies the women

Lack of economic viability
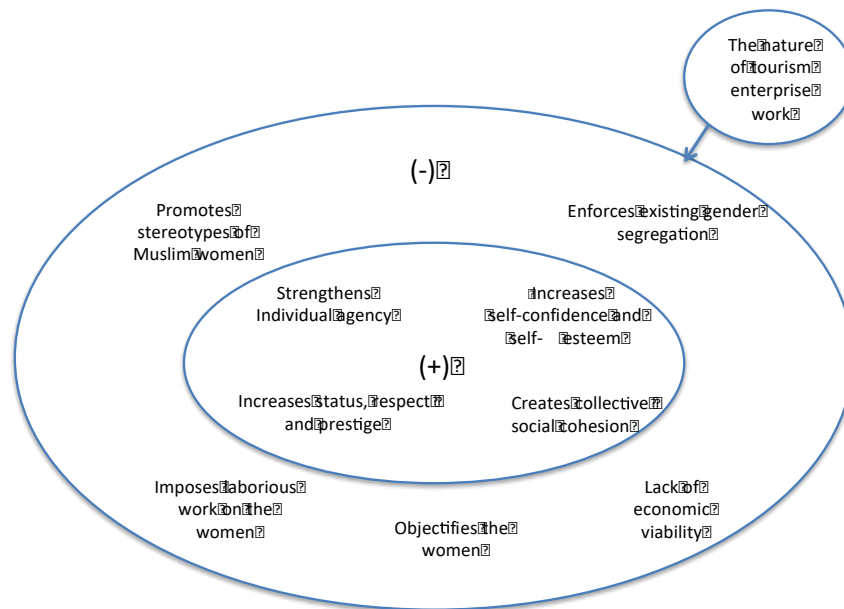
The fourth factor is the cruise tourists. On a positive note, the cruise tourists helped to *increase the women's self-confidence and self-esteem* through the strong cultural exchange that the women had with them (theme 8, sub-themes 8.1/8.2/8.3). The cruise tourists also helped to *strengthen the women's agency* through the new skills that the women were able to develop from interacting with the cruise tourists, such as social and language skills (theme 7, sub-theme 7.2).

However, there are various significant negative effects that arose from interacting with the cruise tourists, which had implications on potentially empowering the

women. The cruise tourists played a role in *imposing laborious work on the women* as they were reluctant and hesitant towards the women's hosting services (theme 4, sub-theme 4.1; theme 10, sub-theme 10.3). There was also *a lack of economic viability* for the women as a result of the cruise tourists not wanting to pay for the hosting services (theme 5, sub-theme 5.1; theme 10, sub-theme 10.4). Moreover, cruise tourists *stereotyped the women.* This is evident from the cruise tourists' curiosity about the women's place in Oman's society and the existing stereotypes that they held about Muslim women in general (theme 4, sub-theme 4.3; theme 9, sub-theme 9.1). In addition, the cruise tourists played a role in the *objectification of the women.* This was evident from the women largely becoming the object of attraction to the cruise tourists, rather than their hosting services (theme 4, sub-theme 4.2). However, the cruise tourists' stereotyping and objectification of the women was influenced by the nature of the tourism enterprise work, as mentioned earlier.

Figure 6: The cruise tourist factor effects (the hosting group)
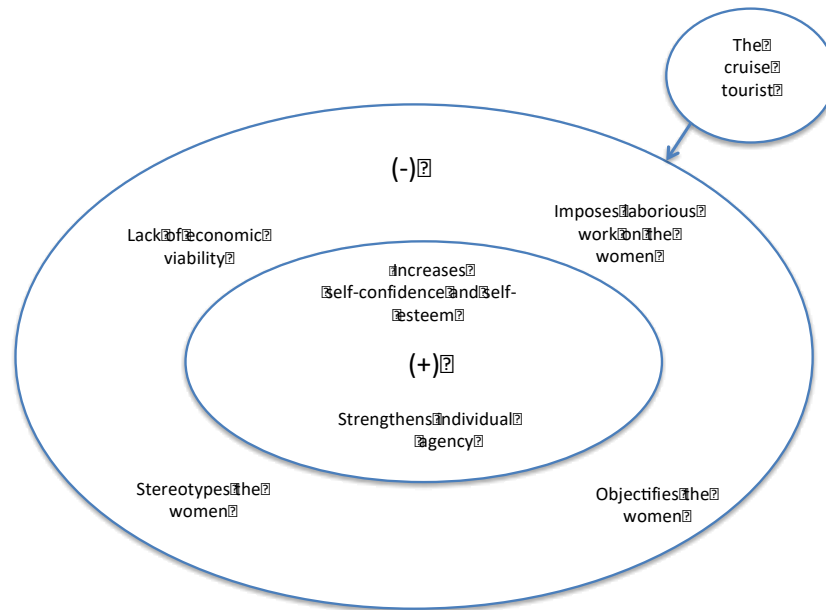


The fifth factor is the tourism structure, which, in this case included the Ministry of Tourism, the tourism development company, local tour operators and international cruise companies. Besides the family and the community, the tourism structure played a major role in providing a support structure for the women to pursue tourism entrepreneurship opportunities, which the women did not have themselves. On a positive note, the tourism development company in association with the Ministry of Tourism helped to *strengthen the women's individual agency* from the various training they provided them, which helped the women develop new skills (theme 7, sub-theme 7.2). They also provided the venue for the women to *create collective social cohesion* by bringing them together through the development of their hosting enterprise (section 7.2). In addition, they provided the opportunity for the women to increase their *self-confidence and self-esteem*. This was evident from the women developing a passion for their hosting enterprise, building stronger personalities, and interacting with and educating the cruise tourists (theme 7, sub-themes 7.1/7.3; theme 8, sub-themes 8.1/8.2/8.3).

However, there were various significant negative effects from the tourism structure, which had implications on potentially empowering the women. One is that the tourism structure *provided limited support* for their enterprise. This was evident from the initial start-up support that the women had from the tourism development company and [Redaction: Name of organization removed due to confidential information.] which only lasted for a short period. This is also evident from the difficulty the women have in forming networks and the lack of industry cooperation (section, 7.2; theme 3, sub-themes 3.1/3.2; theme 10, sub-theme 10.2). As the tourism development company and [Redaction: Name of organization removed due to confidential information.] initiated the enterprise idea, they played a major role in *enforcing existing gender segregation*, which led to major implications for the women, their families and the community, as was discussed earlier (section 7.2; theme 2, sub-themes 2.1/2.2/2.3). They were also responsible for *promoting the stereotypes of Muslim women* (section 7.2; theme 4, sub-theme 4.3; theme 9, sub-theme 9.1) and *the objectification of the women* that occurred with the tourists (section 7.2; theme 4, sub-theme 4.2). Moreover, although the tourism development company and [Redaction: Name of organization removed due to confidential information.] brought the women of the community together for a collective purpose, this proved to be challenging as the women struggled with *collective work cohesion* to run the enterprise. This is evident from the enterprise being primarily run by one member of the group and the other members having less time for the hosting enterprise (theme 6, sub-themes 6.1/6.2).

When it came to the reactions of local tour operators and international cruise companies to the women's enterprise, they *resisted the women's abilities to develop their enterprise.* This is because the women's enterprise challenged existing tourism power structures in forming new networks to develop their enterprise (theme3, sub-theme 3.1). Collectively, all of the above main players in the tourism structure *imposed laborious work on the women.* This was evident when it came to the women dealing with the tourists' reluctance and hesitancy hesitant towards their hosting services (theme 4, sub-theme 4.1; theme 10, sub-theme 10.3). Despite the tourism development company and [Redaction: Name of organization removed due to confidential information.] intention to economically empower the women through developing the hosting enterprise, there

was *a lack of economic viability* for the women due again to the difficulty of forming networks and the lack of industry cooperation from the tourism structure (theme 5, sub-themes 5.1/5.2; theme 10, sub-theme 10.4).

Figure 7: The tourism structure factor effects (the hosting group)

The tourism structure

(-)

Provides limited support

Enforces existing gender segregation

Promotes stereotypes of Muslim women

Strengthens individual agency

Create collective social cohesion

Objectifies the women

Lack of economic viability

(+)

Increases self-confidence and self-esteem

Lack of collective work cohesion

Imposes laborious work on the women

Resistance towards the women
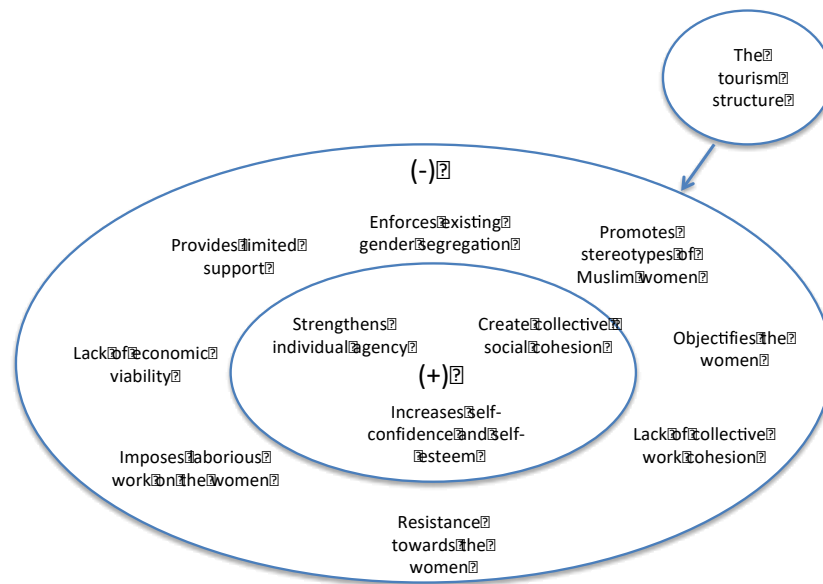
And lastly, the sixth factor is the women themselves. The women themselves play a major role in constructing their lived experience and empowerment. This was through their own choices, perceptions, behaviour and actions but these were influenced by the above five factors. On a positive note, the women played a role in *strengthening their individual agency* by using their existing skills and personal interests in their enterprise (theme 1, sub-theme 1.2). As revealed in the challenges section, the women had a critical self-understanding and awareness of their reality and conditions as Muslim Omani women when it comes to their involvement in their enterprise and the causes of their conditions. This understanding and awareness, in turn, influenced how they presented their selves in the public and private sphere in order to *build autonomy* within their embedded environment. This was evident as they presented themselves as hostesses and promoted themselves as modern Omani women in the enterprise, while they maintained the boundaries set by their families

and the community (theme 2, sub-themes 2.1/2.2; theme 9, sub-themes 9.1/9.2/9.3). The women's critical self-understanding and awareness of their position also influenced their choices and pattern of behaviours. Thus, the women's choices and behaviour is seen *as a form of resistance*, not only to the socio-cultural norms and restrictions they are embedded in but also towards the cruise tourists' stereotyping. This is evident when it comes to their choice to be involved in the enterprise, rectifying the stereotypes and through the deliberate actions they choose to take (theme 1, sub-theme 1.1; theme 9, sub-themes 9.1/9.2). Besides the positive effects from their critical understanding and awareness, they *created their own collective social cohesion* as they developed a strong sisterhood by helping, supporting and understanding each other (theme 7, sub-theme 7.4). Thus, when taking these positive effects as a whole, the women seem to have created their own private enclave from the enterprise in which they can work and act freely.

However, there were various significant negative effects for the women, which had implications on their potential to be empowered through their enterprise. One is that they *conformed to their families existing patriarchal power*, as it was still important for them to gain their family support and adhere to their families' boundaries, conditions and restrictions in order to pursue with their enterprise (theme 2, sub-theme 2.1; theme 9, sub-theme 9.3). They also *conformed to the community's existing conservative power*, as they had to adhere to the community's expectations while being involved in the enterprise, and continue to pursue their acceptance (theme 2, sub-theme 2.2; theme 9, sub-theme 9.3; theme 10, sub-theme 10.1). In addition, they *lacked collective work cohesion* when it came to working together as a group, which, in turn, affects the viability of the enterprise (theme 6, sub-themes 6.1/6.2). This was evident from the enterprise being run by one member of the group and the other members having less time for it.

Figure 8: The women factor effects (the hosting group)
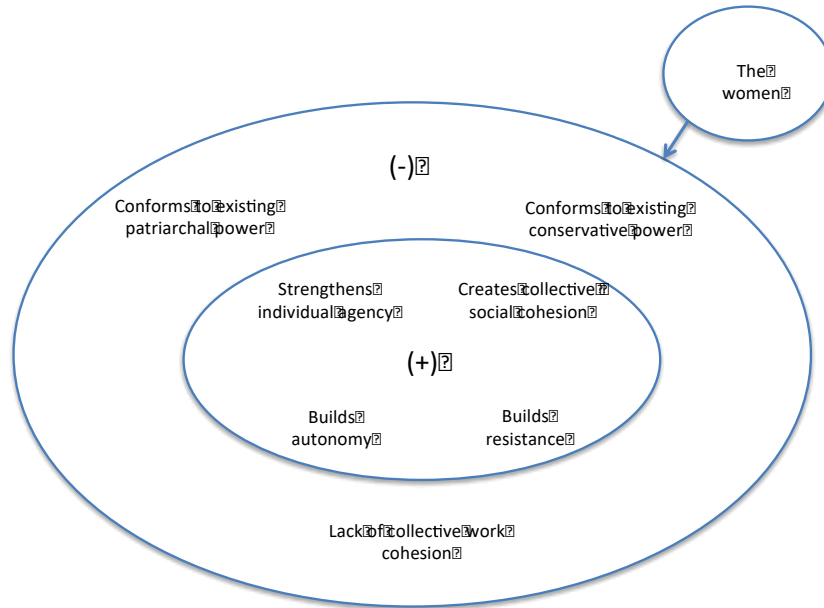
The women

(-)

Conforms to existing patriarchal power

Conforms to existing conservative power

Strengthens individual agency

Creates collective social cohesion

(+)

Builds autonomy

Builds resistance

Lack of collective work cohesion

Taken as a whole, these broad factors along with their effects combine to present the lived experience and empowerment of the hosting group. A summary of the positive and negative effects of each factor is given in table 12 below.

Table 12: Factors affecting the hosting group's lived experiences and empowerment

| Factors | Positive effects | Negative effects |
|---|---|---|
| The family | | Enforces existing patriarchal power |
| The community | | Enforces existing conservative power |
| The nature of tourism enterprise work (hosting) | Strengthens individual agency<br><br>Increases self-confidence and self-esteem<br><br>Creates collective social cohesion<br><br>Increases status, respect and prestige | Enforces existing gender segregation<br><br>Promotes stereotypes of Muslim women<br><br>Objectifies the women<br><br>Imposes laborious work on the women<br><br>Lack of economic viability |
| The cruise tourist | Increases self-confidence and self-esteem<br><br>Strengthens individual agency | Imposes laborious work on the women<br><br>Lack of economic viability<br><br>Stereotypes the women<br><br>Objectifies the women |
| The tourism structure | Strengthens individual agency<br><br>Creates collective social cohesion<br><br>Increases self-confidence and self-esteem | Provides limited support<br><br>Enforces existing gender segregation<br><br>Promotes stereotypes of Muslim women<br><br>Objectifies the women<br><br>Lack of collective work cohesion<br><br>Resistance towards the women<br><br>Imposes laborious work on the women<br><br>Lack of economic viability |
| The women | Strengthens individual agency<br><br>Builds autonomy<br><br>Builds resistance<br><br>Creates collective social cohesion | Conforms to existing patriarchal power<br><br>Conforms to existing conservative power<br><br>Lack of collective work cohesion |

These factors are re-presented in figure 9 below to display how they influence the women's experience and empowerment in relation to the above discussion.

Figure 9: Construction of the hosting group lived experiences and empowerment
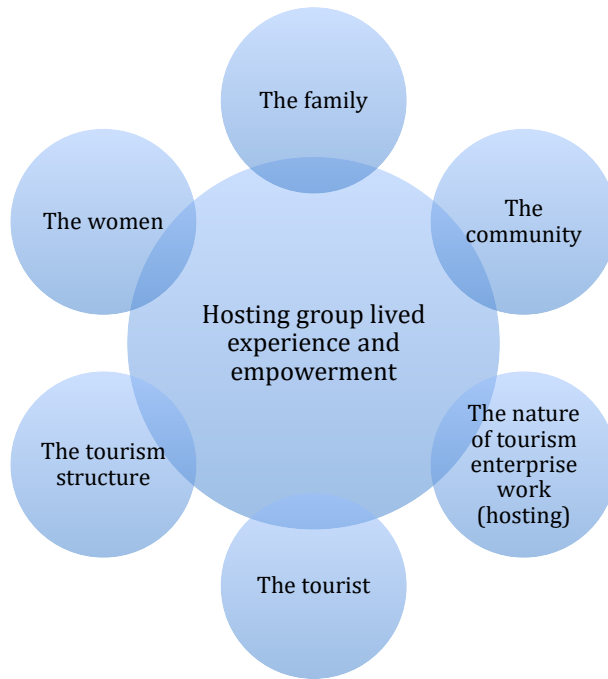


Overall, these are the factors along with their pertaining effects that emerged when reviewing the hosting group information and their narrative.

## 7.6 Conclusion

This chapter presented the hosting group case study. I provided important background information about the formation and nature of the hosting enterprise and the women who participated in it. I also illustrated how the women got involved in tourism entrepreneurship and revealed the various challenges they encountered with their hosting enterprise. These included operating within a patriarchal and conservative environment, operating in a difficult tourism business environment, hosting the tourists, and dealing with economic stress and burden. Moreover, I revealed the main benefits that the women were able to gain from the hosting enterprise. These included the importance of the hosting enterprise to the women, developing cultural exchange and promoting the identity of modern Omani women.

In addition, I presented the group's outlook on the hosting enterprise. At the end, I identified and discussed the main factors that affected the hosting group's lived experience and empowerment. This included the family, the community, the nature of the tourism enterprise work, the cruise tourist, the tourism structure and the women.

The next chapter presents the sewing group case study.

# Chapter 8: Findings: The sewing group

## 8.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to present the sewing group case study. First, I present background information about the sewing enterprise and the women in the sewing group. Then I provide a thematic narrative based on the lived experiences of the women. Later, I identify and discuss the main concepts that emerged from the thematic narrative. I conclude with a recap of the main topics discussed in this chapter.

## 8.2 Background information about the sewing enterprise

The sewing enterprise is located in a coastal fishing village in Oman. An Omani woman from the village along with other local and foreign volunteers originally founded the sewing enterprise in order to help the village women from low-income backgrounds. The sewing enterprise was developed under the supervision of the Ministry of Social Development. The main idea of the enterprise was based on providing an outlet for the local women to develop their existing creative skills and at the same time to be a source of income for the women. Thus, the enterprise was formed based on developing the women's sewing skills. It was initiated in 2004 and has since then been successfully running for more than 10 years. Currently, there are about 25 women involved in this group. The women come from different age groups and martial statuses.

Donations were provided by local organisations to buy the sewing machines and to provide various training for the women, such as English language, computer skills, and so on. In 2010, the founders gave the women full collective ownership of the enterprise and they now run it independently. The group's income is used to cover the expenses of the enterprise (rent, electricity, water, materials, and so on) and to pay themselves a salary. The women earn a monthly salary

**Redacted:** Sentence removed due to confidential information. , depending on the number of sewing products they produce and other related enterprise work.

The group's workshop location is based in a rented house in the village. The workshop is made up of several rooms, which includes a room to display the sewing products that also acts as an office, a room with sewing machines, a room to store and cut the cloth and store other sewing items, a room with traditional Omani garments for photo taking, a kitchen and a main traditional sitting room for the women to gather in and to receive visitors.

Picture 7: Side of the workshop with a sign

**Redaction:** Picture removed due to confidential reasons.
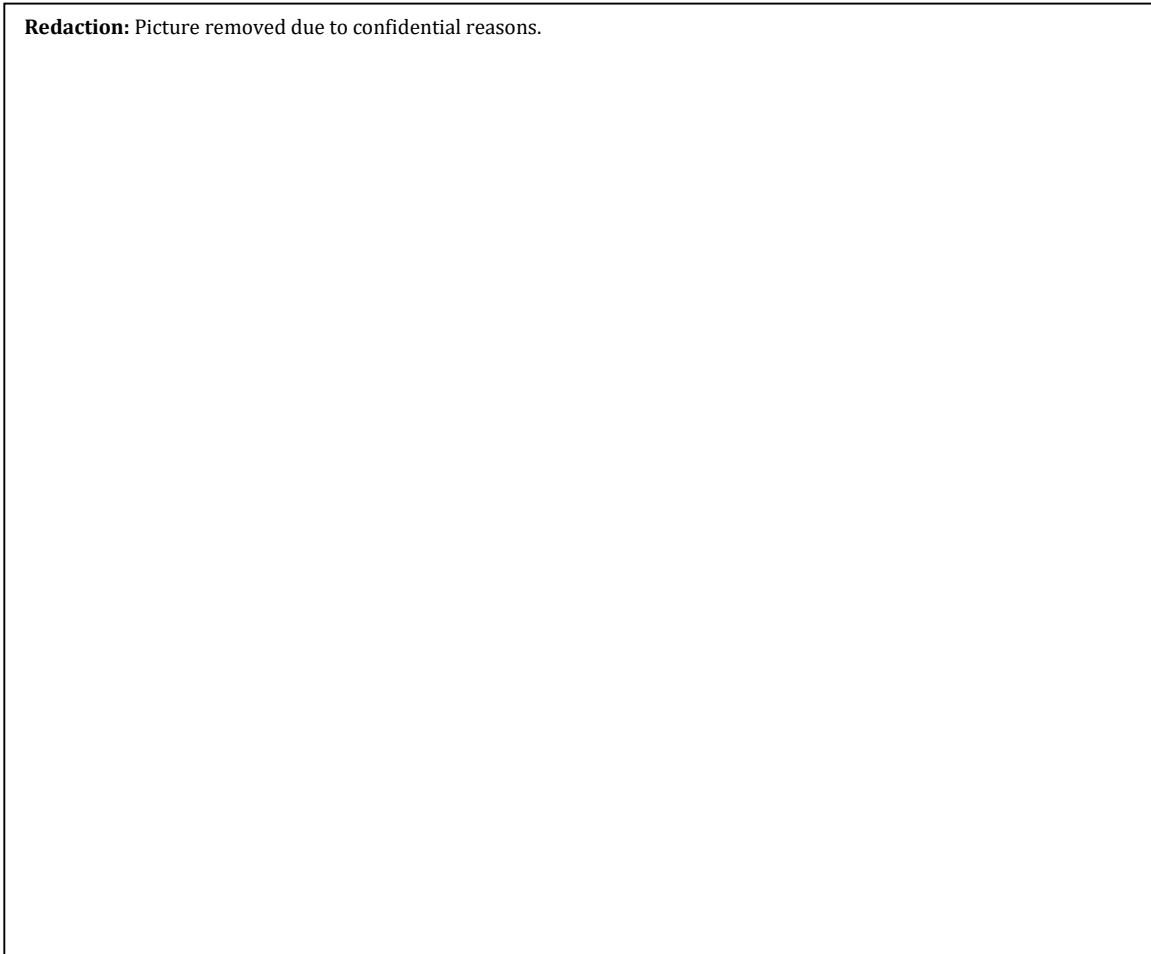
Picture 7: Entrance to the workshop

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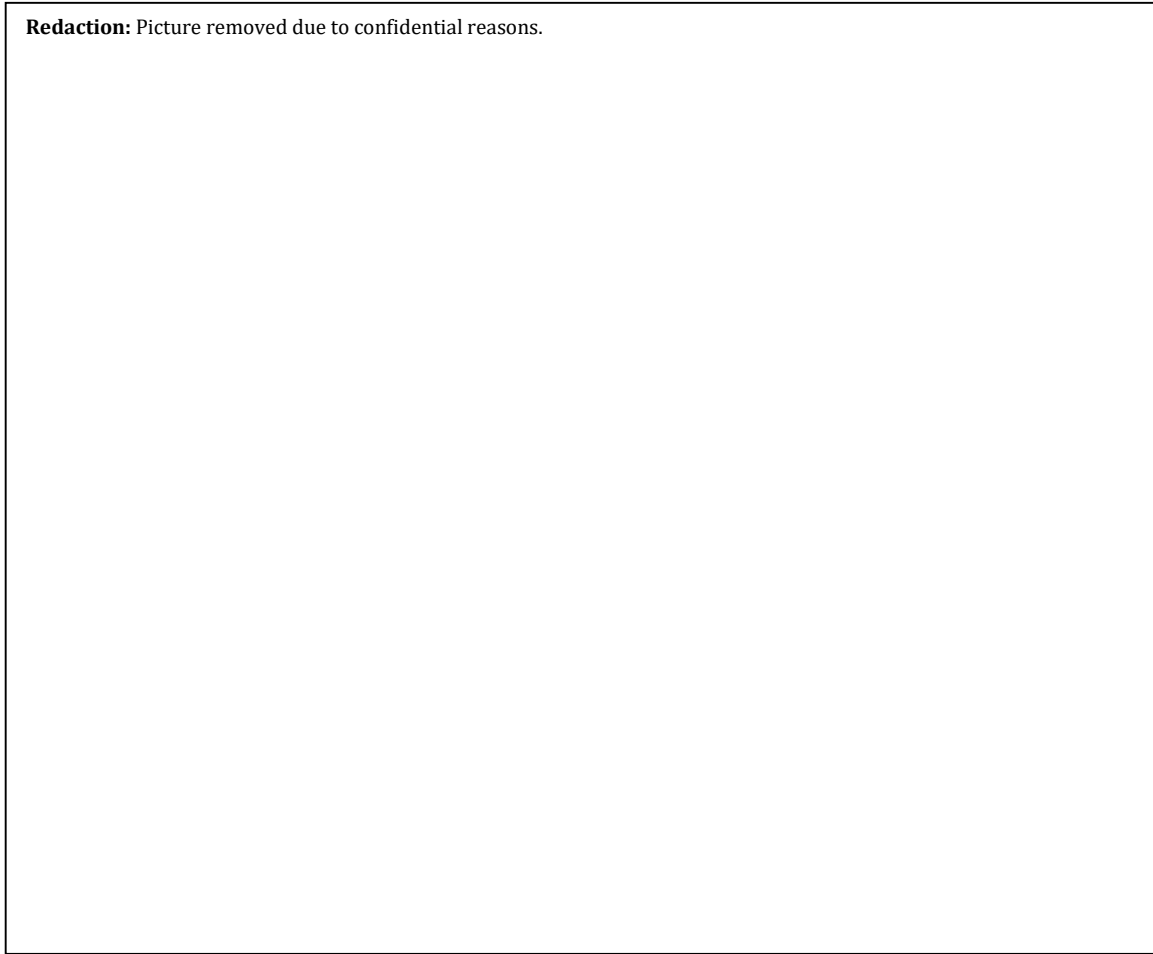
Picture 8: A room with traditional Omani garments for photo taking

**Redaction:** Picture removed due to confidently reasons.
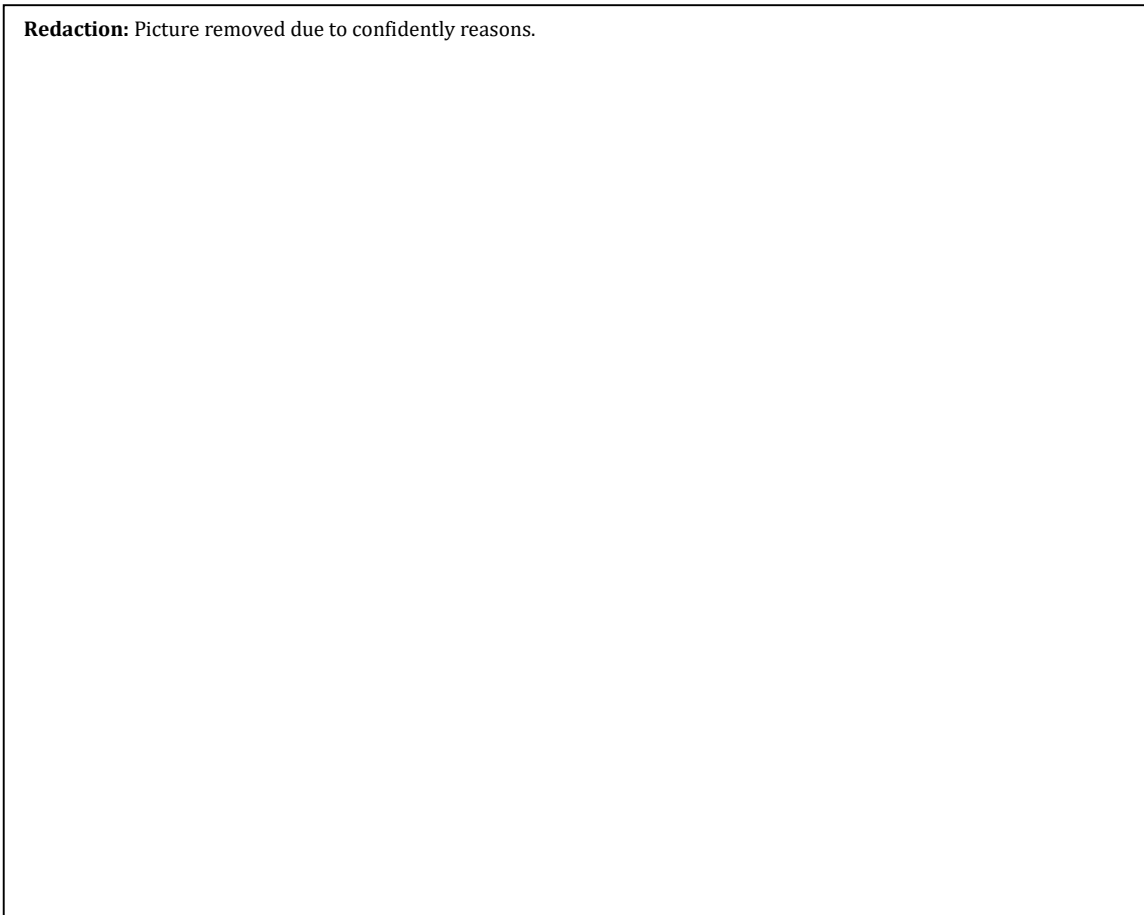
The women sew various types of cloth-made souvenir products that reflect Omani culture. The products are made using mostly sewing machines and occasionally hand sewing. This includes shopping bags, mobile phone cases, cushion covers, tissue boxes, CD covers, water bottle covers, and so on. With the increase of tourism in Oman over the past few years, the group have been successful in selling their products to tourists and they have earned a popular reputation as a key tourist attraction. The sewed products are largely sold from their workshop, as well as from various five=-star hotels, galleries, the duty-free shop at the international airport, and local and international events. Besides the tourists being their main market, the women also often receive custom orders from various government bodies and private companies. During the tourist season, the women receive visits from tourists at their workshop to view their enterprise and products, and to meet the women.

Picture 9: Display of the women's bags at a five-star hotel in Oman

**Redaction:** Picture removed due to confidential reasons.

Picture 10: Tourists viewing the sewing products

**Redaction:** Picture removed due to confidential reasons.
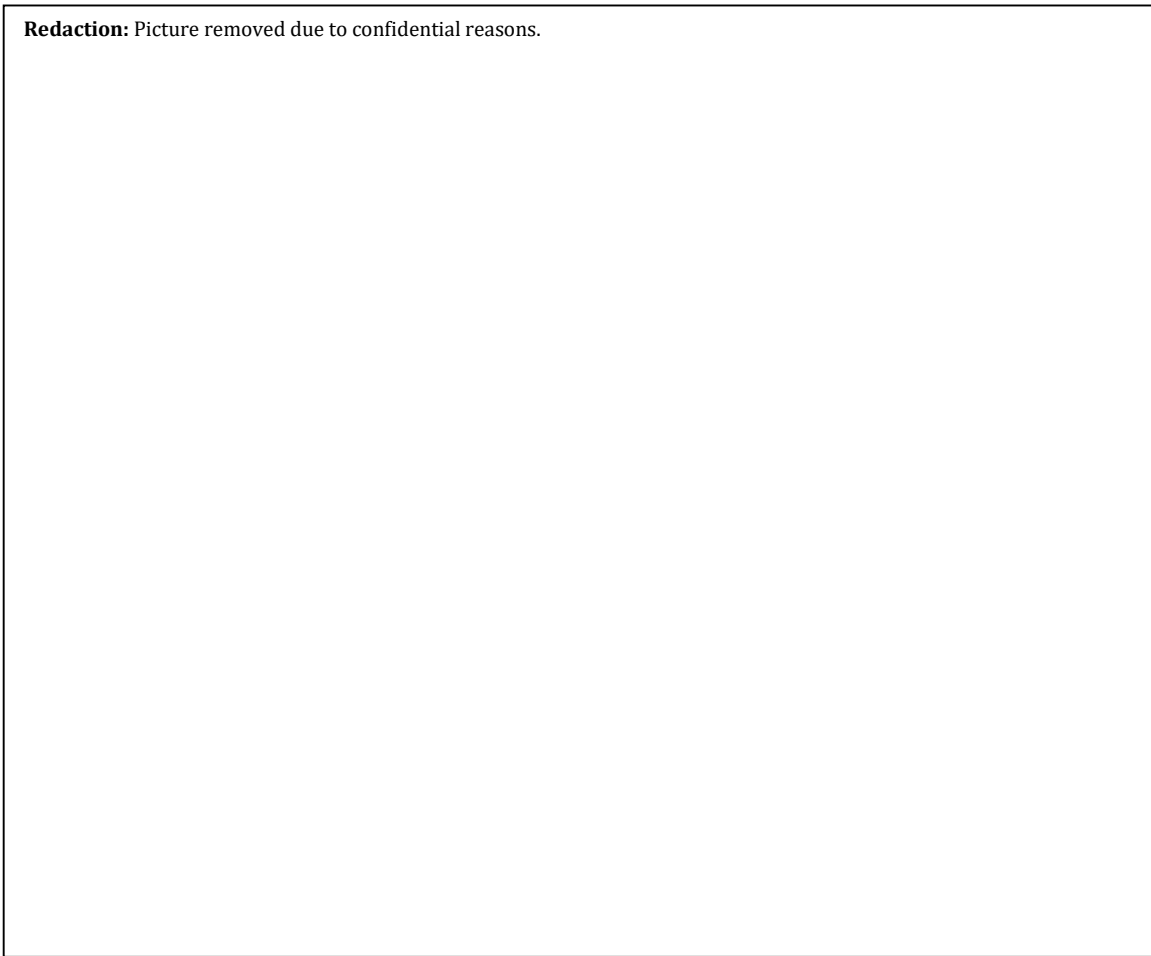
Besides selling their products to tourists, the women also provide traditional Omani hosting to groups of tourists at their workshop in conjunction with local tour operators. The women charge a fee for their hosting service, which depends on the arrangements requested by local tour operators. Typically, the hosting includes serving a traditional Omani meal, Omani coffee, dates and sweets, trying on traditional Omani garments for photo taking, and applying henna tattoos. The hosting that they provide to tourists is another opportunity for the women to sell their sewing products to the tourists.

Picture 11: A hosting gathering with a group of French female tourists

| |
|---|
| **Redaction:** Picture removed due to confidential reasons. |

## 8.3 Information about the women

The following table is a summary of information about the women in the group that I got to know and participated with during the fieldwork. The women's names are not identified, to protect their identity and privacy, and pseudonyms are assigned instead.

Table 13: Information about the women in the sewing group

**Redaction:** Table information removed due to confidential reasons.

## 8.4 Thematic narrative

The following narrative illustrates the lived experiences of the sewing group by using themes and sub-themes, as displayed in table 14 below.

Table 14: Sewing group themes and sub-themes

| Themes | Sub Themes |
|---|---|
| 1. Getting into the sewing enterprise | 1.1 Taking up a new opportunity |
| | 1.2 Using sewing skills |
| | 1.3 Having family and community support |
| 2. The struggle to sew as work | 2.1 Having limited work |
| | 2.2 Dealing with work pressure |
| | 2.3 Mobility issues |
| | 2.4 Sewing at home |
| | 2.5 Enforcing the sewing skill |
| 3. Economic stress and burden | 3.1 Making low and unstable income |
| | 3.2 Effect on economic independence and family support |
| 4. Collective work effort | 4.1 Unequal distribution of work |
| | 4.2 Lack of group cooperation |
| 5. Maintaining domestic responsibilities | 5.1 Sewing and childcare |
| | 5.2 Sewing and housework |
| 6. Sewing in a desirable working environment | 6.1 Having a flexible work place and schedule |
| | 6.2 Balancing domestic responsibilities and sewing work |
| 7. Importance of the sewing enterprise to the women | 7.1 Passion for the sewing enterprise |
| | 7.2 Developing new skills |
| | 7.3 Gaining sewing experience |
| | 7.4 Building gradual economic independence |
| | 7.5 Building a stronger personality |
| | 7.6 Becoming popular and famous |
| 8. Developing a sisterhood unity | 8.1 Having social gatherings |
| | 8.2 Building friendships |
| 9. Developing cultural exchange | 9.1 Interacting with tourists |
| | 9.2 Educating tourists |
| | 9.3 Promoting their modern identity |

| 10. Seeking sustainability | 10.1 Building strong team cooperation |
| | 10.2 Growing bigger |
| 11. Taking different future paths | 11.1 Continuing with the enterprise |
| | 11.2 Seeking for better opportunities |

**The Beginning**

**Theme 1: Getting into the sewing enterprise**

The women's involvement in the sewing enterprise was influenced by two main motivational factors.

*1.1 Taking up a new opportunity*

Initially, when the sewing enterprise was launched in the village, word spread about it and the door was open to any of the women in the village who would like to join it. For example:

> One lady sent me a text message, a lady called Inam told me that they [the founders and existing members] were looking for ladies, they were teaching them sewing and they were going to open a project at this house.

> (Karima)

> The project I knew about it from my sister who lives in the area, my sister heard from there that there was a sewing project.

> (Ibtisam)

Many of the women told me that they were first unsure about the enterprise and that they did not know what to expect. Their decision to be involved in the enterprise was mainly as a chance to take up a new opportunity, as the following women describe:

At the beginning, I was afraid and like this, and then I said OK, so I came [to the workshop], I want to them [the founders and existing members] and they took me in.

(Tahira)

So I said first that I would not go [to the workshop]. Then one day, in the name of God, I put my trust I will go to the workshop so I see how it is.

(Halima)

To be honest it was [new to me], they [the founders and existing members] told me it was about sewing and like this, so I said maybe I will go and try it out, maybe I will see it as something good and like this, I go and try, I have nothing to lose, so I came [to the workshop].

(Majda)

So I said to myself, "Why don't I also bring in an income, let me see what is appropriate for me and what is not appropriate for me". I knew how to sew, so when I came, I saw Latifa [previous member], I asked her, "So is there work?". She said, "Yes, there is work", so I said to her, "OK, I want to work, I mean I want to know how this is done", and she said, "This is about sewing".

(Aaida)

Before the launch of the enterprise, most of the women had not previously worked. They were simply in their homes, confined with their daily domestic responsibilities, and had no available and suitable work opportunities for them to pursue. Fatina shared her background in the following encounter:

As I helped Fatina with loosening the thread from a bag, I took the opportunity to get to know her well. Redacted: Sentence removed due to confidential information. I ask her if she had attended school. She told me she had never been to school. She had been working with the sewing

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group for 6 years. She had never worked before. This was her first ever job. She had always been a housewife.

<div align="right">(Field Note 5, 10 November 2013)</div>

Lama also shared a similar background:

> Yes, my sisters came first, and then later on they told me "it's nice [the sewing enterprise], come, we are just sitting at home, it's better for us to learn, slowly, slowly". Because I never worked before, I was just at home.

<div align="right">(Lama)</div>

A few of the women had attempted to find jobs in the past. However, it was difficult for them to find a job due to their lack of qualifications. Some of these women had only a high school diploma, while others had not completed school. As they explained:

> I looked for a job but during that time, it was not easy... I mean I registered for a job search once but for years it didn't happen [finding a job], I applied but it didn't happen, and then later on I didn't apply much [lost interest]. I am not the type that actively looks for a job to be honest, but I registered with those looking for a job at the Ministry of Manpower.

<div align="right">(Ghania)</div>

> No, there was no work for me; it was my lack of my qualifications that was not helping me.

<div align="right">(Safia)</div>

For those who could find a job, they were only able to work for a short time due to difficult situations that they encountered. **Redaction:** paragraph removed due to sensitive information.

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I made my way down to the workshop with Janan and Rajiha. As we passed through the display room, Bahina was busy assisting two foreign ladies in viewing and selecting the sewing products. We then went to the material room and offered to help Rajiha with cutting up the material. In the material room, there was a large tall role of material placed at the side of the room. There was also a large wooden table placed in the middle room, where the cutting work took place. As we measured the material, I asked Rajiha if she had worked before. She told me that she had worked previously for a short time, about two months for an insurance company. The company had a selling booth at a shopping mall, where herself and another lady used to work together at the booth selling insurance packages. I asked her if she was already married when she worked for the insurance company and she told me she was. She recalled that when she started working, they had a kind manager who treated them well. Then another company bought the insurance company and a new manager was brought in. She commented that this is when the problem started.

**Redaction:** paragraph removed due to sensitive information.

She told me she immediately quit the job. She remembered her previous colleagues begging her to come back to work but she refused after the inappropriate treatment she had received from the new manager. Since that experience, she had not worked and remained at home.

(Field Note 26, 29 January 2014)

Thus, with the lack of appropriate work opportunities in the job market, the sewing enterprise provided a new opportunity for the women to be out of their homes, to have work and to do something beneficial for themselves.

*1.2 Using sewing skills*

Most of the women were able to use their existing sewing skills, which made it attractive and easy for them to get involved in the enterprise. Many of the women had learned to sew during their childhood from their mothers, at school, or from their own previous sewing work. For example, Ibtisam learned sewing from a young age and it developed into a personal interest for her, as was revealed in the following vignette:

> Then I asked Ibtisam where she learned to sew. She told me that she learned to sew herself since she was young and it was an interest that she always had at a young age. She started off sewing by learning to stich jalbai [traditional Arab maxi dress]. She said she used to stich most of her dresses herself.

> (Field Note 24, 20 January 2014)

Dalal learned sewing from her previous job at a sewing factory:

> I learned sewing, I worked before. I worked previously in a factory for sewing, so I heard of the sewing project but I didn't come right away, to be honest. My mother came, she registered me with the project and she talked to them [the founder and existing members], so right away, thank God, they told me to come, so I came and they taught me. I already knew how to sew, so they just taught me how to make the bags and this, so thank God.

> (Dalal)

A few of the women had no previous sewing experience, and they only gained these skills after joining the enterprise and received training from other experienced women in the group, as the following women explained:

> I didn't know how to sew at all. Also the sewing machine, I didn't know how to use it at all, I learned everything through the other ladies, they helped me.

> (Karima)

Never [have not sewed before], I tell you. So I saw the ladies sewing and I started to sew, slowly, slowly. At the beginning, I found the sewing difficult, I was sewing wrong and like this, I then said to myself, "I don't want [to sew], I don't know it", and then slowly, slowly I became good after practicing.

(Qahira)

Therefore, the sewing enterprise opportunity was accessible to all women regardless of their sewing experience. Nevertheless, all of the women had to learn to sew the products and to use the sewing machine. Comments on this included:

I worked first on one type of basic bag. At first, I didn't know how to make it, by the second day I knew how to make it. They [the existing members] said, "Do like this and like that". I did it and learned quickly.

(Fatina)

It was first, I don't know how to sew, when I came, I didn't know anything, "Sew this bag!". Bahira gave me a piece of material so that I can learn how to sew, yes, a small piece. She told me to make one type of basic bag, so I learned, sometimes it came out nicely but as you know it, it improves. Yes, it's a bit difficult but it requires a bit of practice, a bit, thank God, there is improvement [laughing].

(Lama)

Thus, the women had to put in a lot of practice and effort to sew the products properly.

