CHANGING PERCEPTIONS OF TOURISM AS A RESPECTABLE CAREER CHOICE FOR OMANI WOMEN

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ABSTRACT

Tourism in Oman is projected to offer 500 000 new jobs by 2040, but the sector has challenges in attracting local employees, especially women. Tourism is widely not perceived as a respectable career choice for women in the society.

The aim of the thesis was to find solutions for how the perception of tourism can be influenced to assist in lowering the threshold for Oman Tourism College (OTC) female students to choose tourism as a career and how the OTC's women in tourism network (Lady Leaders in Tourism Network) could be used best in the process. The qualitative research applied insider action research with focus group discussions and desk research as data collecting methods. The focus group discussions with OTC female students and the network participants were held in the 3rd annual event of the network in March 2017.

Awareness raising of tourism and careers in tourism and developing tourism education with the sector to be more practical were the main outcomes of the focus groups.

The network is proposed as a CSR program between OTC and the sector companies and stakeholders, aligning with three UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): Gender Equality, Quality Education and Decent Work & Economic Growth. A change cycle through network activities is presented to increase the number of Omani women joining tourism education and starting a career in tourism, to the increase of the overall number of Omani women in tourism, to women being more empowered in tourism, in training and as entrepreneurs.

Keywords **Women in Tourism, SDGs, CSR, Human Capital Development, Oman**
Pages 87 including appendices 16 pages

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ACRONYMS

DBRG	Diversity Business Management Group
CEDAW	Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
GFOTU	General Federation of Trade Unions
GRI	Global Reporting Initiative
ICV	In Country Value
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
MOMP	Ministry of Manpower
MOT	Ministry of Tourism
MOSD	Ministry of Social Development
OAAA	Oman Academic Accreditation Authority
OTC	Oman Tourism College
OQF	Oman Qualifications Framework
OWA	Oman Women Association
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SROI	Social Return on Investment
TANFEEDH	National Program for Enhancing Economic Diversification
UNIDO	United Nations Industrial Development Organization
UNWOMEN	United Nations Organization for Women
WBC	World Business Council
WBCSD	World Business Council for Sustainable Development
WTTC	World Tourism and Travel Council
UNWTO	United Nations World Tourism Organization

1 INTRODUCTION

This thesis is set in the context of the low representation of women in the tourism sector in the Sultanate of Oman and how to improve the situation. The thesis explores the situation from the point of view of female students at Oman Tourism College (OTC), their ideas for how they can be influenced and assisted, through activities organized by OTC Lady Leaders in Tourism Network, to choose tourism as a career.

To support the growth of the Omani tourism sector in the country's quest to diversify its economy to other sectors from oil and gas, the contribution and engagement of all Omani nationals are needed. The need comes from ensuring that the economic growth is in line with the global efforts of ensuring responsible business practices, as lined in United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN SGDs). Likewise, the country has a new tourism strategy which relies on the uniqueness of the Omani culture, heritage and nature by providing authentic experiences for tourists. Omanis are needed to provide the experiences, to stay true to the tourism marketing promises.

Despite of the fact the sector is seeing a strong growth and has extremely promising future, it attracts very few Omanis and even less Omani women.

1.1 Research Aim

The research objectives were to explore how OTC Lady Leaders in Tourism Network can be used as a tool to assist OTC female students to choose tourism sector as a career.

The research questions were:

- How can the perception of the society, family and OTC tourism students be influenced to assist in lowering the threshold for OTC female students to enter the tourism sector?

- How should OTC Lady Leaders in Tourism Network be developed so that it can best assist in the above process, together with the industry and other stakeholders?

Systems thinking for change was the philosophy behind the research. The research itself was a qualitative one, using insider action research process. A participatory approach was used throughout the research, involving colleagues, students and tourism sector participants. The research data was collected by organizing two sets of focus group discussions and through literature review. The first set included conducting three simultaneous focus group discussions in conjunction with the 3rd OTC Lady leaders in Tourism Network event. The second one was a focus group discussion organized for representatives the network with the aim of receiving consultation on how to take the focus group findings further with the help of the network and how to develop the network further. The focus group data from the first set of discussions, was analyzed by using inductive thematic analysis. The data from the 2nd discussion was more of a dialog aiming at validating the analysis results of the first one. Literature review was conducted throughout the research and was in a central role in exploring forming the network as a corporate social responsibility (CSR) program in line with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Oman Tourism College Lady Leaders in Tourism Network and the college female students were used as case examples in the research because the majority – 75% in 2017 - of the students at the college were female and network had already in its annual events involved female tourism students. The network had been envisioned to have a more impactful role in assisting them to choosing tourism as a career.