*1.3 Having family and community support*
In addition, all of the women had their families' support and encouragement to join the sewing enterprise. As they described:

Thank God, they [the family] encourage me, it's good, they tell me it's good that I do it [the sewing enterprise], you get to see people, I mean you change the environment instead of being inside the house, sitting at home.

(Janan)

Yes, she told me, "Go and see", and until today my mother still encourages me, she encourages me a lot. She told me "It's better for you to go [to the workshop] and like this". I mean, she helps me with sewing the tissue covers, she helps me with the sewing, she makes the closings [closes up her sewing products].

(Azza)

In particular, the married women emphasised the help that they received from their husbands with their sewing enterprise work, explaining:

Once I brought home work to do the threading, he was sitting here [the living room] with me and doing it with me.

(Fatina)

We discussed among us about the day's evening event at the German embassy the group were participating in and agreed to meet on time. Bahira then joked about the invitation cards, as they were addressed to Aaida and Bahira plus spouses. Bahira joked about bringing their husbands along. Aaida then said, "Let the husbands stay at home so they can look after the kids while we go out for the event".

(Field Note 5, 10 November 2013)

Besides their families, there was also support for the sewing enterprise within the community, as Najiha recalled:

Yes, my neighbour, she is the one who told me about it [the sewing enterprise]. She told me, "Instead of you just being at home, sitting, and you

know how to use the sewing machine, go there [the sewing enterprise], it's better for you and your children, your circumstances are difficult, you are just sitting at home, go there for a bit".

<div align="right">(Najiha)</div>

Karima also recalled a similar experience:

I was not doing anything, I was just sitting at home, I didn't have any work at all, I also didn't know how to sew at all, and then one lady from the village sent me a message, a lady called Inam told me that they looking for ladies, they are teaching them sewing and they will open a project at a house.

<div align="right">(Karima)</div>

Thus, the women's existing sewing skills along with their family and community support helped and motivated them to get involved in the enterprise.

**Challenges**

However, the women encountered a number of challenges associated with their enterprise and the environment that they operated within.

**Theme 2: The struggle to sew as work**

The first challenge that the women encountered was the struggle to sew as work, due to various issues.

*2.1 Having limited work*

One of the main issues that all of the women talked about in relation to their sewing work was the limited available daily work. The level of available daily work was dependent on the need to stock up their products according to the sales made through tourism establishments and tourist purchases. It also depended on custom orders they received from various tourism-related establishments, government bodies and corporations that they deal with. These sales, purchases and orders were inconsistent and unstable, as Majida described the situation:

I mean like now we have completed a month without work, which means there will be no money, like, for example, if you are working at the workshop, for sure your dependence will be on the workshop money. I mean, all your needs will be met through your work, so currently it is not possible for you to bind yourself to a particular place [referring to the sewing enterprise] where sometimes there is work and other times there is no work.

(Majida)

The following social encounter reveals the effect of the limited work that was available at the workshop:

The ladies arranged to visit their colleague Azza in the evening. The ladies hired a bus to take them to the area where she lived. As the ladies got off the bus one-by-one, I greeted the ladies and I saw Najiha. Najiha asked me if I went to the workshop that day. I mentioned to her that I didn't go that day. Najiha had also not gone to the workshop, and she said, "There is no work at the workshop, so I stayed at home today". As we sat in the sitting room, Najiha asked the ladies if they went to the workshop today. Aaida, Karima and Ghania mentioned that they were all at the workshop and asked Najiha why she didn't go that day. Najiha replied, "There is no work, that's why I didn't come". Aaida mentioned that there would be work on Sunday, as they were expecting a new order for their products. We prepared to leave Azza's house and the ladies headed back to the bus to go back to their homes. Najiha asked me if I would be going to the workshop tomorrow. I mentioned to her that I would be going next week, on Sunday. Najiha then said, "I will not be going to the workshop this week because there is no work. If God will and I am still alive, I will come to the workshop on Sunday as well".

(Field Note 7, 12 November 2013)

This lack of steady work created a sense of worry, stress, and disappointment for the women, as they often heard that there is no available work, often for long

periods. It also led the women to stay at their homes for a longer length of time with no work, which limited the feelings of productivity and satisfaction they gained from their sewing work.

*2.2 Dealing with work pressure*

The women said that they expressed difficulties dealing with work pressure in finishing up with their work on time and having tight deadlines to meet when there was work available, especially when they received large orders. This often meant that they had to work for longer hours during the day, and felt exhausted and tired because of it. As Lama experienced,

> Sometimes with the big orders, like that big order we had before, we worked on it until night. Yes, I worked on it until after night prayer, we worked in stages [shifts], some ladies leave and then others come, they [the companies] wanted it urgently done, they are on our heads that they want it, and I am still not yet done, it was nearly 9pm, and the other ladies had have already left. I sat alone in the workshop, I stay so that I could finish [laughing], I finish the bags, they wanted.
>
> (Lama)

The following vignette reveals the work pressure the women often encountered with the available workload:

> While we chatted in the packaging room (myself, Bahira, Halima, Karima, Rajiha and Qahira), Bahira asked Qahira if she had finished with her current work portion. She replied that she was nearly done. Bahira then told her that was good because there was more new work that they would need to work on soon. Qahira and the other ladies had lately been exhausted with the continuous work orders that they had to complete. Qahira laughed out loud, "What is this, this is sewing for life?", as she complained that she needed a break. Rajiha also joined in the conversation, saying that she had been

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exhausted from the continuous labour work she had lately been getting sore hands from cutting the material.

<div align="right">(Field Note 49, 14 May 2014)</div>

The work pressure was also felt by the supervisors of the enterprise, who had a wide range of responsibilities to run the enterprise, which often led them to work constantly. Bahira explained:

> I'd say it's tiring, to be honest, the responsibility [being a supervisor] is tiring. I am given the responsibility to check/proof the sewed bags, to check on the workshop, the cleaning of the workshop and like this, so these are my tasks, and the designs and I train the ladies, internal things, you know.

<div align="right">(Bahira)</div>

Thus, all of the women in the sewing group felt pressure from their sewing work.

*2.3 Mobility issues*

Moreover, mobility was an issue that some of the women encountered in relation to their sewing work, as they were unable to drive and often lacked access to daily transport to the workshop, as is illustrated below:

> Halima prepares to leave for the day. She said she has to hitch a ride today to go home, as Bahira was not in the workshop today to give her a ride back home. She said it is fine to hitch a ride. She explains that she was able to get a ride yesterday from a teenager to drop her home.

<div align="right">(Field Note 15, 09 December 2013)</div>

Fatina told me that she knew how to drive, she had a driving licence and a car, but now her husband used the car for his taxi business. Her husband used to work at the British Embassy for 40 years but he had retired. He now worked at a private company in the morning, and in the evening he worked as a taxi driver. Therefore, because of her husband's use of the car, she struggled to come to the workshop every day because it was far to walk from her home and it was difficult to get a taxi in her area to bring her to the workshop. She asked me to come and see where she lived, and we agreed that I would drop her home later so that I could see her place.

(Field Note 5, 10 November 2013)

With the lack of mobility for some of the women, this made it difficult for them to attend the workshop on a daily basis.

*2.4 Sewing at home*

Due to the issue of mobility that several women encountered in being able to go to the workshop on a daily basis, as well as the pressure they had from their work, as discussed earlier, this led many of the women to work from home, as well as to take their work home in order to complete it on time. Comments on this included:

Because I like to go there [the workshop], maybe I don't have a car, what can I do then? I go to the workshop, take the bags and I bring them here to sew them from home.

(Ibtisam)

I prefer to work here at the workshop, but still I take my work home. You know what, at home we go do this [more sewing work] and I iron the Omani dresses, you noticed that I iron them at home, this alone takes time, I take work home to continue with it so I pressure myself.

(Ghania)

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Thus, the women are placed in a continuous laborious cycle of working both at home and in the workshop.

*2.5 Enforcing the sewing skills*

Due to the nature of the enterprise, the women were required to sew and to produce various products. Many of the women talked about the difficult details of sewing some of the regular products, as well as the custom orders that they often received. For example:

> As I sat next to Ghania, I watched her make the Omani dress embroidery for the bags. I asked her how she was able to stick the embroidery onto the bags. She took a role of thin material and showed me the material that she used to stick on the embroidery, which was then stitched onto the bags. She told me that the material sticks on the embroidery by ironing it directly onto it. There was a pile of Omani dress embroidery on her table and I reached out to look at it. She then showed me how she ironed the sticky material onto the embroidery. She told me that it takes a lot of time to make these Omani dress embroideries. The dress first needs to be cut out of a cotton-type coloured material. She drew a picture of a dress on the material and then cut it out. This alone took a lot of time. She did most of the dress cutting at home and she brought them to the workshop to embroidery the dress on the sewing machine.

> (Field Note 3, 06 November 2013)

This process often led the women to make mistakes on their sewed products, which required them to either amend their products or for their products to be sometimes rejected and unused. For example:

> We returned to the workshop. Aaida noticed Janan in the sewing room and went to greet her. Janan told her that she had finished with the work that was assigned to her. Aaida asked her to leave the bags that she had finished with the other bags in the packaging room. Aaida then went back to her apartment

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to finish the cooking for the hosting. Rajiha and Dalal had also came into the workshop to help with the hosting, and they brought down the serving plates, cutlery, the coffee and teapot from Aaida's apartment. Janan was not staying for the hosting and was preparing to leave. Aaida then came down to help finish preparing the buffet area for the hosting. She told Janan that Rajiha had noticed some mistakes on the bags that she had made and these had been kept aside to be fixed.

<div align="right">(Field Note 30, 09 February 2014)</div>

As a result, the difficult details of sewing lead to Rajiha and Majida to switch their roles from sewing to cutting in order to have easier and more comfortable work,

> I stopped sewing for nearly three years, I stopped but I didn't stop to stop. From time to time I tried to sew a bit, it is right that the income is more with sewing, but I felt that cutting for me, I felt it is good, the work of cutting and like this, I feel that it is for me, I am very comfortable with it, also the sewing but the cutting I am more comfortable with it.

<div align="right">(Rajiha)</div>

For a few other women, it also led them to not wanting to sew all the products, especially the difficult ones. Comments on this included:

> I don't get involved [with sewing all the products], if I don't know the Omani bag and I don't know what else, like this, the tissue cover, I don't involve myself, I see what orders come and like this you see. Like me and Fatina, Ibtisam, the poor things, Aaida says… Aaida, poor thing, says "Try", Bahira says "Try", we try to make it but it comes out wrong, and then it doesn't look good on us.

<div align="right">(Najiha)</div>

Therefore, the sewing work was not easy for the women to do. Nevertheless, the women had to sew, one way or the other, as it was part of their livelihood. Thus, the sewing skill was forced on the women.

**Theme 3: Economic stress and burden**

The other major challenge that the women in the sewing enterprise had to manage was the economic stress and burden that resulted from their sewing work.

*3.1 Making low and unstable income*

All of the women talked about the low and unstable income that they made from their sewing enterprise. The enterprise income was mainly made based on the available work, which was limited, as mentioned in the previous theme. Thus, the women had no fixed salary from their sewing work and it varied, as Majda explained,

> Yes, because the workshop at the end, there is no constant salary, I mean sometimes there is work and sometimes there is no work and then, of course, you don't want to be in this situation [not having a steady income]. I mean there is no salary, you know, currently life is dependent on money and the workshop, as they say, I won't say it feeds you rice.

> (Majida)

The following vignette reveals Ibatism's disappointment with the low salary she made from her sewing work:

> There were a couple of small boxes in the office room that contained different products. Karima, Halima and Bahira seemed to be updating the stock list, although Karima had already done the stock list two days before. Aaida went to the office desk and pulled out her book, which had information on the type and numbers of products that each woman had produced that week. As it was the end of the week, it was payday that day. Then I sat next to Aaida to watch her prepare the salaries and she called each woman individually to collect their salaries. She then called Ibtisam to collect her salary. Ibtisam stood across the table as Aaida used the calculator, looked at

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her book and informed her of the number of products she produced this week. She informed her that her salary was 7 rials. As Ibtisam took her salary from Aaida's hands, she looked at me to indicate indirectly to me the low salary that she is making from her sewing due to the lack of work, as she had mentioned to me earlier on.

(Field Note 25, 22 January 2014)

Besides the effect of the level of available work on their incomes, the price of their products also had an effect on the low income that they made. The market often pressures them to offer low prices for their products, as displayed in the following encounter **Redaction:** Names of organization removed due to confidential information.

Fatima, who is a member of staff from **Redaction:** Names of organization removed due to confidential information.

, then asked Aaida about the best price she could give for the order. Aaida briefly thought as Fatima waited for her answer. Fatima then told Aaida, "If it is more than 10,000 rials, I will tell you right away – no. It needs to be less than 10,000 rials, the ministry has new budget policies for orders". Aaida seemed disappointed as she was expecting to receive a good profit from the ministry. She explained to Fatima that the sewing work was done by the women themselves and not by foreign labour workers, and that the embroidery on the bags required a lot of effort and work. Fatima seemed understanding and informed Aaida to think about the price and to offer her a good deal, but she reaffirmed again to her that it should not exceed 10,000 rials. Aaida was fine with this arrangement. As we left the ministry, I asked Aaida about her thoughts regarding the meeting and the arrangement she had discussed with Fatima. She told me that she was happy with the meeting and that it would be good that the ministry would deal directly with the group. Aaida then told me the ministry was asking her to lower the price too much, as she needs to make sure that the women benefit from the order. Aaida seemed to be in a conflicting situation between meeting the price of the ministry order and

ensuring that the women would benefit the most from the potential large order that they will receive.

Moreover, tourists do not often buy their products when they visit their workshop, or when they are hosting tourists. The following situation illustrated a lost selling opportunity during a hosting the group provided for a group of tourists:

> The tour guide seemed quite controlling with the tourist group's time at the workshop. He asked us to offer the sweets directly to the tourists, rather than letting them help themselves from the buffet table. As the group finished their sweets, the tour guide asked them to make their way to the tour bus as it was time for their next scheduled visit to another attraction. The group left without purchasing any of the sewing products. When the group left the tour guide thanked us for the hosting, but Aaida didn't seem pleased with the outcome of the hosting and she commented to me that the group didn't purchase any of their sewing products and they had been expecting to make a good sale from the tour group.

With the income that the women were able to make from their enterprise, they were also required to cover the expenses for running and maintaining their enterprise, besides receiving pay for their sewing work. As Bahira explained:

> It's not enough [the income], you know you have the car expenses, the petrol, you go and come [work travel], and the prepaid phone, you call from it, daily the prepaid phone you have to top it up, if one day you don't top it up, it's a problem... so if somebody calls you, you cannot reply.

(Bahira)

Thus, the low and unstable income created a sense of insecurity for the women as they sewed, in terms of their workload and income.

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*3.2 Effect on economic independence and family support*

The low and unstable income that the women made from their enterprise, this affects the women's economic independence as Majda and Lama asserts,

> You know because we ladies, we need to have our own money. Tomorrow [in the future], glory to God, if you want to do something for yourself, won't you need money! I mean what will the workshop do for you? You will end up just being deceived by the limited income but until when? It will not do you nothing [help you], I mean a couple of rials will not do you nothing.

> (Majida)

> It's [the income] not enough, it's not enough for me but they [her family] gives me [some money] at home, my brother, he helps me.

> (Lama)

The low and unstable income also influenced the women's ability to financially support their families. Many of the women used their sewing group salaries to supplement their families' income, due to their difficult life situations and high living costs. As they explained:

> I am forced to work because the salary of my husband is low, he works at a company, his salary is only 300 rials. Recently they have increased his salary but only by 25 rials. The electricity, the house, all of the expenses, he cannot cover it by himself.

> (Fatina)

> For sure, this [low and unstable income] affects us a lot, especially for those who have to pay expenses for the house and children.

> (Safia)

Indeed, the income situation made it challenging for the women to cover basic expenses, which made it impossible for them to consider other desirable purchases for their families. This was displayed in the following encounter:

> As we worked on the sewing machines, Karima and Ulya were chatting about their children's schooling. Karima's youngest daughter was nearly four years old and she was considering putting her in a kindergarten school. As Ulya's five-year-old son attends kindergarten at a private school in the village, Karima asked Ulya how much she pays for her son's school fees. Ulya replied that they pay about 60 rials for each term. Karima commented that it was expensive and that none of her elder daughters had been to a kindergarten school. Ulya didn't seem to like Karima's comment in regards to paying expensive fees for kindergarten. She then replied to her, "But at least they are learning and will be ready for grade 1".

> (Field Note 19, 26 December 2013)

A few of the women talked about considering taking on full-time jobs and made comparisons with their own sewing enterprise in terms of the stable and high salary that they could make. For example, Najiha said:

> Because it's [the income] not enough, I am now looking for a job. With the sewing work, it [the income] is more when I get [sewing] work, if I don't get work, I don't get [an income], but to go to work at another place, you get more [income], people say you can make 300 rials or like this and like that.

> (Najiha)

Halima thought similarly, as revealed in the following vignette:

> As I chatted with Halima, she received a phone call on her mobile. She answered the phone and talked in Balushi [a tribal language]. After she finished talking, she told me that somebody had found her a part-time housemaid that she could hire. She explained that she would need somebody

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to help her with the childcare if she took the job at the supermarket, especially as she would have to work on shifts. She had previously mentioned to me that there were two shifts for the supermarket job and she was struggling to arrange child care for starting this shift work. The maid came into the workshop and started dusting the floor with the traditional palm leave floor brush. Halima chatted with the maid and asked her about her sponsorship arrangement in Oman. The maid explained that she had a sponsor and he allowed her to have cleaning jobs at different homes. Halima then told the maid that she was also planning to hire a part-time maid and about her job offer at the supermarket. She told her, "I will make at least OMR 300 rials and I can pay for electricity and other things, it is good money".

(Field Note 16, 16 December 2013)

Many of the women talked about past members who had left the group mainly due to the low and unstable income that they were making. Dalal recalled:

These [past members] left because maybe their financial situation did not allow them to stay because the salary here is sometimes less, I mean maybe their personal circumstances is different, this is what made them do this thing, to leave and work elsewhere.

(Dalal)

Lama's sisters also left the group for similar reasons, as was revealed in the following encounter:

I informed Lama that I had met her sister, Aisha, at the open day and that she had told me that she used to work previously with the group. Lama nodded and told me that her sister, Aisha, used to work with the group, where she was responsible for the packaging and cutting, but she then left the group. She added that her other sisters, Khadija and Maryam, used to also work with the group but then also left. She explained that they left because they felt that the income was unstable and low, where they sometimes could earn only 1 or

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2 rials a day, which was not enough for them to be able to buy clothes and other needed material things, saying, "You know we ladies, we always need to buy new abayas [long jacket dress], new clothes, etc.". She said that both her sisters, Aisha and Khadija, now have full-time jobs and are happier because of the stable income they make.

(Field Note 44, 08 April 2014)

Thus, the economic instability of the sewing enterprise affected the women's personal lives when it came to their own economic independence and their ability to provide better lives for their families. As a result, this led them to question the economic viability of the sewing enterprise and to look into other potential economic opportunities that past members of the group had gone on to pursue.

**Theme 4: Collective work effort**

Although the sewing enterprise brought the women of the village together for a collective purpose, they found it challenging to work collectively as a team in a number of respects when it came to running their sewing enterprise.

*4.1 Unequal distribution of work*

All of the women complained about the unequal distribution of the sewing work among them and about not always receiving available work, as emphasised below:

I get surprised to see that there are some ladies that take a large amount of work. I see, I think that this one [referring to one of the women in the group], I won't mention names, they take for themselves a big amount of work. I said, "Oh my God, they have already work for themselves and I don't know what, and they don't take into account for others", I mean dividing the work equally when there is a new order.

(Janan)

The distribution of work, it is sometimes, to be honest, it is, it should be right [fair] that if one distributes, they distribute with good intention. I mean

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everybody should get their right [share] and there are times it is not given, there has to be something [an issue], a person doesn't get their right.

<div align="right">(Rajiha)</div>

The distribution of work falls under the responsibility of the women elected as supervisors, who were responsible for redistributing the work equally to the women, as Aaida expressed to Najiha in the following vignette:

I asked Aaida today to give me the names of the ladies who work at home, as I have not yet met some of them, and I informed her that I would like to meet them and include their stories in my research. Najiha was also present in the sewing room working on the machine when Aaida gave me the names. As I noted the names in my notebook, Aaida and Najiha were speaking to each other. It seemed that my request for the ladies' names had sparked a discussion between them. Their discussion seemed to be serious in comparison to the usual chats and jokes that they had among themselves. Najiha then looked at me and asked me, "Right or wrong?" I didn't understand what Najiha was referring to. I asked her to elaborate her question, as it seemed she was asking for my opinion. She told me that a lot of the ladies that work from home had come to the workshop several times, but there was always no work for them. She then looked at Aaida and told her that she should distribute the work equally among the ladies. Aaida replied to her that Bahira was responsible for distributing the work. Najiha then stressed to her, "You are also responsible". Aaida and Najiha continued talking as Aaida then told Najiha that work had recently been slow for the group. Najiha was sympathetic towards Aaida and she advised her, "Have patience, with patience comes sugar/honey" [this is a saying in Hindi].

<div align="right">(Field Note 18, 25 December 2013)</div>

The unequal work distribution among the women was a result of the limited daily available work, as mentioned earlier, which could not be distributed to everyone.

<div align="center">223</div>

However, the difficulty of sewing some of the products, as mentioned earlier on, played a major role in the unequal work distribution, where the work was distributed among the women depending on the level of their sewing skill. As Aaida stated:

> See, with the work, I tell you there is still some unfairness going on, from us, as supervisors, from us it came this problem [unequal distribution of work], that's what! Not all of them take the same work, not all of them, it was our problem and it is their problem as well. They [other women in the group] don't know how to sew everything. People's [tourism establishments and other private companies] orders and the work, you have to give it to them clean [good quality work], so here [in this situation] we have to chose certain ladies and this creates sensitivity between the ladies. So it's a problem for us and a problem for them.

> (Aaida)

For those working from home, they were also further burdened with the unequal work distribution, as they felt that they received less work than those who worked in the workshop. The following conversation displays this:

> Once I saw Ibtisam. Where did I see her? I saw her at a funeral. I want there, she asked me, "Fatina, where have you been? Come" [to the workshop], but there were a lot of people there at the funeral, I couldn't talk with her, I was sitting here and she was sitting there, that's it, I didn't see the others at any other times. If Bahira or Aaida calls me and says, "You have to come, Fatina, there is work", Lubna, how can I go? I don't have a car, now it's hot, and I go and go [looking for a taxi], and I stand there [outside], they [the supervisors] don't think of that. Before my husband, in the mornings, he used to take me

to the workshop, now, no. And when he returns from work, once he finishes his lunch, he goes out again for work and returns late, so it's like this, so that's why I didn't come to the workshop.

(Fatina)

This, in turn, created tension, sensitivity and envy among the women, as some of them felt that certain women were favoured over others. Ghania explained:

See there are times when those [women working from home] don't come, they will give me more work but it still happens sensitivity. Some ladies come and say, "So person, you give her more work, so person you don't give her". She is supposed to speak for herself only, so for them what happens is sensitive. "Why so person you gave her more work and there are ladies who do not have work?". There is a lot of this envy that happens when they distribute the work.

(Ghania)

Therefore, it was challenging for the women to distribute the work equally due to factors including the limited available daily work and the level of the women's sewing skills. This burden of dealing with the work distribution was largely placed on the supervisors, but it also affected the women working from home, as well as causing many problems among the women in the workshop. As a result, the unequal distribution of work affected the collective purpose of the sewing enterprise.

*4.2 Lack of group cooperation*

All of the women also complained about the lack of group cooperation among them when it came to contributing equally to the enterprise work. For example, Karima said:

If there are orders, there is no cooperation between the ladies, when there are no orders, everyone is independent with their own work, to finish their own work, I mean. But when there is an order, like the one we just finished,

there was no [cooperation], Latifa was not able to get us to help each other. For example, like with Bahira, we help each other, there are ladies who like to help and there are ladies who don't.

(Karima)

The following vignette is another example of the lack of group cooperation among the women:

Aaida, Najiha, Karima, Rajiha and Bahira were all gathered in the main room as I entered the workshop. Aaida had messaged me earlier about going to an event being held near the village where they would display and sell their products. The ladies were discussing their group attendance to the event, which ran from 10am to 10pm for 10 days. There seem to be a lack of coordination and interest in the event from several women, and they discussed among themselves about some women who had not helped out with this event or other previous ones. Although they discussed this generally, a few names were mentioned of the women who had not yet helped. Aaida seemed frustrated, as she was now nearing the last few weeks of her pregnancy and the lack of coordination in the group was causing a toll on her, especially as she would soon be away on maternity leave.

(Field Note 41, 30 March 2014)

The lack of group cooperation resulted in some feeling that they were doing most of the work themselves and taking on extra work. Ghania explained:

As long as we have sisters [group of women] here [in the enterprise], let someone iron, I mean that's how it [group work] should be, we act slowly [affects our work progress], because you know who it falls on, not all the ladies here take responsibility in something, you've seen them, at least they should help us with it as we have accepted an order, not only us should take all the responsibility for it. The sewing work that we complete, we should iron it, so to be honest we will end up ironing it, the one who packs it, they

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should insert the bags in the package. Who will package? There is no one, we end up doing the packaging, and the problem with the workshop you noticed who will do it, you will see that it is Bahira, Karima or I. We will pressure ourselves to come and help to package. There was one time bags that they finished sewing, I ended up packaging them.

(Ghania)

Being one of the supervisors of the group, Aaida also often encountered simliar experiences, as displayed in the following vignette:

After the tourists had left, we sat on the chairs set beside the Omani wedding stage wall to rest. Aaida called to Reem to scold her for not attending to the tourists, as she should have been able to see the tourists coming into the workshop from the sewing machine she was using in the sewing room. "You saw there were tourists and you didn't bother to stand to help them". Reem first ignored Aaida comment. She then further scolded her, "Sewing group is just a name, there is only one person running the show. What are you going to do when I give birth? I will come down to still take care of the tourists with my newborn baby". Reem then sarcastically replied that she was here to work and that dealing with the tourists is not part of her job.

(Field Note 37, 05 March 2014)

This, in turn, created a feeling of separation among the women as they often worked alone to complete their sewing work, rather than as a team. As they described this,

I don't know, I feel that it is like this [lack of group cooperation], I don't know, there is I mean when we do the work, I mean they don't think of the others, also because of this, my heart is broken.

(Ibtisam)

There are things [group work]… it should not be an issue, glory to God, you feel that when you are all together, you feel that they make for themselves groups, you feel that they make separations from each other, and for what? I just take it in, I don't let it affect me.

(Janan)

The lack of group cooperation had also affected the reputation of the group and the quality of their sewing products. The below situation displays this effect:

Lama arrived at the workshop. As she greeted us, I suggested to her that we should visit Rajiha and to go together in order to give our condolences following her father-in-law's funeral. She agreed and we left the workshop. While at Rajiha's house, we sat on the floor (myself, Rajiha and Karima), having fruit, dates and coffee, while Lama sat beside the wall because she was fasting. Rajiha asked me if I had heard about the problem they were facing with the ministry's bags order. She told me that Saeed, an owner of a tour company, had come in last Thursday to inform them of mistakes on the order. He complained to them that the group work did not have a good clean finish and that the quality had dropped significantly – he was not happy with the quality of their work.

(Field Note 38, 10 March 2014)

Hence, the women found it difficult to develop group cooperation among them, as they were not all equally taking part in the running of the sewing enterprise. As a result, this challenge further risked the collective purpose and viability of the sewing enterprise.

**Theme 5: Maintaining domestic responsibilities**
Besides the above challenges, the women were further challenged when it came to the need to maintain their domestic responsibilities while sewing for the enterprise.

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*5.1 Sewing and childcare*

With most of the women in the sewing group being married and having young children, childcare was their responsibility alone. Paid domestic help was too expensive for all of the women to afford, which led many of the mothers to sew and care for their children at the same time, either at the workshop or at their homes. Thus, many of the women encountered difficulty sewing and caring for their children. The double work caused stress and burden for the women, as they attempted to meet the needs of their sewing work and their children at the same time. Karima experienced this challenge, as displayed in the following vignette:

> Karima came into the sewing room and greeted us all. She had come to the workshop to drop off a bag full of her sewing products. Ghania asked Karima where her daughter was. She replied that she was sick at home and explained that she was going home to take care of her daughter after dropping off her bag.

> (Field Note 3, 06 November 2013)

Dalal described a similar experience:

> Because my daughter, there is nobody to care of her at home, my mother is at work, my husband is at work, my daughter, there is nobody with her at home, nobody to hold her. So I can't leave her alone and come here, or if I come, I need to hold her, to watch her.

> (Dalal)

Therefore, it was difficult for the women to care for their children and sew at the same time.

*5.2 Sewing and housework*

For all of the women, regardless of their marital status, the housework fell under their sole responsibility due to being female. Thus, the women also encountered difficulty sewing and maintaining their housework. The women would often

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complain of the burden of housework that they needed to deal with, which they did not enjoy. The following vignette displays Karima struggle with her sewing work and housework along with childcare:

> As Karima used the sewing machine to complete the last pile of her assigned bags for the ministry's order, Latifa then came in and asked Karima when she could start working on the new order, as Karima was one of the most experienced in sewing among the group. She told her that she would need to put in more effort and time, as the deadline for the new order was approaching soon. Karima then told her that she could not dedicate all her time to sewing the bags all day, as she had her children and husband to take care of, and needed to prepare the meals and do the laundry. She said that she could not neglect her responsibilities for the bags, as Karima usually works for few hours in the morning and late afternoon on her sewing. Latifa then suggested to her to normally carry on doing her daily housework, but to use her free time in the evening and at night to work on the bags. Karima was first silent, then gave Latifa a long look and said "If God wills".

> (Field Note 44, 08 April 2014)

Although the women were making some income from their sewing work to support their families, domestic responsibilities were not reduced for the women and they still needed to maintain these while sewing. Lama explains:

> Yes, you have to do the housework, you have to work at home, to sit freely at home is not acceptable/possible, you have to look for something [house work], you have to do it, you cannot avoid it, it becomes a problem then, no. You have to, you have to help.

> (Lama)

The women would also be found managing their sewing work according to their domestic responsibilities, often putting their domestic responsibilities first over

their sewing work. This occasionally meant not accepting sewing work in order not to affect their domestic responsibilities. Halima commented on this by saying:

> Because of my home circumstances, yes, see not everyone will understand but I tell you it depends on my home circumstances, it is my intention to come to the workshop, maybe I can come during the morning… it is my intention to wake up and pray, and I come to the workshop, my daughters are already gone to school, but first I check on my home and then I come to the workshop.

> (Halima)

Thus, the women had to maintain their domestic responsibilities, as these were important responsibilities that they could not neglect and were expected from them regardless of their sewing work.

**Benefits**

Despite the various challenges that the women encountered with the sewing enterprise, the women gained a number of benefits on a personal and collective level.

**Theme 6: Sewing in a desirable working environment**

One was that the sewing enterprise provided a desirable working environment for the woman that was suitable and appropriate for their circumstances in being able to work and maintain their domestic responsibilities.

*6.1 Having a flexible workplace and schedule*

The women had the flexibility to work, either at the workshop or at their homes, at their own discretion. Comments on this included:

They [private company donors] have given me a gift, it was a sewing machine, they made a party for us, they give each one of us a machine cause we were the first ones [the first members to join the group]. They gave us this one [referring to her sewing machine in her home], as a reward, they gave us a gift of a sewing machine, the machine that I had before was small, and so I can work here [at home] as well.

(Ibtisam)

At the beginning I used to come here [the workshop], and then later on, slowly and slowly, when I bought a sewing machine, I sewed from home and I bring it [my work to the workshop], everyday I used to bring it in the mornings and like this, and there were times I didn't have a car and... you know it's not possible for me to take a taxi, it's forbidden. Yes, it's good the work, you can take it home, it's good that you can work from home.

(Janan).

The women also had the flexibility in setting their own work schedule and choosing when to work according to their personal circumstances, as there were no fixed working hours and shifts. For example,

Lama compared her sewing work to her sister's full-time job. She told me that she prefers working with the sewing group in comparison to having a full-time job, where there is a set time to work and it will require commuting. She explained that she can come anytime to the workshop and that it is near her home. She asserts that there is a lot of flexibility here, which she is very happy with.

(Field Note 44, 08 April 2014)

Other women also felt the same:

> I mean it's not far, my house is nearby to it [the workshop], we go there anytime, we go and come back home quickly [on time], other types of work you will work until 4 or 5 and then you can go home.

> (Fatina)

> Here it is better, that I don't need to be attached [restricted] to anything [work rules], I mean between my house and my work, I don't need to be attached/obliged to be here daily and there is no particular time that I have to be there at the workshop. I can go in the mornings and late afternoons, we don't have a specific time to come in and to leave, no, here at the workshop, I feel it's better this way, I am not attached/obliged [to a schedule].

> (Rajiha)

> I feel that the place [the workshop] is special with freedom, I mean you can, for example, you are not accounted for being absent. For you to be absent and they cut from your income and something, no, no, it's not like that here, there is no salary here so you have no commitment. For example, if you have a circumstance you can be absent at anytime you want, you come to the workshop at anytime you want, you sew whenever you want.

> (Majida)

Thus, the women valued the work flexibility they had at the sewing enterprise as it provided them with freedom of movement with no strict attachments.

*6.2 Balancing domestic responsibilities and sewing work*

With the women having flexibility over their work place and schedule, this provided the women with the ability to balance their domestic responsibilities and sewing work. Most of the mothers often brought their children to the workshop, where they would sew and have their children nearby, or sometimes chose to sew at home in order to care for their children. For example, Ibtisam said:

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When my boy was small, I used to take him to the workshop, and when there was no school, there was nobody to care for him, I couldn't leave my son and let him go out and go around the neighbourhood, so I used to take him to the workshop, thank God, I was able to care myself for my children, thank God, he is my last child. I couldn't leave my son to go around out on his own, you know, this neighbourhood, God help them all, because of this I said I will take him better to the workshop. Yes, I used to always take him, there was no one at home.

(Ibtisam)

Halima also did the same, as displayed in the following encounter:

Aaida then came into the room and greeted us. She saw the child and asked Halima if he was her son. Halima replied that he was and said that she had brought him in today because there was no one to look after him. She then hesitantly asked Aaida if it was OK that she had brought her son to the workshop. Aaida said, "Of course it's OK, it's normal, be comfortable".

(Field Note 15, 09 December 2013)

A few of the women also had the ability to care for their parents while conducting their sewing work. For example:

I work mostly from home because of my mother, she used to be able to take care of herself at the beginning but then it [her illness] got worse, so she couldn't anymore, so I take something [sewing work] for me and I bring it at home to work.

(Janan)

But I still come here [to the workshop], it's normal to work from home because my father and mother are like this, I mean they always have… they are always sick, so it's better for me to be there [at home], because most of my time is spent on my father and mother. She has had a heart surgery and

my father has had a prostate surgery, so you feel for them when you see them, you feel that they are tired, you are worried to leave them like that [alone], so, thank God, at home I can work.

<div align="right">(Tahira)</div>

When it came to the housework, all of the women were also able to balance their sewing work and housework by making time for each. Comments on this included:

Nobody can run away from it [housework], and I divide my time, with that [sewing work] and the afternoon with the house work. In the morning, my mother and sisters are home, so afternoon, it's my turn, I start the cleaning again, you know the house requires continuous cleaning.

<div align="right">(Azza)</div>

For sure, for me, when my children go to school, I start with my work. Of course, I finish first with the housework and then I start with my sewing work until up to 12 o'clock and it comes to lunch time, everything is stopped then, and later on I take a break until 4 o'clock and I start again my sewing work until evening, and sometimes into the night.

<div align="right">(Safia)</div>

Thus, although the women were burdened in having a double workload with sewing and domestic responsibilities, as mentioned earlier on, it was still important for them to maintain and meet these responsibilities while doing their sewing work, as it was part of their responsibilities that they could not neglect.

### Theme 7: Importance of the sewing enterprise to the women

The other benefit that the women were able to gain is that the sewing enterprise had become an important part of their lives in a number of ways.

*7.1 Passion for the sewing enterprise*

The women had developed a great passion for their enterprise and emphasised the fun and enjoyment that they gained from their work, despite the various challenges that they encountered. As they described:

> No, glory to God, it's nice work, believe me, when I don't have sewing work, I feel bored. I always call to ask if there is any work, from it [the sewing work] you have fun.
>
> (Safia)

> I am having fun here, before I was just seating at home, so they [my family] tell me, "What about your legs, your back?". And when I go home now I say, "My legs hurt me" and I don't know what, they say, "Yeah, go for only 400 baiza [laughing]", "You are just wasting your time, and your back hurts" and I don't know what, "Try not to go". And I say, "It's better for me to go, I have fun, there is fun there and there is sewing there".
>
> (Lama)

> No, it's the opposite [comparing to staying at home only], I feel that it is fun, I am enjoying the work here.
>
> (Rajiha)

> It's fun, to go out [to come to the workshop], to change the weather [environment] from just sitting at home, I mean to come and gather with ladies like you enjoy it, yeah, so its like that.
>
> (Majida)

Thus, the women were passionate for the sewing work they did as it provided a fulfilling and enriching experience to their life.

*7.2 Developing new skills*

The women were also able to develop new skills through the various training they received from local organisations. This included using computers, hospitality, customer service and so on. As they explained:

> I got experience, I got to know people, I mean it's like this, thank God, and we went to places, they [local organisations] gave us training, for me the computer one [training] I didn't attend, the hospitality college they gave us training for one week, and I don't know what, they gave us a course on spring board [a women's empowerment course provided by the British Council], and they gave us three training courses about weaving palm leaves.
>
> (Ghania)

> For example, with the computers, I took training on computers, and I took courses in how to deal with people, how to stand in front of a TV camera/audience to talk, how to converse, how to talk to a customer to let them... I mean to give them the pleasure to take that thing [to sell sewing products], the attractiveness of that thing so that they could buy it, and to give them the benefits of that thing.
>
> (Rajiha)

They were also able to learn English, which was useful as they often interacted with the English-speaking tourists visiting their workshop and through the hosting service they provided. Comments on this included:

> For sure, I gained the English language. For example, when visitors come, I mean I have to talk to them in English, I take from them information [English language knowledge], I take some words, it's nice for me to gain a language from them through the visitors.
>
> (Majida)

Here… see, I never had it [the new skills] at all, the first time I came, I didn't have the English language. I came here, it improved, I don't tell you that I am advanced in English, to be honest nobody here knew English but now my language had improved, I mean, I tell you, if I bump into foreigners, I am able to talk with them, I chat with them, it's correct it's not up to there [advanced level], but I am trying slowly, I am capable. But at the beginning, no, to be honest, before I worked here, to be honest, I didn't know English. If I used to speak English, it was for very simple things [words], very few things, but since I came here, the language has improved a bit, this is the good thing.

(Dalal)

Hence, the women gained valuable skills from the sewing enterprise, which helped to improve their professional development.

*7.3 Gaining sewing experience*

Moreover, many of the women emphasised that they were able to gain good sewing experience and improve their sewing skills through their enterprise, despite the struggles that they encountered with the sewing, as mentioned earlier on. For example:

So I went out [worked outside my home] and l learned how to insert a needle and how like this, and now if a dress is spoiled, I can mend it, first I couldn't, I didn't know anything about sewing.

(Tahira)

I learned, thank God, I learned a lot of things [about sewing]. At the beginning, I didn't know sewing, I mean I knew how to sew but I didn't know how to sew bags, like the Omani bag one and like other things [sewing products], a lot, thank God, I sewed and I benefited from it.

(Ibatism)

When they distribute to us the work, we also ask them that we want to learn [to sew different products] and like this, so they give us, normally, so we could learn from the sewing work that we do.

<div align="right">(Qahira)</div>

Ghania explained that she gained proper sewing experience from the enterprise despite her initial lack of experience gained at school and while at home:

I asked Ghania where she initially started to learn to sew. She said she learned basic sewing skills at school but those were very limited. She also did some basic sewing alterations at home to fix buttons, but she mostly gained her sewing skills through joining the sewing group.

<div align="right">(Field Note 3, 06 November 2013)</div>

As a result, the sewing skill became an important attribute for the women as they became professional sewers and gained the ability to sew different types of products.

### 7.4 Building gradual economic independence

Despite the low and unstable income that the women made from their sewing enterprise, the women were able to build a gradual economic independence for themselves by having their own income. Most of the women were content with the limited income they were making, as it was important for them to have the opportunity to work and to make some income. They explained:

Thank God, it's [the income] according to the order, according to the work that I want to do, whether it's more or less, it depends on the work that I do, it depends, so thank God.

<div align="right">(Janan)</div>

What I can do, it's [the income] not enough, but what can I do? In comparison to just staying at home, we are content with it, but what can we do?

(Lama)

Although the income they made influenced their economic independence and family support, it also gave them the ability sometimes to buy their own things and not to always rely on their families or husbands as Karima and Rajiha affirmed,

I don't like it, for example if we go to the souk [an old traditional market] and he [her husband] pays for me, I don't like it because I have money from the workshop, you know we get paid weekly, 15, 20 or 30 rials. Thank God, I can buy my own things, I don't ask from him.

(Karima)

It is something extra that I am doing for myself because I feel I don't like to rely on someone, I mean I don't rely on my husband for him to give me everything, I mean there are things that I want, I don't have to… I want to help my husband, he gives me, he doesn't say no, but if I want something I want it by myself, I want to take it by myself, I don't like to rely on him.

(Rajiha)

They were also sometimes able to financially help their husbands, and buy things for their children and other family members. For example:

I spend it [the sewing income] on my children, half of it, and the other half for me, thank God. For example, if I went to a tailor and I want a dress, I can go and pay for it, thank God.

(Halima)

The first thing that I like is that it's a source of income, to be honest. Before, as I told you, before my husband's salary, it was not... it was not enough [to cover expenses], and, you know, the school for my daughter, and the house rent, and for this and for this and for this, and the bank deducts [referring to loans].

(Aaida)

With the women having their own income and being able to financially support themselves and their families to the best of their abilities, they were able to create a small form of economic independence for themselves through the enterprise.

*7.5 Building a stronger personality*

As most of the women had been in their homes and had not worked in the past, their involvement in the sewing enterprise gave them the opportunity to build stronger personalities as they described,

Before I was a bit shy... it's a bit better now, I go and come [socialise], I got to also know many ladies and other people, I mean, I know the world now [open minded], it is different, because sitting at home, I thought this was how the world was, but I got to now see more people, how to interact, how to cooperate, how it is, how to talk, dealing with challenges outside and learning from outside helps me to deal with challenges at home, like this I know now.

(Najiha)

Now, see for example… I mean I was able to come out from isolation, I am able to participate, to be sociable, I mean I have now the confidence to talk, to laugh, to do everything I work on and do any work that is required for me. I have the confidence because I have the experience [with the sewing enterprise], the experience with the days, with the years, I have gained the experience that I don't need anything, education or something, that I already have the experience.

(Majida)

It helps you think differently about yourself, that you can work and you have a responsibility, as well as that you can go anywhere.

(Safia)

I am the type that likes to work, I have built my personality in the work that I do, your personality is [built] through your work. I like this thing [sewing enterprise].

(Azza)

Thus, the sewing enterprise gave them a new perspective on life that they would have perhaps not have gained if they had continued staying at home every day.

*7.6 Becoming popular and famous*

As the women pursued and progressed with the sewing enterprise, they became popular and famous for their sewing enterprise on a local and international basis. Aaida described,

It is right that it [the sewing enterprise] is small and simple but still the name of the enterprise, the name is… thank God, the ladies of the sewing enterprise are well known, it is known.

(Aaida)

Bahira also felt similarly, as revealed in the following encounter during an official event at the Germany embassy:

> I attended an official event at an embassy with Aaida and Bahira. During the event, we bumped into a foreign lady that both Aaida and Bahira knew. Bahira told me that the lady was from the embassy and she arranged to bring a group of female tourists for tomorrow's hosting at the workshop. Bahira walked up to the lady. The lady kissed Bahira on the cheeks and said that she couldn't wait for tomorrow's visit. She asked Bahira in a funny way, "How come you are at this event?", as she seem to be surprised to find her at such events. She then joked with Bahira, asking her, "Is your husband German?". Bahira, with a good sense of humour, laughed and replied, "I am famous, that's why I am here". The French lady then said, "You know I am just joking".