1.2 Oman Tourism College and OTC Lady Leaders in Tourism Network

Oman Tourism College (OTC) is the only higher education institute in Oman dedicated solely in tourism. The college was established in 2001 and has steadily developed its portfolio of tourism sector training, offering currently vocational qualifications, degree programs, tailor-made courses. The college annual intake is about 800 students. The

college's vision is to be Oman's leading provider of tourism related education supporting the growth of the country's tourism industry (OTC, 2018).

OTC Lady Leaders in Tourism Network has been formed as platform for all females in the tourism sector in Oman, regardless of their position, stage in their career or nationality. The network has been formed by OTC in 2015 and has currently about 100 participants from 30 different companies across the spectrum of the tourism sector, in addition to OTC female staff and students. OTC has organized one to two events network events annually (Times of Oman, 2015 & Times of Oman, 2016 & Appendix 1).

Image 1. OTC Lady Leaders in Tourism Network 2nd event invite, email banner (OTC, 2016).

1.3 Structure of Thesis

The first chapter presents the aims and objectives of the research. The second chapter presents the philosophical theoretical background of the thesis which is in systems thinking for change. The next chapter focuses on literature review regarding three areas: human resource challenges in Oman, women in tourism and linking Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and Sustainable Development Goals with the human resources management. The forth chapter explains the research design using action research and focus group discussions, as well as explains how the data was analyzed using inductive data analysis. The fifth chapter is dedicated to the findings of the research and analysis.

The last chapter concludes the findings, discusses the theoretical and practical implications of the research and ends up with reflection of the research journey.

2 RESEARCH PHILOSOPHY

This research is a qualitative research with interpretivism as ontological and epistemological approach. The nature of reality, as explained by Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2009), is considered complex and is constructed socially through culture, language and history, creating many realities. The interpretivist researcher wants to understand social worlds and contexts paying special attention to what is meaningful to the research participants. Stories, perceptions and interpretations can be the source of research material and data. This implies a subjectivist approach, where the personal value systems of the researcher affect the research results at least to some level. It is helpful if the researcher is empathetic towards the lived experiences of the research participants. Reflexive approach is paramount as the researcher needs to question her own beliefs and assumptions and possible biased views. (Saunders et al., 2009.)

Image 2. Research Philosophy Using Research Onion (Saunders et al.,2009).

2.1 Systems Thinking for Social Change

Systems thinking helps researchers to learn and describe dynamic and complex relationships and with an eye to creative change as it helps them to look at patterns of behavior from a holistic point of view. Senge (2015), explains that a system is an

organized collection of interdependent relationships and is like a living organism. A system exists within an environment and is formed of parts and has a boundary. Where the boundary is set is called a systemic boundary, the division between a system and its environment. Systemic boundary can change. Changing complex systems often meet resistance, especially if the systemic relationships are not considered. Subtle change can be initiated by altering the relationships. Creating systemic change by intervention in a system, requires a close relationship with the system and a very talented approach. (Senge, 2015.)

Those who want to have social change, as explained by Stroh (2015), change consultant and applied systems thinking advocate, should support people to realize their highest aspirations, especially if the change is not urgent. He advises to make them understand first why the existing system is interesting, including what kind of immediate solutions, quick fixes, does the system offer. Then he advises to look at the change that it is needed in the long run and aim for solutions both for long and short-term interests. As examples of the costs of change, he includes financial investment, new skills development and creation of different work, acting interdependently and patience in waiting for return of investment. To present a strong case for the change, he suggests comparing the benefits of change with the costs of not changing. (Stroh, 2015.)

As a beginning point to the research, the author used the widely used ice-berg model of systems thinking to present the bigger picture of the change needed so that OTC female tourism students would choose tourism as a career. The tip of the ice-berg that can be seen, reflects individual events – in this case a female student who decides to decline a job offer from the tourism sector. The sections of the ice-berg, below the sea level and hidden to the view, explain the system affecting the situation. First layer is called trends explaining a pattern of events – in this case the same student had refused other tourism job offers as had a vast number of other OTC female students. The next layer below is the structure which is the foundation that supports and creates this behavior – in this case the lack of support of the families and society in Oman for females to choose tourism as a career (as explained in 3.2.2). Included in this layer is also the inadequate efforts of both the tourism sector and tourism industry to promote the industry as

reliable and respectable career choice for women (as explained in 3.1). The second last layer is the mental models that explain why the structures exists in the current way – in this case the poor perception of the families and society of tourism as a respectable, reliable and honorable career choice for women. There perceptions are deeply rooted in the culture (as explained in 3.1 & 3.2). The last layer looks at the official visions which are supposed to support the ice-berg with the strategies chosen – in this case the Oman Tourism Strategy and Tanfeedh initiative (as explained later in 3.1). (Northwest Earth Institute, 2018.)

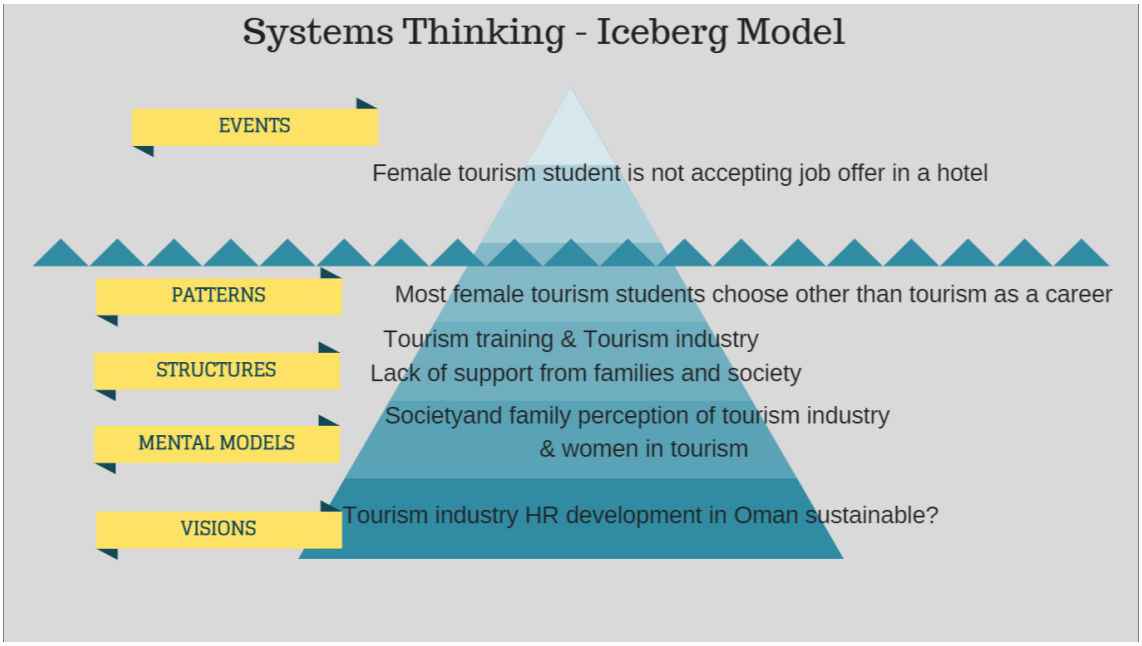

Image 3. Systems Thinking – Iceberg Model Applied (adopted from Northwest Earth Institute, 2018). Raisanen, 2018

2.2 Researcher Background and Reflexivity

The author is working as a Director of Quality for Vocational and Professional Studies at Oman Tourism College since 2013. She is the initiator of OTC Lady Leaders in Tourism Network.

She has 30 years of international experience in tourism development, training and management across Europe, Africa and Asia. In the context of Islamic countries, she has experience in working in the Maldives as Cluster Training and Development Manager as

well as in Zanzibar as General Manager of a resort. She has a post graduate degree in vocational education from Finland and international bachelor's degree in Business Administration in Hotel Management. This thesis is for her master's degree in International Business and Entrepreneurship at HAMK University of Applied Sciences in Finland.