> (Field Note 5, 10 November 2013)

Thus, the women became well known for their enterprise as their sewing work formed an important part of their identity, which they were proud of and took great pride to promote it.

**Theme 8: Developing a sisterhood unity**

Although the women found it challenging to work collectively as a team when it came to running their sewing enterprise, as mentioned earlier, the sewing enterprise helped to bring the women of the community together. Thus, there was more to the enterprise then just being a workplace for the women, where they were able to develop a strong sisterhood among them in various ways.

*8.1 Having social gatherings*

The sewing enterprise workshop was a place for the women to socially gather and to spend time together, besides conducting their sewing work, as Majida and Rajiha described:

I, to be honest, I like the gathering with the ladies, I like it when there is a gathering with the ladies, between us we talk, between us we gossip, like this, and have gatherings to meet up, so everything, I mean this is what I like, to be honest, about the workshop.

(Majida)

Here you feel, when I came here, the gatherings, I mean through the gatherings, I feel we are like one family, I mean it's different, everyone is together, with one hand we are holding together.

(Rajiha)

Not only would the women socially gather at the workshop but they would often be found arranging outings to visit each other for various occasions, such as for births, funerals, weddings, house warmings, and so on. Karima explained,

This [friendship] is a lot [important], thank God, and you feel that the ladies, for example, if something happens to you, we visit each other, weddings and I don't know what, thank God, it's nice when the ladies gather.

(Karima)

The following vignette displays the women arranging a visit to a member's house:

Ghania talked to all of the ladies in the sewing room about a gathering that they were planning to take place in a member's house, who had recently moved to another area (which was quite far from the village). They were planning to either go that day or the next to visit the member. Ghania said, "We need to check with the other ladies in the group and see who is coming so we can arrange a bus to take us". Najiha told Ghania that she was ready to go any day and just to let her know the time. Najiha than asked me if I would like to join them. I asked them more about the gathering. Najiha tried to explain to me about whose house they were visiting. I misunderstood her and asked her whether they were going to visit one of the members who had just

given birth (Najiha had a different accent and it was a bit difficult to understand her). Ghania then explained to me that one of the members, who actually used to sit on the seat that I was sitting on at that moment and at the same machine table, had recently moved out of the village with her family and they were going to pay her a visit.

(Field Note 3, 06 November 2013)

As a result, these gatherings and outings among the women played a strong social aspect in their personal lives.

*8.2 Building friendships*

The sewing enterprise also gave the women the opportunity to meet other women in the community and to build friendships amongst themselves, as most of the women only got to know each other through the enterprise. Lama said,

> No, only from here I got to know the ladies, some of them are my neighbours, from the same neighbourhood. Ghania and I don't know who else, but I didn't know them very well, since we came here [to the workshop], we got to know each other well, she has now become my friend [laughing]

(Lama)

Azza also felt the same:

> What I like about the workshop is the sister spirit that we have among us. I mean our visits, first we all go there [to the workshop], if anything happens to anybody, we all go to visit her. It's nice, I mean, for example, we ask, "How are the ladies?". I am the type that likes to ask about those who come and go, any of the ladies, so it's like that, me and Ghania we are like sisters over there, together, so our separation [Azza moved to another town] was difficult because me and her were always at the workshop together.

(Azza)

Such friendship was mostly filled with joy and laughter among the women, as revealed below:

> While at Azza's house, Azza's mother came to greet us and sat on the floor besides Najiha. Azza's mother told us about the area that they live in and that they were happy that they moved to this area. Najiha mentioned that she was also planning to build a house in the same area. The ladies asked Najiha if she was also going to leave the village and move to Azza's area. Najiha replied that she planned to move in the future to the area, "If God will, I plan to build my house in this area". Karima then teased Najiha and said, "That they will also take a bus to visit Najiha when her house is ready".  Najiha said that once she moves to her new house, she hoped to get pregnant again,
>
> **Redaction:** sentences removed due to sensitive information.
>
> Najiha already had five grown-up children. All of the ladies burst out laughing, as they found Najiha's comment funny. Najiha often switches from Arabic and Balushi as she speaks to the ladies, but not all of the ladies understand Balushi, including myself. The ladies told Najiha to speak in Arabic and not to speak in Balushi. She commented that they always tease her for her Arabic.

(Field Note 7, 12 November 2013)

Due to these growing friendships, the women valued the strong sisterhood unity that they had among them.

**Theme 9: Developing cultural exchange**

With the women having tourists visiting their workshop and providing them with arranged hosting, the sewing enterprise provided them with the opportunity to develop a strong cultural exchange with the tourists in various ways.

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*9.1 Interacting with tourists*

All of the women talked about enjoying the tourist visits to their workshop and providing the hosting experience to the tourists, as it gave the women the opportunity to meet and interact with new people. Fatina explains this interaction,

> The tourists, when they come, they sit with us, we talk with them, they look around the workshop, they ask us about our work, "What is this? What are you making? Who made this?", like this they ask us. I am fine to talk to tourists, anything that I know how to say I say it, if I don't know, I keep quiet [laughing].
>
> (Fatina)

Others also felt the same:

> I like talking to the foreigners but this requires speaking English and I don't know it well but I go along with it, they laugh, they say "yes, no, come in…" [laughing].
>
> (Najiha)

> There are a lot of guests, there are groups, foreigners that come to our workshop, they talk to us, we talk to them, they see us… I mean they interact with us, we interact with them about our environment, about what the Omani people are like and what… our hospitality/hosting is like.
>
> (Janan)

Indeed, most of the women in the group would took the opportunity to be involved in social encounters with tourists, as revealed below:

> A group of foreign women were coming into the workshop that morning for product viewing and photo taking with traditional Omani garments. Many of the members were present today at the workshop with the children of Aaida, Bahira, Halima, Ulya, Karima and Rajiha. The foreign women arrived at the

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workshop. With the hosting being more like an open house day, many of the foreign women were scattered around the workshop with the members, with some viewing and purchasing the products in the display room, some having coffee and dates in the main room hosting area, while others watched members conduct their work in the sewing room. After the product viewing and the coffee and date serving, a few of the foreign women were keen to try on the Omani dresses in the photograph room. We assisted the foreign women with selecting and wearing the dresses with the appropriate jewellery and accessories, they then made their way to the main room as their colleagues took their pictures with the Omani traditional door as the background of the picture.

(Field Note 40, 18 March 2014)

Besides the gatherings and outings that the women had among themselves, these interactions also played an important social aspect for the women as they allowed them to meet new people through their sewing enterprise.

*9.2 Educating tourists*

As the women interacted with the tourists through the sewing enterprise, they also took the opportunity to educate them about their enterprise, their sewing work, Omani culture, religion and about themselves as working Omani women. Comments on this included:

I like it [hosting tourists] a lot, I like to be with them [tourists], I explain to them and I talk to them. I mean, they tell us about their habits and we tell them about our habits, this is the most important thing, we talk to them about the Omani things, about the Omani clothing, about the habits and traditions, and for them it's the same thing, they tell us about their habits and traditions on things, about their clothing, they tell us and they get to know about Islam and how Islam is with us, there are rules, there are obligations on us, and for them it's the same thing, they respect us, we respect them for the same thing, and this is what's good about it [interacting with tourists].

(Rajiha)

They [tourists] like it when we tell them that this is how we dress up and like this. Once, during Ramadan [fasting month for Muslims], the foreigners used to come, we made dinner for them, they wanted to see how we pray. I mean, you feel, that they are… their self [thinking] changes. Also, once one of them [the tourists] came to the workshop by surprise wearing an abaya [traditional Arabic female coat]. So it's nice that you give them ideas, and you give them information about our traditions, and you feel that they like it, you feel that when you talk to them and you laugh with them, socialise with them, they take away a good idea of the country.

(Tahira)

They [tourists] mostly come here [the workshop] so that they could see the ladies, how they sew, that it is true that there are some Omani ladies who do sewing.They get surprised when they see our things [products]. "Have you sewed this or have you imported it from outside?", this is the question they always ask us. I tell them, "No, I did the sewing myself".

(Bahira)

The following vignette displays an educational encounter between Aaida and a guest:

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Today there was an event held at the | **Redaction:** word removed due to confidential information. |

ambassador's house. As the guests had started to pour in, many had made their way to our display table, admiring and buying the sewing products. One guest held up a bag made of Omani koma (an Omani cap worn by Omani men). She asked Aaida, "Did you make these by yourself?" Aaida replied, "Yes, these are all made by Omani ladies". Another guest held the same bag and asked what the Arabic name was for the cap used for the bag? Aaida replied that it was called a koma.

(Field Note 10, 20 November 2013)

Therefore, the women got to exchange important educational information with the tourists and vice versa.

### 9.3 Promoting their modern identity

When the women were educating tourists about their sewing work and themselves, they emphasised the tourists' curiosity about them being independent Omani women and of their capabilities in operating the sewing enterprise. They also felt that many of the tourists had the wrong impression of them. As the women explained:

> They get surprised, I mean, "How is it for you Omani ladies? Is it normal for you to work and is it normal…?" So there were questions, "Is it normal for you to work?". We feel that they are… the idea that they have of us is that we are only honourable at home, that we are simply women that are confined to their homes, that it is forbidden for us to go out, that it is wrong for us to do, I mean it's forbidden, there are a lot of things, I mean they have put a lot of things [incorrect perceptions of Omani women], so I tell them, "No", and that they have taken the wrong idea in their mind.

(Dalal)

When they [the tourists] come here [the workshop], they ask us these questions: "Do they beat you?", we say "No", "Are you oppressed?", we say "No", "So you'll work here?", we reply, "Yes, we work here", "I mean they [your families and husbands] don't forbid you, they allow you to work?", we reply "No, we are free".

(Aaida)

To be honest, they [the tourists] get surprised with our work and they see the Omani lady, that she works hard, that she takes care [is responsible] for her work, that she works passionately, that she has confidence and that she is doing something for herself.

(Majda)

The women felt very strongly about these misconceptions, as further revealed in the following vignette:

As the guests ate their food on the floor, the **Redaction:** word removed due to confidential information.

lady continued to talk to them in French. The **Redaction:** word removed due to confidential information.

lady then asked us in English, "Who wears the pants in the house? Is it the man or the woman?". The ladies were initially not sure of the question. The

**Redaction:** word removed due to confidential information. lady asked again, "In the home, is

it the men who are the bosses?" while she imitated a man by lifting her muscles, "Or is it the women who are the bosses and take care of the family, the children and makes all the decisions? Is it true or false?" Aaida than answered, "No, no, no, it is not true. Both are in charge of everything in the home". The

**Redaction:** word removed due to confidential information. lady then translated the answer

to the guests. The French ladies were amazed with the answer and were interested to know more about the women.

(Field Note 6, 11 November 2013)

Thus, the women took the opportunity to promote their modern identity to improve tourists' view of themselves and their work.

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**The future**

**Theme 10: Seeking sustainability**

Nevertheless, because of the various benefits that the women were able to gain from the enterprise, they all felt that they needed to improve the enterprise in order to ensure its long-term sustainability.

*10.1 Building strong team cooperation*

The women talked about the need to build strong group cooperation, as this was currently lacking in the group and had an impact on the viability of the enterprise. They suggested that this could be improved by having regular group meetings, which were currently lacking.  For example,

> If there is cooperation… if we all said that we are all in agreement together and do everything together, the enterprise will not only be a workshop, the opposite, it will develop into a factory.

> (Dalal)

> There has to be strong cooperation because the group's name is for a group of ladies, it's not for one person, so this thing [group cooperation] is a must, we either speak to the ladies or there is a training in this thing [group cooperation] or… so I feel that it is still important.

> (Aaida)

It is better that we sit together, weekly for example, to get everyone's views, what this says and what that says, maybe those that don't like, for example, to cut and they get tired and I don't know what, all that for few rials, I mean they don't like the amount they get. This [regular meetings] will be better, to gather the ladies, "you, what you want, what you ask, what you need, and you...". So, yes, we want like a meeting to see the ladies, for example a meeting once a week, for example in a month once, it doesn't have to be weekly, so we can see all the ladies, what they're thinking.

(Karima)

Therefore, the women felt stressed on the need to have strong group cooperation among them.

*10.2 Growing bigger*

Most importantly, all of the women emphasised the need to grow the enterprise bigger. Some of the women suggested having other branches of the enterprise open in other areas of the country, as well as eventually turning the workshop into a factory,

If there is expansion, there is branches, if we do, for example, a place like a factory complete with sewing, we bring other ladies to train, I mean we add other things [sewing products] to the workshop, not only bags, we add other things, there will then be more and more improvement of the workshop, one has to renew the idea, not to work on one thing only, but to add.

(Majida)

I wish that our enterprise, I want it to be opened in other areas so that others can benefit as well, not to only be focused in our area, I want also other areas to have one, so that everybody will benefit, if it is in several areas it's better, if there are branches, then everybody will benefit.

(Janan)

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Others suggested offering sewing and Omani cooking classes, having a permanent location for the workshop and having more sewing machines,

> The enterprise until now, I say, it still requires improvement, it's still for one thing [sewing] as you say, it is right there is work that is going on, but it requires improvement. If it was a place as our own place, not by rent, we will feel more comfortable, I mean you don't know what will happen with this house, they [the owners of the rented house] may take it, which place can we then move to, to do our work? This is what I am talking about.
>
> (Bahira)

> There are school children and like this, they come to us, the children want to learn, there are schoolgirls that came to us, they ask us, "How do you know sewing? How is it?" like this. A lot of school girls visit the workshop, so if we make, for example, an awareness campaign to teach the young ones, because those who learn from young and they have a hobby, they become successful in life.
>
> (Najiha)

Thus, the women strongly emphasised the need to make their enterprise bigger to help in ensuring available daily work and a good steady income for themselves.

**Theme 11: Taking different future paths**

When it came to each of the women's future plans with the sewing enterprise, they were divided.

*11.1 Continuing with the enterprise*

Some of the women were content with their involvement in the sewing enterprise and were planning to continue to be involved with it on a long-term basis, due to the various benefits they gained. As they explained:

Yes, I will continue, I like this work, as long there is sewing, and so I will continue, thank God.

(Ibtisam)

This [the sewing enterprise] lets me work. Why? Because I like this work, basically, I mean I like the idea of sewing and I have learned sewing because I like it, so this thing that lets me work, maybe it's my love for sewing that keeps me going, so for me, where the workshop goes, I am with it.

(Dalal)

See, I don't want to have just anything, like I told you, I am every day learning things here, so this is what mostly keeps me to continue, you see people, you get to know other people and like this, so if I sit at home with the children only, why? You saw every day we are out, every day from the workshop, I tell you. Never in my life I entered before an embassy, never in my life I entered a ministry, never in my life I want and travelled. I mean, I travelled, for example, to Germany, also in my imagination I never thought of it. So from the enterprise, to be honest, I mean there are a lot of things I learned, a lot, a lot of people I saw, a lot of people I met, those who are of high [well known people], being in newspapers, magazines, this alone is a world, so why should I hide myself? Maybe the salary will improve, maybe it will change.

(Aaida)

Therefore, these women were happy to continue with the sewing enterprise, as they saw it as a valuable work opportunity for themselves and they enjoyed the sewing work.

*11.2 Seeking better opportunities*

As for the other women, they were open to seeking better work opportunities, due to various reasons. This included wanting to develop themselves further, to have something better for themselves, and to make more income. These women felt

limited by their involvement in the sewing enterprise, despite the benefits they were able to gain from it. For example,

> The human does not attach to only one thing, she has to try, she tries and tries everywhere, I mean until she becomes permanent in something particular, she tries and she gains experience from here and there so that she could develop herself, but she doesn't cling to something particular and if that thing is something weak, so she doesn't cling to it, it is for sure that she would aim to find for herself something else, that she can gain from it.
>
> (Majda)

> For long term, no [laughing], what I want for myself, first, first thing I wish to have a certificate, a car, a job, not from here, for sure, I will not continue with this, I want something better. It is nice to work at the workshop and we are comfortable, but everyone will look for something better.
>
> (Qahira)

> If I find a job in another place, I mean it has a good and high salary, and is a suitable job, I will leave. If I get another job, like now I heard there is a nursery for small children, you make food for them in the kitchen, this will be good for me, there is also work at hospitals for washing and ironing clothes. I know like these types of jobs, if I get like this, I will go, anything that has high salary and is easy I will go, if it's difficult I won't go.
>
> (Najiha)

Thus, for these women, their involvement with the enterprise could be seen as a short-term solution and they were looking for something more beyond the sewing enterprise. Overall, all of the women were continuing to be involved with the sewing enterprise for now, but their long-term involvement depended on themselves, individually and collectively, as well as on the viability of the sewing enterprise.

## 8.5 Emerging main concepts

When reviewing the case study of the sewing group, I identified a number of factors that influenced the women's lived experiences and their potential to be empowered through their sewing enterprise, each of which has both positive and negative effects. As I discuss each factor below, I cross reference the effects of each factor to the background information and thematic narrative presented above to showcase its embedded evidence from the data, as displayed in square brackets. I have also highlighted the positive and negative effects in italic to clearly show their relationship to the discussion below. In addition, I have provided a figure for each factor to display its positive and negative effects.

The first factor is the family. The family plays a major role in providing a support structure for the women to pursue their enterprise. As the women had family support from the outset, this meant that they experienced no problems concerning their attitudes towards the sewing enterprise. However, I argue that the women only had the support of their families from the beginning because the sewing enterprise is based on using a women's cultural domestic skill. Therefore, the families *enforce an existing gender skill* on the women (theme 1, sub-theme 1.3). The families also *enforce traditional roles and responsibilities* on the women, as they had to maintain their domestic responsibilities as well as their sewing work (theme 5, sub-themes 5.1/5.2).

Figure 10: The family factor effects (the sewing group)

The Family

(-)

Enforces an existing gender skill

(+)

Enforces traditional roles and
responsibilities
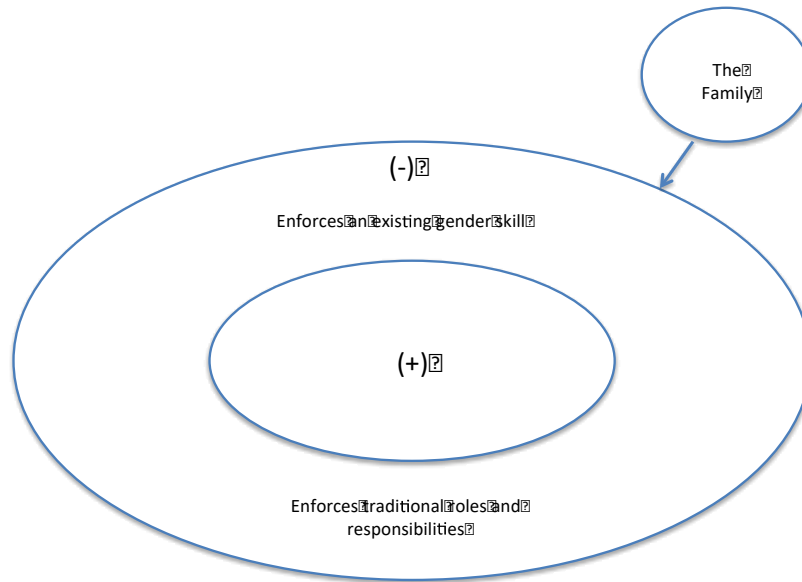
The second factor is the community. Similar to the family, the women also had the support of the community to participate in the sewing enterprise from the beginning because it is based on using a cultural domestic skill for women. Therefore, the community *enforces an existing gender skill* on the women (theme 1, sub-theme 1.3).

Figure 11: The community factor effects (the sewing group)

The community

(-)

Enforces an existing
gender skill

(+)
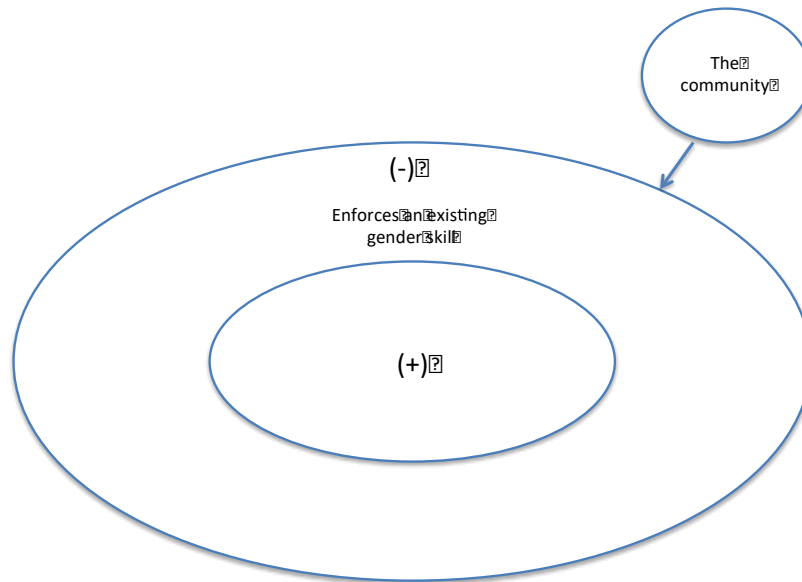
The third factor is the nature of the tourism enterprise work, which in this case, is based on sewing. On a positive note, the nature of the tourism enterprise work gives the women the ability to *strengthen their own individual agency* when it comes to using their sewing skills and gaining sewing experience from the enterprise (theme 1, sub-theme 1.2; theme 7, sub-theme 7.3). It also gives the women *increased self-confidence and self-esteem*. This was a result of the women developing a passion for their sewing enterprise, building stronger personalities, as well as interacting with and educating tourists (theme 7, sub-themes 7.1/7.5; theme 9, sub-themes 9.1/9.2). In addition, it provides them with the venue to *create a collective social cohesion* through developing a sisterhood unity in the enterprise (theme 8, sub-themes 8.1/8.2). Moreover, it provides the women with a feeling of *increased status, respect and prestige* through becoming popular and famous for their sewing work (theme 7, sub-theme 7.6).

However, there are various significant negative effects from the nature of the tourism enterprise work, which has implications on potentially empowering the women. As the nature of the tourism enterprise work is based on using sewing skills,

it helps to *enforce existing gender skill* on the women (theme 1, sub-theme 1.2). It also helps to *promote stereotypes of Muslim women* through the traditional Omani hosting that they provide to tourists. This is evident from the tourist's curiosity of the women's work capabilities and independence (theme 9, sub-theme 9.3). Moreover, it *enforces traditional roles and responsibilities* on the women because they had to maintain their domestic responsibilities while conducting their sewing work, despite the desirable work environment they have (theme 5, sub-themes 5.1/5.2; theme 6, sub-themes 6.1/6.2). In addition, it *imposes laborious work on the women.* This was evident from the women having limited work, dealing with pressure, mobility issues, sewing at home and with the sewing skills being enforced on them (theme 2, sub-themes 2.1/2.2/2.3/2.4/2.5). Furthermore, there is a *lack of economic viability* for the women due to the low and unstable income that they make and the gradual but limited economic independence they have from the enterprise. This is especially true as all of the women emphasised on the need to grow the enterprise bigger for a good steady income. Moreover, half of the women were searching for better opportunities, while the others were content to continue with their involvement in the enterprise (theme 3, sub-themes 3.1/3.2; theme 7, sub-themes 7.4; theme 10, sub-theme 10.2; theme 11, sub-themes 11.1/11.2).

Figure 12: The nature of tourism enterprise work effects (the sewing group)
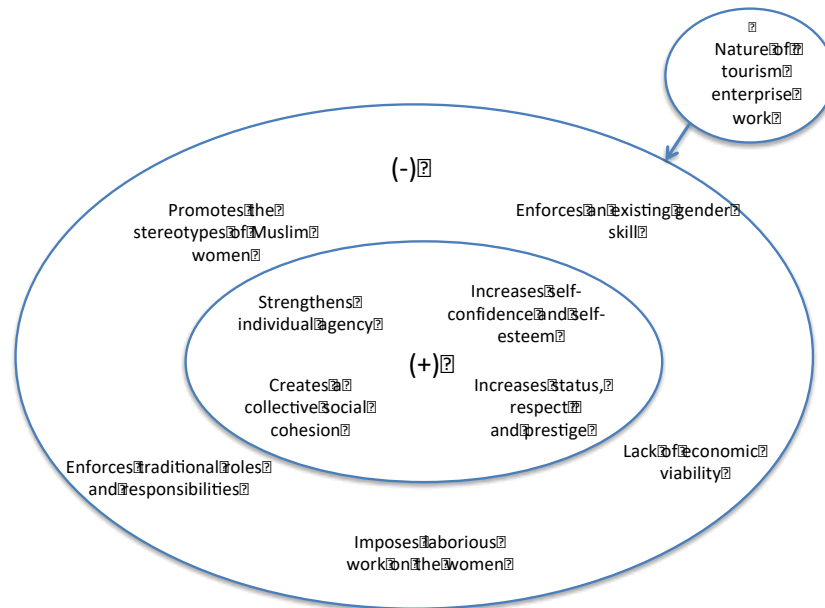


The fourth factor is the tourists. On a positive note, the tourists help to *increase the women's self-confidence and self-esteem* through the women interacting with and educating tourists (theme 9, sub-themes 9.1/9.2). They also help to *strengthen the women's agency* from the English language skill that the women are able to develop from interacting with the tourists while they host them (theme 7, sub-theme 7.2). However, there are various significant negative effects from the tourists, which have implications on potentially empowering the women. One is that there is a *lack of economic viability* for the women, as the tourists do not often buy their sewing products when they visit the women's workshop and attended their hosting events (theme 3, sub-themes 3.1). The tourists also *stereotyped the women*, which was evident from the women's need to promote their modern identity as they emphasised the tourists' curiosity about their work capabilities and independence (theme 9, sub-theme 9.3).

Figure 13: The tourist factor effects (the sewing group)
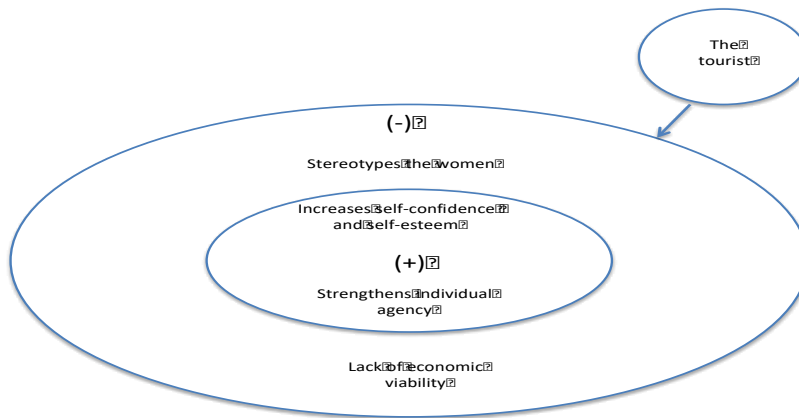


The fifth factor is the tourism structure, which in this case includes the founders, volunteers, **Redaction:** Name of organization removed due to confidential information. local organisations, tourism establishments and tour operators. On a positive note, these people and organisations help to *strengthen the women's individual agency* by developing the sewing skills of the women and other new skills that they were able to gain from the various training they provided them with (theme 1, sub theme 1.2; theme 7, sub-themes 7.2/7.3). They also provide the venue to *create collective social cohesion* by bringing the women of the community together through the development of the sewing enterprise (section 8.2). In addition, they provide the opportunity for the women to increase their *self-confidence and self-esteem*. This was evident from the women developing a passion for their sewing enterprise, building stronger personalities, and interacting with, and educating tourists (theme 7, sub-themes 7.1/7.5; theme 9, sub-themes 9.1/9.2).

However, there are various significant negative effects from the tourism structure, which have implications on potentially empowering the women. One is that the tourism structure *provides limited support* for their enterprise. This was evident

from the initial start-up support that the women had from the founders, volunteers,

| Redaction: Names of organization removed due to confidential information. | and local organisations,

which was provided for only a limited period. This is also evident from the limited available daily work that the women have in making sewing products for tourism establishments (section 8.2; theme 2, sub-theme 2.1). As they based the idea of the enterprise on developing sewing skills for the women, they help to *enforce an existing gender skill on the women* (section 8.2; theme 1, sub-theme 1.2). They are also responsible for *promoting the stereotypes of Muslim women,* as they helped the women set up the traditional Omani hosting for tourists as part of the sewing enterprise concept (section 8.2; theme 9, sub-theme 9.3). Moreover, they help to *enforce traditional roles and responsibilities* on the women because they still had to maintain their domestic responsibilities while conducting their sewing work, despite the desirable work environment that they created for them (theme 5, sub-themes 5.1/5.2; theme 6, sub-theme 6.1/6.2). In addition, they *impose laborious work on the women.* This was evident from the women having limited work, dealing with pressure, mobility issues, sewing at home and with the sewing skills being enforced on them (theme 2, sub-themes 2.1/2.2/2.3/2.4/2.5).

Although they brought the women of the community together for a collective purpose, this proved to be challenging as the women struggle to have collective *work cohesion* to run the enterprise, as is evident from the unequal distribution of work among them and the lack of group cooperation (theme 4, sub-themes 4.1/4.2; theme 10, sub-theme 10.1). Despite the founder's interest in economically empowering the women by developing the sewing enterprise, there is a *lack of economic viability* for the women due to the low prices that they have to offer tourism establishments, as well as the effect of the limited available work on their incomes, which is based on sales and orders from various tourism-related establishments, government bodies and corporations. This is also evident from all of the women's desire to grow the enterprise bigger for a good steady income, as well as the fact that half of the women sought better opportunities (theme 3, sub-themes 3.1; theme 10, sub-theme 10.2; theme 11, sub-themes 11.1/11.2).

Figure 14: The tourism structure factor effects (sewing group)
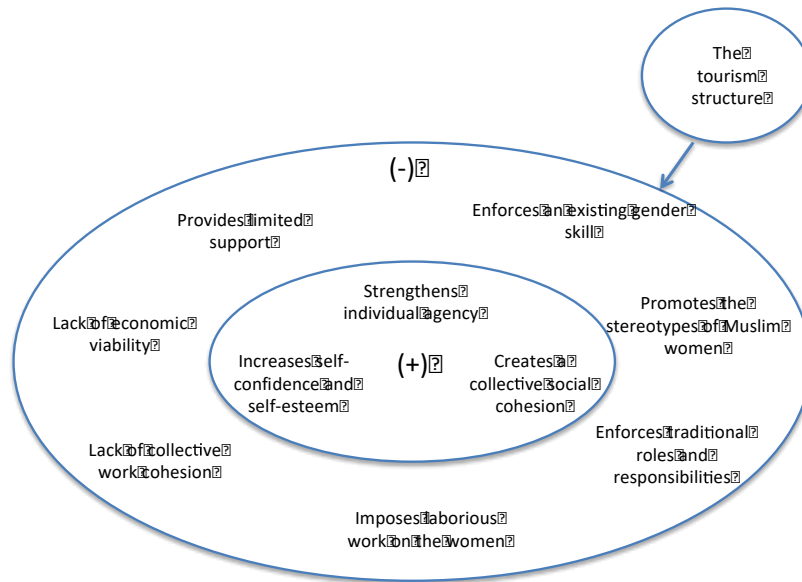


And lastly, the sixth factor is the women themselves. When reviewing the overall effects of the above five factors on the women, the case study reveals that the women themselves play a major role and influence in constructing their lived experience and empowerment. This is through their own perceptions, behaviour and reactions, although these are influenced by the above five factors. On a positive note, the women play a role in *strengthening their individual agency* by using their sewing skills in the enterprise (theme 1, sub-theme 1.2). As revealed in the challenges section, the women have a critical self-understanding and awareness of their reality and conditions as Muslim Omani women when it came to their involvement in their enterprise and the causes of their conditions.  This, in turn, influences how they present their selves in the public and private sphere in order to *build autonomy* within their embedded environment. This is evident as they present themselves as sewers and hostesses, and promote themselves as modern Omani women in the enterprise while they maintained the boundaries set by their families (theme 5, sub-themes 5.1/5.2; theme 9, sub-themes 9.3).  The women's critical self-understanding and awareness of their position also influences their choices and

pattern of behaviours. Thus, the women's choices and behaviour is seen as a *form of resistance* not only to the traditional roles and responsibilities that they are embedded within, but also towards the tourists' stereotyping. This is evident when it came to their choice to be involved in the enterprise and their promoting their modern identities to tourists (theme 1, sub-theme 1.1; theme 9, sub-theme 9.3). Besides the positive effects from their critical understanding and awareness, they *created their own collective social cohesion* as they developed a strong sisterhood through having social gatherings and building friendships (theme 8, sub-themes 8.1/8.2). Thus, when taking these positive effects as a whole, the women seem to have created their own feminine space from the enterprise in which they can work and socialise.

However, there are various significant negative effects for the women from the sewing enterprise, which has implications on their potential to be empowered through it. One is that they consciously *conformed to using an existing gender skill* by agreeing to use sewing skills for work and gaining sewing experience (theme 1, sub-theme 1.2; theme 7, sub-theme 7.3). They also consciously *conformed to traditional female roles and responsibilities* as they struggled to maintain their domestic responsibilities while conducting their sewing work (theme 5, sub-themes 5.1/5.2). Moreover, they *lacked collective work cohesion* when it comes to working together as a group, as is revealed from the unequal distribution of work and lack of group cooperation (theme 4, sub-themes 4.1/4.2; theme 10, sub-themes 10.1).

Figure 15: The women factor effects (the sewing group)
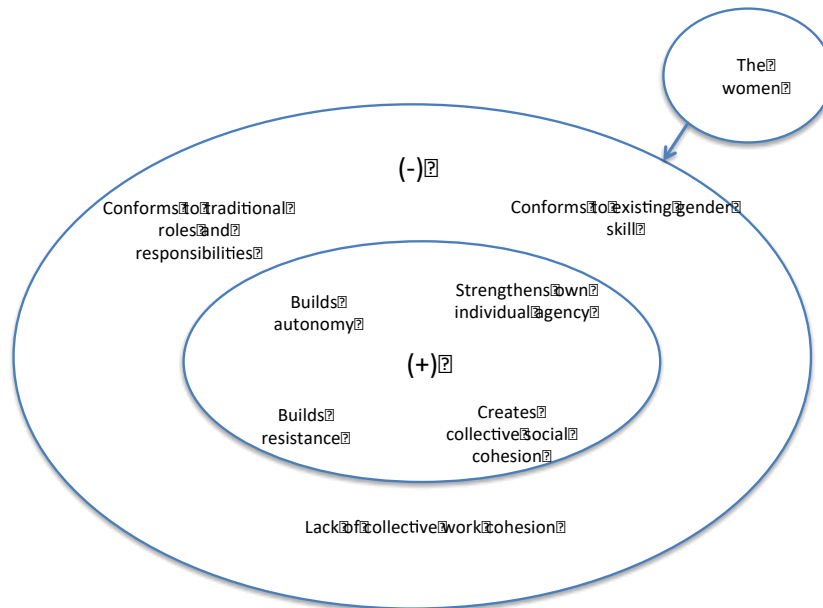


Taken as a whole, these broad factors along with their effects combined to present the lived experiences and empowerment of the women through their sewing enterprise. A summary of the positive and negative effects of each factor is given in table 15 below.

Table 15: Factors affecting the sewing group lived experience and empowerment

| Factors | Positive effects | Negative effects |
| --- | --- | --- |
| The family | | Enforces an existing gender skill<br><br>Enforces traditional roles and responsibilities |
| The community | | Enforces an existing gender skill |
| The nature of tourism enterprise work (sewing) | Strengthens individual agency<br><br>Increases self-confidence and self-esteem<br><br>Creates collective social cohesion<br><br>Increases status, respect and prestige | Enforces an existing gender skill<br><br>Promotes stereotypes of Muslim women<br><br>Enforces traditional roles and responsibilities<br><br>Imposes laborious work on the women<br><br>Lack of economic viability |
| The tourist | Increases self-confidence and self-esteem<br><br>Strengthens individual agency | Lack of economic viability<br><br>Stereotypes the women |
| The tourism structure | Strengthens individual agency<br><br>Creates collective social cohesion<br><br>Increases self-confidence and self-esteem | Provides limited support<br><br>Enforces an existing gender skill<br><br>Promotes stereotypes of Muslim women<br><br>Enforces traditional roles and responsibilities<br><br>Imposes laborious work on the women<br><br>Lack of collective work cohesion<br><br>Lack of economic viability |
| The women | Strengthens individual agency<br><br>Builds autonomy<br><br>Builds resistance<br><br>Creates collective social cohesion | Conforms to using existing gender skill<br><br>Conforms to traditional roles and responsibilities<br><br>Lack of collective work cohesion |

The factors are re-presented in figure 16 below to display how they impact on the women's experiences and empowerment, as discussed above.

Figure 16: Construction of the sewing group lived experience and empowerment
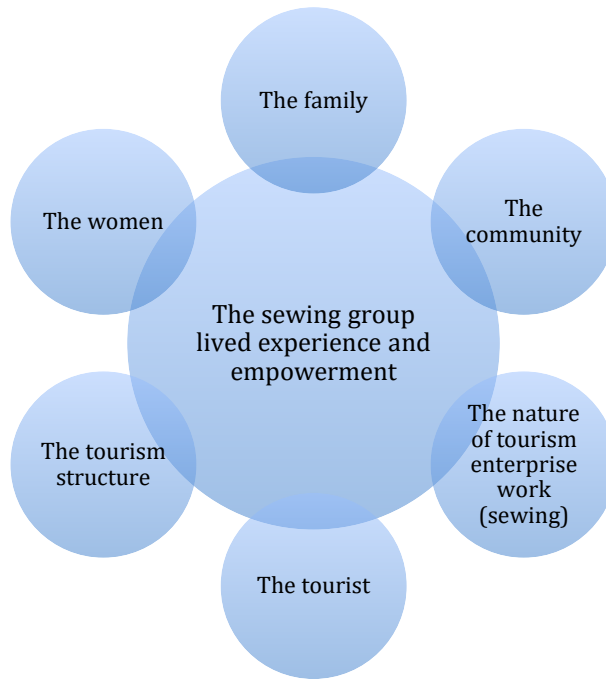


Overall, these are the factors, along with their pertaining effects, that emerged when reviewing the sewing group information and narrative.

## 8.6 Conclusion

This chapter presented the sewing group case study. I provided important background information about the formation and nature of the sewing enterprise, and the women who participated in it. I also displayed how the women got involved in the hosting enterprise because it was a new opportunity and to use their existing sewing skills. Then, I revealed the various challenges that the women encountered with the sewing enterprise. This included the struggle to sew as work, economic stress and burden, collective work effort, and maintaining domestic responsibilities. Moreover, I revealed the main benefits that the women were able to gain from the sewing enterprise. This included sewing in a desirable working environment, the importance of the sewing enterprise to the women, developing a sisterhood unity,

and cultural exchange. In addition, I presented the group's outlook for the sewing enterprise. At the end, I identified and discussed the main factors that influence the sewing group's lived experiences and empowerment. This included the family, the community, the nature of the tourism enterprise work, the tourists, the tourism structure and the women.

In the next chapter, I present the third and final case study that I developed, which is based on the lived experiences of women tourism entrepreneurs.

# Chapter 9: Findings: Women tourism entrepreneurs

## 9.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to present the case study about the women tourism entrepreneurs. First, I present background information about the women and their tourism enterprises. Then, I provide a thematic narrative based on the lived experiences of the women. Next, I identify and discuss the main concepts that are emerging from the thematic narrative, then I conclude with a recap of the main topics discussed in this chapter.

## 9.2 Background information about the women and their tourism enterprise

The women tourism entrepreneurs are based in the capital city of Oman. They own a formally established SME in Oman's tourism industry. They also each founded and launched their own respective tourism enterprise with no financial support from the government or financial institutions, with the exception of one entrepreneur who inherited her tourism enterprise. In addition, they fully manage their enterprise on a day-to-day basis and directly deal with tourists. Table 16 is a summary of information about the women and their tourism enterprises. The women's names are not identified, in order to protect their identity and privacy, and pseudonyms are assigned instead.

Table 16: Information about the women and their tourism enterprises

**Redaction:** Table information removed due to confidently reasons.

## 9.3 Thematic narrative

The following narrative illustrates the lived experiences of women tourism entrepreneurs by using themes and sub-themes, as displayed in table 17 below.

Table 17: Women tourism entrepreneurs themes and sub-themes

| Themes | Sub-themes |
|---|---|
| 1. Getting into tourism entrepreneurship | 1.1 Creating individual opportunity |
| | 1.2 Using existing skills, personal interests and passions |
| | 1.3 Being creative and innovative |
| 2. Operating in a difficult tourism business environment | 2.1 Approving the tourism enterprise |
| | 2.2 Lack of support |
| | 2.3 Lack of funding |
| | 2.4 Dealing with competition |
| 3. Being a woman tourism entrepreneur | 3.1 Selling her enterprise idea |
| | 3.2 Dealing with negative views |
| | 3.3 Showing her capabilities |
| | 3.4 Struggling to provide tourism products and services |
| 4. Economic stress and burden | 4.1 Making low income |
| | 4.2 Taking financial risks and chances |
| | 4.3 Fear of failure |
| 5. Dealing with the family | 5.1 Having family concerns |
| | 5.2 Balancing family time and enterprise |
| 6. Overcoming gender challenges | 6.1 Forming a positive identity |
| | 6.2 Proving her-self |
| | 6.3 Gaining family support |
| 7. Building gradual economic independence | 7.1 Having success |
| | 7.2 Making decent income |
| 8. Importance of the enterprise to the women | 8.1 Passion for enterprise |
| | 8.2 Building stronger personality |

| | 8.3 Becoming unique |
| | 8.4 Becoming popular and famous |
| 9. Developing cultural exchange | 9.1 Educating tourists |
| | 9.2 Promoting their modern identity |
| 10. Benefiting others | 10.1 Doing it for the country |
| | 10.2 Preserving culture and heritage |
| | 10.3 Making an impact |
| | 10.4 Involving others |
| 11. Looking to the future | 11.1 Growing bigger |
| | 11.2 The future of tourism entrepreneurship for other Omani women |

**The beginning**

**Theme 1: Getting into tourism entrepreneurship**

When asked about their story in setting up their tourism enterprise, there was a common pattern of motivations that led the women to open their business.

*1.1 Creating individual opportunity*

Many of the women felt that there were many missing products and services that were not yet provided in Oman's tourism industry. Thus, the women sought to create their individual opportunity by setting up their own tourism enterprise based on the tourism products and services missing in Oman.

> I found out that all of the gifts [souvenirs] that we were giving away [providing to tourists] didn't reflect the identity as an Omani, so if you go to any country, you get something handicraft, something that really belong to the country but in Oman, no, you get everything from different parts of the world but not Oman, so I wasn't really comfortable [happy].
>
> (Zainab)

When it comes to the apartment hotels in Oman, to be honest unfortunately it doesn't meet to the level for one to relax themselves, it's only possible if it's maybe a 5-star hotel, but not all people can pay these high prices, I mean a night there can reach 100 and something rials, so this is very difficult for people who have limited budgets.

(Zara)

Besides providing the missing tourism products and services for Oman, some of the women also sought to create their individual opportunity in order to gain independence:

I started developing an interest to set up something of my own, I decided I wanted to do more on my own, like I am used to doing everything on my own, so I became accustomed to it.

(Gadeer)

We took a lot of chances, mind you it was all financed by us individually, we went out and took out a loan, we didn't say let's take money from our husbands and start this business, we wanted to be independent.

(Salwa)

Moreover, some of the women had encountered personal circumstances, which led them to create their individual opportunity. For Wafa, it was the sudden death of her father that led her to create her individual opportunity to pursue her father's accommodation business.

Two years ago, my father passed away while I was at university. As I was the eldest of my siblings, I decided to inherit the business and to take the big responsibility to take over the family business.