Altinay, Paraskevas and Jang (2016) in Planning Research in Hospitality and Tourism, advice researchers who work outside their native countries, to consider the positive and negative implications their values may have. As a norther European middle-aged woman who is not of Arab origin nor practicing Islam, the author took efforts to be considerate to the local Omani culture and people to her best understanding. She also tried to be stay aware of her own limitations in understanding and interpreting discussions, results and in drawing conclusions. The author has consciously worked towards raising her intercultural competence by fostering respectful and open attitude towards the Omani people and culture while staying curious about the lived experienced of Omanis, especially the women. Deodorff (2006), in his pyramid model of intercultural competence is based on the previously mentioned attitudes and then finetuned by the knowledge and comprehension about being culturally self-aware and being a skillful listener, observer, interpreter and analyzer. The author spent her formative years from the age of 9 to 14 outside her native country Finland, in Nigeria due to the work of her parents. Having had the experience as the "Third Culture Kid" (TCK), has developed her personality towards that of a global citizen. TCKs by research has shown to keep the global dimensions throughout their lives, having learnt early on about living in another cultural context (TCK, 2018).

3 LITERATURE REVIEWS: TOURISM, WOMEN AND CSR IN OMAN

Oman is situated in the Arabian Peninsula, neighboring United Arab Emirates, Kingdom of Saudi-Arabia and Yemen. Until 1970 the country remained closed for outside world and started opening, after His Majesty Sultan Qaboos took over the reign from his father and started the period called Renaissance in Oman, developing the country.

Since then, there has been a rapid change in the country's economic and social development. The country's economic development has been heavily relying on oil, but the country has acknowledged that the reserves will not last forever and the country needs to look for alternative industries. Since 1986 the Sultanate has acknowledged tourism as a new economic field in which the country should invest in. In the 3rd 5- year plan for 1986 – 1990, tourism had been seen to bring about economic growth, employment and source of foreign exchange. In 1991 UNDP and UNTWO assisted Oman in manpower planning for the tourism industry to attract Omanis to the industry that had not been perceived at all interesting or suitable for the locals. Many Omanis joined the industry as the traditional attitudes started to change. However, the industry continued to suffer from under-representation of local workforce. In 1995, in line with "The Vision for Oman's Economy: Oman 2020", Ministry of Industry and Commerce formed a department dedicated to tourism and in 2004 Ministry of Tourism was launched. Oman Tourism College was established in 2001. The tourism sector has seen a tremendous growth in investment in the recent years, spearheaded by a company, Omran, that was set up by the government to attract investment in tourism and to manage the assets and investments in which the government has a stake in. Currently Omran has a portfolio of 11 internationally recognized hotels around Oman, in addition to newly opened Oman Convention and Exhibition Center (Omran, 2017). The Public Authority for Investment Promotion and Export Development, Ihtraa, is actively looking for international companies to invest in Oman, also in the tourism sector (Ihtraa, 2017). Hotel capacity has risen steady from 207 hotels in 2014 to 367 hotels in 2017 (MOT, 2018). In 2016 Oman received its' own low-cost airline, Salam Air, which alongside the national carrier Oman Air have since 2018 their home at the new Muscat International Airport.

Image 4. Map of the Sultanate of Oman (CIA Fact Book, 2016).

Oman is annually visited by 3,2 million tourists (MOT, 2017). Ministry of Tourism statistics (2018) show that most of the tourists come from the neighboring countries, followed by Asians and Europeans. In 2017, as per the statistics the major European tourist source markets were UK, Germany, Italy, France, the Netherlands, Switzerland and Poland. 221,813 of the tourists were on cruises, a growing sector in tourism in Oman. As attractions go, Oman has a vast selection of natural sights ranging from the dessert, mountains and dried river basins and valleys to the sea and beaches. Oman's culture and heritage, which has stayed true to its' Arabic and seafaring roots are another attraction. (MOT, 2018.)