(Wafa)

With early marriage at the age of 16, having her children at a young age and completing her high school studies at a later age, this made it difficult for Noor to find a suitable job. This circumstance led her to pursue her own doll-making enterprise, as she explained:

> When I turned 16, they married me off, I didn't finish my studies, my age was 16 and I got pregnant and then I had a second pregnancy, and then I stopped bringing [having] more children. I continued with my studies, in the night I mean, I completed it. I took my secondary school certificate, and I studied a bit of accounting so I could find a job and like this but it didn't happen for me, I mean a blessed opportunity in finding a job. I tried here and there [different places] but it didn't happen, no, but the problem is I didn't try hard enough to make... to find for myself a job and like this, and I got busy with my home and my family, and then I had twins, I got busier, I couldn't go out to any place [to search for a job]".

> (Noor)

Thus, a series of factors led the women to create their own individual opportunities.

*1.2 Using existing skills, personal interests and passions*

Many of the women used their existing skills, personal interests and passions to develop their own tourism enterprise, which played a large role in influencing the concept of it. Some of the women used their existing skills related to business, which they gained from their previous education and work experience, to help set up their tourism enterprise.

> I came from a different background, I have been in banking, I came from an economic point of view, I have been in banking, so it did, it actually [helped] keep my eye on what I am doing but also to remain more grounded in economics.

> (Mirya)

All of the personal interests and passions that the women had were related to either Oman's landscape, food, culture, heritage or tradition. For Zelkha, it was her passion and love for the sea that led her to set up her tour company.

> I am a sea person, basically I like to see the sea, I am happy when I am near the sea, so my interest was not on land tours, although I enjoy nature, but, yeah, if I have a choice I will stick around the sea much longer than if I go to the interior, under the trees, you know in the mountains, it is my thing, but my top priority is the sea, and that's how the idea started about the business – passionately I loved the sea.
>
> (Zelkha)

For Gadeer, it was her passion for traditional Omani food that led her to set up an Omani restaurant, as she explained

> Because at that point [in the past] I have always been, I mean, I always knew a little bit more about the kitchen than the people [family and friends] I knew around me, like I used to cook when I was in the UK, my first shawa [traditional Omani meat dish] I made in the UK, my first populau [Omani sweet] I made in the UK. So I started looking into my hobbies, I started looking at my own interests and I identified this [Omani food].
>
> (Gadeer)

Some of these passions and interests that the women had were influenced by experiences from their childhood. For Noor, she developed her passion in sewing from a young age, where she learned sewing from her older sister who taught her to make the dolls.

> She knew how to make the dolls, I used to sit with her, my age was 10, something like that, my big sister, she used to stich, making designs, everything, so I used to like to make handwork when I was small.
>
> (Noor)

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For Neila, it was her daily walks through the souk [an old traditional market] to school during her childhood that led her to develop a passion for Omani jewellery.

> See the story is when I was small, I had to pass the souk of silver and gold in order to go to school, so everyday I had to walk through this way, I had to go through the souk from inside and then I reach to school. I used to see those people [traditional Omani jewellery makers] working, I used to feel something was attracting me to it [jewellery making], so daily when I used to go to school, this was the only thing that used to pull my attention along the way.

> (Neila)

As a whole, the women's existing skills, personal interests and passions helped them to develop their tourism enterprise.

*1.3 Being creative and innovative*

The women were also efficiently creative and innovative to turn their existing skills, personal interests and passions into an enterprise idea. This involved making the products and services that they offered modern and practical, yet, at the same time, maintaining their traditional and local element. For Ahlam, her creativity and innovation was about playing with the culture and tradition of Oman. As she explained:

> So what my thing [enterprise idea] is I am playing with the culture, with the tradition of Oman, things that we have in Oman, I am trying to play around with them and see it [create] in a better way.

> (Ahlam)

As for Sharrifa and Gadeer, it was about mixing different elements to their offerings:

Because we built... the concept is that we try to make our own chocolates and we try to get the ingredients from Oman and we mix it with the chocolate, so we have a twist of European chocolate, the Belgian chocolate with our flavours, with our local ingredients.

(Sharrifa)

So what I did is like I came up with the dishes through inspirations through different cuisines. At the end of the day, food is food, food is created through, like over... through history, what is available in agriculture, in farming, so I tried to see the different influences, you find people who are living in the interior in Oman have more meat-based food rather than, you know, other regions of Oman, there is vegetation option, others are more seafood options.

(Ghadeer)

Thus, the women went beyond their tourism enterprise in offering unique and different tourism products and services that were not commonly found in Oman's tourism industry.

**Challenges**

However, as the women set up their enterprises they encountered a number of challenges associated with it and the environment that they operated within.

**Theme 2: Operating in a difficult tourism business environment**

The first challenge that the women encountered when it came to setting up and running their enterprise was related to their difficult tourism business environment. The difficulty of the tourism business environment was found with various players that were already operating within the tourism structure. This included tour operators, hotels, the Ministry of Tourism, and other tourism-related government bodies and private companies.

## 2.1 Approving the tourism enterprise

In general, the main step in setting up a tourism enterprise in Oman is the requirement of receiving official approval from

Redaction: Names of organization removed due to confidential information. This proved to be a challenge for most of the women due to the complicated procedures that were required. For example, for Kuwaithr, it took her about 10 years to obtain approval for her heritage village project.

> One of the challenges was the delay of receiving agreements [approvals], for nearly 10 years it took me to start the tourism project despite other complications.

> (Kuwaithr)

Zara emphasised that there were too many complicated rules and procedures when it came to registering their hotel.

> When we started, I mean particular descriptions, particular spaces, particular parking, I mean a lot of things [rules], so there was a lot of obstacles to be honest.

> (Zara)

Thus, receiving official approval for a tourism enterprise in Oman is not easy or straightforward.

## 2.2 Lack of support

Besides receiving approval for their tourism enterprise, many of the women feel that there was a general lack of support for tourism entrepreneurship from the overall tourism business environment in Oman. The women referred to the lack of support when it comes to encouragement for local tourism products and services, as well as to access information, resources and incentives. For Gadeer, she had to conduct her own research in order to understand current tourist trends. As she explained:

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I had to go to hotels and sit there for a weekend and understand what's going on, they [Redaction: Names of organization removed due to confidential information.] don't report issues on this matter [tourist trends]. All that I am telling you, it is from personal observations and from someone who came and told me that this is the trend now [Omani restaurants for tourists]. So this is the kind of thing we need the [Redaction: Names of organization removed due to confidential information.] to have, because if they don't provide these annual reports of what trends are happening, or at least quarterly… It's much needed, this is the support system that we need

(Gadeer)

Other comments on this included:

I mean, there is a market but there is no demand [for local tourism product and services] from the [Redaction: Names of organization removed due to confidential information.]

, there is no demand from the local hotels that are coming up, there will be a few orders but there is no big push [support] from them, you know what I mean.

(Arwa)

The location, it was very tough to get the [business] location but I got it by fighting, I fought with the ministry, the municipality and it was supposed to be removed [the business location], and I fought to keep it until now. I have it [the business location] for me till 2015, I will need to fight again for more years, forever.

(Zainab)

Hence, the lack of industry support made it even more difficult for the women to set up their tourism enterprises.

*2.3 Lack of funding*

The women also felt that there was a lack of funding to help start up their tourism enterprise. Mirya explained when she set up her handicraft business 21 years ago:

It was a big problem because people [government and private companies] at that time were not used to [financially] supporting small projects, this was one of the big issues, they are all happy to give to big international projects, but when it came to something small and personal which would actually effect the lifestyles of people, very difficult.

(Mirya)

The funding situation remains the same to date. Zara was able to take a loan from the government to set up her hotel but that proved to be a challenge, as she had to contribute 50% of the cost from her own money.

So we turn to the government through the bank, the development bank, there is a government support for loans, so we took it, they gave us a loan, of course, but for them to give you a loan, you have to actually contribute 50% for the project, so this was the challenge also.

(Zara)

As a result of the lack of funding, most of the women started small and from scratch with their enterprise, and used their own money to set it up.

From the beginning, I started only with 30 rials (50 pounds), it was 30 rials that I started with, and I used to avoid taking money that I made [profit], in that I don't take from it a salary for example, and to used it only [to build my business].

(Neila)

On our own expense, based on our salaries only and because… being a banker, you get bonuses, so all our bonuses, our salaries, we just invested in the enterprise, it's our own experience, no one gave us anything.

(Sharrifa)

Therefore, the women faced financial difficulty in setting up their own tourism enterprises.

*2.4 Dealing with competition*

Not only was there a lack of support and funding for the women entrepreneurs, but they also had to, at the same time, face competition with those already operating in the market.

> Because people know I am different [unique enterprise], I have the quality. Yes, you pay more and it takes a long time [to make authentic handicrafts], this is one of my challenges, competing with the souk, and I think until now it will still, it will always be a challenge, but those who know, those who appreciate [authentic handicrafts] come to us but it was a challenge. It's more expensive than the souk, yes, I am, because I am working with Omanis [local handicrafters], in the souk you have those bringing souvenirs from India, from Afghanistan, Pakistan, you name it.
>
> (Mirya)

> These are the people [competitors], somebody wants to paint a bad image of you because he wants to knock you off business, which gives me something [a sad feeling]. I find it not just awkward, it's unacceptable and if you had faith you wouldn't be doing that [bad mouthing and spreading rumours]. I have had experiences, lets say, I had a group of tourists coming into my dhow [traditional Omani boat], I normally see them happy, I get feedback from my husband, I do check with the tour operators sometimes after the trip, "I hope they [tourists] are all happy", this kind of thing, "Is there anything [comments]? I will be happy if you can share the feedback". And then you get these people who come to the marina, who have their own companies, tour operators, and they say, "Don't give your trips to Zelkha, you go to the person that I deal with, a business partner, don't give this company, don't give them". 'Why?', the tourists ask. The tour operators reply, "We found, their [previous]

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guests who were there [on the dhow] on the last trip, they found a cockroach in their dhow", these kind of things.

<p align="right">(Zelkha)</p>

Therefore, it was difficult for the women to launch their tourism enterprise in the existing market.

**Theme 3: Being a woman tourism entrepreneur**

Besides the general challenge of setting up and running their tourism enterprise, the women encountered the challenges in being entrepreneurs due to their gender. Aspects of gender discrimination were found in various areas of their experience, which caused several difficulties for the women as they initially set up their enterprise. The challenge of being woman tourism entrepreneurs not only came from the tourism business environment, but also from general Omani community.

*3.1 Selling her enterprise idea*

With all of the women using their existing skills, personal interests and passions as the basis of their tourism enterprise, the women had to first sell the viability of their business idea in order for it to be accepted. For example, for Gadeer, there was resistance to her idea of using Omani food as the concept for her restaurant and convincing others of her idea.

> It was like, "what are you talking about, Omani modern, Omani fusion, what is that? What planet are you on?" from everyone that I spoke to. "What are you talking about? What does it mean?". I said it means "is that you have shawa [Omani meat dish with rice] as a sandwich", that's how I would it explain to them, When I opened it [the restaurant], there was a lot of resistance, picking on how the food was cooked, and how it was prepared, and, "Why would you serve shawa in bread when it is meant to be eaten with rice?", people commented on stuff like that.

<p align="right">(Gadeer)</p>

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As for Ahlam, it was her creative use of Omani jewellery in turning them to modern souvenirs that people were not convinced of at the beginning.

> There are some people who wants things [souvenirs] but they don't understand your art and your creativity, so you have to convince them, this is a big challenge, big challenge, big challenge to convince someone to buy it.

> (Ahlam)

Therefore, it was challenging for the women to sell their enterprise idea and to receive acceptance for it from the people around them.

*3.2 Dealing with negative views*

The women also dealt with negative views when it came to their tourism enterprise concept. For Noor, she encountered negative views towards her dolls as being forbidden and taboo.

> Haram [forbidden] that this doll will take your soul [referring to witch craft/magic], so I told them if this is haram, stealing is haram but this one gives you [a livelihood]. It's not like I am worshiping it, I am actually making it and people are buying it, foreigners.

> (Noor)

**Redaction:** Sentence and quote removed due to sensitive information.

Kuwaithr explained that she experienced societal negative views towards her enterprise due to the influence that mass tourism can have on the country.

> Yes, there is a negative view, I mean they [Omani community] still don't want to mix with other cultures because the more tourists are added [visit Oman], the Omani heritage becomes different [influenced] and its difficult for them to accept this, and the Omani community will not easily accept all ideas [referring to tourism], although we are a country, we are still not open minded.

> (Kuwaithr)

Although societal negative views towards tourism are not new in Oman in general, such views were more prominent for the women tourism entrepreneurs due to their gender.

*3.3 Showing her capabilities*

The women also had to show their capabilities, as they were undermined for being capable tourism women entrepreneurs. For example, with the sea being a traditional male domain, Sarah constantly encounter harassment from the coast guards and fishermen whenever she went out to sea for her escorted tours.

> I am a woman, also they don't think... I do think that they [coast guards and fishermen] think that a woman shouldn't be [in the sea], they didn't like it, yeah, they didn't like it. And I am a single woman because my husband and I are divorced, so they know I am a divorcee, I am alone and I am out there [in the sea], and they very much know that I head the company. They don't like it, and also in the sea it's a traditional area for men, it's a guy thing.

> (Sarah)

When it came to setting up her tour company, Basma also sensed that others doubted her capabilities due to being a woman.

> Yes, and there was someone from [**Redaction:** Names of organization removed due to confidential information.]
> , when I want to put, went to ask for a tourism licence, he said this sentence, he said, "You girls, I advise you not to enter the tourism field, you will fail, we are men and we

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didn't try to risk it, there is a very big risk [in tourism entrepreneurship], so how it will be for you [for a woman], so I advise you not to continue [pursue her tourism enterprise]". And for me, based on his words, I mean I don't know, there was a challenge from his stubbornness.

<div align="right">(Basma)</div>

Reem had a similar experience of people doubting her ability to operate her business successfully.

A female German tourist wanted a cheap hotel, so I took her to this small hotel in the city, near Crown Plaza, that little hotel. Anyway, I booked a deluxe room for her and I made sure that she would be comfortable and so on, and I had an appointment with her at 10 o clock. At 10 o clock I want to the hotel, and I sat and sat and sat. Then I said to the receptionist, "Please check this lady because our appointment was at 10 o clock, I have been here since 10 clock and I have not seen her yet". The receptionist replied, "Oh she went out, madam, half an hour ago she went out". She went out instead with another male tour guide, I saw him coming into the hotel. Later on, the female tourist got back to me, writing me an email saying that I was not professional enough, and she never paid me.

<div align="right">(Reem)</div>

Wafa recalled that when she took over her father's accommodation business she had to face a major challenge with the staff. She commented that "there was a major demotivation from the staff". She often felt, at the beginning, that they saw her as incapable of taking over her father's business and running it successfully. This was especially true as she was quite young with no previous work experience and was also female. She experienced similar encounters with the community around her accommodation and with her father's previous business partner.

As a whole, the community did not believe in the women's capabilities to run their own tourism enterprises successfully.

*3.4 Struggling to provide tourism products and services*

The women tourism entrepreneurs also struggled to provide their tourism products and services due to the time and effort that they needed to put in. For Wafa, running the accommodation had been overwhelming, especially during the high tourism season. She needed to work at the weekends and during holidays, and sometimes worked up to 14 hours a day. For Noor, it was the long length of time it took to complete sewing the dolls that she struggled to meet.

> Yes, because the dress that I was just showing you, from 1 o clock to 3 o clock I was just working on the dress, the dhofari [a region in Oman] dress is a bit easier but the Balushi [an Omani tribe] and the Omani dress takes time, yes, I stitch them and it takes time.
>
> (Noor)

Other comments on this included:

> For me, I have struggled [to provide her handicrafts], it's not easy to go everyday in the morning and get out and go to all the miniseries and beg/ask [for deals and contracts], it's not easy, you know, not easy to go, trying to sell [her handicrafts].
>
> (Ahlam)

> To be honest, it is for sure a tiring field [tourism] and it requires you to be completely available. I mean you don't think if you have children or a husband to think it will be easy, you have to... there needs to be organisation, you need to organise your time.
>
> (Basma)

Thus, the provision of tourism products and services was not easy for the women due to the high work requirements that they needed to adhere to.

**Theme 4: Economic stress and burden**

With the challenges of operating their tourism enterprise in a difficult tourism business environment and being woman, these challenges created a major economic stress and burden for the women in various ways.

*4.1 Making low income*

The main challenge was due to the low income that they made from their enterprise at the beginning.

> This is part of the challenges that we have to face because we are still not a huge company and the business income generating is not big enough to cover all of the expenses, this is the stress given to us.
>
> (Sharrifa)

> So I felt I was not actually benefiting financially and I felt that my income, if I am lucky enough, just covers the expenses of renting the office and like this.
>
> (Basma)

Besides the effect of the difficult tourism business environment and their gender on their income, the women also faced difficulties in selling their products and services to tourists.

> I remember years ago, I had a male tourist staying at the Hyatt and he said, "I want a fishing charter". This was very much at the beginning [at the time of launching her tour enterprise], I think those days I was charging something like 180 rials for the day. He said, "The guy at the concierge told me that I could find a local fishing boat for 50 rials only". I said, "Well, be my guest, well, you are staying at the Hyatt, it's fine if you want a comfortable experience, fine, if you don't, it's absolutely fine, it's your choice if it works well, but don't tell me I am expensive because you don't want to pay the money". I still have a challenge in this regard.
>
> (Sarah)

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A tourist criticised me once for my handicrafts, I was in the shop, he turned to me and said, "Why should I buy this? How do I know this is made in Oman' and he picked up something, "This could have been made in China".

(Mirya)

Therefore, the women struggled to make sufficient income from their enterprise, which, in turn, affected the financial progress of their businesses.

*4.2 Taking financial risks and chances*

There were also major risks and chances that the women had to manage when they set up and operated their enterprise.

I just took a chance, but then I said to my husband, "You know, I want to make things [souvenirs] that tourists can take with them because it was ridiculous, every time you go to the souk, people [referring to tourists] want to buy, they want to pay, they don't get what they want to take as an Omani souvenir and at the same time it's good quality, high quality stuff".

(Ahlam)

Sharrifa and Neila had to quit their jobs and take the risk to focus on their enterprises.

In 2009, I was afraid to leave my job because I don't know if I will continue [with my business] or will there be an income to cover [business expenses] or no income, especially as my children are all in university, all of them. But I said, "OK, I can do it", so I took the step and I came out of my job.

(Neila)

A few of the women also felt that the tourism industry in general is a risky market to venture into due to fluctuating tourist numbers and potential crisis, and they often encountered such effects:

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I realised in 2009, with the economic crisis, there was not going to be many tourists. So what I am banking on, and what I was doing people [community] were resisting my business concept for more traditional food. The tourism industry was more or less like… going down the drain at that stage, nobody was spending on holidays.

(Gadeer)

As a result, the women had to make difficult financial decisions and encounter challenging financial situations as they pursued with their tourism enterprises.

*4.3 Fear of failure*

With the combination of making a low income and taking financial risks and chances with their enterprise, many of the women emotionally struggled with their business and emphasised their urge to sometimes give up on their enterprise or not expecting to succeed due to the fear of failure. For Reem, she experienced self-doubt as she encountered various bad experinces:

So experience after experience, I thought, "No, this is not for me", because then, after this kind of experience [bad experience], I never took it seriously, I thought this was not for me.

(Reem)

Zara had to convince herself of the potential success she could have with her business, despite the fear of failure that came with running a business.

I didn't expect that I would succeed because, you know, I worked in the government for 20 years, not in business but one learns with practice.

(Zara)

Others encountered similar experiences:

> I had disappointment to a point I wanted to close down the office, I felt myself not being capable because I put a lot of effort and energy and in turn the amount is not there, which is the income.

<div align="right">(Basma)</div>

> I reached to a stage that I was tired, I told my husband "Enough, I don't want [the enterprise], Enough, I will stop everything".

<div align="right">(Neila)</div>

Although the women proceeded with their businesses despite having this fear of failure, they had to carry a heavy emotional burden as the possibility for failure was always present.

**Theme 5: Dealing with the family**

Besides the tourism business environment and the community as a whole, the women also had to deal with their own families when it came to their involvement in tourism entrepreneurship.

*5.1 Having family concerns*

Many of the women dealt with family concerns in relation to the concept and nature of their enterprises, and their capability of running these due to being a woman. Wafa recalled her mother's constant concerns and worries when she took over her father's accommodation business. This was because her mother constantly heard negative talk from various people, "She can't do it, she can't do it", as many people lacked confidence in her ability to run the business. She then told her mother, "Mum, please give me one year, just give me one year and we will see what will happen". Her mother had several times tried to persuade her to sell the business due to her constant worries. Other examples included:

The more you talk to people, sometimes the more discouraged you become. You go to family members and they tell you, "Why, what for, you have your salary". You know not everyone is going to encourage you [to start a business].

(Zelkha)

It was a challenge, it was tiring and my family refused for me to work this type of job, to drive a car and go out with the tourists. If there was a driver it would have been possible, but not on my own for being a girl and like this.

(Basma)

Thus, the women's families doubted their tourism enterprise endeavours and their capabilities of becoming entrepreneurs.

*5.2 Balancing family time and enterprise*

The women also had to make time for their family while they operated and managed their tourism enterprise. Thus, they struggled to balance time for their family with their tourism enterprise. This was challenging for all of the women, regardless of whether they were single, married or married with children, due to the strong traditional roles and responsibilities placed on Omani women.

I try to make time, I try because of my family, I have small girls and originally my goal [business goal] was to have more free time for my family.

(Zara)

For me, to be honest, without the help of my mother with my daughter, I would definitely feel guilty, because I am always spending less time with my daughter. I mean, most of the time is on my work, in following up, in making calls and like this.

(Basma)

It does take up my time, sometimes I have to let go of [not attend] family gatherings, we do have, almost once a month family gatherings, but if I have a trip that needs me, I leave my family and go on it. We have made it very clear to our families, they know this [business] is what we do and we keep on telling them that hopefully when it is summer, we will be available but now I have to seize the opportunities, I have to work now.

(Zelkha)

For a few of the women who had older children, the children's age played a major factor in the women's ability to start their enterprise. For example:

I don't think I would [have started the business], I wouldn't have because I took full charge of my kids, I sent them to school, I sat with them and I came back with them, it was my full-time job. I didn't include my husband, I did it myself, so I don't think I would have wanted it [the business].

(Ahlam)

Our kids now are at an age we can probably take some more time and focus more on work, but there was a time when we all had small kids and you have certain responsibilities. We saw a direct reflection definitely, we needed to be more focused, we weren't [ready for business], we had so much [childcare responsibilities].

(Salwa)

Although it was difficult for the women to balance family time and their enterprise, making time for their families was an important priority that they had to maintain while running their tourism enterprises.

**Benefits**

Despite the various challenges that the women encountered with their enterprise, all of them were determined to continue with their enterprise as it provided them with a number of benefits.

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**Theme 6: Overcoming gender challenges**

The women used their tourism enterprise as a platform to deal with the challenges that they encountered in being an Omani woman in their everyday life, when it comes to their selves, their families and the community. This, in turn, helped the women to overcome many of the prevailing immediate challenges that they encountered in relation to their enterprise.

*6.1 Forming a positive identity*

Despite the difficulty of the various challenges that the women encountered, they were able to form a strong positive identity from dealing with the challenges and not giving up. Ahlam decided to take a positive view towards the challenges she was encountering:

> I kept on saying, "I will stop this [the enterprise], stop this, stop this", but now I have changed, changed my thinking, because I love the challenges and I love to show that I am going to do better than you [referring to those who doubted her], you know you have something to show them that you are better.
>
> (Ahlam)

Mirya had a similar positive awakening:

> I never looked at things as problems, I look at everything as a challenge and I kept on telling myself, "This is the idea". It's motivational, we have no problems, we only have challenges.
>
> (Mirya)

For others, it was deciding to continue pursuing their enterprise positively, no matter the consequences:

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So for me it was an effort from myself and, thank God, I continued and I will continue with it [her enterprise] because maybe I have patience, strong faith and at the same time my stubbornness towards the men.

(Basma)

When I started [her enterprise], I thought that it would go in a different way [no succeed] but once you are in it, you have two chances, you walk away or you go through with it, I choose to go through with it.

(Sarah)

It was not in my mind that it will be like this [difficult to set up a tourism business], so I told him [her husband] that I will not give up, so I went once, twice, three times, and I bought all the things that they asked for  [for the tourism license].

(Zara)

The women reaffirmed positive thoughts to themselves to help them continue pursuing with their enterprise and to believe in themselves, no matter the challenges they encountered.

*6.2 Proving herself*

Not only did the women become positive towards the challenges they faced, but they were also determined to prove themselves as capable women tourism entrepreneurs in resisting these challenges. Kuwaithr proved herself by showing that she was a serious business lady:

And, for sure, I struggled during that time, and I had to change the project, of course, with great struggles, with the minister's understanding, "OK, we can maybe give her the project approval", because I have shown to them that I am a serious lady, only now I am accepted as a serious woman.

(Kuwaithr)

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For Gadeer and Basma, they proved themselves by challenging gender discrimination:

> These shifts don't take place unless you are willing to challenge the norms… norms like, "Why is a girl seen in a restaurant? What is she doing there?" It's the same, if I can bring myself to do it then I would encourage other people, more people to do it, I would make at least that much of a statement, whether I become successful or not.

(Gadeer)

> The talk of the men, I felt there was stubbornness [in her], a challenge between them and me. I mean, I am a girl, you are mocking me for being a girl, not being able to do this thing [tourism entrepreneurship]… so, yes, to prove myself and to prove that a girl shouldn't be weak and that a girl can enter any field.

(Basma)

As for Noor, she proved her capabilities through the independence she was able to gain from her enterprise:

> This is sewing, hand work which I am doing, instead of me going to beg, instead of me going to steal, I make this [her enterprise], I mean it benefits me.

(Noor)

As a whole, the women used various forms of resistance in order to prove themselves as strong and determined women tourism entrepreneurs.

*6.3 Gaining family support*

With the ability to become positive and to prove themselves, the women were able to gain their families' support despite the early concerns that they had about their enterprise and their capabilities. When it came to Wafa's mother concerns of others

holding negative view towards her, she emphasised that her mother was more comfortable now, especially after she was able to prove her abilities to run the camp because, as she puts it, "now I have trust and I own that trust cause I was able to prove my capabilities to everyone". Similarly, Sarah was able to gain her family's respect due to her hard work and effort with her enterprise:

> I think for many years, they completely thought that I was crazy [laughing], well, it's because it's been a lot of effort, it turned out to be hard work and took time... now they have looked at it [her enterprise], you know now, honestly, I think they really respect me for having done it and worked on it.

> (Sarah)

Also, the married women were able to gain their husbands' support. Although Basma's husband was unsure first of her entrepreneurial endeavour, he later on accepted it and offered to financially help her as she proved herself:

> My husband said he will take a loan on his personal account for this [her enterprise]. He also said, "OK, if you are confident with your enterprise and have faith, I will give you the amount that you need". So he took out a loan from the bank, so I got a car and I opened this office.

> (Basma)

Zelkha had a similar encounter with her husband:

> He [her husband] is more comfortable, and also he started to leave me more alone [to be independent], you know it's my field. Before he was with me [concerned], hand by hand, but when I became stronger, he felt now I am OK, he doesn't really need to care like [have concerns], he knows that I am doing well.

> (Zelkha)

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Consequently, gaining their family support helped the women to confidently pursue with their businesses.

**Theme 7: Building gradual economic independence**

The women's ability to use their enterprises to overcome gender challenges helped them to build gradual economic independence through their tourism enterprise.

*7.1 Having success*

Despite the early economic stress and burden that the women experienced when starting their tourism enterprise, they were able to have some success and make good progress in the following years. Zara knew she had a successful small hotel business when other entrepreneurs offered to sell their hotels to her:

> I mean, we are very encouraged with our success, we get surprised that the owners of enterprises that are similar to our enterprise, they come to us and they want to sell their enterprise to us. So we ask them, "Why do you want to sell to us?. They see us and they get surprised, "Why you haven't sold till now?" I mean a lot of people like us [other tourism entrepreneurs], they didn't even complete six months, and there are people who didn't even start but they want to sell it already. You know why? They gave up, they got tried, you can imagine now five owners of hotels came to us and asked if we want to buy from them and like this, or someone from Salalah [a city in Oman] come and manage it for us.

> (Zara)

Arwa and Salwa's success came from their ability to distribute their souvenirs to various tourism outlets:

> Yeah, I mean it's grown, the company has grown, it's moving in the direction that we wanted it to move. So we sell online, we also sell at the airport duty free, and we sell to the galleries. Some of the five-star hotels we deal directly with, they put it in the rooms and things like that, when they have guests coming, some of the tourism companies order from us something specifically

with their big tours coming up. also takes a lot of our souvenirs when they go out for exhibitions and stuff, other corporate companies that go out for international exhibitions; they take a lot of our souvenirs with them. We were the first gifts for the national airline carrier. When they first launched their new business and first classes, they said to give them souvenirs from us.

(Arwa)

Other comments on this included:

> Well, I just acquired the management [staff] on a new boat. Literally I signed the contract two days ago, I am very happy about this, this is a brand new luxury product in this market. She's a luxury dhow, her name is Ibra, she is licensed to carry 45 pax, but she can sleep 6 people on board in very beautiful style, a very luxurious product, so this is something completely new and different.

(Sarah)

> What's happening right now as we speak is that I am setting up a central kitchen, which is for catering, I started doing a lot of catering from the current operation.

(Gadeer)

Thus, the women gained their success as they had more business opportunities.

*7.2 Making decent income*

After the tourism enterprise grew, the women were also able to make a decent income from it. Basma was recently able to make decent income and to cover the growing expenses of her business:

> I am very proud of myself because I was able to cover the car instalments, the office rental and I have work, thank God, and I was able to participate in an

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international tourism exhibition this year. I got an income, a very simple income, the first five years that I started the company, I didn't get this type of income. This year, thank God, the income that I got, imagine from July until now, I got an income let's say about 10,000 (15,000 pounds), so I took out another car for the business.

<div align="right">(Basma)</div>

For Noor, who had never worked before, she was able to have her own money from the decent income she made from her doll making:

Yes, it [the income] helps me. For example, if I make 10 dolls, maybe I will get 100 rials [150 pounds], I mean at least it brings something, I can make them [income], I can spend them [income], I can do whatever I want. For example, if I have loans, I mean these last few days, I finished the dolls, I covered my loans, so that's it, thank God, and now any amount that I receive I am able to keep for myself.

<div align="right">(Noor)</div>

Other examples included:

I have now my own income, I control my income that I don't have to wait for a salary. OK when I refer to salary, I mean I have become my own boss, you know, I mean, this has become my own business, I can control my time, I control the income, what I will do and what I will not do with it.

<div align="right">(Neila)</div>

I have been able to do things that I was not able to do before because I didn't have sufficient funds with me, but now with the extra cash, yes, you pay the price, when people are sleeping and you are still seating until midnight and cracking your head and thinking how to do this, where to do it but there was… a far out way [long path to success], hardships that I go through, so I now have this [income] plus the opportunity to be self-employed.

(Zelkha)

With the growing success and the decent income the women were able to gain from their enterprise, they were able to build a path to their economic independence.

**Theme 8: Importance of the enterprise to the women**

However, the women felt that there was more to their enterprise than just having success and making a decent income, and that the enterprise had become an important part of their lives in various ways.

*8.1 Passion for their enterprise*

The women developed a great passion for their enterprise and emphasised the love they had for the work they do, despite the various challenges they encountered. Ahlam developed passion for her enterprise as it was based on doing something she loved, which was making Omani jewellery.

I always had it [a passion for Omani jewellery], I always loved it, you do business for something you love and you enjoy it, it's just like the work you work, it's like you are not working because you enjoy that work. I have, I seem to enjoy my business a lot.

(Ahlam)

The other women also felt similarly regarding their passion for their enterprise. For example:

It is our baby, we feel it is closer to what we believe in, you know, it's closer to our values and we see we can reflect that and take that much further.

(Salwa)

I am more into restaurants, restaurants are more intimate, they have more personality, you know, I feel it's a lot more fun, I like the whole tourism industry.

(Gadeer)

Thus, the women were passionate for the work they did through their tourism enterprise as it provided a fulfilling and enriching experience to their life.

*8.2 Building a stronger personality*

The women also felt that their enterprise had helped them to build stronger personalities from being able to develop their own enterprise and taking up important roles, to encountering difficult situations and proving their abilities. Comments on this included:

I am more confident in what I am doing, I knew what I was doing was a good thing back then, back in 1995, but was I truly confident? I knew what I was doing but confidence is something that grows in you.

(Mirya)

I am a much stronger person than I was, as a human being; personally, I have grown enormously.

(Sarah)

Definitely confidence, more confidence, more aware of what's happening in the country, we have become more professional instead of being more emotional in our work.

(Eman)

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With stronger personalities, the women believed they could achieve more in their lives, and believe in themselves and their abilities.

*8.3 Becoming unique*

As the women used their existing skills, personal interests and passions to develop their tourism enterprise in a creative and innovative way, the women believed that they were unique in being the first to start such an enterprise and having one-of-a-kind business. With silver jewellery making traditionally being largely dominated by Omani men, Neila felt unique in being able to break that gender barrier and turn it into a business, which few Omani women have done:

> In my field [traditional jewellery], no [there are no other ladies], that work on silver from A to Z. I know including myself, I know there are three of us, I mean there is me, and I know one and I know another one, but they work at home only.
>
> (Neila)

Sarah felt unique with her enterprise as others, particularly her competitors, attempted to copy her business idea:

> You know, imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, people copy me which I am very pleased to see, they now for example I smile. I have seen on all their dive boats and stuff, they take out fresh foods and stuff because they have seen me doing that, and I got a bit cranky because I pioneered doing the forts and palaces tours of the guided tours from Mutrah [an area in the capital city], Al Alam palace [a tourist attraction] and so forth, and now everybody does it, so I laugh about that, but you know it's good, it's good, if people [copy you]... imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, they must be thinking that I am doing something right if they are copying me.
>
> (Sarah)

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Others felt similarly:

> When we started, no one was making chocolates with Omani ingredients in Oman, we were the first, maybe we were the only first ones in Oman.

> (Sharrifa)

> First of all, I like doing this thing and anyone who comes to see me, when they see the dolls, right away they go to touch them and they do like this [hug them].

> (Noor)

Hence, the women felt they were setting new standards and patterns for Oman's tourism industry through their unique one-of-a-kind products and services.

*8.4 Becoming popular and famous*

Moreover, the women became popular and famous for the work they were doing through their tourism enterprise on a local and international basis. Examples on this included:

> The tourists were encouraged, "because you are an Omani lady and we will come with you, rather than to another tour company [in Oman]". Every time a foreign tour company designs a tour, I used to add more things [tour options] from my side and I give them more information from me and I take them to extra places from me, without the knowledge of the big tour companies. And, thank God, the compliments that they used to give me were excellent, all the tour companies used to call me and wanted me to take them [on tours].

> (Basma)

> Yes, and then people started to realise that I am doing nice packing, people started to realise that my souvenirs are different from other souvenirs because they are in very good shape and in very good quality, good colours.

I like it [I am happy] especially when the museum said there are people [tourists] I mean, that liked it a lot when they see it [her dolls] and they touch it, so it makes me happy [laughing] because they liked it, especially when they take it outside [back home as a souvenir], not only here, it's outside.

(Noor)

The women became well known as more people got to know about their offerings and were interested to purchase their unique products and services. As a result, their enterprise formed an important part of their new growing identity.

**Theme 9: Developing cultural exchange**

With the women providing products and services that were needed in Oman's tourism industry, their enterprise provided them with the opportunity to develop a strong cultural exchange with the tourists in various ways.

*9.1 Educating tourists*

All of the women felt that their enterprise played an important role in educating tourists about Oman's heritage and culture as they provided their products and services to them. Zelkha educated tourists about the capital as she escorted them on her a boat tour around the city:

> The mission of this company actually is to be able to educate, when I say educate it is when we take people, we take people, especially tourists, because the locals are not keen adding another piece of information or a product that they already know, you take tourists and you tell them where you are going.

(Zelkha)

Ahlam educated tourists about the craft and art of Omani jewellery:

You know how many tourists come and ask, "What is this, what is that, what is the meaning of this, what is done with that?" I have taught a lot of tourists things that they didn't know about Oman jewellery.

(Ahlam)

Mirya educated tourists about authentic Omani handicrafts, as she strongly felt that tourists were misinformed about this:

What upsets me about the souk the fact is that people [vendors] are lying and so when I had the opportunity... again part of what the gallery does is also dissemination of information, it is a two-way feedback, I always give feedback to the artisans but I also give information to the customers [tourists] what is Omani, I say this is how it's made, this is where it's made so that when they go the souk, hopefully they are little bit better armed [well informed about Omani handicrafts]... (Mirya).

Therefore, it was important for the women to properly educate tourists about Oman and to provide correct information to them, which they took great pride in doing.

*9.2 Promoting their modern identity*

While the women educated the tourists about Oman's heritage and culture, they emphasised the tourists' curiosity about them being entrepreneurs and of their capabilities in providing tourism products and services. Such curiosity included their ability to do certain work due to their gender and religion. As the women explained:

When I have a tourist group coming in my workshop, to tell them about my work, for those who like to see my workshop, they get to see that there is an Omani women, Arab women, who works in this thing [handicraft work]… I mean they get surprised of this thing a lot and they realise it [that Omani women can do this type of work].

(Neila)

When they [the tourists] see me, I go around the hotel and finish some things, I go to the rooms and check on things, they get surprised and they say, for example, "It was not in our mind that Omani ladies would be found working in this type of work". They asked me, "Is this your hotel? Are you part of it?" I say, "Yes, it's my project".

(Zara)

They [tourists] were more than happy in one way for me to take them on tours, and they were also shocked to see that I could speak to them, I could explain to them, and I am not bragging. They got very comfortable with me because I knew the culture of my country.

(Reem)

Thus, the women took the opportunity to promote their modern identity to improve tourists' view of themselves and their work.

**Theme 10: Benefiting others**

The women wanted their enterprise not just to benefit themselves individually, but to benefit others as well.

*10.1 Doing it for the country*

The women believed that their enterprise helped to benefit the country by promoting it internationally due to their love and nationalist commitment to their country. As they asserted:

I know I have made an impact and that, God forbid, if the gallery has to close down for whatever reason, I am confident in knowing that I have done something, I have given something back to Oman. So that has given me a deeper love of the country, it's fostered something [passion for the country].

(Mirya)

I am promoting the country, they [the tourists] come to my dhow [traditional Omani fishing boat], they learn a thing or two about Oman's seas history, they learn about the locals.

(Zelkha)

This is it, convincing that you are, I mean your love for the country and your care of achieving what is not there or the idea is not in your country [providing missing tourism products and service for Oman], this is the main goal, not the money is the goal.

(Kuwaithr)

To be honest I want to cover first the… to take the chocolates abroad, this is one of our major plans now, we are working on this as I said we are promoting Oman in a indirect way and just being available in Europe or Australia or USA or anywhere. It will be a huge thing for me, people will taste the chocolates, they will want to know more, people curiosity, they will want to know what is this, where it is from it, we will just promote the country, promote our stories and of course I mean it will be a good coverage for Oman.

(Sharrifa)

Through their enterprise, the women believed that they helped to make Oman popular and famous on a global basis as more tourists purchase their products and services.

*10.2 Preserving culture and heritage*

The women also believed that their enterprise helped to preserve the country's culture and heritage from the unique local and traditional products and services that they provided. Salwa believed that they helped to preserve Oman's culture and heritage through the traditional stories that were intertwined with their souvenirs. As she described:

> It's definitely… it's the Omani story, it's stories about Oman, you know, when you buy the frankincense, the actual Majmar [a traditional frankincense burning clay pot], for example, you can explain that the Majmar is done by Salim, for example [a handicrafter]. You know then you get to touch something that he actually handmade and the way he makes it, some in the old school way and everything, and you buy that from him, and then again, we use the local farmers to get the best quality of frankincense so that we take the oil out of it, so it's a whole process, you know, but at the end, you end up with something that really tells a beautiful story about Oman you know, a personal story.
>
> (Salwa)

Other women also believed in the importance of preserving Oman's heritage and culture through their enterprise. For example:

> I try to preserve the traditional handicrafts of Oman because this is who we are, this is our cultural identify.
>
> (Mirya)

> Actually, I promote Oman, I protect my heritage, I promote it, I encourage the handicrafts and not only that, I want to show case our souvenirs, very high quality, very high end handicrafts around the world.
>
> (Zainab)

I am trying also with my daughters if they want to continue to make [the dolls], for example, you don't know when the human will [die], so if someone else can take it for me, so this would be a good thing.

(Noor)

Therefore, the women were protecting the cultural identity of the country through their enterprises.

*10.3 Making an impact*

The women believed that their enterprise had made a major impact on Oman's tourism industry, as they provided many of the missing tourism products and services in Oman through their tourism enterprise. For Sarah, she emphasised that her enterprise had helped raise the standard of sea tourism,

I could see very plainly we had very high quality accommodation, in terms of hotels and stuff like that, so as a tourist you had a very high quality experience staying in a hotel. But the minute you stepped out the door, the quality of that experience immediately plummeted, it was very patchy back then, and what I wanted to do was to help provide a much better service outside the door, to kind of equalise the quality of that experience, and I really feel that I actually have done that. I think that, as I say, I think that even other operators have raised their game, have had some other thoughts about how they do their business. I think, yeah, generally speaking I have helped, I have helped to raise the standard, and certainly raised kind of the expectations.

(Sarah)

Zara felt that opening up her small hotel in an unpopular local area had helped make the place more attractive to tourists, as more tourists were visiting the area.

I mean we have done a service for this area, that we made this [hotel] inside it, I mean it is now more active/lively. For example, it has become like an attraction, "Come on over, there is so and so person's hotel", "We are beside

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so and so person's hotel". You know, the tourists have started to come to this area, I mean they stay here and like this.

<div align="right">(Zara)</div>

As for Mirya, she felt that she was making an impact on the industry through providing authentic handicrafts that tourists could take away,

> And it's, you know, for me, I had people [tourists] come and say "Thank you for giving us something that we can take overseas, the weaving, the pottery, the pot to put the Frankincense in and give, and a lot of [other handicrafts]". So, yes, I feel I have developed items for the tourism industry.

<div align="right">(Mirya)</div>

As a result, the women were able to improve Oman's tourism industry through their products and services.

*10.4 Involving others*

In addition, many of the women's enterprises had a large social element, where they purposefully involved other people in their enterprise from the wider community, especially other women in order to help them. Wafa involved the community in different ways with her accommodation business to ensure that they also felt they were benefiting and to maintain good neighbourly relationships. For example, she had a local Bedouin band play traditional folklore music during dinner times. She would also work with the community to conduct desert clean-ups. She recalled specifically an incident that she had with the community during her first year after taking over the accommodation. The accommodation offered shuttle services for their guests, as the accommodation was located in the heart of the desert. The local Bedouin men provided the shuttle services, as they are well experienced with the desert landscape. The community had then complained that many of the big tour operators were offering their own shuttle services to tourists. Therefore, the community felt they were losing out on a livelihood opportunity and that the tour operators were taking away a service that they have always provided and benefited from. Wafa then

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assured the community, as there was only one month remaining in the season, that this problem would be resolved for the next season. In the new season, she included in all of the booking contracts she arranged with tour operators that only the local community would provide the shuttle service. However, a few of the tour operators attempted to bypass this new rule, and she then had issue several warnings for them.

Other examples included:

> So another thing I said to myself, "Look, women are sitting in their villages, they are so talented, they are so awake, why don't I start bringing these women [female tourists] to the villages and meet other women from Oman?" I had little groups of two, three, six women, doing craftwork, doing kuma [Omani traditional cap]. Say in Sinwa [a village in Oman], I choose six women and I went to another area, I think it was Al Waisl [a village in Oman] or somewhere to choose another group.
>
> (Reem)

> I can preserve this old sweet, and it's not [difficult to make]… I can make this, yeah, if I told you I want to make anything, I will go to try to make it, but I don't, I prefer to go to the old ladies, the ones who have enough experience, the ones who are really good at this [Omani sweet making] as a kind of support, number one, and the second thing is they are producing the top quality, they know what to do. For me, I can learn to make it and manage maybe 50% of their quality, or maybe less, but I can make it. But as a support of this, because she's at home, who will support her? If you buy, normal people will buy small quantities but for a company if you are buying in large quantity, you are supporting her indirectly and you are still maintaining this same concept.
>
> (Sharrifa)

Through involving others in their enterprise, the women were indirectly empowering the wider community in Oman.

**The future**

**Theme 11: Looking to the future**

When it comes to the future of tourism entrepreneurship in Oman, the women were optimistic with their own tourism enterprise, as well as for other Omani women.

*11.1 Growing bigger*

With the gradual success and on-going progress that the women made with their enterprises, they were all looking ahead to expand and grow their enterprises on a bigger and international scale in the future. With Selwa and Arwa's success arising from being able to distribute their souvenirs at various tourism outlets in Oman, they were now targeting the international market in order to further grown their business:

> We want to start going out in the regions and then hopefully internationally. We have individual orders that come from outside but we do not distribute to overseas yet, so we just individually sell, you know, we have certain companies that buy from us, and things like that, nothing bigger. We are hoping to open a shop.

> (Salwa)

Sarah looked into growing her business bigger through her inspiration of potentially having a cruise ship added to her business:

> Well, this is kind of my stepping stone, one of my dreams has always been that I will have something like a cruise ship that would go from Salalah [a city in Oman] to Dubai [a city in the United Arab of Emirates] and everything [other places]. And there's a boat that does this kind of trip off the coast of Western Australia, it has about 10 cabins and it's like… it's very luxury but it's also extremely educational and they have a marine biologist on board and they do diving, and they do fishing and they do [other activities], so it's very eco but you basically do this 10 days trip, where you go on the coast and that frankly can also be between Musanadam [a region in Oman] and Salalah, I would say it will just be [great]…

Other women were looking to open branches to expand their businesses. For example:

> Really, I wish for my enterprise to get bigger and to have more than one branch. I mean, this office is small, to have branches and to have more staff and a big building, and to have a tourist camp through a different way.

<div align="right">(Basma)</div>

> My next five-year [plan] is to open two branches and I would like to open other branches, if God wills, if I can swing it [implement it], I have to see everything slowly [observe carefully], for example, at the duty free shop when the new airport opens.

<div align="right">(Mirya)</div>

Thus, the women strongly emphasised the need to grow their enterprise in order to have a profitable business.

*11.2 The future of tourism entrepreneurship for other Omani women*
As for the future of tourism entrepreneurship for other Omani women, the women believed that there were many available opportunities for other women to start up their own tourism enterprise, especially as there are many tourism ideas that had not yet to be pursued in Oman. Such ideas included:

> There are many opportunities for women, which is wonderful. I think there needs to be more entrepreneurial [opportunities], there needs more of a push for doing more cottage industries.

<div align="right">(Mirya)</div>

> Of course, absolutely, I mean the biggest thing, the biggest need at the moment is the things like homestay, you know, cooking classes, tours, even market tours and things like this. I mean, accommodation of all sorts, we really need

<div align="center">314</div>

to start working on accommodation outside of the hotel environment, you know if we could do a village stay, you know these are all perfect businesses, frankly, for women because they are not requiring huge investment, which is often difficult. You know they [Omani women] tend to be more kind of stay at home or… there are easier jobs in business that women can handle while dealing with family, children and aged parents, so this sort of thing.

(Sarah)

However, the women did acknowledge that there are many issues surrounding tourism entrepreneurship that limited Omani women's involvement in this activity, as they reflected their own experiences. These issues included: gender discrimination, socio-cultural restrictions and the negative views of women in tourism that limits other Omani women's participation in tourism entrepreneurship. These were issues that the women themselves experienced as they started their own tourism enterprise, as mentioned earlier,

> Because of our cultural limitations, I mean, I can't think of any other thing, it will never happen, it's not a problem. See the thing is this is Oman, there are some things that you cannot consider to be a problem, it's not a problem, and it's a fact, OK? I am in it because I have had the back up in order to do it, but how many people are out there like me. I don't think so, it's not that easy, you know, and that's why I thrive on the challenge. Some people get beaten down, they don't want to be challenged 24 hours a day by their husbands, by their fathers, let's be honest.

(Gadeer)

I think probably the fear of, not just the fear of doing business, no, because they do other business, the fear of… how do you say this, it's the mentality that this is associated with something that is immoral, probably. So I have not seen many that side [other Omanis in tourism entrepreneurship], yeah, because people associate tourism with the Europeans, they come with short dresses

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and so probably that could be one, but, of course, the culture… don't forget that then the familiarity [acceptable gender norms], men can easily go to the souk with these [tourists] people and show them and this [take them on tours]. For you [women], with your other responsibilities at home, it might be difficult to just get into a four-wheel drive and take people all the way to the mountains.

(Zelkha)

However, the women felt it was not just these issues that limited Omani women's involvement in tourism entrepreneurship, but also that the other women themselves did not have the right mind set for becoming tourism entrepreneurs and resisting such challenges. As they explained:

It's never going to be better unless you are determined, like how I was determined. Now my [old] age, of course, and I am not well anymore, that's what pulled me down but if it wasn't for that, I would be still doing tourism.

(Reem)

Yes, running it [her accommodation business] is not easy, it's a big project, it includes a service for people and you have to be personally involved or you don't get to go far and like this [succeed], you have to come and see and supervise the rooms, you check on things. So this makes a lot of women hesitate, and they say, "I come and go because there are men there, I don't know how and like this, and then people would talk about me, [if] I said I am going to a hotel". [Mentioning] the simple word 'hotel' is no, no, no [a taboo], you understand how, I expect these are the challenges that they face.

(Zara)

I see the situation that there are a few in this field because the women in the tourism field are very few, women are searching for projects that can easily generate income, she doesn't want a project that will tire her and lead her to burdens and that will take a long time.

Nevertheless, the women emphasised that it was still important for other women to have the support of their families in order to be involved in tourism entrepreneurship.

> Really, the work in tourism entrepreneurship is fun but tiring at the same time. If they are not there, your family to support you in your enterprise, you will not succeed.
>
> (Basma)

> Believe in your product, try to have the support of your family and persevere if you can. It's not always easy, believe me it's not always easy.
>
> (Mirya)

Besides the above, the women believe that the continuous lack of industry support and funding limits other women's involvement in tourism entrepreneurship. For example, Wafa emphasised that there is currently a lack of training for entrepreneurs on understanding the actual operations of a tourism business. She believes it would be very helpful to have such training for those running or trying to start a tourism business in order to gain basic knowledge about running a tourism business. She suggested that the ministry of tourism should offer such training to support tourism SMEs in Oman. Others made similar comments, for example:

> I mean I would love one day, you should pop in one day to see the village house and I would love to turn that into a homestay, which I could do because it has the kitchens, the rooms but I will never get the licensing, the ministry will never give me licensing, as an accommodation place because they are fixed on their one to five star thing, but to actually get a license for a bed and breakfast, forget it, don't try, it's not possible.
>
> (Sarah)

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The start-up head is big, I mean for you to open in the field of tourism, for example, a travel agency, a tour office, I mean there are big obstacles to open projects like this, if one liked to invest in tourism, the permissions alone are tiring, the authorities and I don't know what, and then you have to pay an amount for guarantee, but that amount for the guarantee she wants to take advantage of it for the project, she just goes to put it for the bank only like this, like these type of things I expect that makes people (stay away from tourism entrepreneurship).

(Zara)

Overall, all of the women were hopeful about the future of their tourism enterprise and they encouraged other women to be involved in tourism entrepreneurship, despite the persistent issues surrounding this activity for women in Oman.

## 9.4 Emerging main concepts

When reviewing the thematic narrative of the women tourism entrepreneurs, I identified a number of factors, each of which has both positive and negative effects on the women's lived experiences and their potential to be empowered through their tourism enterprise. As I discuss each factor below, I cross reference the effects of each factor to the background information and thematic narrative presented above in order to illustrate its embedded evidence from the data, as displayed in square brackets. I have also written the positive and negative effects in italic in order to clearly highlight them in the discussion below. In addition, I provide a figure for each factor to display its positive and negative effects.

The first factor is the family. The family plays a major role in providing a support structure for the women to develop their own enterprises, and the women had to gain their families trust. That the women had family concerns and had to prove themselves in order to gain their families' support could be seen as a norm in Oman, due to the cultural and social role that family plays in women's general lives in the embedded environment. However, these approaches reveal the *existing patriarchal powe*r of

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their families and that the women are already in a disempowerment state in this regard. The existing patriarchal power of the women's families is not only evident with their own families, but also with the women of the other families in general. The women emphasised the importance of gaining family support when it came to future tourism entrepreneurship opportunities for other women in Oman. Thus, the patriarchal power of families was already in existence in the embedded environment as a whole and strongly controlled the lives of the women (theme 5, sub-theme 5.1; theme 6, sub-themes 6.1/6.2/6.3; theme 11, sub-theme 11.2). Besides the existing patriarchal power, the approaches of the family also reveal that they *resist the women's ability to develop their enterpris*e (theme 5, sub-theme 5.1; theme 6, sub-themes 6.1/6.2/6.3). In addition, the families *enforce traditional roles and responsibilities* on the women, as they had to make time for their family while running their enterprise (theme 5, sub-themes 5.2).

Figure 17: The family factor effects (women tourism entrepreneurs)

The Family

(-)

Enforces existing
patriarchal power

(+)

Resistance towards
the women

Enforces traditional roles
and responsibilities
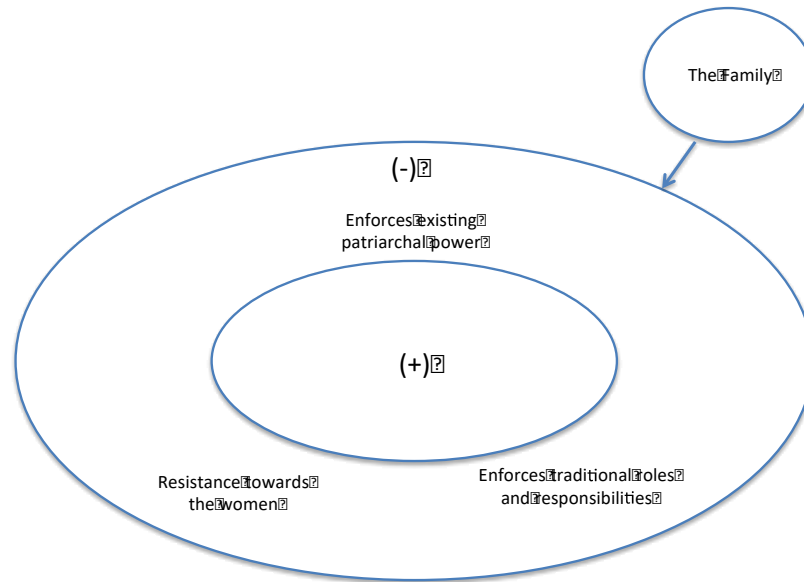
Similar effects can also be found in the community, as I identify this as the second factor that affects the women's lived experiences and empowerment. The community plays a major role and influence in providing a support structure for the women to pursue tourism entrepreneurship opportunities, which the women did not have. The community often made it difficult for the women to sell their enterprise ideas, and people having negative views towards their business and undermining their capabilities could be seen as the norm. It could be argued that such approaches should be expected from the community due to the strong cultural and social role that it plays in women's general lives in Oman. Thus, when new changes arise, it leads to the community being sceptical of these changes. This is especially true when it comes to the involvement of local women and the need to protect them. However, these approaches reveal the *existing conservative power* of the community and that the women are already in a disempowered state within the community. The community does not support changes, like tourism entrepreneurship being sought by the women,

especially when it comes to potentially empowering them. The existing conservative power is also evident for other women in general. The women emphasised on the role and influence of socio-cultural norms and restrictions, and the negative views about future tourism entrepreneurship opportunities for other women. Thus, the conservative power of the community is already in existence in the embedded environment as a whole (theme 3, sub-themes 3.1/3.2/3.3; theme 11, sub-theme 11.2). Besides the existing conservative power, the approaches of the community also reveal that it *resists the women's ability to develop their enterprise* (theme 3, sub-themes 3.1/3.2/3.3), as well as *discriminating against the women* due to their gender specifically as the women stated that gender discrimination is an issue for other women who wanted to be involved in future tourism entrepreneurship opportunities (theme 3, sub-themes 3.1/3.2/3.3; theme 11, sub-theme 11.2). Thus, the community's resistance and discrimination against the women reveals the continuous existence of gender ideologies in the embedded environment.

Figure 18: The community factor effects (women tourism entrepreneurs)
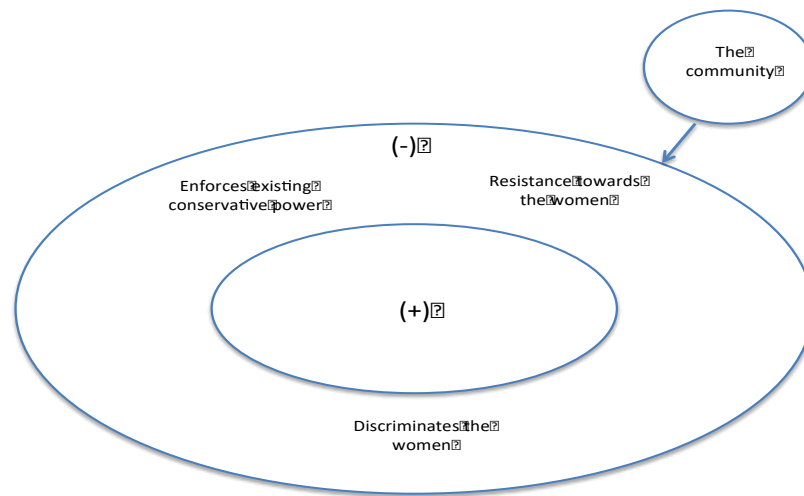


The third factor is the nature of the tourism enterprise work. This case study is based on a variety of tourism-related work, including handicrafts, food, restaurants, hotels, and so on. On a positive note, the nature of the tourism enterprise work gives the women the ability to *strengthen their own individual agency* when it comes to using their existing skills, personal interests and passions, as well as giving them opportunities to be creative and innovative (theme 1, sub-themes 1.2/1.3). It also gives the women *increased self-confidence and self-esteem* from developing a passion for their enterprises, building stronger personalities and educating tourists (theme 8, sub-themes 8.1/8.2; theme 9, sub-themes 9.1). Moreover, it provides the women with a feeling of *increased status, respect and prestige* through becoming unique, popular and famous, as well as being able to benefit others through their tourism

enterprise (theme 8, sub-themes 8.3/8.4; theme 10, sub-themes 10.1/10.2/10.3/10.4).

However, there are various significant negative effects from the nature of the tourism enterprise work, which have implications on the potential empowerment of the women. One is that the nature of tourism enterprise work *imposes laborious work on the women.* This was evident when it came to the large amount of time and effort that they needed to put in to provide their tourism products and services (theme 3, sub-theme 3.4). It also enforces existing *gender discrimination*, as they were challenged in pursuing their own tourism enterprise due to being woman (theme 3, sub-themes 3.1/3.2/3,3). In addition, it *enforces traditional roles and responsibilities* on the women as they have to meet the expectations placed on them as daughters, wives and mothers, as they struggle to balance their time for the enterprise and their family (theme 5, sub-theme 5.2). Moreover, there is a *lack of economic viability* for the women due to the economic stress and burden they experience, and the gradual, but limited, economic independence that they gain from their tourism enterprise, particularly as they emphasised the need to grow their enterprise bigger for a profitable business (theme 4, sub-themes 4.1/4.2/4.3; theme 7, sub-themes 7.1/7.2; theme 11, sub-theme 11.1).

Figure 19: The nature of tourism enterprise work factor effects (women tourism entrepreneurs)
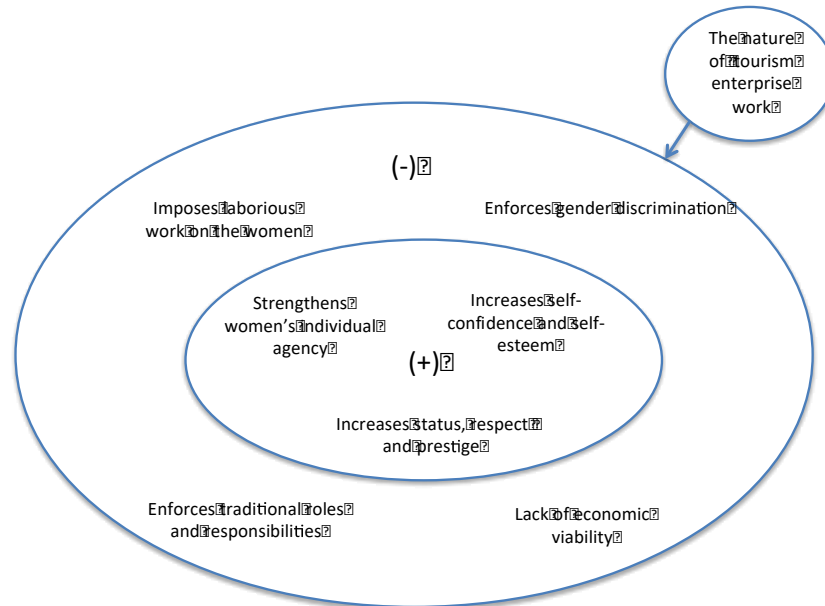


The fourth factor is the tourists. On a positive note, the tourists help to *increase the women's self-confidence and self-esteem* through the women educating tourists about Oman's heritage and culture (theme 9, sub-theme 9.1). However, there are various significant negative effects from the tourists, which have implications on the potential empowerment of the women. One is that there is a *lack of economic viability* for the women, as the tourists are hesitant when it comes to purchasing their products and services (theme 4, sub-theme 4.1). They also *stereotype the women*, which was evident from the women's need to promote their modern identity in response to the tourists' curiosity about their roles as entrepreneurs and their work capabilities (theme 9, sub-theme 9.2).

Figure 20: The tourist factor effects (women tourism entrepreneurs)
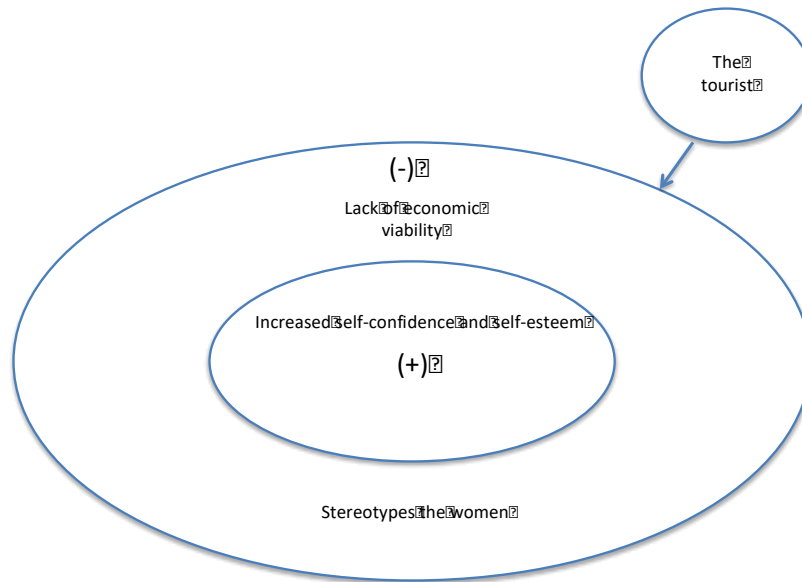


The fifth factor is the tourism structure, which, in this case, includes tour operators, hotels, [Redaction: Name of organization removed due to confidential information.] and other tourism-related government bodies and private companies. Besides the family and the community, the tourism structure plays a major role in providing a support structure for the women to pursue tourism entrepreneurship opportunities, which the Omani women did not have. Thus, the tourism structure *provides no support* for tourism entrepreneurship in general. This was evident when it came to approving tourism enterprises, the lack of available support and funding for tourism entrepreneurs and dealing with competition. The lack of industry support is not only a reality for the women I studied but also for other women in generally. The women emphasised the overall lack of industry support when it came to future tourism entrepreneurship opportunities for other women (theme 2, sub-themes 2.1/2.2/2.3/2.4; theme 11, sub-theme 11.2). The tourism structure also *resists the women's abilities to develop their enterprise*, as well as purposefully *discriminating against the women* in pursuing their tourism enterprise due to being female, which is a reality for other women who want to be involved in future tourism entrepreneurship opportunities (theme 3, sub-

themes 3.1/3.2/3.3; theme 11, sub-theme 11.2). Moreover, there is *a lack of economic viability* for the women as a result of operating in a difficult tourism business environment and in being women tourism entrepreneurs (theme 4, sub themes 4.1/4.2/4.3).

Figure 21: The tourism structure factor effects (women tourism entrepreneurs)

The tourism structure

(-)

Provides no support          Resistance towards the women

(+)

Lack of economic viability          Discriminates the women
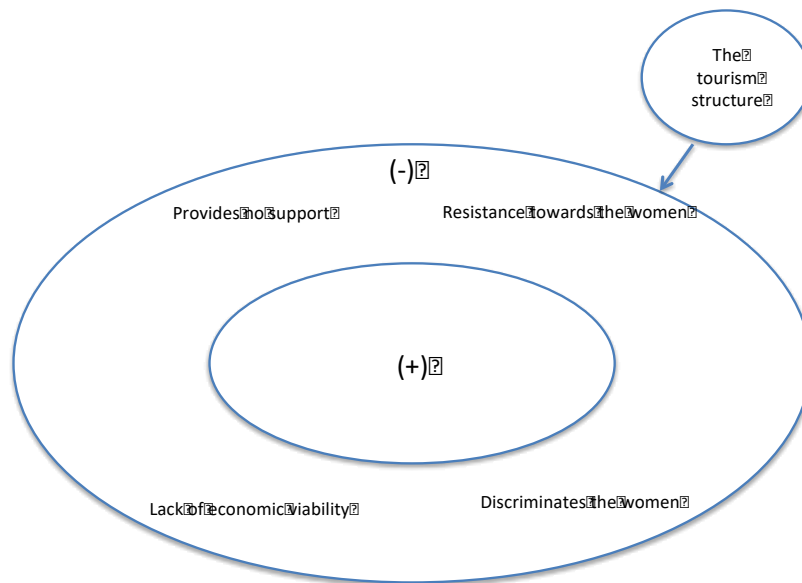
And lastly, the sixth factor is the women themselves. The women play a major role in constructing their lived experiences and empowerment. This is through their own perceptions, choices and approaches, although these were influenced by the above five factors. On a positive note, the women *strengthen their own individual agency* through tourism enterprises. This was evident when it came to the women purposefully using their existing skills, personal interests and passions in their own creative and innovative approach to develop their own tourism enterprise (theme 1, sub-themes 1.2/1.3). As revealed in the challenges section, the women have a critical understanding and awareness of their reality and conditions as Muslim Omani women and the causes of their conditions. This understanding and awareness, in turn, influenced how they presented themselves in the public and private sphere in order to *build autonomy* within their embedded environment. This

is evident as they present themselves as tourism entrepreneurs, and promote themselves as modern Omani women in the enterprise, while maintaining the boundaries set by their families (theme 5, sub-theme 5.2; theme 9, sub-theme 9.2). The women's critical self-understanding and awareness of their position also influences their choices and pattern of behaviours. Thus, the women's choices and behaviours could be seen *as a form of resistance* to the socio-cultural norms and restrictions that they are embedded in, as well as to perceptions and conventions held about Omani women in the community. This was evident when it came to their choice to get involved in tourism entrepreneurship, the way in which they formed a positive identity in relation to the challenges they encountered and in proving themselves as capable tourism women entrepreneurs. Such approaches are important when it comes to future tourism entrepreneurship opportunities for other women. The women emphasised the importance of having the right mind-set for other women wanting to pursue tourism entrepreneurship opportunities (theme 1, sub theme 1.1; theme 6, sub-themes 6.1/6.2; theme 9, sub-theme 9.2; theme 11, sub-theme 11.2). Thus, when reviewing the positive effects as a whole, the women seem to have created a personal form of empowerment and they were in charge of their own empowerment.

However, there are various significant negative effects from the women, which have implications on their potential empowerment through their enterprise. One is that they *conform to their families existing patriarchal power*, as it was still important for them to gain their family support in order to pursue their enterprise (theme 6, sub-theme 6.1/6.2/6.3). They also *conform to the community's existing conservative power*, as the community does still not support women in tourism entrepreneurship, despite the women forming a positive attitude and proving themselves to the community. This is particularly true when they emphasise the role and influence of socio-cultural norms and restrictions, and the negative views of women in tourism when it comes to future tourism entrepreneurship opportunities for other women (theme 6, sub-themes 6.1/6.2; theme 11, sub-theme 11.2). Moreover, they conform *to the traditional roles and responsibilities* that are embedded on them, as they had

to make time for their family while running their enterprise (theme 5, sub-theme 5.2).

Figure 22: The women factor effects (women tourism entrepreneurs)
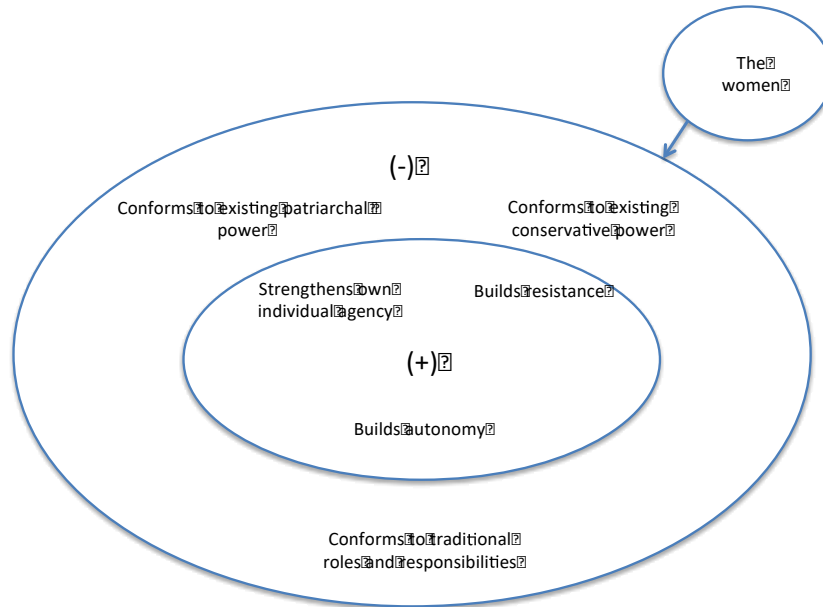


Taken as a whole, these broad factors along with their effects combine to present the lived experiences and empowerment of the women through their tourism enterprises. A summary of the positive and negative effects of each factor is given in table 18.

Table 18: Factors affecting women tourism entrepreneurs lived experiences and empowerment

| Factors | Positive effects | Negative effects |
|---|---|---|
| The family | | Enforces existing patriarchal power<br><br>Resistant towards the women<br><br>Enforces traditional roles and responsibilities |
| The community | | Enforces existing conservative power<br><br>Resistant towards the women<br><br>Discriminates against the women |
| The nature of tourism enterprise work | Strengthens individual agency<br><br>Increases self-confidence and self-esteem<br><br>Increases status, respect and prestige | Imposes laborious work on the women<br><br>Enforces existing gender discrimination<br><br>Enforces traditional roles and responsibilities<br><br>Lack of economic viability |
| The tourists | Increases self-confidence and self-esteem | Lack of economic viability<br><br>Stereotype the women |
| The tourism structure | | Provides no support<br><br>Resistant towards the women<br><br>Discriminates against the women<br><br>Lack of economic viability |
| The women | Strengthens individual agency<br><br>Builds autonomy<br><br>Builds resistance | Conforms to existing patriarchal power<br><br>Conforms to existing conservative power<br><br>Conforms to traditional roles and responsibilities |

These factors are re-presented in figure 23 below to illustrate how they influence the women's experiences and empowerment, as discussed above.

Figure 23: Construction of women tourism entrepreneurs' lived experiences and empowerment
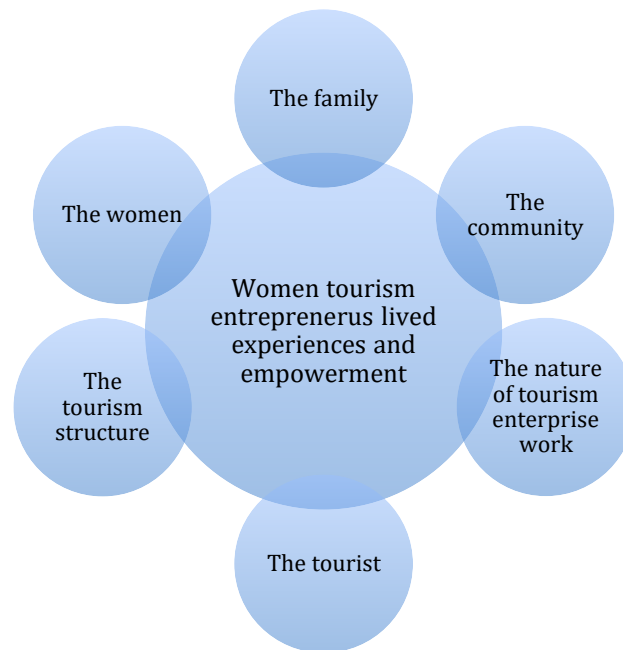


Overall, these are the factors along with their pertaining effects that emerged when reviewing the women tourism entrepreneurs information and their narrative.

## 9.5 Conclusion

This chapter presented my women tourism entrepreneurs case study. I provided important background information about the women and their tourism enterprise. I also displayed how the women got involved in tourism entrepreneurship. Next, I revealed the various challenges that the women encountered with their enterprise. This included operating in a difficult tourism business environment, being a woman tourism entrepreneur, experiencing economic stress and burden, and dealing with the family. Moreover, I revealed the main benefits that the women were able to gain from their enterprise. This included overcoming gender challenges, achieving economic viability, the importance of the enterprise to the women, and their ability to help others. In addition, I presented the women's future outlook of their own enterprise and of tourism entrepreneurship opportunities for other women in Oman. At the end, I identified and discussed the main factors that influenced the women's

lived experiences and empowerment through their tourism enterprise. This included the family, the community, the nature of tourism enterprise work, the tourists, the tourism structure and the women.

The next chapter provides an overall discussion of the combined findings from the three case studies.

# Chapter 10: Discussion

## 10.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to provide a discussion of the research findings. First, I briefly discuss and present the conceptual framework that emerged from the three case studies. Next, I use this conceptual framework to provide a detailed discussion about the research findings and their relation to existing literature. Then I provide a conceptualisation of Omani women's empowerment in tourism entrepreneurship, followed by a discussion of important theoretical and practical implications based on the overall findings of my study. I conclude with a recap of the main topics discussed in this chapter.

## 10.2 Conceptual framework: The lived experiences and empowerment of Omani women in tourism entrepreneurship

When looking at the emergent main concepts section from the three case studies, there are common factors affecting Omani women's lived experiences and empowerment in tourism entrepreneurship. These include: the family, the community, the nature of tourism enterprise work, the tourists, the tourism structure and the women.

When reviewing the positive and negative effects of each of these factors, a number of empowering outcomes emerge from specific positive effects that appear often across all three case studies. These include: personal development, resistance and freedom, and collective social cohesion. There are also several disempowering outcomes that emerge from specific negative effects that also appear across all three case studies. These include: enforced gender ideologies, enforced socio-cultural restrictions, working in difficult conditions and demands, and a lack of economic viability. Thus, when I take these emerging theoretical manifestations as a whole, they represent the lived experiences and empowerment of Omani women in tourism entrepreneurship. To adequately present this phenomenon, I developed the following conceptual framework.

Figure 24: Conceptual framework: The lived experiences and empowerment of Omani women in tourism entrepreneurship
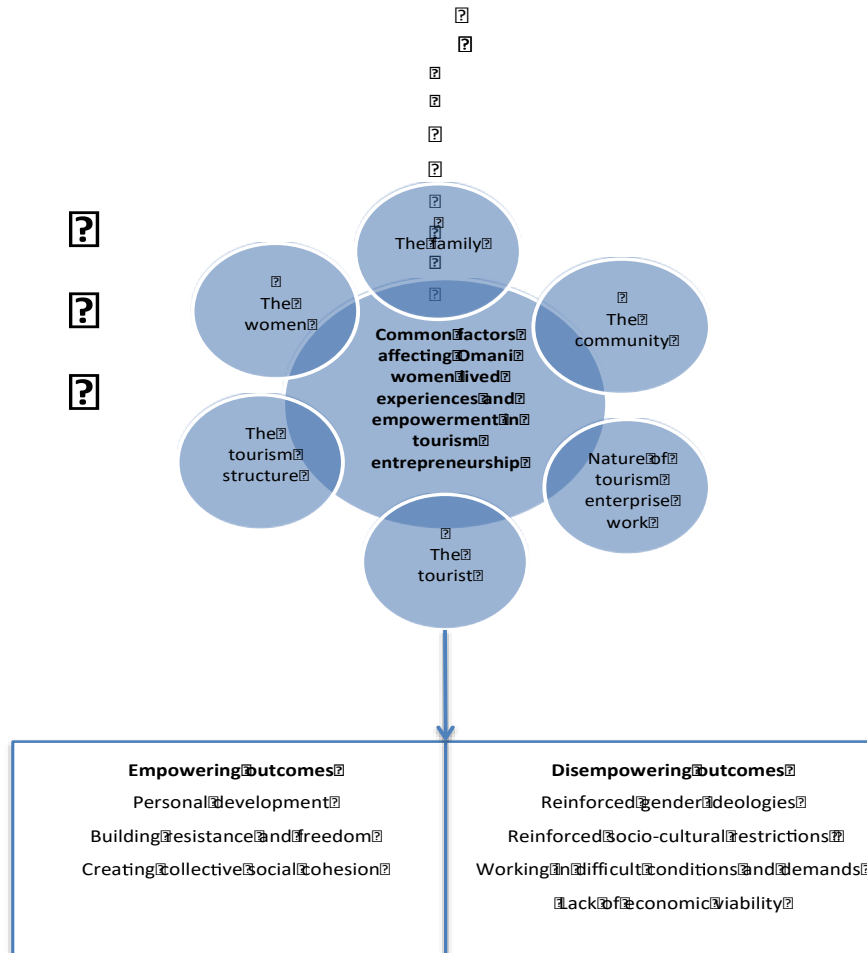


There are three critical components for the framework. A through discussion of the content of each component and its relation to the existing literature is provided in more detail below.

**10.2.1 Common factors affecting Omani women's lived experiences and empowerment in tourism entrepreneurship**

The first component of the empirically informed conceptual framework represents the common factors affecting Omani women's lived experiences and empowerment in tourism entrepreneurship. The role and significance of each factor is discussed below, with the positive and negative effects for each factor displayed in a table.

*The family*

The case studies revealed the important role and influence that the women's families play in their lives. The approaches and reactions of the families towards the women and their tourism enterprises is due to the strong cultural and social role that the family plays in women's general lives in Oman. Previous studies conducted on Omani women have emphasised the role and influence that the family have on Omani women in various aspects of their lives. These include the family influence on female entrepreneurs in general (Al-Lamky, 2007; Al-Sadi et al., 2013; Belwal et al., 2014; McElwee and Al-Riyami, 2003), on their career choices (Bontenbal, 2014; Deeb, 2005), around pursuing overseas higher education (Al Omairi and Amzat, 2012), and with daily matters and decision making (Barth, 1983; Riphenburgh, 1998). Thus, the family hold the ultimate power when it comes to providing their support for the women's involvement in tourism entrepreneurship. Although the families did eventually provide their support in one way or the other to the women, this was not easily gained and it was governed by the existing gender ideologies and social-cultural restrictions related to the social institution of the family that the women were deeply and culturally embedded within in Oman. Both the positive and negative effects of the family factor can be seen in table 19 below.

Table 19: The family factor

| Positive effects | Negative effects |
|---|---|
| **Hosting group**<br>None | **Hosting group**<br>• Enforces existing patriarchal power |
| **Sewing group**<br>None | **Sewing group**<br>• Enforces an existing gender skill<br><br>• Enforces traditional roles and responsibilities |
| **Women tourism entrepreneurs**<br>None | **Women tourism entrepreneurs**<br>• Enforces existing patriarchal power<br><br>• Resistance towards the women<br><br>• Enforces traditional roles and responsibilities |

Such ideologies and restrictions towards the women are difficult to remove and challenge. Therefore, the women's experiences and their potential to be empowered through their tourism enterprise is affected as the family reinforces these existing ideologies and restrictions in order to sustain their power over the women. Besides the controlling support that the family provides to the women, the family provides no positive effects for the women.

Previous studies from the development studies literature did emphasise the importance of considering the domestic unit, i.e. the family and the husband, when measuring women's empowerment (Deshmukh-Ranadive, 2005; Hall, 1992; Singh, 2007). Furthermore, previous studies within the tourism discipline on women in tourism entrepreneurship found barriers and challenges in relation to the family (Alonso-Almedia, 2012; Haddad, 2013; Tucker and Boonabaana, 2012; Van Der Cammen, 1997), although few relate these challenges to the effects they have on the women's potential to be empowered through their tourism enterprise (Annes and Wright, 2015; McMillan et al., 2011; Pleno, 2006; Tran and Walter, 2014). However, these studies did not deeply examine and particularly identify the role and

significance of the family on the women's lived experiences and empowerment. Thus, my study adds new information to the literature regarding the importance of considering the family when it comes to women's lived experiences and empowerment in tourism entrepreneurship.

*The community*

The surrounding community also plays an important role in the women's lives, as is revealed from the case studies. The approaches and reactions of the community towards the women and their tourism enterprise is due to the strong cultural and social role that the community plays in women's general lives in Oman. Previous studies conducted on Omani women have emphasised this role and the influence, including on female entrepreneurs in general (Al-Lamky, 2007; Al-Sadi et al., 2013; Belwal et al., 2014; McElwee and Al-Riyami, 2003), holding management positions (Al-Lamki, 1999) and their participation in employment (Al-Shanfari, 2011; Al Mashrifi, 2012; Ministry of National Economy, 2011; National Centre for Statistices and Information, 2013). As well as the family holding the power to provide the support that the women need to pursue with their tourism enterprise, the same is found with the community. Although the support of the community varies between the case studies, in all cases it is accompanied with the existing gender ideologies and socio-cultural restrictions that Omani women are deeply and culturally embedded in within the social institution of the community. Both the positive and negative effects of the community factor can be seen in table 20.

Table 20: The community factor

| Positive effects | Negative effects |
|---|---|
| **Hosting group**<br>None | **Hosting group**<br>• Enforces existing conservative power |
| **Sewing group**<br>None | **Sewing group**<br>• Enforces an existing gender skill |
| **Women tourism entrepreneurs**<br>None | **Women tourism entrepreneurs**<br>• Enforces existing conservative power<br><br>• Resistance towards the women<br><br>• Discriminates against the women |

Such ideologies and restrictions are difficult to remove and challenge. Consequently, the women's experiences and their potential to be empowered through their tourism enterprises are affected, as the community reinforces these existing ideologies and restrictions in order to sustain their power over the women. The community provides no positive effects for the women.

Although the role of the community has been scarcely considered in previous studies that looked at women in tourism entrepreneurship (Haddad, 2013; McMillan et al., 2011), its role and significance on women's lived experiences and empowerment has not been previously considered. Thus, my study adds new information to the literature regarding the importance of considering the community when considering women's roles in tourism entrepreneurship.

*The nature of tourism enterprise work*

The actual nature of tourism enterprise work plays a major role and influence on the women's lives who are involved in it. The case studies provide a distinctive view of various types of tourism enterprises that Omani women are involved in. This includes: sewing, hosting and a variety of other tourism-related enterprises such as handicrafts, souvenirs, restaurants and hotels. Although each women's tourism

enterprise is different, it commonly provides similar positive effects for the women when it comes to the personal and collective development opportunities it presents. Nevertheless, the case studies reveal that the actual nature of tourism enterprise work also causes major negative effects, which are largely related to the existing gender ideologies that are reinforced on women. It is also related to the reality of tourism enterprise work, which is not easy to pursue and does not provide strong economic viability for the women. As a result, the women's experiences and their potential to be empowered are affected. Both the positive and negative effects of the nature of tourism enterprise work are outlined in table 21 below.

Table 21: The nature of tourism enterprise work factor

| Positive effects | Negative effects |
|---|---|
| **Hosting group** | **Hosting group** |
| • Strengthens individual agency | • Enforces existing gender segregation |
| • Increases self-confidence and self-esteem | • Promotes stereotypes of Muslim women |
| • Creates collective social cohesion | • Objectifies the women |
| • Increases status, respect and prestige | • Imposes laborious work on the women |
| | • Lack of economic viability |
| **Sewing group** | **Sewing group** |
| • Strengthens individual agency | • Enforces an existing gender skill |
| • Increases self-confidence and self-esteem | • Promotes stereotypes of Muslim women |
| • Creates collective social cohesion | • Enforces traditional roles and responsibilities |
| • Increases status, respect and prestige | |
| | • Imposes laborious work on the women |
| | • Lack of economic viability |
| **Women tourism entrepreneurs** | **Women tourism entrepreneurs** |
| • Strengthens individual agency | • Imposes laborious work on the women |
| • Increases self-confidence and self-esteem. | • Enforces existing gender discrimination |
| • Increases status, respect and prestige | • Enforces traditional roles and responsibilities |
| | • Lack of economic viability |

Previous studies on women in tourism entrepreneurship have considered the nature of tourism enterprise work in terms of the benefits it provides for women (for example, Acharya and Halpenny, 2013; Chhetri and Lama, 2013; Cone, 1995; Dieke, 2001; Gentry, 2007; Iakovidou, 1997; Kimbu and Ngoasong, 2016; Scheyvens, 2000; Ling et al., 2013; Wilkinson and Pratiwi, 1995), and the challenges that it causes for them (for example, Bensemann and Hall, 2010; Bras and Dahles, 1998; Canoves and Perez, 2002; Garcia-Ramon et al., 1995; Khan, 1995; Li, 2003; Mottiar and Laurincikova, 2009). Although my study did the same, it went beyond previous research by revealing new important information about the nature of this work that affects women's experiences and empowerment in tourism entrepreneurship. Therefore, my study adds new information to the literature regarding the nature of tourism enterprise work for women.

*The tourists*

With tourists being the main users of the services and products provided through the women's tourism enterprises, they play an important role in the women's lives. Tourists provide several positive effects for women by providing opportunities for interactions and cultural exchange. However, their actions, reactions and perceptions towards the women and their tourism enterprises also cause many negative effects for the women. This could be the result of the self-orientalism that Feighery (2012) identifies in Oman's first tourism promotional film, 'Welcome to My Country'. The film, produced by the Ministry of Tourism in 2001, and aims to introduce Oman's heritage, hospitality, culture and adventures to an international Western audience. According to Feighery, "self–orientalism is an outcome of the East's representation and expression of itself from the eyes of the West and with the image which the West has fictionalised for it" (2012, p. 271). Thus, the representations of Oman shown in the film – such as Western perceptions of orientalism, the timeless and exotic destination, local man wearing traditional Omani clothing and performing traditional livelihoods (for example, fishing) – seem to have resulted from this self-orientalism Feighery described. However, there are no images of women and children in the film. This absence of Omani women may

have further propagated Western stereotypes about Muslim women, as the film signifies a male-dominated culture in Oman. Nevertheless, the tourists' negative effects have a major impact on the women's lived experiences and empowerment, which are largely related to the existing gender ideologies that the tourists reinforce. It is also related to tourists' influence on the economic viability of the women's tourism enterprise and, to some extent, in placing them to work in difficult conditions and demands. The positive and negative effects of the tourist factor are displayed in table 22.