Ministry of Tourism (2018) launched a new Oman Tourism Strategy under the themes 'Top Omani Tourism Experience' and 'Authentic Omani Experience', with the understanding that today's and tomorrow's tourists are seeking authentic and unique experiences. The strategy projects 500,000 new jobs in tourism by 2040 and 1200 new SMSs by 2020 The human capital development to support the tourism growth in Oman would mean major capacity development of Omanis, in the form of attracting them into

the tourism industry, retaining them as well as educating and training Omani talent (MOT, 2016).

In 2017 Omani government started an initiative called National Economic Diversification Program (Tanfeedh) to combine the efforts of the government and different stakeholders to reach the goals of the government's Strategic Plan 2016 – 2020. Tourism was included as one of the key sectors in the plan. The program involved a participatory approach from all stakeholders, both from public and private sector. Omani general society had a possibility to comment and influence the final program as well. The program came up with a set of 14 initiatives for tourism and Tourism Diversification Committee was formed to ensure goals are met. The top goals for tourism by 2020 in the program are increasing the tourist arrivals to 2.7 million per year, increasing the sector's GDP to 1.50 billion, building the private sector investment minimum to 1.8 billion and increase the number of jobs in tourism to 45,000. (Tanfeedh, 2017.)

As per World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) in 2017 Tourism industry employment was 3,4% of the total employment in Oman. WTTC projects this to grow 1,5% in 2018 and 2,6% per year reaching to 4% of total employment by 2018 (WTTC, 2018).

3.1 Human Resource Challenges in Tourism in Oman

To boost the rate of employment among its' nationals, and the replace the expatriate work force by locals, Oman has set Omanisation targets for six private sectors. The sectors need to employ a certain percentage of locals on an annual basis. Omanisation has been in place since 1988 and the percentage have been adjusted several times. For the tourism sector the percentage is now 30% (Tanfeedh, 2017). However, some professions are completely Omanised, meaning 100% of the workforce in certain positions such as drivers, HR, security guards, marketing and receptionists are all handled by locals (MOMP, 2017).

Companies need to submit their Omanisation plans annually to the Ministry of Manpower. The negative implications for the companies who do not meet the set

annual Omanisation requirements are refusal to grant visas for the expatriate employees. This is turn complicates the human resources management and thus the entire operations of the companies. In order to assist companies with their Omanisation efforts, one of the solutions the Ministry of Manpower has in place is training for employment scheme. For the tourism sector, scheme matches together the unemployed young Omanis, the company seeking for Omanis for entry level positions and the various tourism training providers. The student gets a stipend from the government for taking part in a vocational short training program and the company is committed to employing the student after the course. (MOM, 2017.) Similar program is funded by oil companies through their In-Country-Value programs. There are less than 10 training providers who are involved in delivering these programs.

The below table, as adopted from information from Ministry of Tourism (2018) shows the employment details in the tourism sector from 2010 to 2016. The total employment in 2016 was 144,790 out of which 12.1% were Omanis, which equals to the Omanisation percentage of 12.1%. Omani females were roughly a quarter of total Omanis working in the sector, 25.6%. It is not clear which industries were included in the statistics, but it is understood that the information is reflecting direct employment only. International recommendations for tourism statistics include the following industries: accommodation for visitors, food and beverage serving activities, passenger transportation services (railway, water, road, air), transport equipment rental, travel agencies and other reservation service providers, cultural activities, sports and recreational activities, retail trade of country specific tourism characteristics goods and other country specific characteristics goods (UNWTO, 2014). Ministry of Tourism is currently working on defining which industries are included in the tourism sector for the country (Tanfeedh, 2017).

Year	Total employees	Total Omanis	Omani-sation %	Total Omani Females	Omani females %	Omani females % of total Omanisation
2010	74,819	12,037	16.1%	2,692	3.6%	22.4%
2011	85,252	11,656	13,7%	2,675	2.3%	22.9%
2012	97,437	11,380	11.7%	2,728	2.4%	23.9%
2013	107,536	11,971	11.1%	2,973	2.8%	24.8%
2014	115,640	12,796	11.1%	3,363	2.9%	26.2%
2015	127,044	14,721	11.6%	3,891	3.0%	26.4%
2016	144,790	17,526	12.1%	4,495	3.1%	25.6%