Table 22: The tourists factor

| Positive effects | Negative effects |
|---|---|
| **Hosting group** | **Hosting group** |
| • Increases self-confidence and self-esteem | • Imposes laborious work on the women |
| • Strengthens individual agency | • Lack of economic viability |
| | • Stereotypes the women |
| | • Objectifies the women |
| **Sewing group** | **Sewing group** |
| • Increases self-confidence and self-esteem | • Lack of economic viability |
| • Strengthen individual agency | • Stereotypes the women |
| **Women tourism entrepreneurs** | **Women tourism entrepreneurs** |
| • Increases self-confidence and self-esteem | • Lack of economic viability |
| | • Stereotypes the women |

The role of the tourist is seldom discussed in research on women in tourism entrepreneurship. A few studies have addressed the role and influence that tourists have on the portrayal of women running tourism enterprises and the interactions they have with them (Flacke-Neudorfer, 2007; Henrici, 2002; Jiménez-Esquinas, 2016; Tucker, 2009b), although these studies did not consider the influence of tourists in empowering and disempowering women tourism entrepreneurs. However, Moswete and Lacey (2014) reveal social empowering benefits that some women in Botswana gained from their interactions with tourists through their cultural tourism enterprise. Furthermore, Megarry (2008) also describes the

positive empowering experiences that women running a silk sarong dying enterprise in Kerala, India had with ethical tourists. Although the case studies provide some similar results to previous research, they go further by revealing both the positive and negative effects that tourists have on the experiences and the potential for the women to be empowered through their tourism enterprise. Thus, my study extends the limited information regarding the role of tourists on women in tourism entrepreneurship.

*The tourism structure*

Establishing and running of tourism enterprises requires support from the actual industry that it operates within and, thus, necessitates collaboration with various tourism entities, such as tourism bodies, tour operators, cruise companies and hotels, to be successful. The tourism structure as a whole plays a major role in the women's lived experiences and empowerment in tourism entrepreneurship. Along with the family and the community factors discussed above, the tourism structure holds power by supporting tourism entrepreneurship opportunities for women. In the case of the hosting and sewing group, the tourism structure provided some positive effects for the women through introducing a collective micro-tourism enterprise intervention programme. However, the tourism structure caused many negative effects for the women. Some of these negative effects are related to existing gender ideologies that the tourism structure reinforces, while others are related to economic development, and working conditions and demands. For the Omani women tourism entrepreneurs, these negative effects were aggressive and challenging for them as they pursued their own tourism enterprise independently and, unlike the hosting and sewing group, they did not receive any positive effects from the tourism structure. The positive and negative factors of the tourism structure are outlined in table 23 below.

Table 23: The tourism structure factor

| Positive effects | Negative effects |
|---|---|
| **Hosting group** | **Hosting group** |
| • Strengthens individual agency | • Provides limited support |
| • Creates collective social cohesion | • Enforces existing gender segregation |
| • Increases self-confidence and self-esteem | • Promotes stereotypes of Muslim women |
| | • Objectifies the women |
| | • Lack of collective work cohesion |
| | • Resistance towards the women |
| | • Imposes laborious work on the women |
| | • Lack of economic viability |
| **Sewing group** | **Sewing group** |
| • Strengthens individual agency | • Provides limited support |
| • Creates collective social cohesion | • Enforces an existing gender skill |
| • Increases self-confidence and self-esteem | • Promotes stereotypes of Muslim women |
| | • Enforces traditional roles and responsibilities |
| | • Imposes laborious work on the women |
| | • Lack of collective work cohesion |
| | • Lack of economic viability |
| **Women tourism entrepreneurs** | **Women tourism entrepreneurs** |
| None | • Provides no support |
| | • Resistance towards the women |
| | • Discriminates against the women |
| | • Lack of economic viability |

Previous studies have revealed the difficult business environment that Omani women entrepreneurs operate within (Al-Sadi et al., 2013; Dechant and Al Lamky, 2005; McElwee and Al-Riyami, 2003). As for the tourism business environment in Oman, Atef and Al-Balushi (2015) provide some indication of the potential barriers that tourism entrepreneurs there may face from the tourism structure. However,

their study is based on tourism and hospitality students' interests and perceptions towards entrepreneurship, not on actual explored lived experiences. Hence, the empirical evidence from my study reveals that the reality of the tourism business environment in Oman is that it is not gender friendly and there is unwillingness to share the predominately male-dominated market with the women. Thus, it is difficult for the women to become part of the tourism structure. My research also reveals that the Omani tourism structure does not support and foster tourism entrepreneurship opportunities for women. When it came to the two enterprises that were formed from intervention programmes, the hosting group and the sewing group, little socio-cultural, gender sensitivity and business planning took place and there was limited consideration of the implications on the women who participated in them, despite them being launched by the tourism structure itself.

Within the development studies literature, Abdo and Kerbage (2012) reveal the structural gaps that characterise the support services provided to women entrepreneurs in Lebanon from international organisations, the government and local NGOs. These weak support services affected women's empowerment. Within the tourism discipline, previous studies on tourism entrepreneurship have emphasised the important role that government support, industry cooperation and networking opportunities play in fostering the development and success of tourism SMEs (Bastakis, Buhalis and Butler, 2004; Dahles, 1998, 1999; Jaafar and Rasoolimanesh, 2015; Lerner and Haber, 2001; Thomas, 2000, 2007; Wanhill, 1996, 2000). Despite this emphasis, Haddad (2013) reveals some barriers and challenges in relation to the business environment for female handicraft business owners in Jordan. Moreover, several previous studies have revealed many issues with the practical efforts of local and international organisations to empower women through tourism entrepreneurship opportunities (Ateljevic, 2009; Castelberg-koulma, 1991; Ferguson, 2010a, b, 2011; Henrici, 2002; Kwaramaba et al., 2012; Megarry, 2008; Tucker and Boonabaana, 2012). Although my study provides some similar results, it goes further providing deeper insight of the actual tourism business environment in Oman, the various key players in the tourism structure and

the challenges this causes for women, which, in turn, affects their empowerment. Hence, my study adds further information on the questionable practical efforts of local and international tourism organisations to empower women through tourism entrepreneurship opportunities.

*The women*

Finally, the case studies provide a distinctive overview of the women entrepreneurs themselves and their position among the other factors that influence their lived experiences and empowerment in tourism entrepreneurship. As the women self-determined their involvement in tourism entrepreneurship, they sought its positive effects in order to develop themselves and to improve their lives and status – individually and collectively. The pursuit of self-development can be seen through the women's own behaviour, perceptions, reactions, awareness, choices, decisions, approaches and self-presentation, which were largely purposeful and deliberate. However, at the same time, because of the existing gender ideologies and socio-cultural restrictions that the above factors reinforce, the women had no choice but to accept, manage and conform to these existing ideologies and restrictions, as these are strongly embedded and difficult to change and challenge. In addition, they worked in difficult conditions with complex demands and struggled to achieve economic viability from their tourism enterprises. These, in turn, influenced their experiences and potential to be empowered through their tourism enterprises. The positive and negative factors of the women factor are shown in table 24.

Table 24: The women factor

| Positive effects | Negative effects |
|---|---|
| **Hosting group** | **Hosting group** |
| • Strengthen individual agency | • Conforms to existing patriarchal power |
| • Builds autonomy | • Conforms to existing conservative power |
| • Builds resistance | • Lack of collective work cohesion |
| • Creates collective social cohesion | |
| **Sewing group** | **Sewing group** |
| • Strengthens individual agency | • Conforms to using existing gender skill |
| • Builds autonomy | • Conforms to traditional roles and responsibilities |
| • Builds resistance | • Lack of collective work cohesion |
| • Creates collective social cohesion | |
| **Women tourism entrepreneurs** | **Women tourism entrepreneurs** |
| • Strengthens individual agency | • Conforms to existing patriarchal power |
| • Builds autonomy | • Conforms to existing conservative power |
| • Builds resistance | • Conforms to traditional roles and responsibilities |

Several previous studies from the development studies literature emphasise the importance of considering women's own direct views, their behaviour under the conditions which they live, and the subtle strategies they use when it comes to their general empowerment (see Ali, 2013; Ali, 2002; Chant, 2006; Desai, 2002; Erman et al., 2002; Kabeer, 1999; Osmani, 1998; Scheyvens, 1998; Singh, 2007; Syed, 2010; Wieringa, 1994). However, this has not been addressed in previous studies on women in tourism entrepreneurship. Therefore, my study adds new information to the literature on the importance of considering women when it comes it their lived experience and empowerment in tourism entrepreneurship.

Overall, this component of the framework reveals the importance of considering collectively the role and influence of the various factors that affect women's lived experiences and empowerment in tourism entrepreneurship. This, in turn, helps to provide a bigger holistic picture of the reality of Omani women's experiences in

tourism entrepreneurship. It also helps to identify their empowerment through the various forces surrounding their tourism business. This approach is important for critical feminist theory in considering social institutions, as well as the wider social, economic, cultural and political contextual factors that shapes women's lived experiences (Angelique, 2012; Howell et al., 1999; Kushner and Morrow, 2003; Loftsdóttir, 2011). As each of the identified factors has positive and negative effects on the women, these effects are discussed in detail in the next two components of the conceptual framework and are assigned as under overarching empowering and disempowering outcomes, as mentioned earlier.

**10.2.2 Empowering outcomes**

The second component of the framework refers to the overarching empowering outcomes that the women gain from their tourism enterprise. As I discuss each empowering outcome, I display the cross references I made in the emerging main concepts sections of each case study accordingly as overall evidence from the findings chapters. These cross-references are displayed in a table.

*Personal development*

The first empowering outcome is personal development. All of the three case studies reveal that the women are able to gain personal development from their involvement in tourism entrepreneurship. Elements of this empowering outcome are evident from specific positive effects across the three case studies. One common element is that participation in their enterprises strengthening their individual agency, as can be seen in table 25.

Table 25: Evidence of strengthened individual agency

| Chapter 7: The hosting group | Chapter 8: The sewing group | Chapter 9: Women tourism entrepreneurs |
|---|---|---|
| Theme 1, sub-theme 1.2 Theme 7, sub-theme 7.2 | theme 1, sub-themes 1.2 Theme 7, sub-themes 7.2/7.3 | Theme 1, sub-themes 1.2/1.3 |

Agency is defined as "the capacity of actors to take purposeful action, a function of both individual and collective assets and capabilities" (Sen, 1985, 1999 cited in Narayan, 2005, p. 6). Thus, the women are largely able to strengthen their individual agency by being able to use their existing skills, personal interests and passions in developing their tourism enterprise. The women are also able to strengthen their individual agency by gaining new skills through training and the interactions with tourists.

Within the context of Oman, previous studies note that Omani women entrepreneurs use their existing skills, hobbies and interests to help develop their enterprise (Al Sadi et al. 2013; Dechant and Al Lamky, 2005; McElwee and Al Riyami, 2003). This is similar to the situation found globally, with many studies revealing that women largely used their existing skills, personal interests and passions in their tourism enterprises (Harris et al., 2007; Iakovidou and Turner, 1995; Manwa, 2008; McMillan, et al., 2011; Walker et al., 2001). A few studies also found women gain new skills from their involvement in tourism entrepreneurship (Pleno, 2006; Annes and Wright, 2015; Canoves and Perez, 2002). Although my study reveals similar information, it goes further by linking this important information to helping women increase their individual agency. Thus, my study adds new information to the literature regarding strengthening individual agency as a personal development that empowers Omani women in tourism entrepreneurship.

The other common element of personal development that empowered the women is having increased self-confidence and self-esteem, as can be seen in table 26.

Table 26: Evidence of increased self-confidence and self-esteem

| Case study 7: The hosting group | Case study 8: The sewing group | Chapter 9: Women tourism entrepreneurs |
|---|---|---|
| Theme 7, sub-themes 7.1/7.3 Theme 8, sub-themes 8.1/8.2/ 8.3 | Theme 7, sub-themes 7.1/7.5 Theme 9, sub-themes 9.1/9.2 | Theme 8, sub-themes 8.1/8.2 Theme 9, sub-theme 9.1 |

The women gained increased self-confidence and self-esteem through the passion they developed for their tourism enterprise and from building stronger personalities as well as through the cultural exchange they had with tourists. This information is similar to previous studies on women in tourism entrepreneurship that found women gaining increased self-confidence and self-esteem from their tourism enterprise (Acharya and Halpenny, 2013; Annes and Wright, 2015; Cone, 1995; Gentry, 2007; Moswete and Lacy, 2014; McMillan et al., 2011; Pleno, 2006; Tran and Walter, 2014; Scheyvens, 2000; Walker et al., 2001; Iakovidou, 1997).

Similarly, increased status, respect and prestige is another common element of personal development that empowered the women, as is shown in table 27.

Table 27: Evidence of increased status, respect and prestige

| Case study 7: The hosting group | Case study 8: The sewing group | Case study 9: Women tourism entrepreneurs |
|---|---|---|
| Theme 7, sub-themes 7.5/7.6 | Theme 7, sub theme 7.6 | Theme 8, sub-themes 8.3/8.4 Theme 10, sub themes 10.1/10.2/10.3/10.4 |

Such an important outcome was gained because the women became well known because of their tourism enterprises, as well as the fact that they had opportunities to benefit others through them. This information corresponds with past studies in tourism entrepreneurship that revealed women gaining increased status, respect and prestige as a result of their involvement in it (Alonso-Almedia, 2012;

Castelberg-Koulma, 1991; Chhetri and Lama, 2013; Cone, 1995; Dieke, 2001; Iakovidou, 1997; Long and Kindon, 1997; McMillan et al., 2011; Scheyvens, 2000; Walker et al., 2001).

*Building autonomy and resistance*

The second empowering outcome is building autonomy and resistance. All of the three case studies reveal that the women are able to build some autonomy and resistance from their involvement in tourism entrepreneurship, as can be seen in table 28.

Table 28: Evidence of building autonomy and resistance

| Chapter 7: The hosting group | Chapter 8: The sewing group | Chapter 9: Women tourism entrepreneurs |
|---|---|---|
| Theme 1, sub theme 1.1 | Theme 1, sub-theme 1.1 | Theme 1, sub-theme 1.1 |
| Theme 2, sub-themes 2.1/2.2 | Theme 5, sub-themes 5.1/5.2 | Theme 5, sub-theme 5.2 |
| Theme 9, sub-themes 9.1/9.2/ 9.3 | Theme 9, sub-theme 9.3 | Theme 6, sub themes 6.1/6.2 |
| | | Theme 9, sub-theme 9.2 |
| | | Theme 11, sub-theme 11.2 |

With all of the women having a critical self-understanding and awareness of their reality and conditions as Muslim Omani women, they took the opportunity to build autonomy and resistance from their tourism enterprise in order to improve their position in the community. The women are able to build some autonomy through their self- presentation as either hostess, sewers or tourism entrepreneurs, as well as by promoting their modern identity, while maintaining the boundaries set by their families and the community in order not to cause major disruptions to these existing embedded social institutions. However, when it comes to their resistance, the women are not shy or hesitant to admit that this is one outcome from their tourism entrepreneurship, particularly emphasizing the importance of this for the future success of tourism entrepreneurship opportunities for other women in Oman.

They build some resistance from their choice to be involved in tourism entrepreneurship and the actions they then take to resist the existing gender ideologies and socio-cultural restrictions that form part of Omani women's embedded environment.

I previously discussed a similar finding on tourism employment being a site of resistance for Omani women (Almazro'ei, 2010; Almazro'ei and Shaw, 2014). This kind of finding has been extensively discussed in the field of leisure (for example, Green, 1998; Henderson, 1994; Hickerson, 2007; Parry, 2005; Raisborough and Bhatti, 2007; Shaw, 2001), but resistence is not a common theme in the literature on women in tourism entrepreneurship. Indeed, this information scarcely appeared in the few previous studies that revealed women's ability to develop autonomy and resistance through tourism enterprise, although Annes and Wright (2015) note that French women were able to create a "space of resistance" (p. 5) from their farm tourism businesses, and Pleno (2006) reveals that women in the Philippines were able to gain autonomy at a household level from their involvement in ecotourism-related businesses. Thus, this finding confirms and extends the existing scarce knowledge on the potential for tourism entrepreneurship to be a site of autonomy and resistance for women.

*Creating collective social cohesion*

The last major empowering outcome is creating collective social cohesion. The hosting group and sewing group case studies revealed that the women are able to create collective social cohesion from their involvement in tourism entrepreneurship, as can be seen in table 29.

Table 29: Evidence of creating collective social cohesion

| Chapter 7: The hosting group | Chapter 8: The sewing group |
| --- | --- |
| Section 7.2<br>Theme 7, sub-theme 7.4 | Section 8.2<br>Theme 8, sub-themes 8.1/8.2 |

The concept of the hosting and sewing group centres on a group of women running the enterprise collectively, which provides opportunities for them to create social cohesion when they come together and become acquainted through their enterprise. They also create collective social cohesion from the strong sisterhood they develop from their involvement in the enterprise. For the hosting group, the strong sisterhood comes from helping, supporting and understanding each other as they run their enterprise. With the sewing group it comes from the social gatherings and the friendships they have developed through their enterprise. Such an important empowering outcome can only be gained from collective enterprises.

This important knowledge is not discussed in the development studies literature, nor frequently enough in research on women in tourism entrepreneurship. Scheyvens (1999, 2000) discusses social cohesion being a sign of social empowerment for communities and women that work together to develop ecotourism enterprises. Cole (2007) also describes a women-weaving group in Indonesia that gained social benefits from the group. More recently, Annes and Wright (2015) have shown that rural French women in farm tourism businesses were able to develop valuable social relationships with other farmwomen through their agri-tourism network. Thus, my study makes a contribution to this limited pool of knowledge about collective social cohesion being an important empowering outcome for Omani women that can be achieved through collective tourism enterprises.

Overall, this component of the framework reveals the empowering outcomes that the women are able to gain from their tourism enterprise. Although these outcomes are important for women's overall empowerment, a critical feminist cannot take these outcomes for granted and must question the underlying issues in relation to the realities of women's lives, the context, and the implications of their entrepreneurial activities. Thus, the following component of the framework reveals that Omani women are not empowered in all respects by tourism entrepreneurship and that their participation in this kind of work often brings other major implications.

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**10.2.3 Disempowering outcomes**

The third component of the framework refers to the overarching disempowering outcomes that the women experience from their tourism enterprise. To disempower is defined as to "make (a person or group) less powerful or confident" (Oxford Dictionaries, 2017a). As I discuss each disempowering outcome below, I display the cross references I made in the emerging main concepts sections of each case study accordingly as overall evidence from the findings chapters. These cross-references are displayed in a table or in the text.

*Reinforced gender ideologies*

The first major disempowering outcome is reinforced gender ideologies. All of the three case studies reveal that certain gender ideologies are reinforced on the women from their involvement in tourism entrepreneurship. Each case study has its own unique element of reinforced gender ideologies that disempowered the women. For the hosting group, their families, the community and other women resisted their enterprise concept because it involved hosting both male and female tourists. This resistance, in turn, enforces the existing embedded practice of gender segregation found in Oman. With the tourism structure launching the hosting enterprise to provide an attraction for the cruise tourists, they did not carefully consider the consequences of their hosting enterprise project on the women when it came to enforcing such segregation. In general, gender segregation is common in Oman (Al-Azri, 2013; Barth, 1983; Chatty, 2000; Wikan, 1982). Arab hospitality is also commonly gender segregated through male or female only hosting spaces (Sobh, Belk and Wilson, 2013). Thus, the women are disempowered by the enforced existing gender segregation (chapter 7, section 7.2 and theme 2, sub themes 2.1/ 2.2/2.3).

This finding has not been discussed in previous studies on women in tourism entrepreneurship. Although the ideology of gender segregation is not applicable to all experiences of women in tourism entrepreneurship, depending on context, nevertheless this finding reveals the importance of considering specific contextual gender ideologies when assessing the experiences of women in tourism

entrepreneurship. Therefore, my study provides new information on gender segregation as a gender ideology that disempowers Omani women in tourism entrepreneurship.

Besides enforcing existing gender segregation, objectifying the women is another unique element of gender ideology that disempowered the hosting group (chapter 7, section 7.2 and theme 4, sub-theme 4.2). Through the nature of their hosting enterprise, tourists are provided with a unique encounter with local Omani women that provide a hosting [Redacted: Word removed due to sensitive information.] service. As a result, this unique encounter subjugates the women to become objects of attraction through the [Redacted: Word removed due to sensitive information.] tourists' photo taking requests and behaviour, although their innocent main purpose in providing a hosting service to tourists. This consequence could largely be blamed on the tourists. However, it is largely linked to the nature of the women's tourism enterprise being based on hosting, which provides opportunities for such opportunities to occur. Therefore, it is also linked to the tourism structure as they chose to base this enterprise concept on hosting.

This type of objectifying gender ideology is common in tourism (Pritchard, 2014; Wall and Norris, 2003). For example, Cole and Eriksson (2011) found evidence of indigenous Kayan women in Thailand and Mursi women in Ethiopia often being made objects of attraction by tourists taking non-consensual photos of them. Such ideology has rarely been observed in past studies on women tourism entrepreneurs. For example, Higgs (2008) observed the objectification of female straw vendors by tourists in the Bahamas, although her study does not focus on women's empowerment. Therefore, my research provides new information on the objectification of women as a gender ideology that disempowers Omani women in tourism entrepreneurship.

In the case of the sewing group, the tourism structure launched an enterprise based on sewing skills to help the women economically, and the women's families and the community supported the endeavour. Although this could mistakenly be considered good practice and beneficial for the women, this actually enforces the existing

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gender skill of sewing that is found in Oman. Sewing is a culturally embedded activity for women in Oman and is considered part of the women's traditional roles and responsibilities in different parts of the country (Al Mahrooqi, 2010; Heath, 2013). As a result, the women conformed to using this existing gender skill for the sewing enterprise. Thus, the women are disempowered by the action of enforcing and promoting sewing as an existing gender skill for women (chapter 8, section 8.2; theme 1, sub-themes 1.2/1.3 and theme 7, sub-theme 7.3).

Previous studies on women in tourism entrepreneurship have largely advocated the positive link between stereotypical women's work and tourism entrepreneurship opportunities for women (for example, Gentry, 2007; Harris et al., 2007; Iakovidou and Turner, 1995; Lama, 2000; MacLaren et al., 2013; Manwa, 2008; Walker et al., 2001). Also, previous studies on Omani women entrepreneurs found that they use their existing skills, hobbies and interests to help them develop an enterprise (Al Sadi et al., 2013; Dechant and Al Lamky, 2005; McElwee and Al-Riyami, 2003). I could make the same point by emphasising that sewing helps women to be involved in tourism entrepreneurship, which is true to some extent. However, in reality, sewing remains an embedded gender skill for Omani women. Hence, I instead propose that this gendering aspect of tourism entrepreneurship is actually negative, as the sewing enterprise enforces the idea that sewing is women's work rather than challenging it. Thus, this finding indicates that the link between stereotypical women's work and tourism entrepreneurship is not always necessarily positive. It also reveals the need to be more critical towards the tourism entrepreneurship opportunities provided to women when they are largely linked to stereotypical women's work. Moreover, my research shows that this kind of work is also culturally embedded as being women's work in Oman.

As for the women tourism entrepreneurs, they are able to create their own individual opportunity by launching their own enterprise and providing the missing products and services for Oman's tourism industry in their own creative and innovative way. However, because of their gender, they experience discrimination despite their unique pioneering capabilities. Such discrimination came largely from

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general the community and the tourism structure. They did not want the women to prosper and made it difficult for the women to be tourism entrepreneurs. The women stated that gender discrimination is an existing challenge for other women who want to be involved in tourism entrepreneurship. In general, gender discrimination is common in Oman (Al-Azri, 2013; Al-Lamki, 1999). It is also a common barrier that Oman women entrepreneurs (Al-Sadi et al. 2013; Dechant and Al Lamky, 2005; McElwee and Al-Riyami, 2003) and other general women entrepreneurs in Arab/Muslim contexts (for example, Ahmad, 2011; Hattab, 2012; Javadian and Singh, 2012; Roomi and Harrison, 2010) endure while pursuing their entrepreneurial endeavours. Thus, the women are disempowered by their experience of gender discrimination (chapter 9, theme 3, sub-themes 3.1, 3.2, 3.3 and theme 11, sub-theme 11.2).

This important finding is not common in existing studies on women in tourism entrepreneurship. Both Haddad (2013), and Kimbu and Ngoasong (2016) find evidence of gender discrimination for women tourism entrepreneurs in their studies. However, their study does not focus on women's empowerment. Thus, my study provides new information on gender discrimination as a gender ideology that disempowers Omani women in tourism entrepreneurship.

Besides the unique elements of reinforced gender ideologies found for each case study, there are common elements of enforced gender ideologies that are found across the three case studies. One common element of enforced gender ideology that disempowers all of the women is stereotyping, as can be seen in table 30.

Table 30: Evidence of stereotyping

| Chapter 7: The hosting group | Chapter 8: The sewing group | Chapter 9: Women tourism entrepreneurs |
|---|---|---|
| Section 7.2 | Section 8.2 | Theme 9, sub-theme 9.2 |
| Theme 4, sub-theme 4.3 | Theme 9, sub-theme 9.3 | |
| Theme 9, sub-theme 9.1 | | |

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This element is found in all three case studies and mainly comes from tourists. The stereotyping is more strongly evident in the case of the hosting group, and to some extent with the sewing group. This is largely influenced and promoted by the main nature of their tourism enterprise in providing hosting by local Omani women to tourists. It is also linked to the tourism structure as they chose to include hosting as part of the enterprise concept. Regardless of the tourism enterprise type, all of the women experienced stereotyping from tourists. The occurrence of this stereotyping is largely a result of the women being Muslim. The tourists already hold existing general stereotypes of Muslim women, thus, they are curious about women's place in Oman's community, of their roles as entrepreneurs and work capabilities, and their independence. This in turn made the women feel undermined, awkward and less valuable as they constantly had to deal with such stereotypes. Western stereotypes of Muslim women are not new and are commonly found in the existing literature on the status of Muslim women (for example, Afzal-Khan and El Saadawi, 2005; Aquil, 2011; Bullock, 2002; Hussain, 1984), as well as discussed in the media (Botsford, 2002; Martin-Munoz, 2002; Muslima, 2016).

Although no previous studies on women in tourism entrepreneurship have discussed tourists stereotyping Muslim women, some scholars have found evidence of tourists stereotyping women tourism entrepreneurs. For example, Henrici (2002) records that tourists held exotic and indigenous portrayals of women selling ethnic crafts in Pisac village in Peru. Similarly, Flacke-Neudorfer (2007) describes tourists holding traditional images of Akha women that sold handicrafts in Muang Sing, Northern Laos. Tucker (2009b) also remarks that she observed a German couple stereotyping a local woman, who invited them to view her cave house and buy her handicrafts, as "an authentic, uncorrupted cave-dwelling woman" (p. 453) during an encounter she observed between the two parties in Goreme, Turkey. The occurrence of such ideology could be the result of tourism marketing materials that have used illustrations of gender and heterosexuality that "have led to women being represented as exoticized commodities which are there to be experienced"

(Pritchard and Morgan, 2000, p. 891). However, these past studies did not consider the disempowering outcome of stereotyping on the women they researched.

Jiménez-Esquinas (2016) offers a more recent and different perspective about the stereotypes held towards women tourism entrepreneurs. In her case study of women bobbin lace-makers in Galicia, Spain, she discusses the negative reactions of pride and resentment from the women towards the stereotypes held of them by tourists, researchers (including herself) and local politicians, which included considering them ""conservative", "rural", "traditional", "fine lady" or "Urbanite"" (p. 3). As she describes, the women "remained seated, bearing a grim face whenever they were photographed and certainty refusing to teach urban women how to make their local bobbin lace patterns; third they rejected every single attempt to "improve" their economic or social situation either from well-intentioned tourists, researchers or local politicians" (p. 7). However, she did not consider the disempowering effect of these stereotypes on these women, which explains the women's negative reactions towards the people who visited their workspace. Thus, although my research extends existing knowledge of tourists stereotyping women tourism entrepreneurs, it goes further by revealing its disempowering outcome for Omani women in tourism entrepreneurship.

Another common element of reinforced gender ideology that disempowers the women is enforced traditional roles and responsibilities, as can be seen in table 31.

Table 31: Evidence of enforced traditional roles and responsibilities

| Chapter 8: The sewing group | Chapter 9: Women tourism entrepreneurs |
|---|---|
| Theme 5, sub-themes 5.1/5.2 Theme 6, sub-themes 6.1/6.2 | Theme 5, sub-theme 5.2 |

This element was found in the sewing group and women tourism entrepreneur's case studies. The women still had to maintain their traditional roles and responsibilities while running their tourism enterprise. These deeply embedded

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roles and responsibilities are enforced by their families, and the women had no choice but to conform to these expectations, as these are difficult to challenge and change. Within the context of Oman, previous studies discussed traditional roles and responsibilities that are imposed on Omani women, and continue to be imposed despite their growing participation in society (Al-Lamki, 1999, 2000; Al-Lamky, 2007; Al-Mahrooqi, 2010; Barth, 1983; Chatty, 2000; Ministry of National Economy, 2011; National Centre for Statistics and Information, 2013; Riphenburgh, 1998). Previous studies that looked at Omani women entrepreneurs also found that balancing business and domestic responsibilities was an expectation that the women had to maintain, although this was easier for the other women that had access to paid help (Al-Sadi et al., 2013; Dechant and Al Lamky, 2005; McElwee and Al-Riyami, 2003). In the case of the sewing group, it is their domestic responsibilities that they have to maintain, which includes childcare and housework. Despite the tourism structure providing the women with a flexible workplace and schedule that allowed them to balance their domestic responsibilities with their sewing work, they did not carefully consider the consequences of the sewing enterprise project on the women in enforcing and burdening them, rather than liberating them from such roles and responsibilities. As for the case of the women tourism entrepreneurs, it is their cultural embedded roles as daughters, wives and mothers that they have to maintain.

Notwithstanding the few previous studies on women in tourism entrepreneurship that have reported women being able to challenge and change gender relations (Acharya and Halpenny, 2013; Cone, 1995; Henry et al., 2014; Kimbu and Ngoasong, 2016; Li, 2003), this finding corresponds well with other previous studies that found such economic opportunities reinforce, rather than challenge, gender roles and relations (see Bensemann and Hall, 2010; Bras and Dahles, 1998; Canoves and Perez, 2002; Castelberg-Koulma, 1991; Garcia-Ramon, Canoves and Valdovinos, 1995; Khan, 1995; Long and Wall, 1995; Mottiar and Laurincikova, 2009; Stavroulakis et al. 2013; Walker et al., 2001). It is also in line with previous studies from the development studies discipline that found the same results for women's

involvement in entrepreneurship opportunities (Abdo and Kerbage, 2012; Chitsike, 2000; Kabeer, 2012; Kantor, 2003). Hence, my research adds to the available evidence about the limited ability of tourism entrepreneurship to help women challenge gender roles and relations.

Finally, resistance is another common element of reinforced gender ideologies that disempowered the women, as can be seen in table 32.

Table 32: Evidence of resistance towards the women

| Chapter 7: The hosting group | Chapter 8: Women tourism entrepreneurs |
|---|---|
| Theme 3, sub-theme 3.1 | Theme 3, sub themes 3.1/3.2/3.3 |
| | Theme 5, sub-theme 5.1 |
| | Theme 6, sub-themes 6.1/6.2/6.3 |

This element is found in the hosting group and women tourism entrepreneur's case studies. Resistance is more strongly evident with the women tourism entrepreneurs due to their individual endeavours to pursue their own tourism enterprise opportunity, and it came from their own families, the community and the tourism structure. These factors made it difficult for the women to sell their enterprise idea, caused people to think negatively towards their enterprise and undermined their capabilities. The occurrence of this resistance is largely due to the threat and the potential for change that women's tourism entrepreneurial endeavours can enact upon existing power structures. In the case of the hosting group, resistance came largely from the tourism structure, where they made it difficult for them to form networks. Thus, both case studies revealed resistance towards the women's tourism enterprise.

This type of gender ideology has not been discussed in previous studies on Omani women or in previous studies on women in tourism entrepreneurship. Thus, it provides new information on resistance as a gender ideology that disempowers Omani women in tourism entrepreneurship. Overall, the case studies show that women's involvement in tourism entrepreneurship disempowers them in

reinforcing existing gender ideologies. At the same time, gender ideologies are unavoidable as West and Zimmerman (1987) both argue. Kabeer (2012) also emphasises the role of gender in forming the whole entrepreneurial activity for women in general. Thus, my study reveals the role of gender in influencing the women's lived experiences and empowerment in tourism entrepreneurship, which is an important point of analysis that critical feminist theorists' focus on when exploring women's lived experiences (Angelique, 2012; Breitkreuz, 2005; De Saxe, 2014; Howell et al., 1999; Kushner and Morrow, 2003; Loftsdóttir, 2011; Mills, 1994).

*Reinforced socio-cultural restrictions*

The second major disempowering outcome is reinforced socio-cultural restrictions. This disempowering outcome is revealed in the hosting group and the women tourism entrepreneur's case studies. There are two main elements of socio-cultural restrictions that are evident from the specific negative effects across the two case studies. One is the existing patriarchal power, the evidence of which can be seen in table 33.

Table 33: Evidence of enforced existing patriarchal power

| Chapter 7: The hosting group | Chapter 9: Women tourism entrepreneurs |
|---|---|
| Theme 2, sub-themes 2.1/2.3 | Theme 5, sub-theme 5.1 |
| Theme 9, sub-theme 9.3 | Theme 6, sub-themes 6.1/6.2/6.3 |
| Theme 10, sub-theme 10.1 | Theme 11, sub-theme 11.2 |

According to Pilcher and Whelehan (2004), "patriarchy means rule by the male head of a social unit (a family or tribe, for example). The patriarch, typically a societal elder, has legitimate power over others in the social unit, including other (especially, younger) men, all women and children" (p. 93). The hosting group and the women tourism entrepreneurs had to first gain their family support in order to be involved in tourism entrepreneurship. They also had difficulty gaining this support. For the hosting group, they had to convince their families and deal with family strictness.

Although they eventually managed to gain their families' support, this support was provided along with imposed boundaries; conditions and restrictions that the women needed to follow while being involved in the hosting enterprise. As for the women tourism entrepreneurs, they had to deal with their families' concerns and prove themselves in order to gain their support. Thus, the women had no choice but to conform to the existing patriarchal power of their families in order to have their support. However, the issue of patriarchy is not only unique to the women that I researched, as they reiterated this was an issue for other women who also wanted to be involved in tourism entrepreneurship. Within the context of Oman, few previous studies have emphasised the patriarchal power found in Oman and its influence on Omani women's lives (see Al-Azri, 2013; Barth, 1983; Riphenburgh, 1998). Thus, the patriarchal power disempowers the women.

Although it is not discussed often in the literature on women in tourism entrepreneurship, a few previous studies have discussed the influence of patriarchy on women's tourism entrepreneurial activities. Tucker and Boonabaana (2012) reveal that women in both Goreme, Turkey and Mukono, Uganda had to gain the permission of their husbands for their tourism entrepreneurial activities. Similarly, Van Der Cammen (1997) shows that staff from development organisations had to first convince the reluctant male leaders to allow the women to be involved in tourism-related entrepreneurial activities. Alonso-Almedia (2012) also describes a woman that owned and managed the family restaurant in Morocco but still had to conform to her father's patriarchal power, as "the father is the head of the family at home and is asked for his opinion, "as a signal of respect""(p. 349). In Haddad's (2013) study, she reveals that female handicraft business owners in Jordan emphasised the need for family support for their businesses due to the patriarchal influence of their families. However, these studies did not link the role of patriarchy to the empowerment of these women through their tourism entrepreneurial activities. Previous studies from the development studies literature have emphasised the role of patriarchy in limiting women's ability to be empowered through entrepreneurship opportunities (see Al-Dajani and Marlow, 2013a, b;

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Kantor, 2003; Landig, 2011; Osmani, 1998; Torri and Martinez, 2011, 2014). Annes and Wright's (2015) recent study shows the perseverance of a patriarchal culture and agrarian ideology in rural France that limits the women's empowering potential through their farm tourism businesses. Thus, this finding extends new knowledge on the disempowering influence of existing patriarchal power in the embedded environment for women involved in tourism entrepreneurship.

The other main element of reinforced socio-cultural restriction that disempowers the women is existing conservative power, as can be seen in table 34. Conservative is defined as "averse to change or innovation and holding traditional values" (Oxford Dictionaries, 2016).

Table 34: Evidence of enforced existing conservative power

| Chapter 7: The hosting group | Chapter 9: Women tourism entrepreneurs |
|---|---|
| Theme 2, sub-themes 2.2/2.3 | Theme 3, sub-themes 3.1/3.2/3.3 |
| Theme 9, sub-theme 9.3 | Theme 6, sub-themes 6.1/6.2 |
| Theme 10, sub-theme 10.1 | Theme 11, sub-theme 11.2 |

Both the hosting group and women tourism entrepreneurs have difficulty in gaining the support of the community. The community are sceptical and do not support Omani women pursuing tourism entrepreneurship opportunities. This new economic activity interferes and causes chaos to the current power structure of the community and, thus, the community uses different approaches to rebel against these new changes. For the hosting group, the community initially held negative view towards their enterprise. Nonetheless, the women gradually gained community support and continued to pursue community acceptance for their enterprise, this support was provided along with imposed expectations that the women need to meet while being involved in their hosting enterprise. As for the women tourism entrepreneurs, the community made it difficult for them sell their enterprise ideas. They also held negative views towards the women's enterprise and undermined the women's capabilities. Although the women tourism entrepreneurs

are able to create a positive identity and prove themselves, the existing conservative power of the community did not diminish as they continued to face challenges arising from conservatism while pursuing their tourism enterprise. Hence, the women had to accept and deal with the existing conservative power of the community, as this was too difficult change and challenge. Similar to patriarchy, the issue of existing conservative power is not only unique to the women that I researched, as they often stated this was also an issue for other women who want to get involved in tourism entrepreneurship. Conservatism is an existing socio-cultural restriction that is found in the general society of Oman towards women's progress and development, which previous studies have revealed (Al-Lamki, 1999, 2000; Al-Lamky, 2007; Al Omairi and Amzat's, 2012; Belwal et al., 2014; Bontenbal, 2014; Jaffer and Afifi, 2005; Ministry of National Economy, 2011; National Centre for Statistics and Information, 2013; Riphenburgh, 1998). It is also particularly evident for the tourism industry in Oman, where several past studies have emphasised the continuous existing societal negative views towards the industry, and specifically towards women involvement in tourism (Almazro'ei, 2010; Arnold, 1997; Bontenbal and Aziz, 2013; Inskeep, 1994; Ministry of Tourism and United Nations World Tourism Organisation, 2011; Oxford Business Group, 2015).

In comparison to patriarchy, this finding is scarcely discussed in previous studies on women in tourism entrepreneurship. While Haddad (2013) reveals the patriarchal influence of families on women handicraft business owners in Jordan, as discussed above, she also notes that the community held negative attitudes towards the women's business and were not supportive of them as a result of operating in a traditional society. In general, there is a conflict between modern western tourism and Islamic cultures, with tourism seen to dilute the interpretation of Islamic culture (Burns and Cooper, 1997). For example, the behaviours and dress of tourists, sexual permissiveness, gambling, and consumption of pork and alcohol are seen to be inappropriate and offensive (Henderson, 2003; Ritter, 1975). Due to this, many Muslim societies have taken a cautious view of tourism in order to protect their community and culture from the western influence of in-coming modern tourism

(Baum and Conlin, 1997). Thus, this finding provides new information on the disempowering influence of existing conservative power in the embedded environment for women involved in tourism entrepreneurship.

Both the existing patriarchal and conservative power is not evident with the sewing group case study as their enterprise is based on using an existing gender skill. Chatty (2000) emphasises that women's formal groups in Oman are socially accepted if they follow cultural ideas based on women's traditional roles and responsibilities as well as on modest behaviour. Meanwhile, the enterprise concept of the hosting group and the women tourism entrepreneurs are operating against appropriate cultural ideas, which led to the enforcement of patriarchy and conservatism on them. These are important power structures that a critical feminist would uncover when analysing women's lived experiences.

*Working in difficult conditions and demands*

The third major disempowering outcome is working in difficult conditions and to demand. All of the three case studies reveal that the women had to work under difficult conditions and to demand because of their involvement in tourism entrepreneurship. Elements of this disempowering outcome are evident from specific negative effects across the three case studies. One element is imposed laborious work, as can be seen in table 35.

Table 35: Evidence of imposed laborious work

| Chapter 7: The hosting group | Chapter 8: The sewing group | Chapter 9: Women tourism entrepreneurs |
|---|---|---|
| Theme 4, sub-theme 4.1 Theme 10, sub-theme 10.3 | Theme 2, sub-themes 2.1/2.2/2.3/2.4/2.5 | Theme 3, sub-theme 3.4 |

All of the women's tourism enterprises impose laborious work on them, where the women have to deal with difficult conditions in order to provide their products and services. The hosting group manage tourists' reluctance and hesitancy while providing their hosting services to tourists. The sewing group have limited work,

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deal with work pressure, experience mobility issues, sew at home and have the sewing skill enforced on them. As for the women tourism entrepreneurs, they struggled to provide their tourism products and services due to the large amount of time and effort that they needed to put in. These difficult conditions are part of the nature of tourism enterprise work, which the women are forced to deal with. Although the tourism structure launched both the hosting and sewing enterprise for the women, they did not carefully consider the working conditions of these enterprises in imposing laborious work.

Although past studies on women in tourism entrepreneurship have mainly implied that tourism enterprise work is easy work for women because of its link to stereotypical women's work, as discussed earlier, few studies have addressed the laborious work that is actually associated with tourism enterprise work for women. Garcia-Ramon, Canoves and Valdovinos (1995) note that farm tourism required women in Spain to work long hours and weekends, and they had many tasks to complete, such as shopping, cleaning and cooking. Canoves and Perez (2002) also reveal similar results for agri-tourism work for women in Spain and Portugal. Haddad (2013) shows the difficulty that women handicraft business owners in Jordan encounter in producing handicrafts due to its long process and high effort. Hence, this finding extends scarce knowledge on the laborious work associated with tourism enterprise work for women. It also adds new information on the imposed laborious work associated with tourism entrepreneurship that disempowers Omani women.

The other element of working in difficult conditions and demands that disempowered the women is the level of support they received, as can be seen in table 36.

Table 36: Evidence of level of support

| Chapter 7: The hosting group | Chapter 8: The sewing group | Chapter 9: Women tourism entrepreneurs |
|---|---|---|
| Section 7.2 Theme 3, sub-themes 3.1/3.2 Theme 10, sub-theme 10.2 | Section 8.2 Theme 2, sub-theme 2.1 | Theme 2, sub-themes 2.1/2.2/ 2.3/2.4 Theme 11, sub-them 11.2 |

The tourism structure provides different levels of support for the women's tourism enterprise. Such support mainly includes funding, marketing, training, networking, cooperation, sales and production deals. Although the tourism structure launched and helped to set up both the hosting group enterprise and sewing group enterprise, they provide limited ongoing support for the two groups. The hosting group had only initial start-up support for a certain period only. The sewing group had a longer length of support, but also for a limited period. As for the women tourism entrepreneurs who set up their own enterprises, they had no support at all for their tourism enterprise and they stated that this was a reality for other women who wanting to be involved in tourism entrepreneurship. Despite the various levels of support provided to the women, the level of available support for the women's tourism enterprise is weak and it affected the women's tourism enterprises.

This important information has not been sufficiently considered in previous studies on women in tourism entrepreneurship. Haddad (2013) observes that there was a lack of government and NGO support for women handicraft business owners in Jordan when it came to marketing, competition and funding. Although a few previous studies on women in tourism entrepreneurship revealed positive practical efforts of government and development agencies support towards tourism entrepreneurship opportunities for women (Castelberg-koulma, 1991; Gurung, 1995 cited in Shah and Gupta, 2000; Koutsou et al., 2009; Manwa, 2008; Megarry, 2008; Pleno, 2006), the level of support was not clear in these studies. Moreover, Castelberg-koulma (1991), Gurung (1995 cited in Shah and Gupta, 2000) and Megarry (2008) found some weaknesses in the support. Hence, this finding extends

limited knowledge on the level of support that the tourism structure provides to women in tourism entrepreneurship and also provides new information on the disempowering effect it can have.