Image 5. Employees in Tourism in the Sultanate of Oman 2010 – 2016 (MOT, 2018)

Oman has featured in several reports covering human capital issues by international organizations and consultancies. World Travel and Tourism Council's Global Talent Trends for the Travel and Tourism Sector (2015) looks at the talent deficit of countries and then assesses how well placed the countries are in enabling environment, highlighting the countries where tourism is most at risk from human capital issues over the next five to ten years. Oman has been placed among the countries that have acute to medium versus long-run talent challenges. This has been seen as a result of the demand growth in the medium versus long-run. In terms of the overall Gulf region countries, the study notes that despite graduating from the few hospitality colleges, the young nationals are not employed in tourism because of salary, culture and working times (WTTC, 2015). Similarly, the enabling environment should take into consideration the need to include a positive perception of tourism as well as tapping into the female talent (ibid).

Oxford Strategic Consulting (2016) in Oman Employment Report, Insights for 2016 highlights the poor status of the tourism sector in the eyes of basically the entire under 30 population in Oman, as only 5% of the sampling group wanted to work in tourism and only 1% mentioned tourism as their ideal role in the future.

Gulf Research Analysis and ILO report on the Hotel sector labor challenges summarized the key issue that the hotels are facing in Oman, which is a general lack of staff and then a lack of Omani staff (GRA, 2017). As per the report findings, with Omani staff, the hotels were facing a problem both to attract them and then to retain them. The reasons why the hotels are not able to attract and retain the Omani staff the report concludes as a result of the poor sector image in the largely still conservative society even management level work in the hotel is seen as negative. The report goes on to explain that working in the service role is undesirable and reflects badly on person's public image and on their family's image. Furthermore, the religious implications of especially women working or being around unknown men, alcohol and haram food as well as activities also hinder the interest of working in hotels (GRA, 2017). The report found out that some of the reasons behind low retention of Omanis were related to how the Omani employees themselves were treated by their supervisors from other countries as for example addressing people with respect and speaking kindly is taken for granted in Omani culture. The nature of work in the hotels is hard work in a busy environment and coping with this is seen as one of the reasons for the low retention rate of Omanis (ibid). The report suggests there should be a marketing campaign that would aim at changing the perception of tourism and working in hotels among the Omani youth and wider society, encouraging Omanis to join the sector. The report also encourages hotels to interact more closely with the tourism education providers regarding what are the exact skills that are needed and what exactly do the different jobs in hotels entail. As a partial solution to preventing the high turnover of Omani staff as per the report, is having a cultural understanding of the Omani employees, better communication with them and actively investing in their development as well as fostering a better working environment. (GRA, 2017.)

ILO consultation draft report about forming effective labor policy for the tourism industry in Oman (ILO, 2017) draws together the major tourism research that has been completed about employment in the tourism sector in the country. The report confirms the role of tourism sector for economic diversification due to it's potential to contribute to economic growth and generate employment, however, concludes that currently Omanis are not willing to work in it due to the intensity of work and the long unsocial working hours. The report calls for an image campaign to show the social acceptability

for working in the sector so that more Omanis would join tourism and related sectors, including women, especially in the rural areas. (ILO, 2017.)

A more recent study about the SME Ecosystem in Oman (Jansen, Halbe, Van Blitterswijk & Niewenhuijsen,2017), concluded that the lack of availability of skilled staff and managers are hindering the otherwise lucrative growth of the SMEs in the country.

There is a handful of research conducted about tourism education in Oman. Bontenbal, & Aziz, (2013) and Khan & Khrisnamurthy (2015) were studies about OTC students completing their diploma or bachelor's degrees. The results from the first research showed that nearly 75% of the students thought that the tourism industry jobs didn't fit the traditional values of culture and religion in Oman. The results from the second research supports the same finding, stating that the students though that Omani traditional values and non-tourism spouse preference discourage students to study tourism and to seek employment in tourism. Majority of the students also felt that expatriates were better suited to work in the hotels and restaurants in Oman. Between the years 2004-2010, only 25% of the graduated OTC students were employed in tourism on average (Bontenbal et al, 2013). Regarding the types of jobs available in tourism and what to expect as requirements for working in tourism, the students knew very little (ibid). Both research support recommendation that the tourism and hospitality educational institutes should include more practical exposure, including study visits and tours.