The last element of working in difficult conditions and demands that disempowered the women is the lack of collective work cohesion. This element is specifically from the hosting group and sewing group case studies, as can be seen in table 37.

Table 37: Evidence of lack of collective work cohesion

| Chapter 7: The hosting group | Chapter 8: The sewing group |
|---|---|
| Theme 6, sub-themes 6.1/6.2 | Theme 4, sub-themes 4.1/4.2 |
| | Theme 10, sub-theme 10.1 |

As the tourism structure based the hosting and sewing enterprise on a model that was to be collectively run by a group of women, the women struggled to run the enterprise as a group. One woman largely runs the hosting enterprise, while the other women in the group have less time for the enterprise due to their jobs. As for the sewing group, their struggle largely comes from an unequal distribution of work between them and they lacked group cooperation. This element reveals that it difficult to run a collective tourism enterprise, and that it is not a simple and easy effort.

This important finding has not been considered in past studies that looked at collective women tourism enterprises (for example, Castelberg-koulma, 1991; Ferguson, 2010a,b; Koutsou et al., 2009). Hence, this finding provides new information on the disempowering effect of the lack of work cohesion that results from collective women tourism enterprises. One of the main analysis criteria for critical feminist theory is to reveal practices that improve women's lives while analysing their lived experiences (Rhode, 1990). Therefore, these difficult work conditions and demands make the women's work situation worse rather than improving it.

*Lack of economic viability*

The last major disempowering outcome is the lack of economic viability. All of the three case studies reveal that the women have a lack of economic viability from their tourism enterprise.

Table 38: Evidence of lack of economic viability

| Chapter 7: The hosting group | Chapter 8: The sewing group | Chapter 9: Women tourism entrepreneurs |
|---|---|---|
| Theme 5, sub-themes 5.1/5.2 Theme 10, sub-theme 10.4 | Theme 3, sub-themes 3.1/3.2 Theme7, sub-themes 7.4 Theme 10, sub-theme 10.2 Theme 11, sub-themes 11.1/11.2 | Theme 4, sub-themes 4.1/4.2/ 4.3 Theme 7, sub-themes 7.1/7.2 Theme 11, sub theme 11.1 |

All of the women make income from their tourism enterprise. However, there are issues with the income that they make. The hosting group made unstable and limited income from their enterprise. This, in turn, led to three of the women in the group continuing their jobs while running the enterprise. Although they are in the early years of their enterprise, they did strongly emphasise the need to make steady and greater income in order to achieve economic viability. The sewing group is content with the income that they make and being able to sometimes financially help their families. However, the income they make is still low and unstable, and this affects their economic independence and family support despite running their enterprise for a longer length of time. They emphasise the need to grow the enterprise bigger in order to have good stable income. Also half of the women in the group are looking for other opportunities in order to earn more money. The income situation with the women tourism entrepreneurs is better in comparison to the two groups of women, as they are now able to make decent incomes and have some success, despite their low incomes at the beginning, and having taken financial risks and chances. Nevertheless, they did emphasise the need to grow their enterprise bigger in order to have a profitable business.

One reason for the women's low income is that tourists do not often purchase the women's products and services, and they largely made it difficult for the women to sell it to them. Moreover, the tourism structure makes it difficult for the women to economically develop their tourism enterprise. For the hosting group, the tourism structure makes it difficult for them to develop networks and there is a lack of industry cooperation in helping the women to form the needed networks for their enterprise. As for the sewing group, the tourism structure demands low prices from the women and makes limited sales and orders for their sewing products. With the women tourism entrepreneurs, the tourism structure makes it difficult for them to set up and run their tourism enterprises. Hence, when considering the above issues as a whole, it is clear that the women do not have economic viability, as they are unable to live off their tourism enterprise and struggle to economically sustain it.

Many past studies on women in tourism entrepreneurship have emphasised women's economic empowerment through the income they are able to gain from this work (Acharya and Halpenny, 2013; Chhetri and Lama, 2013; Dieke, 2001; Gentry, 2007; Ling et al., 2013; MacLaren et al., 2013; Megarry, 2008; Moswete and Lacey, 2015; Tran and Walter, 2014; Wilkinson and Pratiwi, 1995). The women in my study reported making income from their tourism enterprise, but there were many issues with this, as I revealed above. Therefore, I argue that this income was not actually capable of empowering the women economically due to these limitations. This finding supports previous studies on women in tourism entrepreneurship that found a lack of economic empowerment for the women in their studies (Annes and Wright, 2015; Bras and Dahles, 1998; Canoves and Perez, 2002; Long and kindon, 1997; Mottair and laurincikova, 2009; Pleno, 2006). However, my study went beyond just focusing on income, as I looked at the actual economic viability of the tourism enterprise as a whole, which previous studies had not done. Such approach is important from a critical feminist perspective in considering the realities of practices that limits women (Rhode, 1990). As a result, it raises the concern that most tourism businesses deliver marginal economic gain for women. Thus, this finding adds new information on the

need to consider the economic viability of tourism entrepreneurship opportunities for women as a whole and its impact on their empowerment.

Overall, this component of the framework reveals the disempowering outcomes that the women experience from their involvement in tourism entrepreneurship.

## 10.3 Conceptualising Omani women's empowerment in tourism entrepreneurship

Based on the overall findings of my study and my understanding of the concept of women's empowerment from the development studies literature, I see Omani women's empowerment through their tourism entrepreneurial activities as an on-going non-linear personal process. This process is accompanied with a series of empowering outcomes that the women gain as a result of a tourism entrepreneurial opportunity that they chose to pursue, individually or collectively, in order to improve their lives. The empowering outcomes include personal development, building autonomy and resistance, and creating collective social cohesion. However, this process is largely accompanied with disempowering outcomes, which are largely related to deeply embedded constraints and daily struggles they currently undergo in their embedded environment, privately and publicly. The disempowering outcomes include reinforced gender ideologies, reinforced socio-cultural restrictions, working in difficult conditions and demands, and lack of economic viability.

When reviewing the empowering and disempowering outcomes, it is clear that the women are more disempowered than empowered from their involvement in tourism entrepreneurship. I argue that empowerment cannot be observed, given the level of intensity, exploitation and seriousness of the disempowering outcomes on the women through various aspects. One is that existing gender ideologies and socio-cultural restrictions found in the embedded environment are reinforced on the women. From a critical feminist perspective, existing gender ideologies and institutional arrangements makes it difficult for women to attain empowerment and equality (Rhode, 1990). The women are also placed to work in difficult conditions

and demands. Moreover, they did not attain economic viability that they are supposed to gain from their tourism enterprise. Such outcomes limits women and does not improve their lives, which are against the tenants of critical feminist theory in transforming women's lives. Although the women gained personal development, autonomy and resistance, and collective social cohesion, which are all important elements of women's empowerment, these empowering outcomes are not sufficient to claim that Omani women are empowered from their involvement in tourism entrepreneurship. More specifically, these empowering outcomes are also limited to help the women challenge gender ideologies, and socio-cultural restrictions. Overall, with consideration of both the empowering and disempowering outcomes, I conclude that tourism entrepreneurship does not inevitably bring about empowerment for Omani women. It is far from being an activity for women's individual and collective empowerment, given that the scope for such remains dependent on the embedded environment and is influenced by the nature of tourism enterprise work. Although this is a bold statement that I make, I believe it is an important and accurate statement that needs to be made in order to push the limited understanding and boundaries on the discourse of women's empowerment through tourism entrepreneurship. Such approach is important for researchers opting critical feminist theory in order to promote social change for women.

This argument represents a new understanding for the tourism discipline in relation to the empowerment of women in tourism entrepreneurship. Hence, my study questions previous studies that have advocated the empowering potential of tourism entrepreneurship for women (Annes and Wright, 2015; McMillan et al., 2011; Moswete and Lacey, 2014; Pleno, 2006; Tran and Walter, 2014). It is also in line with previous studies that have critically questioned women's empowerment through entrepreneurship opportunities (Abdo and Kerbage, 2012; Al-Dajani and Marlow, 2013a, b; Chitsike, 2000; Gill and Ganesh, 2007; Kabeer, 2012; Kantor, 2003; Lairap-Fonderson, 2002; Landig, 2011; Osmani, 1998), in contrast to those that have advocated positive empowering evidence in entrepreneurship opportunities for women (Abbasian and Bildt, 2009; Ahmed et al., 2011; Basargekar,

2009; Bunch and Carrillo, 1990; Datta and Gailey, 2012; Donahoe, 1999; Mayoux, 2001; Moyle et al., 2006; Özkazanç-Pan, 2015; Scott et al., 2012; Sharma and Varma, 2008; Sharma, 2007; Torri and Martinez, 2011, 2014). Within the context of Oman, it shows that cultural gendered ideologies and socio-cultural restrictions continue to prevail on Omani women to date and affects their participation in society, as previous studies have done (for e.g. Al-Azri, 2013; Al-Lamki, 1999, 2000; Barth, 1983; Riphenburgh, 1998). Thus, it questions the government's over-elaborated emphasis in achieving the third millennium goal of women's empowerment and gender equality for Omani women (Ministry of National Economy, 2010).

## 10.4 Theoretical and practical implications

The overall findings of my study provide important theoretical and practical implications when it comes to the empowerment of women through tourism entrepreneurship opportunities. Theoretically, the concept of women's empowerment should be used with reservation in the tourism discipline. We should be cautious about celebrating and promoting tourism entrepreneurship's potential to empower women when clearly it is yet far from delivering this potential, as revealed with the case for Omani women. It is also important to be critical towards women's experiences in this activity, which I was able to achieve through critical feminist theory. The popular narrative of tourism entrepreneurship as a means for women's empowerment has been widely utilised and manipulated. Doing so had led us to overlook the underlying issues that actually make this potential unreachable. Moreover, it is not as glorious as the industry depicts it to be in its potential to empower women, particularly in its inability to address and deal with deeply rooted gender and cultural issues for women in their embedded environment, which are key to their empowerment. Besides the gender and cultural issues, it is not easy work for women and its over-exaggerated economic benefit is not necessarily attainable. This is not to say that tourism entrepreneurship is bad for women and that we should stop using this activity as a tool for empowering women. However, we should be reasonable with our expectations when it comes to promoting its empowering potential for women, given it is limited to a certain extent and

according to the context. In reality, social change needs to come first from the broader society and there is yet much more work that needs to be done for women's empowerment and gender equality in general. Only then, perhaps, will tourism entrepreneurship be able to deliver its true potential to empower women.

As for practical implications, support from the wider tourism structure for women in tourism entrepreneurship should be in place first in order to use this activity for the purpose of empowering women. This support should be developed through public and private sector partnerships. It should also be continuous, monitored and requires follow-up. Moreover, it should assist women in various areas, such as funding, marketing, networking, training and cooperation. The existence of such support will assist women with the establishment and running of their tourism enterprises. It will also help increase the economic viability of their enterprise. Besides the support, the focus of collective tourism entrepreneurship projects for women should move beyond the narrow purpose of only economically empowering the women. Instead, it should conduct proper socio-cultural, gender sensitivity and business planning when introducing these projects. This type of planning can help address potential challenges that could arise from such projects in order to reduce the negative effects on women. Such an important implication has been previously emphasised about the problem in intervention programmes that use tourism entrepreneurship opportunities for women's empowerment (Ferguson, 2010a, b, 2011; Henrici, 2002; Kwaramaba et al., 2012; Tucker and Boonabaana, 2012). Finally, with on-going imposed gender ideologies and the existence of strongly embedded socio-cultural restrictions on women, an effort to create awareness and understanding among families and the wider community about opportunities for women in tourism entrepreneurship should be sought through education campaigns. This, in turn, may help promote better acceptance towards women's entrepreneurial activities in the tourism industry, as well as to encourage other women to start up tourism enterprises. A similar campaign should also be targeted towards tourists in order to promote the women's products and services, which, in turn, will encourage potential sales and ethical behaviour from tourists.

Regarding the future of tourism entrepreneurship for Omani women, my study serves as a starting point in raising awareness of the challenges and issues that affect Omani women in tourism entrepreneurship. Tourism is still growing in Oman and there will be more women getting involved in tourism entrepreneurship. Thus, a proper policy that takes the above practical implications into consideration needs to be devised in order to promote and support Omani women in tourism entrepreneurship. This will help to provide an enabling environment for women's empowerment, as well as acting as an agenda for social change, which is important for critical feminist theory.

## 10.5 Conclusion

The chapter has provided a discussion of the research findings. I briefly reviewed the information from the emerging main concepts section of the three case studies. Then, I presented a conceptual framework that represents Omani women's lived experiences and empowerment in tourism entrepreneurship. I also provided a detailed discussion about the researching findings and their relation to the existing literature by using the three main components of the framework. This included the common factors affecting Omani women's lived experiences and empowerment in tourism entrepreneurship, the empowering outcomes and the disempowering outcomes. Through reviewing the empowering and disempowering outcomes, I provided a conceptualisation of Omani women in tourism entrepreneurship. As a result, I conclude that this economic activity does not inevitably bring about empowerment for Omani women and that it is yet far from being an activity for women's individual or collective empowerment. My study provides important theoretical and practical implications for women's empowerment through tourism entrepreneurship opportunities.

The following final chapter provides the conclusion of my PhD thesis.

# Chapter 11: Conclusion

## 11.1 Introduction

The aim of this final chapter is to provide a conclusion to the overall research that I conducted for my PhD thesis. First, I revisit the aim and objectives of my thesis. Next, I provide an outline of the contributions my research makes to theory and practice. This is followed by an outline of the study's limitations and recommendations for future research. After providing my closing reflexive thoughts about my overall research journey, I conclude with a recap of the main topics discussed in this chapter.

## 11.2 Aims and objectives

The main aim of this thesis was to explore the nature and experiences of Omani women involved in tourism entrepreneurship, with particular regards to empowerment.

The five main objectives for my research were:

- To present the lived experiences of Omani women involved in tourism entrepreneurship.

- To understand the challenges that Omani women encounter in tourism entrepreneurship due to cultural and gender constraints.

- To determine the benefits of tourism entrepreneurship for Omani women.

- To consider theoretical manifestations that emerges from the lived experiences of Omani women in tourism entrepreneurship.

- To assess the potential and the extent to which Omani women are empowered in tourism entrepreneurship.

Each of the above objectives has been met. The first three objectives were met through the development of three case studies. This included the hosting group, the sewing group and Omani women tourism entrepreneurs. Information for the case studies was collected through the use of participant observation and interviews. The

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information was then analysed using thematic analysis. Each case study provided a thematic narrative of the lived experiences of the women, which revealed the challenges that they encounter and the benefits they gain. The fourth objective was met through the identification of key emerging concepts from each case study. It was also met through developing an empirically informed conceptual framework that further captured and presented the commonalities of Omani women's lived experiences and empowerment in tourism entrepreneurship. Moreover, it has been achieved through the conceptualisation of Omani women's empowerment in tourism entrepreneurship that emerged from the discussion of findings.

The last objective was addressed through the conceptual framework. The framework included three main components: the common factors affecting Omani women's lived experiences and empowerment in tourism entrepreneurship, empowering outcomes and disempowering outcomes. By using the conceptual framework, I provided a thorough discussion of the research findings in relation to the existing literature in which the potential and the extent to which Omani women are empowered in tourism entrepreneurship was assessed. Overall, achieving the above objectives were possible through adopting a critical feminist theory lens and case study methodology, where they both focus on lived experiences and rely on an inductive ground-up analytical approach.

## 11.3 Contributions

My PhD research provides several important contributions to theory and practice. The first contribution is that I provided a much-needed critical approach to analyse the opportunities that are provided for women through tourism entrepreneurship and the subsequent implications of these opportunities in order to determine the real potential for tourism entrepreneurship to empower women. I went beyond the focus of women's economic empowerment and considered coherently complex issues of culture and gender that affect women's overall empowerment. I also considered and provided a critical reflection of the social forces surrounding the women and their businesses in order to understand their experiences in tourism

entrepreneurship. Applying this critical approach was possible through critical feminist theory, which focuses on gender and other sources of social and cultural inequality. As a result, I developed the new knowledge that tourism entrepreneurship does not inevitably bringing about empowerment for Omani women and that it is still far from being an activity for women's individual and collective empowerment. I also challenged the somewhat narrow assumptions underpinning the discourse of women's empowerment through tourism entrepreneurship and revealed the dangers of construing tourism entrepreneurship as an idealised solution for women's empowerment.

The third contribution is that I developed an empirically informed conceptual framework grounded in the data in order to present the nature and experiences of Omani women in tourism entrepreneurship in relation to empowerment. This approach is different from previous studies that used and imposed existing frameworks, definitions or theories to assess women's empowerment through tourism entrepreneurship opportunities (Annes and Wright, 2015; McMillan et al., 2011; Moswete and Lacey, 2014; Pleno, 2006; Scheyvens, 1999, 2000, 2002; Tran and Walter, 2014). As a result, it helped me to critically assess the potential and the extent to which Omani women are empowered through their tourism entrepreneurial activities. The developed conceptual framework can serve as an example to compare women's empowerment through tourism entrepreneurship in other contexts. However, the conceptual framework should be used tentatively and cautiously, especially given the importance of context and that empowerment takes many forms. Therefore, it could be used for on-going discussions regarding the empowerment of women through tourism entrepreneurship opportunities.

Through the developed conceptual framework, I extend existing limited information on empowering outcomes for women in tourism entrepreneurship by revealing agency, autonomy, resistance, and collective social cohesion as elements of personal development that empower Omani women in tourism entrepreneurship. I also provide new information on disempowering outcomes for women in tourism entrepreneurship by revealing various disempowering outcomes for Omani women

working in this area that have not been considered in previous studies. This includes gender ideologies (gender segregation, objectification, enforced existing gender skill, gender discrimination, stereotyping, and resistance), socio-cultural restriction (conservative power), difficult work conditions and demands (laborious work, level of support, collective work cohesion), and economic viability. More specifically, I extend existing information on the disempowering outcomes for women in tourism entrepreneurship by further revealing the disempowering effect of gender relations and patriarchy for Omani women.

Besides the framework, I provided a conceptualisation of Omani women's empowerment in tourism entrepreneurship, which has not been done to date and is important, as emphasised by feminists from the development studies discipline (for example, Malhorta and Schuler, 2005; Parpart et al., 2002; Rowlands, 1997). The developed conceptualisation is grounded in the data and is based on the actual tourism entrepreneurial experiences of Omani women. Although it is not generalisable, it provides a platform to discuss and conceptualise women's empowerment through tourism entrepreneurship opportunities. It also provides an invitation for other tourism feminist scholars to develop women's empowerment definitions grounded from women's lived experiences in tourism. Only through such efforts would we truly understand the meaning of women's empowerment in the tourism discipline.

With scant information available on women tourism entrepreneurs in Arab/Muslim contexts, I have provided new information on the experiences of Omani women in tourism entrepreneurship, which has not been done before in the tourism discipline. More specifically, I have advanced existing knowledge on Omani women in general entrepreneurship. Through the three developed three case studies, I have revealed Omani women's lived experiences in tourism entrepreneurship, the challenges they encounter and the benefits that they gain. I have also introduced a unique and pioneer group of women that are taking up tourism entrepreneurship opportunities in a newly emerging tourism industry in Oman. By focusing on Omani women, this, in turn, provided the venue to foster new understanding on the potential for tourism

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entrepreneurship to empower women in a new and unique context. When it comes to practical contributions, I have provided important information that should be considered for projects, initiatives and policies developed by local and international organisations that promote women's empowerment through tourism entrepreneurship opportunities in the previous chapter under the section 10.4. Such information includes the importance of providing efficient support, conducting proper socio-cultural, gender sensitivity and business planning, and creating awareness and understanding on women's tourism entrepreneurial activities.

Finally, although my study focused on making a contribution to the tourism discipline, it also makes an important potential contribution to the development studies and entrepreneurship disciplines in regards to the on-going discussions on women's empowerment through entrepreneurship opportunities in general. This, in turn, can help foster cross-disciplinary understanding on the area of women's empowerment.

## 11.4 Limitations of the study

My research has limitations in relation to researching women's empowerment and context. As empowerment is an outcome and on-going process, I was only able to assess the empowerment of Omani women in tourism entrepreneurship on a short-term basis and at a specific time in the women's lives. The experiences of the women may have changed, for the better or worse, which, in turn, will affect their empowerment and disempowerment outcomes. It has been suggested that longitudinal studies are effective to assess women's empowerment (Al-Dajani and Marlow, 2013a; Malhotra and Schuler, 2005; Nazneen et al., 2014). However, this was not possible for my study due to the limited duration of my full-time PhD programme. Nevertheless, I believe the time I spent in the field with the women was adequate for the purposes of my study and in being able to collect the information needed. I also considered the women's historical involvement and their future directions with their tourism entrepreneurial endeavours in my research to provide an efficient account of their experiences.

With my research focusing specifically on the context of Oman, it could be argued that my findings cannot be generalised to other contexts. However, generalisability is not the main purpose of my study, particularly as the experiences of women in tourism entrepreneurship will be different according to the context, meaning women will experience empowerment differently. Nevertheless, I am confident that the findings of my research make a significant contribution to the debate on the potential for tourism entrepreneurship to empower women. It also makes a significant contribution to the pool of knowledge available on the experiences of women in tourism entrepreneurship in different contexts. This helps to identify commonalities and differences among the world's women and to increase cross-cultural understanding of women's experiences in tourism entrepreneurship.

## 11.5 Future research

When it comes to future research, there is still much scope to further critique and improve the current focus on tourism entrepreneurship as an idealised solution for women's empowerment.  Thus, further studies can be conducted in other Arab/Muslim contexts, as well as in developed and developing countries, on the experiences of women's tourism entrepreneurial endeavours. These studies can further extend existing information about the empowering elements (agency, autonomy, resistance, and collective social cohesion) and disempowering elements (gender relations and patriarchy) that were discussed in my study. More specifically, these studies can explore the new information about the disempowering outcomes that were revealed from my study. These included: gender ideologies, conservative power, difficult work conditions and demands, and economic viability. This will help to further increase cross-cultural understanding and to identify the commonalities and differences among the world's women. It will also allow us to better understand the different ways in which tourism entrepreneurship empowers and disempowers women.

As for the context of Oman, it is anticipated that more Omani women will participate in tourism entrepreneurship as the tourism industry continues to grow and evolve

in the country. Thus, further studies can be conducted to further explore the experiences of new emerging Omani women tourism entrepreneurs from different parts of Oman. Furthermore, studying the perspectives of Omani male tourism entrepreneurs may be helpful in terms of identifying the commonalities and differences with regard to the experiences of Omani men and women involved in tourism entrepreneurship.

## 11.6 Final reflexive thoughts

As I end this research journey, I provide here my final reflexive thoughts on the overall research journey that I have undertaken during the past four years for my PhD research. My research journey has played a major role in my development to become a professional tourism researcher, from planning my research and using various research methods, to developing the case studies and the conceptual framework. This, in turn, has helped me to reveal the experiences and empowerment of Omani women in tourism entrepreneurship. It has also taught and pushed me to become a critical thinker and has helped to bring out the feminist in me as I explored women's involvement in tourism entrepreneurship through a critical feminist lens. Moreover, it has increased my understanding of the concept of women's empowerment, which was previously an unfamiliar term to me. In addition, it increased my conscious awareness of the issues that affect Omani women, including myself, which I used to take for granted. Overall, these important lessons and knowledge will have a lasting impact on my personality and way of thinking. Although I have reached towards the end of my PhD research, my research journey does not end here. My journey as an Omani woman tourism researcher, who is passionate about the tourism industry, particularly when it involves women in tourism, will continue. The path is still wide open and there is much work that needs to be done.

# Appendices

## Appendix (1:) Review of studies on the potential and extent of women's empowerment through tourism entrepreneurship opportunities

| Study | Findings of empowerment | Barriers and challenges |
|---|---|---|
| Moswete and Lacey (2015) | <ul><li>Enhanced vocational training</li><li>Having economic independence and financially supporting their families</li><li>Increased confidence</li><li>Enhanced social engagement with outsiders</li><li>Becoming positively productive with their social activities.</li></ul> | <ul><li>Lack of formal educational opportunities for women</li><li>Lack of financial support for their ventures</li><li>The need for entrepreneurial, management, empowerment (motivation/confidence), and leadership skills training</li><li>Strong government control of tourist attractions</li><li>Lack of training and involvement of women in policy formulation</li><li>Lack of understanding on men's influence on the women's empowerment</li></ul> |
| MacLaren, McMillan and O'Gorman (2011, 2013) | <ul><li>Increased financial independence</li><li>Having reduced workload in comparison to the traditional agriculture work</li><li>Increased respect from the community</li><li>Increased social status and autonomy</li><li>Increased confidence and happiness</li></ul> | <ul><li>Reinforced traditional roles</li><li>Lack of access to education</li><li>Limited representation at national and local political structures</li></ul> |
| Pleno (2006) | <ul><li>Learning new skills</li><li>Improving their communications skills</li><li>Increased self-confidence and self-esteem</li></ul> | <ul><li>Making limited income</li><li>Lack of transparency in the project transactions</li><li>Jealousy among the women</li><li>Negative attitudes of husbands</li></ul> |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | • Taking up leadership roles and being involved in the decision-making process of the ecotourism projects<br>• Having autonomy at the household level<br>• Developing environmental consciousness | |
| Tran and Walter (2013) | • Increased access to education<br>• Increased access to loans and credit to invest in their tourism enterprise<br>• Having a fair division of labour<br>• Better income for the women<br>• Control over income<br>• Increased self-confidence<br>• More involvement in the community<br>• Access to new leadership roles | • Husband's control over major family decisions<br>• Enforced subservient ideology on women<br>• Inequities of social class<br>• Lack of childcare<br>• Violence against women |

# Appendix (2): List of definitions and understandings of women's empowerment

| Author | Definition |
| --- | --- |
| Stromquist (1995) | "Empowerment consists of four dimensions, each equally important but non-sufficient by itself to enable women to act on their own behalf. These are the cognitive (critical understanding of one's reality), the psychological (feeling of self-esteem), the political (awareness of power inequalities and the ability to organize and mobilize) and the economic (capacity to generate independent income)" (cited in Stromquist, 2002, p. 23). |
| Alsop and Heinsohn (2005) | "Empowerment is defined as a person's capacity to make effective choices; that is, as the capacity to transform choices into desired actions and outcomes. The extent or degree to which a person is empowered is influenced by personal agency (the capacity to make purposive choice) and opportunity structure (the institutional context in which choice is made)" (p. 4). |
| O'Brien and Whitmore (1989) | "An interactive process through which less powerful people experience personal and social change, enabling them to achieve influence over the organizations and institutions which affect their lives, and the communities in which they live" (p. 309). |
| Kabeer (1999) | "It is inescapably bound up with the condition of disempowerment and refers to the processes by which those who have denied the ability to makes choices acquire such an ability" (p. 437). |
| Batliwala (1993) | "A process, which must enable women to discover new possibilities, new, options... a growing repertoire of choices" (p. 11). |
| Rowlands (1995) | "Empowerment can be seen to have three dimensions: |

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| | • Personal: where empowerment is about developing a sense of self and individual confidence and capability, and undoing the effects of internalized oppression.<br>• Close relationships: where empowerment is about developing the ability to negotiate and influence the nature of the relationship and decisions made within it.<br>• Collective: where individuals work together to achieve a more exhaustive impact than each could have had alone" (p. 103). |
| United Nations Population Information Network (1995) | "Empowerment encompasses women's sense of self-worth; their right to have access to opportunities and resources; their right to have the power to control their own lives, both within and outside their home; and their ability to influence the direction of social change to create a more just social and economic order, nationally and internationally." |
| Narayan (2005) | "Empowerment is the expansion of assets and capabilities of poor people to participate in, negotiate with, influence, control and hold accountable institutions that affect their lives" (p. 5). |
| Mosedale (2005) | "The process by which women redefine and extend what is possible for them to be and do in situations where they have been restricted, compared to men, from being and doing. Alternatively, women's empowerment is the process; by which women redefine gender roles in ways, which extend their possibilities for being and doing" (p. 252). |
| Moser (1989) | "The capacity of women to increase their own self-reliance and internal strength. This is identified as the right to determine choices in life and to influence the direction of change, through the |

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| | ability to gain control over material and non-material resources" (p. 1815). |
| Mayoux (2000) | "Individuals acquiring the power to think and act freely, exercise choice, and to fulfil their potential has fallen equally to members of society" (p. 4). |

## Appendix (3): Review of studies that advocated women's empowerment through entrepreneurship opportunities

| Study | Positive results | Benefits |
|---|---|---|
| Torri and Martinez (2011, 2014) | • Increased income to help with their household expenses, invest their income for agricultural materials and livestock, and to attain better direct sales through their enterprise<br>• Increased access to power and resources in the community and in their homes<br>• Increased self-confidence, pride and communication skills<br>• Gained social recognition for the work they did through their enterprise<br>• Better access to basic health services for their family and children due to their enterprise | • Economic viability<br>• Personal development |
| Moyle, Dollard and Biswas (2006) | • Increased collective efficacy and self-efficacy<br>• Increased positive attitudes and self-esteem<br>• Reduced psychological distress<br>• Increased income | • Personal development<br>• Collective development<br>• Economic viability |
| Scott, Dolan, Johnstone-Louis, Sugden and Wu (2012) | • Received entrepreneurial support through training, networking, mentoring and capitalisation<br>• Having better incomes and reduced poverty<br>• Experiencing changes in family dynamics<br>• Improving their self-perceptions | • Working conditions and demands<br>• Economic viability<br>• Personal development |

| Abbasian and Bildt (2009) | • Ability to integrate into Swedish working life through their enterprises<br>• Having important careers as entrepreneurs<br>• Ability to use their experiences and qualifications to start their own business<br>• Gained economic independence<br>• Increased status in society<br>• Increased self-confidence and well-being | • Personal development<br>• Economic viability |
|---|---|---|
| Ozkazanc-Pan (2014) | • Challenges gendered economic development | • Gender ideologies<br>• Socio-cultural restriction |
| Datta and Gailey (2012) | • Increased economic security<br>• Developed entrepreneurial behaviour<br>• Increased contributions to the family through the income they earned | • Economic viability<br>• Personal development |
| Ahmed, Siwar and Idris (2011) | • Played an important role in family decision making<br>• Having more freedom | • Personal development |

## Appendix (4): Review of studies that critiqued women's empowerment through entrepreneurship opportunities

| Study | Negative results | Issues |
|-------|------------------|--------|
| Kantor (2003) | • Less power for the women due to influence of social norms<br>• Women's reduced control over the income earned<br>• The burden of domestic unpaid work<br>• Limited ability to share their experiences with other women and to build their identities due to homework environment | • Socio-cultural restrictions<br>• Work conditions and demands<br>• Gender ideologies |
| Landig (2011) | • Continued to face social challenges, such as existing patriarchal beliefs towards women<br>• Women lacked self-confidence<br>• Continued to face structural challenges, such as lack of education, legal discrimination, lack of economic and political power, and limited regional government support | • Socio-cultural restrictions<br>• Personal development<br>• Gender ideologies |
| Abdo and Kerbage (2012) | • Intentional concentration of women entrepreneurs' activities in feminised, service-related and low productive sectors.<br>• Intentional concentration of women entrepreneur's activities in opening small businesses only<br>• Reinforces domestic division of labour<br>• Reinforce informality and vulnerability due to limited | • Gender ideologies<br>• Economic viability<br>• Work conditions and demands<br>• Socio-cultural restrictions |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | support services for women entrepreneurs<br>• Lack of consideration of business environment, government policies and cultural norms that limited women's businesses | |
| Chitsike (2000) | • Existing cultural views towards women entrepreneurs, such as the taboo surrounding women making large profits, displaying strong and decisive behaviour that would be considered as male standards, needing to have a male family member involved in their enterprise, and so on<br>• Existing structural barriers that defined the size, scale and type of enterprises that the women developed, such as the lack of marketable products and service, limited time and ability to travel for due to the cultural expectation for them to care for their families, lack of ownership and control of assets and lack of education. | • Gender ideologies<br>• Socio-cultural restrictions<br>• Economic viability<br>• Gender ideologies |
| Kabeer (2012) | • Having low growth enterprises<br>• Making low incomes in comparison to male enterprises<br>• Influence of gender on women's entrepreneurial activity, such as the challenge of separating business and family decisions, balancing their enterprise and domestic responsibilities, having limited time and mobility, experiencing discrimination in | • Economic viability<br>• Gender ideologies<br>• Personal development |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | accessing the resources needed for their enterprise, lack of education, lack of self-confidence, and so on<br>• Pursuing entrepreneurship opportunities for their survival | |
| Gill and Ganesh (2007) | • Increased reliance on negotiating approaches to deal with entrepreneurship challenges, such as mental stimulation, determination, pioneering frontier attitude, and seeking and using supportive outlets<br>• Experiencing daily personal struggles with their enterprise in order to achieve their goals and passions | • Work conditions and demands |
| Al-Dajani and Marlow (2013 a, b) | • Limited economic viability<br>• Inability to challenge existing patriarchal power in the embedded environment | • Economic viability<br>• Socio-cultural restrictions |
| Osmani (1998) | • Limited improvement in perceived self-interest.<br>• Lack of autonomy, due to prevailing cultural conditions in the embedded environment<br>• Continued reliance on their husbands due to limited credit access | • Personal development<br>• Socio-cultural restrictions |
| Lairap-Fonderson (2002) | • Economic exploitation of women | • Gender ideologies |

# Appendix (5): Interview guide for the hosting group

**The beginning:**

- At the beginning of the project, when it was announced, what made/motivated you to join the project?
- Thinking back to when the project was being set up, how did you feel about getting into the project? And what about now?
- How do you feel about the various training that you have undertaken to date and did it help you with the running of the project?
- What type of skills did you have that helped you to be involved in the project?

**Managing the enterprise:**

- How do you view the project to date (success, needs more work, or failure)?
- How do you feel about the group work that you share with the other ladies?
- How do you feel about running the project independently?
- What are your feelings towards your role and responsibilities in the project?

> **Redacted:** name removed due to confidential information.

  - How were you assigned with the main role of providing henna services?
  - Currently, the hosting enterprise is the only work that you are doing. Would you eventually like to work full-time one day? If you get the opportunity, would you take it, as your other colleagues are all working full-time? Do you want the same?
  - Would you choose between the project and a formal employment opportunity?

> **Redacted:** names removed due to confidential information.

  - With working full time, do you feel you get to put enough time and attention into the project?
  - How do you feel about balancing the demands of your full time work and hosting, as you had mentioned to me previously that you feel stressed?
  - Would you choose between the project and formal employment?

**Economic Benefits:**

- What are your feelings towards the limited and fluctuating income you gain from the project? And what if the situation continues?
- How do you feel about the main income that you get from applying henna?
- How do you distribute the income between the four of you?
- You mentioned to me previously the potential idea of introducing entrance fees to the tent. Is this something you are still looking into introducing and implementing soon or during the next cruise season?
- Coffee and dates are currently offered for free, why? Would you like to potentially charge for this service?
- Could the project potentially be your main source of income? Could you ever rely on this income?

**Other benefits:**

- As the income gained from the project fluctuates and is limited, what are the other most important benefits that you have gained from the project (e.g. independence)?
- How did the project change you as a person and your life?
- What new skills have you gained and improved?

**Hosting:**

- What are your feelings and views towards the hosting that you provide to the cruise tourists?
- What are your feelings about the cruise tourists' lack of interest to visit the tent and what needs to be done to help attract more tourists to the tent?
- What are your reasons to continue hosting, especially as it does not generate sufficient income, the tourists are not always interested in your hosting service, and you need to take time off from work to host?
- How do you want to represent yourself through this project as Omani women offering hosting services?

- Through this project, how do you want to represent Oman and Omani women through your hosting? What type of images and information do you want to present?
- How do you see your hosting project in relation to developing and promoting Oman as a tourism destination?

**Future:**

- Where do you see yourself in the future with the project?
- Where would you like to see the project in future?
- What do you feel is now needed to do to take the project to the next stage?
- What new skills and training do you need to improve the project?
- Would it be something you would like to do long term?
- In the future, when there are more ships coming to the town, how will you handle the demand? Are you prepared to leave your jobs?
- Would you eventually look into providing your hosting services to other types of tourists, e.g. groups of tourists staying at the hotel or individual tourists visiting the town?

## Appendix (6): Interview guide for the sewing group

**The beginning:**

- How did you hear about the project?
- When did you join the group? How many years have you been with the group?
- Did you work before joining the group? What you used to do before joining the group?
- What motivated you to join the group?
- Why didn't you take up full-time employment?
- How did you feel when you joined the group? And what about now?

**Sewing:**

- Where and when did you learn to sew? (e.g. childhood, family, acquired it with the sewing group)
- What do you think about the sewing work that you do?
    - What is it that you like about your sewing work? (e.g. freedom, flexibility, bringing children to the workshop, designing the products).
    - What is it that you least like about your sewing work? (e.g. designs of certain sewing items, measurements, the process of sewing).
    - Do you find this type of work easy or difficult to do?
- What improvement do you feel you need to make in your sewing work?
- To what extent does the sewing work you do connect with Oman heritage?

**Managing the operation and group (team leaders):**

- How do you feel about your role and responsibilities as the team leaders of the group?
- What challenges, if any, do you face in operating the business and managing the group?

**Workload:**

- What do you think about the workload that gets assigned to you?

- How satisfied are you with the current work arrangement?
- How confident or overwhelmed (with pressure) are you by your workload?
    - Do you feel that you get sufficient or too much work to do?
    - Does it take up too much of your time?
- Is the workload distributed equally?
- What do you think about the other responsibilities that you have at the workshop?
- Do you feel you have the ability to make choices and decisions when it comes to the workload assigned to you?
- Do you decide when to work and when not to work?
- Do you choose when to work based on personal circumstances?
    - Working days and hours?
    - Woking during weekends and holidays?
- Where do you usually do your sewing work? Do you prefer to work from home or at the workshop? Why?
- Can you take holidays anytime?

**Home and family:**

- Does the sewing work impact your home responsibilities?
- Do you get to pay enough time and attention to your family and children?
- How do you balance the demand of your sewing work and home responsibilities?
- What does your family/husband think about your sewing work?

**Teamwork:**

- How do you feel about the teamwork in the group in operating the sewing project?
- How is your relationship with the other women in the group?
- What are the best things that you like about working with the other women?
- What needs to be done to improve the teamwork of the sewing group?

- Do you feel you have the ability to make opinions/suggestions when it comes to operating the sewing project as a team?

**Economic benefits:**

- How do you feel about the income you make from your sewing work?
- Is it sufficient or limited?
- Does the income you make allow you to cover your own expenses and help your family?
- Is the money you make for yourself or for your family?
- How important is working and making money is to you?
- Besides the salary you make, are you provided with a bonus or other benefits?
- What keeps you continuing with this line of work despite the fluctuating income and workload?

**Other benefits:**

- Besides the income you make from the sewing work, what are the other most important benefits that you gain from it?
- Do you get opportunities to attend training and events? Why?
- How has the project changed you as a person and your life?
- What new skills have you gained and improved?

**The sewing project**

- What is your view of the project to date?
- What are the best things that you like about the sewing project?
- What improvements/changes would you like to be seen done to the project?
- What type of support would you like to receive to improve the project?
    o Financial resources
    o Training
    o Marketing the project
    o Affiliations/networking

- Should this come from the directors or from the team?
- Do you feel you are part of the enterprise/group or just a sewer?

**Community:**

- What do you think are the views of the community/Oman of the sewing project?

**The hosting service:**

- What do you think about the hosting service that you provide to groups of visitors?
- What do you like/dislike about the hosting that you provide to visitors?
- Tourists don't always buy your products. How do you feel about that?
- Do you enjoy interacting with foreign visitors? (e.g. taking their photos, talking to them, asking questions, helping them to wear the Omani dresses)
- How do you want to represent yourself as an Omani women when foreign visitors come to your workshop and see your work?

**Future:**

- How long do you think you will continue in this line for work? Why?
- Is the sewing work something you want to do long term?
- Other past members have left the group and taken up full-time work, have you considered the same?
- What are your future plans?
- Where would you like to see the sewing project in future?
- Do you think similar projects should be opened in Oman?

## Appendix (7): Interview guide for women tourism entrepreneurs in Oman

### 1. Introduction

Thank you for agreeing to meet with me today, and for your interest in my study of the experiences of female tourism entrepreneurs in Oman. I hope you will enjoy being part of this study.

The purpose of our meeting today is to get to know about your enterprise, to hear about your overall experience as a tourism entrepreneur, and for you to ask any questions that you might have.

### 2. Getting to know the entrepreneur

**Q. Can you start telling me a little bit about yourself?**
**Indicative areas:**
- Age
- Martial status
- Number of children and their ages
- Education
- Past work experience

### 3. Setting up the tourism business

**Q. So how did you come to start your business?**
**Indicative areas:**
- Motivation/inspiration to start a tourism business
- Idea behind the business/creativity
- History of business
- Personal interest in the offered products and services
- Type of skills to help start and run the business
- Formal training to help start and run the business

4.  **Becoming a female tourism entrepreneur**

**Q.  Thinking back to when you set up the business, how did you feel about going into business?**

**Indicative areas:**

- General thoughts about tourism entrepreneurship
- Likes and dislikes about being a tourism entrepreneur
- Choice between self-employment and formal employment
- Choice between tourism entrepreneurship and general entrepreneurship in other fields
- Change of past thoughts
- Exceeding her expectations

5.  **Running the tourism business**

**Q. Can you tell me about your role and responsibilities at your tourism business?**

**Indicative areas:**

- Level of involvement in business
- Most important responsibilities
- Time spent on business responsibilities
- Place of work (on site, from home, business travel)
- Committed hours of work
- Number of employees and type of jobs assigned to employees
- Possible engagement in other types of work besides the business
- Feelings about her role and responsibilities

6.  **Ownership of the tourism business**

**Q. How do you feel about having your own business?**

**Indicative areas:**

- Freedom
- Flexibility
- Building self identity and reputation

- Accountability and responsibility
- Leadership
- Making choices
- Making decisions

### 7. Tourism entrepreneurship benefits

**Q. How has running your tourism business benefited you?**

**Indicative areas:**
- Type of benefits
- Most important benefits
- Other desirable benefits
- Importance of economic benefits

### 8. Tourism entrepreneurship challenges

**Q. What challenges, if any, did you encounter in setting up your tourism business?**

**Indicative areas:**
- Local business environment and conditions
- Access to financial resources
- Training opportunities
- Networking opportunities
- Type of support available and used to set up the business
- Affiliation with local enterprise groups and associations
- Other type of challenges
- Ways of dealing with challenges

9. **Societal views and attitudes**

**Q. In general, how do you think women going into business are viewed in Oman?**

**Indicative areas:**

- Negative or positive societal view and attitudes towards female tourism entrepreneurship
- Societal acceptance or resentment towards female entrepreneurship
- Religion, cultural and tradition influence
- Gender stereotypes towards female entrepreneurs
- Different views and attitudes towards female tourism entrepreneurs and general female entrepreneurs in other fields
- Personal encounters with societal views and attitudes
- Influence of societal views and attitudes on her business
- Ways of dealing with societal views and attitudes
- Conformation to social and cultural norms
- Maintenance of proper conduct and behaviour
- Future change of societal views and attitudes towards female tourism entrepreneurship

10. **Family views and attitudes**

**Q. And what does your family think about your tourism business?**

**Indicative areas:**

- Negative or positive family views and attitudes towards her business
- Family acceptance or resentment towards her business
- Family consent and any other special conditions
- Family support
- Religion, cultural and tradition influence
- Conformation to social and cultural norms
- Maintaining family honor and reputation
- Personal encounters with family views and attitudes

- Influence of family views and attitudes on her business
- Ways of dealing with family views and attitudes

### 11. Husband's views and attitudes (if relevant)

**Q. What does your husband think about your tourism business?**

**Indicative areas:**

- Negative or positive husband's views and attitudes towards her business
- Husband's acceptance or resentment towards her business
- Husband's consent and any other special conditions
- Husband's support
- Religion, cultural and tradition influence
- Conformation to social and cultural norms
- Maintaining family honor and reputation
- Personal encounters with husband's views and attitudes
- Influence of husband's views and attitudes on her business
- Ways of dealing with husband's views and attitudes

### 12. Social change

**Q. To what extent has your role in the household changed since you started your business?**

**Indicative areas:**

- Influence of business on marriage and motherhood
- Influence of martial status on being a tourism entrepreneur
- Changes to family life
- Changes to married life
- Enforcement or transformation of gender relations

- Economic contribution to household
- Balancing work, home and family responsibilities
- Burden and stress of domestic work

- Division of labor

- Level of social change


**13. Meaning of empowerment**

**Q. To what extent has being a tourism entrepreneur changed your life?**

   **Indicative area:**

- Personal and professional changes

- Self-development and growth (e.g. status, self-esteem, respect, independence, confidence, building self-identity)

- Personal important aspects of her business

- Source of empowerment


**14. Perspective on tourism in Oman**

**Q. How do you see your role in relation to developing and promoting Oman as a tourism destination?**

   **Indicative areas:**

- Views of Oman's tourism industry

- Connecting with Oman's heritage and culture

- Preserving Oman's heritage and culture


**15. Perspective on tourism entrepreneurship opportunities for women in Oman**

**Q. To what extent do you think there are opportunities for women to start their own tourism business?**

   **Indicative areas:**

- Reasons for Omani women to be involved, or not to be involved, in tourism entrepreneurship

- Need for Omani women to be involved in tourism entrepreneurship

- Types of benefits that Omani women can gain from tourism entrepreneurship
- Types of tourism entrepreneurship opportunities for Omani women
- Social impact of Omani women's involvement in tourism entrepreneurship
- Lack of Omani women in tourism entrepreneurship and the reasons for this (e.g. difficult, lack of opportunities, lack of support, lack of training opportunities, lack of networking opportunities, limited access to financial resources, harsh business environment)
- Support and resources to help promote tourism entrepreneurship opportunities for Omani women? (e.g. training, resources, special policy, initiative)

**16. The future**

**Q. Where do you see yourself in the future with your business?**

- Future plans for herself and business
- Other plans

**17. Closure**

**Q. Is there anything more you would want to add at this time?**

**Q. Do you have any questions you would like to ask?**

**Thank you for your time and input.**

## Appendix (8): Information letter for hosting group and sewing group

To the Director of Hosting group,

My name is Lubna Al Mazroei and I am a doctoral student from the University of Strathclyde[1] in Glasgow, United Kingdom. This letter provides information about my study and is an invitation to consider your group participation in my study. The aim of my PhD study is to explore the nature and experiences of Omani women involved in tourism entrepreneurship with particular regards to empowerment. In general, there has been no research to date that has been conducted to assess tourism entrepreneurship opportunities for women in Oman. Through this study, we will help to create awareness and understanding of Omani women involvement in tourism entrepreneurship activities.

Therefore, I would like to invite your group to participate in my study. You have been invited to take part in my study due to the nature of your business being a form of tourism entrepreneurship activity and because of the involvement of Omani women as members of the group. Participation in this study is voluntary and members of the group have the right to withdraw from the research at any time. The nature of the investigation is based on exploring your group's overall experience in running a tourism business. It will involve me participating in your tourism entrepreneurship activity by volunteering to help your group with the production and operation of the business, as well as to attend any events and training sessions you may have. It will also involve members of your group voluntarily teaching me about the operation of your business, and how to make the products and services that you provide and sell to tourists. Shortly after completing my participation in your group's activity, I would like to present the findings of my research to your members for their kind review and feedback. I would like to ask for your permission to voluntarily participate in your activity and to be part of your team. My participation will take place in your business

[1] I received ethical approval and conducted my data collection during my time at Strathclyde University. Then I moved to Edinburgh Napier University.

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location for the duration of 6 months, starting 01 November 2013 to 30 April 2014. I would like to visit and participate in your group's activities about twice a month during my fieldwork, dependent on the cruise dates. My participation in your group's activity will not involve any significant risk to the physical or mental well-being of the members of the group. All of the information that I collect will be considered completely confidential and used for the purpose of research only. Your business and the personal names of the members will not appear in the thesis that I will produce for my doctoral study. The information I collect will be kept secure at all times in my password-protected laptop and will be retained for five years. I will also be the only one who will have access to this information.

Thank you for reading this information and please feel free to ask me any questions if you are unsure about what is written here. If you are happy with my participation in your group's activity, I would like to ask if you could sign the consent form to confirm this. I would like to assure you that this study has been reviewed and received ethical approval by the University of Strathclyde ethics committee. If you have any questions/concerns, during or after the investigation, or wish to contact an independent person to whom any questions may be directed or further information may be sought from, please contact the secretary to the Marketing Department Ethics Committee at the University of Strathclyde at +44 141 548 4919 or by email christina.mcfadden@strath.ac.uk. Thank you for your time and I look forward to working with you soon.

Yours sincerely,
Lubna Al Mazroei
University of Strathclyde, Marketing department

To the Director of the sewing group,

My name is Lubna Al Mazroei and I am a doctoral student from the University of Strathclyde in Glasgow, United Kingdom. This letter provides information about my study and is an invitation to consider your group participation in my study. The aim of my PhD study is to explore the nature and experiences of Omani women involved in tourism entrepreneurship with particular regards to empowerment. In general, there has been no research to date that has been conducted to assess tourism entrepreneurship opportunities for women in Oman. Through this study, we will help to create awareness and understanding of Omani women involvement in tourism entrepreneurship activities.

Therefore, I would like to invite your group to participate in my study. You have been invited to take part in my study due to the nature of your business being a form of tourism entrepreneurship activity and because of the involvement of Omani women as members of the group. Participation in this study is voluntary and members of the group have the right to withdraw from the research at any time. The nature of the investigation is based on exploring your group's overall experience in running a tourism business. It will involve me participating in your tourism entrepreneurship activity by volunteering to help your group with the production and operation of the business as well as to attend any events and training sessions you may have. It will also involve members of your group voluntarily teaching me about the operation of your business, and how to make the products and services that you provide and sell to tourists. Shortly after completing my participation in your group's activity, I would like to present the findings of my research to your members for their kind review and feedback.

I would like to ask for your permission to voluntarily participate in your activity and to be part of your team. My participation will take place in your enterprise location for the duration of 8 months, starting 20 October 2013 to 30 May 2014. I would like to visit and participate in your group's activities about three times a week during my

fieldwork. My participation in your group's activity will not involve any significant risk to the physical or mental well-being of the members of the group. All of the information that I collect will be considered completely confidential and used for the purpose of research only. Your business and the personal names of the members will not appear in the thesis that I will produce for my doctoral study. The information I collect will be kept secure at all times in my password-protected laptop and will be retained for five years. I will also be the only one who will have access to this information.

Thank you for reading this information and please feel free to ask me any questions if you are unsure about what is written here. If you are happy with my participation in your group's activity, I would like to ask if you could sign the consent form to confirm this.

I would like to assure you that this study has been reviewed and received ethical approval by the University of Strathclyde ethics committee. If you have any questions/concerns, during or after the investigation, or wish to contact an independent person to whom any questions may be directed or further information may be sought from, please contact the secretary to the Marketing Department Ethics Committee at the University of Strathclyde at +44 141 548 4919 or by email christina.mcfadden@strath.ac.uk. Thank you for your time and I look forward to working with you soon.

Yours sincerely,
Lubna Al Mazroei
University of Strathclyde, Marketing department

## Appendix (9): Consent form for hosting group and sewing group

## Consent Form

**Name of the researcher:**   Lubna Al Mazroei, PhD student
**Title of the study:**            Towards understanding the experiences
                                         and meaning of empowerment for Omani
                                         women in tourism entrepreneurship

- I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet for the above project and the researcher has answered any queries to my satisfaction.

- I understand that my group participation is voluntary and that we are free to withdraw from the project at any time, without having to give a reason and without any consequences.

- I understand that we can withdraw our data from the study at any time.

- I understand that any information recorded in the investigation will remain confidential and no information that identifies the group will be made publicly available.

- I consent to members of the group to be participants in the project
  Yes/ No

- I consent to the researcher's voluntarily participate in our activity based on our business location
  Yes/ No

- I consent for photographs and videos to be taken of the group's activities as part of the project
  Yes/ No

| (PRINT NAME) | |
|---|---|
| Signature of Participant: | Date |

## Appendix (10): Information letter for women tourism entrepreneurs

Dear Madam,

My name is Lubna Al Mazroei and I am a doctoral student from the University of Strathclyde[2] in Glasgow, United Kingdom. This letter provides information about my study and is an invitation to consider your participation in my study. The aim of my PhD study is to explore the nature and experiences of Omani women involved in tourism entrepreneurship with particular regards to empowerment. In general, there has been no research to date that has been conducted to assess tourism entrepreneurship opportunities for women in Oman. Through this study, we will help to create awareness and understanding of Omani women involvement in tourism entrepreneurship activities.

Therefore, I would like to invite you to participate in my study. You have been invited to take part in my study due to the nature of your business being a form of tourism entrepreneurship activity. Participation in this study is voluntary and you have the right to withdraw from the research at any time. The nature of the investigation is based on exploring your overall experience in running a tourism business. It will involve an interview of approximately 40 minutes to 1 hour in length to take place at your business location and on a date and time that is convenient for you. You will have the option to review the findings of my research upon the completion of my fieldwork.

All of the information that I collect will be considered completely confidential and used for the purpose of research only. Your business and personal name will not appear in the thesis that I will produce for my doctoral study; however, with your permission anonymous quotations may be used. The information I collect will be kept secure at all times in my password-protected smart phone and laptop, and will

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[2] I received ethical approval and conducted my data collection during my time at Strathclyde University. Then I moved to Edinburgh Napier University.

be retained for five years. I will also be the only one who will have access to this information.

I would like to assure you that this study has been reviewed and received ethical approval by the University of Strathclyde ethics committee. If you have any questions/concerns, during or after the investigation, or wish to contact an independent person to whom any questions may be directed or further information may be sought from, please contact the secretary to the Marketing Department Ethics Committee at the University of Strathclyde at +44 141 548 4919 or by email christina.mcfadden@strath.ac.uk.

Thank you for your time and I look forward to talking with you soon.

Yours sincerely,
Lubna Al Mazroei
University of Strathclyde, Marketing department

## Appendix (11): Consent form for women tourism entrepreneurs

## Consent Form

**Name of the researcher:** Lubna Al Mazroei, PhD student
**Title of the study:** Towards understanding the experiences and meaning of empowerment for Omani women in tourism entrepreneurship

- I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet for the above project and the researcher has answered any queries to my satisfaction.

- I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw from the project at any time, without having to give a reason and without any consequences.

- I understand that I can withdraw my data from the study at any time.

- I understand that I can refrain from answering any interview questions that I may feel uncomfortable about.

- I understand that any information recorded in the investigation will remain confidential and no information that identifies me will be made publicly available.

- I am aware that excerpts from the interview will be included in the thesis and/or publications to come from this research, with the understanding that the quotations will be anonymous.

- I consent to being a participant in the project:  Yes/ No

- I consent to being audio recorded as part of the project:  Yes/ No

- I consent for photographs to be taken of my business as part of the project:  Yes/ No

- I consent the researcher to contact me again for the purpose of collecting more information or for clarifications: Yes/ No

| (PRINT NAME) | |
| --- | --- |
| Signature of Participant: | Date: |

## Appendix (12): Example of a coded interview transcript and field note (hosting group)

| Aisha interview transcript | Codes |
|---|---|
| Lubna: so for you, you joined the project when it was being announced?<br>Aisha: yes<br>Lubna: when they announced it, what motivated you to join the enterprise?<br>Aisha: (laughs), I like it… because it is something to do with heritage. | Motivation for enterprise/enterprise heritage attachment/heritage symbol |
| Lubna: Because it has to do with heritage<br><br>Aisha: Because I like something called heritage, I like something called tradition… I like the old things, that is why I like the enterprise, this is what motivated me. | Liking heritage/tradition/attachment of heritage to enterprise |
| Lubna: You feel that the enterprise has all of these features<br><br>Aisha: Yes, it has the opportunity to renew/revive our heritage, I mean there is some (other enterprises/project), you feel that they are just a trend, they forget about our heritage, that is why I liked to enter (the enterprise), to a point that when we first want to arrange the room (the hosting room), at the beginning we want first to see a fort to get ideas, so when I first entered the fort, there was one lady selling, her room in the fort, her whole room is decorated with palm leaves handy work, I didn't sit but if you ask Fatma, she would tell you that I was taking photos, and more photos, I wanted to learn, and I asked her how (she makes the palm leaves handicrafts), and I don't know what | Renewing and reviving our heritage<br><br>Preserving our heritage<br><br>Loving heritage/passion for handicraft in enterprise |

| | |
|---|---|
| (laughing), so that is why I loved the idea of the enterprise. | Loving the heritage aspect of enterprise |
| Lubna: yes, and what about the enterprise itself because it is something new that you'll started to establish on your own?<br><br>Aisha: the enterprise didn't make me fear of anything but I had a concern, at the beginning there was not much acceptance (from the community) but we calmed the situation, they felt that it is something new and anything that is new you don't expect there will be acceptance from the beginning, but later on there was then a better acceptance. | Initial negative reaction from community<br><br><br>Introducing something new in community<br>Unsure of community acceptance at the beginning<br>Having now better community acceptance |
| Lubna: yes, because there was a large group of ladies that were supposed to join the group but then they abandoned the enterprise at the end?<br><br>Aisha: they didn't abandon…<br><br>Lubna: I mean they maybe didn't like the idea about the…(the enterprise)!<br><br>Aisha: No, its not the idea, they are… you feel that their families, the families in the town are a bit strict, I mean they didn't like the idea of being photographed, and they didn't like the idea of talking (to the tourists) and like this, so because of this, this is why they came out.  At the beginning, there were 10 girls, they managed to get 5 girls, and then 2 left, and then one other joined, we were then completed as 4 girls. | <br><br>Other women not joining<br><br><br><br><br>Difficult for other women to join/family strictness/not wanting to be photographed/not talking to tourists |

| | |
|---|---|
| Lubna: Ok, I see, and how do you feel about your role and responsibilities in the team? Do you feel that you have a clear role? Responsibilities? | |
| Aisha: For me, my role is the accounting manager, I am the one who tells them (the team), this ship we took more (income), this ship we didn't take a lot… to do the table, maybe I didn't bring the table today, you will find it in my car, that this ship we received like this, and that this ship we received like this, this month we got like this, that this particular ship gives more, as for a particular ship, it doesn't give more. My other role is to dress tourists in the traditional clothing. | Being responsible for the accounting (Aisha) Keeps track of income<br><br>Monitoring income from each cruise ship<br><br>Dressing female tourists |
| Lubna: yes but the photographing will come later on inshallah!<br><br>Aisha: the photographing, of course I photograph, you feel that most of the tourists, they bring their own camera but the thing that can maybe you feel you can get more (income) that we make a print and with it a case, we can put our logo or a brochure.<br><br>Lubna: yes that is a good idea. Now you are working full time at the hotel, do you feel? You also have the enterprise! Do you feel that your work doesn't let you, give you the time to concentrate on the enterprise?<br><br>Aisha: see, it is right, the one with two eyes is a liar (laughing), ok so sometime… yesterday you saw me, I didn't come back to the tent, after 12 o clock I didn't come back cause I got busy, but I | Using hobby skill/photographing/finding other ways to make income<br><br><br><br><br><br>Difficulty to balance work and enterprise/being busy at work |

| | |
|---|---|
| cannot neglect my job and neglect the enterprise at the same time. So, for me, I try to be balanced, some hours here, some hours there. Yes, sometimes… before yesterday, for example I didn't come to the enterprise but generally I used to come out from 8 or 9 o clock until 12 o clock in the afternoon, at 12, I come back here, 3 or 4 I go again, so I like to be balanced. As for difficulties, there is no at all because my manager, the head of my department is also understanding, also sometimes he comes to tell me "Aisha, the cruise ship is here" and I tell him ok (laughing)<br><br>Lubna: yes, yes but you are comfortable you have your work, and the enterprise?<br><br>Aisha: yes | Not neglecting work and enterprise<br>Trying to balance work and enterprise<br><br><br><br><br><br><br>No issues with job for enterprise |
| Lubna: would you choose between them in the future?<br><br>Aisha: no, never but inhsallah if insallah I see the enterprise is successful and like this, of course I don't, I don't want to work<br><br>Lubna: yes, do you wish, do you wish that your enterprise becomes you'll main source of …<br><br>Aisha: yes, to be honest | Wanting financial independence/rely only on enterprise<br><br><br><br><br>Financial independence from enterprise |
| Lubna: yes, do you feel it has the potential to reach… | |

| | |
|---|---|
| Aisha: Of course, because the enterprise is very successful and… you feel that the foreigner they like heritage things, something traditional, so I wish for this | Having a successful enterprise<br><br>Tourists liking heritage and tradition<br><br>Becoming a main source of income |
| Lubna: so you wish it becomes the source… | |
| Aisha: our main source | Financial independence from enterprise |
| Lubna: the main work for you all | Financial independence from enterprise |
| Aisha: yes | |
| Lubna: good, good, but I mean, in the future inshallah, you are not married yet, do you feel that your situation may change for you, it may become… | |
| Aisha: maybe | Future marriage challenge |
| Lubna: But it is something, inshallah when you get married, it is something you still want to continue with? | |
| Aisha: yes of course, of course I will continue with it because it is something that I love, something heritage, something I love, so I will continue with it also after if I get married, but… but you will feel there will be a bit difficulty | Loving the enterprise for its heritage<br><br>Continuing with enterprise after marriage |
| Lubna: yes, now… I want to ask you about the income, the income as you told me, sometimes… it is not stable? | |
| Aisha: no, it's not stable. | Unstable income |

| | |
|---|---|
| Lubna: and sometimes the amount… | |
| Aisha: sometimes it is up, sometime it is down, and sometimes it is in the middle | Fluctuating income |
| Lubna: What are your feelings about this? | |
| Aisha: I get angry when it is down (laughing), I get angry when it is down, to be honest | Angry with unstable income |
| Lubna: Yes, so what do you feel that you'll could do so that the income becomes higher and becomes stable, and more? | |
| Aisha: It is, see, we are, thank god, thank god, everything is good but… some tourists you feel that they are scared, sometimes you find tourists… if they are Italians, you feel they are accepting more. As for the Germans, you feel… the Norwegians as well, you feel that they are afraid, and because of this, when we see there is a ship that has Norwegians, it has Germans, you feel disappointed, if you see Italians, you would see them come out so we could welcome them | Dealing with tourists reluctance<br><br>Tourists being scared/reluctant to hosting<br><br>Dealing with different nationalities/Italians more accepting<br><br>Germans and Norwegians being afraid<br><br>Income depend on tourist nationality |

| Field note 9-11 February 2014 | Codes |
|---|---|
| I receive a call about 9am from my room phone. It was Leila on the line. She greeted me and told me that she is ready to go to the port. I went down to the reception and found Leila still working at the reception. It seemed that Leila had trouble leaving her work to attend to the cruise hosting, as the cruise ship had already arrived at the port. Aisha stood by the reception, waiting for Leila to finish up with her work so that they could leave. I went to greet Aisha and | Meeting job and enterprise demands<br>Balancing full time work and business |

| | |
|---|---|
| she told me that we will need to wait for Leila to finish up with her work and then we would leave for the port. I asked her about the progress of her human resources work at the hotel. She told me that lately its been quite and that she has not a lot of work to do in comparison to when she started the job, as she was busy allocating staff for the new hotel. She then took me to the waiting area at the reception so that we could wait for Leila. | |
| Leila told me that on the cruise dates, she would come in to the hotel for about an hour and would then leave for the tent.  The front office manager | Balancing job and enterprise |
| was present at the reception desk and it seemed that Leila was waiting to find a good opportunity to sneak out to go to the port. As we waited, Aisha | Balancing job and enterprise |
| kept on gesturing to Leila that they needed to leave for the port as it was already 0930am and the cruise ship had already arrived at the port since 0800am. Then I asked Leila if Khadija was already at the tent as I recalled from my previous | Sneaking out for hosting |
| visit of Khadija being enthusiastic to be at the tent on time by 0800. She told me that Khadija is still at her home and that she had to finish with some work before she comes to the tent. Leila then came to the waiting area with her handbag, and told us lets go before the manager comments about her leaving and gestures to us to leave quickly. As we walk out of the hotel, Aisha walked besides Leila and covered her up with her abaya, and laughs that she is covering her so | Meeting job and enterprise demands |
| that the manager wouldn't see. Leila complained about the front office manager that he is very strict. She told me that he is a new manager and has only been working at the hotel for about a | Sneaking out for hosting/strict job |

month but he is very strict. As we walked out from the main entrance of the hotel, Leila told us that the manager had even commented to her that she should use the staff entrance of the hotel rather than guests entrance.

**Redaction:** field note removed due to sensitive information.

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## Appendix (13): Example of table with codes (women tourism entrepreneurs analysis)

| Mirya interview | Sarah interview | Basma interview |
|---|---|---|
| Lack of support for artisans/helping artisans | Corporate background | Tourism background/tour guide |
| Saving handicraft industry | Education background | Having tour guide education |
| Maintain quality of handicrafts | Pursuing fathers passion/hobby/fishing | Difficulty of getting tour guide job/competition with expats |
| Non for profit company | Taking advantage of tourism boom in Oman | Lack of Omani tour guides |
| Convincing the non for profit concept | New opportunities for TE/boating | Low tour guide salary |
| Saving the handicraft industry | No background in fishing | Low recognition for tour guide certificate |
| Challenge of saving Omani handicrafts | First fishing charter company | Starting career as freelancer |
| Encouragement from parents/mother | Having background/knowledge about tourism and marketing | Enjoying tour guiding |
| Saving a declined handicrafts industry/answering call of help | Meeting demand for charter boats | Unstable job with freelancing |
| Saving lost handicrafts | Affect of world economic crisis on business | Doing everything/driving and tour guiding |
| More then her own success | Making a large investment/dealing with international economic crisis | Tiring work/family refusal for tour guiding |
| Challenge of funding small projects | Providing a luxury experience | Family worry/being a girl/taking tourists |
| Role of her background/proving herself | Using her influence and reputation to operate | Uncle encouragement to study tourism |
| Role of her background in getting funding/challenge | Basing business on Oman's tourism model/luxury destination | Uncle encouragement for TE |
| Lack of CSR approaches in past | Focusing on luxury tourism business | Unstable income with freelancing |
| Benefiting Oman | Price competition to tourists | Tiring work with freelancing |
| Being naïve of project idea | Good progress with business | Lack of good tourism jobs in Oman |
| Lack of support for small projects | Challenge of convincing tourists the product | Lack of tour guide certificate recognition |
| | | Deciding to establish TE/from no where |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Learning new things/benefiting herself | Pursuing her passion/boats and sea | Tourism work experience/freelancer |
| Learning new skills/writing business plans | Passion to provide quality experience to tourists | Getting TE idea from MOT |
| Different background/banking | Offering an authentic experience to tourists | Providing something missing/lack of Omani tour guides |
| Benefit of banking background/investing properly | Involving other women | Foreigners control of tour guide market |
| Feeling scared/taking a risk | Providing a valuable experience | Little investment start up for TE |
| | Providing something missing for tourists | |
| Having a great time | Offering tourists a connection to Oman | Getting TE idea from friend |
| Not wanting prestige/benefiting others | | Lack of work opportunities for tour guides |
| Doing it for the country/not for herself | Offering a different Omani experience to tourists | Starting business with her friend |
| Building a good support team/network | Offering a personal and experiential experience | Getting initial funding for tour business |
| Having a good support network | Being hands on with business at beginning | Friends family refusal for TE |
| Preserving Oman heritage/reviving handicrafts | Importance of being hands on | Not getting funding for business start up/being a girl |
| Preserving Oman handicrafts | Being very involved in business/cooking, cleaning, etc. | Friend withdrawal from starting business together |
| More then business/personal | Being hands on to understand business | Negative encouragement from MOT/being a girl |
| Helping the handicraft industry | Meeting tourist expectations/high end market | Lack of TE support from MOT |
| Maintaining Oman handicraft level | Importance and benefit of her role as an Omani hostess | Proving them wrong/motivation |
| Being positive with challenges/being motivated by challenges | Learning to be assertive with people | Proving herself |
| | Doing everything at the beginning | Starting with nothing |
| Having different responsibilities | Learning to be assertive | Getting funding from family |
| People based business/helping others | Proving she can do it | Turning to her family for help/funding |
| Preserving heritage/not changing handicrafts | Gaining respect | Difficulty of funding rules |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Competing with others (challenge) | Women's way being different and strong | Talking to family for funding |
| Being different/high quality | Women being more smarter than men | Challenge of getting appropriate office location |
| Selling for tourists | Showing her toughness to staff | Getting more encouragement from uncle |
| Challenge of being expensive | Changing her natural way to tough | Challenge of high rent expensive |
| More than economic | Doing everything/being busy/marketing | Working from home/needing few resources |
| Importance of profit and benefiting handcrafters | | Using freelancing to build her business/networking (3) |
| Not being taken serious | Doing it herself/marketing | Tourist attracted to her business/being an Omani women tour guide |
| Struggle with funding | Using her background in business/marketing | |
| Justifying herself for funding | Looking constantly for new opportunities | Providing something extra for tourists |
| Justifying funding for helping others | Using her background in business/marketing | Gaining recognition |
| Helping others help themselves | Importance of marketing | Receiving good feedback from tourists |
| Justifying herself for funding | Providing something missing in Oman tourism | Gaining recognition internationally |
| More than economic | Providing something new | Challenge of business loans/needing guarantees |
| First to adopt CSR concept | | |
| Being busy in the past/hands on | Technical challenge/being in the sea | Challenge of limited resources/cars, staff and office |
| Mainly non profit concept | Importance of having a good team | Getting help from other tour guides |
| Benefit of being greedy for success/survival | Good team work | Not making enough/not covering expenses at beginning |
| Being careful with funding | Doing something exciting | |
| Being busy | Being native at the beginning | Not getting help from MOT/pardoning licence fee |
| Importance of family support (2) | Operating challenge in Oman | Receiving limited help with funding from family/risky business |
| Having family support and encouragement | Proving herself/doing things properly | |
| Accepting criticisms | Difficult environment to operate/Oman | |
| Importance of family support | Effect of her family name/proving herself | Receiving limited funding help with family |

# Appendix (14): Example of table with categories and codes (sewing group analysis)

## Past work and study

| Karima | Majida | Ibatism | Janan |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Fatina** | **Najiha**<br><br>Doing only sewing work/limited opportunities<br><br>Difficult to find job/lack of qualifications | **Lama**<br><br>Not worked before 16 | **Safia**<br><br>Not work before/lack of qualifications |
| **Tahira** | **Dalal**<br><br>Working in sewing factory | **Bahira** | **Halima** |
| **Ghania**<br><br>Tried further education/issue with college<br><br>Registered at manpower/diffcuilt finding a job<br><br>Applying for job/didnt bother following up<br><br>Registered with manpower/no reply | **Rajiha**<br><br>Worked for short time only<br><br>Tried for other jobs/not finding something suitable<br><br>No suitable jobs out there/trying other jobs<br><br>Worked before/bad sexist experience 26 | **Qahira**<br><br>Not worked before<br><br>Considred private sector work<br><br>Dfifcuilt to get job/lack of ceritifcates | **Azza**<br><br>Worked before in factory (2)<br><br>Joiing sewing insitute<br><br>Worked at factory |
| **Aadia** | | | |

## Sewing work opportunity

| Karima | Majida<br>Trying out sewing | Ibatism | Janan |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Fatina**<br><br>Good place to join<br><br>Sewing not a job<br><br>Opportunit to have work | **Najiha**<br><br>Doing only sewing work/limited opportunities | **Lama**<br><br>Needing an approrpaite job 16 | **Safia**<br><br>Opportunity to learn a profession<br><br>Easy accessible work/opportunity to sew and make friends/gaining good experience |

| | | | Doing something for herself |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Tahira** | **Dalal** | **Bahira** | **Halima** |
| **Ghania**<br><br>Wanting to work/doing something with her life/taking up an opportunity | **Rajiha**<br><br>Doing something useful/doing something useful with time | **Qahira**<br><br>Less requirents to join project | **Azza** |
| **Aaida**<br><br>Havng an appropaite job | | | |

## Level of income made

| **Karima** | **Majida** | **Ibatism** | **Janan** |
|---|---|---|---|
| Making little money at beginning<br><br>Getting later increased income | Issue with workshop/not steady income/inconstant work<br><br>Not making enough income<br><br>Needing a salary<br><br>Good to have salary system/not workable | Making good income<br><br>Receiving good income<br><br>Continuous good income/increased bag prices<br><br>Responsibilities<br><br>Making low income 25 | |
| **Fatina** | **Najiha** | **Lama** | **Safia** |
| Making unstable income<br><br>Not liking the unstable income<br><br>Not making enough income<br><br>Making little income/low bag prices<br><br>Making little income/needing to increase bag prices | Good work/unstable income<br><br>Not making enough income/looking for a job<br><br>Unstable work/unstable income/considering a job<br><br>Liking the project/not making enough income | Making litte income/too much pressure/difficult detailed work<br><br>Lack of salaries/needing to register with ministry of manpower | Making little income/unstable work<br><br>Limited income/depends on your own work |
| **Tahira** | **Dalal** | **Bahira** | **Halima** |

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| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Making little income at beginning/comparing herself to family income<br><br>Learning sewing slowly/making income steadily<br><br>Receving ok income/steady income | Income depending on workload<br><br>Not making enough | Not making enough income<br><br>Not making enough income/too many work expenses | |
| **Ghania**<br><br>Making little income<br><br>Income based on work load<br><br>Getting good income/based on work load<br><br>Salary not specifc/depending on workload<br><br>Unfair bonus distribution/more for those who work more | **Rajiha**<br><br>Attending exhibitions/should be compenstated<br><br>Income not always enough<br><br>Needing to increase cutter rates<br><br>Not making regular income/asking for pay for weekend event 29 | **Qahira**<br><br>Lack of salary at project/making steady income<br><br>Not making enough<br><br>Not making enough money | **Azza** |
| **Aaida**<br><br>Income based on individiaul work load and commitment<br><br>Rate distribution for sewers,cutters and pay rent<br><br>Having a fixed salary<br><br>Making little income (2)<br><br>Receving guranated pay/sold or not sold 10 | | | |

## Income effect on personal circumstances

| Karima | Majida | Ibatism | Janan |
|--------|--------|---------|-------|
|  | Salary issue with workshop/difficult to build indepdence<br><br>Limitation with little income |  |  |
| **Fatina**<br><br>Forced to work/helping husband with expenses<br><br>Helping husband with expenses<br><br>Helping husband with income 5 | **Najiha**<br><br>Needint stable work/helping her family<br><br>Needing money for new house<br><br>Asking for salary/needing money urgently 45 | **Lama**<br><br>Not making enough income/getting extra income from brother | **Safia**<br><br>Limited income/affects house expenses |
| **Tahira** | **Dalal**<br><br>Helping her family | **Bahira**<br><br>Helping husband with income<br><br>Helping parents/house renovations | **Halima** |
| **Ghania** | **Rajiha**<br><br>Using salary to help husband | **Qahira**<br><br>Family spending on her<br><br>Comparing herself to sisters/income<br><br>Wanting to have her own car | **Azza** |
| **Aaida** |  |  |  |

## Maintaining housework/home responsibilities

| Karima | Majda | Ibatism | Janan |
|--------|-------|---------|-------|
| Finishing sewing according to house work |  | Pressure balancing sewing and house/likes sewing |  |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Taking work according to time available<br><br>Not attending event/needing to make family lunch/maintaining house work/not having help with house work 8<br><br>Burden of house work 19<br><br>Maintain home resposibilties/not attending hosting 30<br><br>Pressure to finish orders/maintaining home responsibilities 44 | | | |
| **Fatina**<br><br>Leaving on time/making lunch 3<br><br>Not wanting a maid/doing everything herself 5 | **Najiha**<br><br>Meeting home obligations/making lunch on time 11 | **Lama**<br><br>No home responsibilities | **Safia** |
| **Tahira** | **Dalal** | **Bahira**<br><br>Affecting her home responsibilities/needing to always be at workshop<br><br>Maintain home responsibilities in afternoon | **Halima**<br><br>Working according to circumstances<br><br>Putting home first then work |
| **Ghania**<br><br>Not married yet/still having home resposniblities<br><br>Working at workshop/avoiding house work 14 | **Rajiha** | **Qahira**<br><br>Wanting a job/beign with her mom<br><br>Father fine with sewing work/being home on time<br><br>Working until 11/going home on time/making lunch | **Azza**<br><br>Dividing time for sewing and house work<br><br>Choosing marriage over sewing |

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| | | Not attending events/maintaining home responsibilities 46<br><br>Off to the kitchen/maintaining home responsibilities 46 | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Aaida**<br><br>Having domestic work/having maid for domestic work 1 | | | |

## Level of available work

| Karima | Majda | Ibatism | Janan |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Organizing her work load<br><br>No work for 1 month/no income<br><br>Unstable workload | No work for her 6<br><br>Lack of work 24<br><br>Wishing for work/waiting for big order 24 | Being patient with no work |
| **Fatina**<br><br>Used to receive regular work/not really working now<br><br>Unstable work<br><br>Not sewing for a long time<br><br>Previous regular attendance | **Najiha**<br><br>Unstable work/ladies complain/being content<br><br>Previous weekly stable work/not stable now<br><br>Lack of work/sitting at home for 2 month<br><br>Not liking the unstable work<br><br>No work today/not coming to work (2) 7<br><br>Not coming to work/no work 7<br><br>No work today 15<br><br>Making prayers to receive large orders 46 | **Lama**<br><br>Not always receving work 16 | **Safia**<br><br>Content with limited work/opportunity to work<br><br>Good project o join/depends on order |
| **Tahira** | **Dalal** | **Bahira** | **Halima** |

| Ghania | Rajiha | Qahira | Azza |
|---|---|---|---|
|  | Working according to work availability | | Not supplied enough sewing resources |
|  | Asking for work 20 | | Being committed to sewing work/attending daily |
|  | | | Asking for work |
|  | | | Attending daily/being good in sewing/receiving most of the work |
|  | | | Wanting wrok/asking for work to be satisfied |
|  | | | Asking for work |
|  | | | Keeping int otuch with workshop for work |
|  | | | Maintain contact with workshop/occasiona lvisits |
| **Aaida** | | | |
| Having work for ladies/challenge | | | |
| Pressure having work for ladies | | | |
| Needing to maintain work flow/challenge | | | |
| Ladies still come despite no work | | | |

## Appendix (15): feedback letter and summary of results

Dear participant,

I am writing to thank you for sharing your tourism business experience with me. I appreciate your time and input towards my study, and it was a pleasure meeting you. I have included with the letter a brief summary of my study results. Please feel free to review this and to provide further information or comments to me about the issues we discussed.  Your continued input is much appreciated. Thank you.

Yours sincerely,

Lubna Al Mazroei

PhD Student

**Summary of results (hosting group)**

The following results illustrate the experiences of the hosting group with their business:

1. **Getting into the hosting enterprise**

    The women's involvement in the hosting enterprise was influenced by two main motivation factors that resulted in the women's participation in the enterprise. This included taking up a new opportunity, as well as being able to use their existing skills and personal interests.

**Challenges:**

However, the women encountered a number of challenges associated with their enterprise and the environment that they operated within.

2. **Operating within a patriarchal and conservative environment**

    The first challenge that the women encountered was operating their enterprise within a patriarchal and conservative environment. The women had to first gain their families' acceptance and deal with family strictness in order to participate in the enterprise. The women also dealt with community and other women's negative views towards their involvement in the enterprise due to the nature of their hosting enterprise.

3. **Operating in a difficult tourism business environment**

    The other challenge that the women encountered is operating their enterprise in a difficult tourism business environment. The women found it difficult to develop networks with local tour operators and international cruise companies in order to help them sell their hosting services to the cruise tourists. The women also felt that there was a lack of industry cooperation from the tourism development company and [Redaction: Name of organization removed due to confidential information.] in helping them to deal with the challenges that they were encountering with local tour operators and international cruise companies.

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4. **Hosting the cruise tourist**

   Hosting the cruise tourists was also challenging for the women. The cruise tourists were reluctant and hesitant towards the women's hosting services. The cruise tourists also made persistent photo taking requests of the women, as well as the women often having to deal with inappropriate behaviour from [Redaction: word removed due to sensitive information.] cruise tourists. In addition, the cruise tourists were curious of the women being Muslim from the type of questions that they will often ask them relating to their status in society.

5. **Economic stress and burden**

   Moreover, the women dealt with economic stress and burden. This challenge was largely due to the unstable and limited income that they made from the enterprise. Also, they had to continue working while operating their enterprise due to the need for a reliable income.

6. **Collective work effort**

   With the hosting enterprise being collectively run by the four women, the women found it challenging to work collectively as a team in various respects. This included placing a large dependence and reliance on one member to run the hosting enterprise, as well as having less time for the enterprise due to their current full-time jobs.

**Benefits:**

Despite the various challenges that the women encountered with their hosting enterprise, they were able to gain a number of benefits.

7. **Importance of the hosting enterprise to the women**

   One benefit was that the enterprise became an important part of the women's lives in various ways. This included developing a great passion for their hosting enterprise, developing new skills, building a stronger personality, developing a

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strong sisterhood between them, becoming popular and famous, and benefiting their country and community.

8. **Developing cultural exchange**

The other important benefit that the women were able to gain was the opportunity to develop strong cultural exchanges with the cruise tourists. This cultural exchange was developed through interacting with and learning from the cruise tourists. The women also took the opportunity to educate tourists about their local traditions, cultural habits and customs, religion and about their country.

9. **Promoting the identity of a modern Omani woman**

The women also took the opportunity to promote their identities as modern Omani women to the cruise tourists. This included rectifying the general stereotypes that were held about Muslim women and taking deliberate actions, such as hosting male tourists and agreeing to be photographed. The women maintained their modesty and proper conduct while they promoted their modern identities.

10. **Seeking sustainability**

To improve the enterprise, the women sought to gain sustainability in various areas. This included gaining gradual acceptance for the community and other women, gaining industry support, attracting cruise tourists to buy their hosting services, and achieving economic viability.

**Summary of results (sewing group)**

The following results illustrates the experiences of the sewing group with their business:

1. **Getting into the sewing enterprise**

   The women's involvement in the sewing enterprise was influenced by two main motivation factors. This included taking up a new opportunity, using their sewing skills, and having family and community support.

**Challenges:**

However, the women encountered a number of challenges associated with the enterprise and the environment that they operated within.

2. **The struggle to sew as work**

   The first challenge that the women encountered was the struggle to sew as work, due to various issues. This included having limited work, dealing with work pressure, struggling with mobility, needing to sew at home and experiencing difficulty with the sewing skill.

3. **Economic stress and burden**

   The other major challenge that the women had to deal with was the economic stress and burden resulting from their sewing work. The women made a low and unstable income from their sewing enterprise. This, in turn, affected their economic independence and ability to financially support their families.

4. **Collective work effort**

   With the sewing enterprise being collectively run by a group of women, the women also found it challenging to work collectively as a team in various ways. This included the unequal distribution of the sewing work among them and the lack of group cooperation.

5.  **Maintaining domestic responsibilities**

    Besides the challenges of the sewing enterprise, the women were further challenged when it came to the need to maintain their domestic responsibilities while sewing. These domestic responsibilities included childcare and housework.

**Benefits:**

Despite the various challenges that the women encountered with the sewing enterprise, the women were able to gain a number of benefits on a personal and collective level.

6.  **Sewing in a desirable working environment**

    One is that the sewing enterprise provided a desirable working environment for the woman. This included having a flexible workplace and schedule, and the ability to balance their domestic responsibilities and sewing work.

7.  **Importance of the sewing enterprise to the women**

    The other benefit that the women were able to gain was that the sewing enterprise became an important part of their lives in a number of ways. This included developing a passion for their sewing enterprise, developing new skills, gaining sewing experience, building gradual economic independence, building stronger personalities, and becoming popular and famous.

8.  **Developing a sisterhood unity**

    The women were also able to develop a strong sisterhood unity among them through various aspects. This included having social gatherings and building friendships.

9.  **Developing cultural exchange**

    In addition, the sewing enterprise provided the women with the opportunity to develop strong cultural exchanges with the tourists. This cultural exchange was developed through interacting and educating tourists. The women also took the

opportunity to promote their modern identity to improve tourist's view of themselves and their work.

## 10. Seeking sustainability

To improve the enterprise, the women sought to gain sustainability in various areas. This included building strong team cooperation among them, as well as growing their enterprise bigger.

## 11. Taking different future paths

When it comes to each of the women's future plans with the sewing enterprise, the women were divided. Some of the women want to continue to be involved with the enterprise on a long-term basis, while others were open to seeking other better work opportunities.

**Summary of results (women tourism entrepreneurs)**

The following results illustrates the experiences of women tourism entrepreneurs with their businesses:

1. **Getting into tourism entrepreneurship**

   The women's decision to set up their own tourism enterprise was influenced by three main motivation factors: creating their individual opportunity, using their existing skills, personal interests and passions, and being creative and innovative with the products and services that they offer.

**Challenges:**

However, the women encountered a number of challenges associated with the enterprise and the environment that they operated within.

2. **Operating in a difficult tourism business environment**

   The first challenge that the women encountered was related to the difficult tourism business environment when it came to setting up and running their enterprise. Aspects of this challenge included receiving approval for their tourism enterprise, lack of support, lack of funding and dealing with competition.

3. **Being a woman tourism entrepreneur**

   The other major challenge that the women encountered was due to their gender and having tourism-related enterprises. As a result, the women experienced difficulty in selling their enterprise idea, dealing with negative views, needing to show their capabilities, and struggling to provide their tourism products and services.

4. **Economic stress and burden**

   The women also had to deal with economic stress and burden from various aspects. This challenge included making a low income, taking financial risks and chances, and fear of failure at the beginning.

5. **Dealing with the family**

   In addition, the women had to deal with their own families when it came to their involvement in tourism entrepreneurship. This challenge included having family concerns towards their business and making time for their family while running their business.

**Benefits:**

Despite the various challenges that the women encountered with their enterprise, the women were able to gain a number of benefits.

6. **Overcoming gender challenges**

   One is that the women used their tourism enterprise as a platform to overcome the gender challenges that they encounter in relation to their enterprise in various ways. This included forming a positive identity, proving themselves and gaining their families' support.

7. **Building gradual economic independence**

   The other benefit that the women were able to gain was to build gradual economic independence by having success and making a decent income through their tourism enterprise.

8. **Importance of the enterprise to the women**

   The women's enterprise also became an important part of their lives in various respects. This included developing passion for enterprise, building stronger personalities, becoming unique, and becoming popular and famous.

9. **Developing cultural exchange**

   In addition, the women's tourism enterprise provided them with the opportunity to develop strong cultural exchanges with the tourists. They were able to educate tourists about Oman's heritage and culture. They also took the

opportunity to promote their modern identity to improve tourists' view of themselves and their work.

## 10. Benefiting others

Moreover, the women benefited others through their tourism enterprise in a number of ways. This included giving back to the country and promoting it internationally, preserving the country's culture and heritage, making an impact on Oman's tourism industry, and involving other people in their business.

## 11. Looking to the future

With the future of tourism entrepreneurship in Oman, the women were ambitious to expand and grow their own enterprise. The women also believed that there were many available opportunities for other Omani women to start up their own tourism enterprises. However, these opportunities were challenged due to certain existing issues such as gender discrimination, socio-cultural restrictions and lack of support.

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