There are a range of current government initiatives to tackle the HR challenges in the sector. The Tanfeedh (2017) program originally had an initiative called Finding Solutions to Employment of Omanis in the tourism sector, but as all private sectors were facing similar issues, the initiative was merged together with the other target sectors, thus forming common goals for 2020. These common goals were such as doubling the amount of direct jobs for Omanis with 10,000 new jobs and raising the industry wide Omanisation ratio to 44% with sub-initiatives such as ICV-initiatives and human capital development, grace period of 2 years for new establishments and establishing sector associations to represent private sector views. The initiative has set steps in 2017 to

allow part time work both for students and others. In human resources development the country wide targets are to finalize the Oman Qualifications Framework (OQF), include technical and vocational training in the quality assessment system of education (0AAA), ensure 50% private sector participation in boards of training and education establishments, develop a national leadership development program and establish a National Center for Employment and enhancing SME development. The initiative also aims at enhancing the private sector attractiveness for Omanis by establishing a system for work environment measurement card, by enhancing the pension scheme for private sector employees and by forming sector organizations. Solutions for female labor force participation were included forming of a scorecard with incentives to create women-friendly work environment. The scorecard includes nurseries at work place, flexible work and promoting more women in boards. (Tanfeedh, 2018.)

In addition to the nation- wide Tanfeedh program, individual companies have their own Talent Management Programs. As Oman doesn't have an umbrella organization to represent the tourism sector companies and the best practices have not been shared. However, formation of Tourism Association is under way, as one of the initiatives of Tanfeedh (2017).

The tourism sector in Oman in clearly in need of more Omanis to join the industry. The sector has difficulties in finding Omanis as well as retaining the ones that they have. The question is that are there serious efforts to encourage Omanis, men and women, to join the industry? Out of the Tanfeedh initial 15 initiatives, one was originally called Finding Solutions to Employ Omanis in the Tourism sector, but it was which was then later combined with other sector labor issues. However, the follow up report on implementing the initiatives has readopted the initiative with the understanding that it is not possible to develop the sector without starting to plan a serious roadmap for human capital investment as a support.

3.2 Women in Tourism and in Oman

The importance of women in tourism has been well globally acknowledged, both in the context of developing countries in especially in decreasing poverty and globally in empowering women economically. UN Women and United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) have been working together since 2008 towards gender equality and economic empowerment of women in the tourism industry. In 2007, the annual World Tourism Day theme was dedicated for women under the slogan "Tourism Opening Doors for Women", spreading awareness of the opportunities that tourism has for women. Global Report on Women in Tourism (UNWTO & UN Women, 2010) was the first survey that mapped women's participation in the tourism sector worldwide. It states that tourism provided a wide range of income generating opportunities for women, especially in the developing regions. Globally tourism industry is seen to provide better opportunities for women than many other sectors for employment, entrepreneurship, and leadership (ibid). Similarly, more recent report by World Bank (2017) about Women and Tourism: Designing for Inclusion, states that in some countries tourism has almost double the number of females working in the sector than in other sectors, offering significant opportunities not just for employment but to have their own enterprises (more than 50% in Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand and Latin America).

However, in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, women in tourism are under-represented in line with the general female labor force participation rate between men and women, which is the highest in the world with estimated 53% gap (ibid). MENA region is also lagging the more matured tourism markets in terms of gender diversity, but companies are beginning to realize the importance of women to their successful operations (HotelierMiddleEast, 2017). Women at the top of tourism corporates are even less, with 5% representation at Managing Director level and 4% as owners (World Bank, 2017). This is reflected in the region in the publication by Hotelier Middle East (2018) of the 50 most powerful hospitality influencers in hospitality in the Middle East for the past two years, of which none were women.

Even globally the women in tourism face several challenges, such as gender stereotyping and discrimination (World Bank, 2017). The report comments that women in worldwide tourism remain underpaid, underutilized, under-educated and under-represented worldwide (ibid). The report recommends increasing awareness of the women's role in tourism as well as improving the working conditions for women. Working conditions improves include improving maternity leave coverage, flexible working hours, distance work and assistance with child care. World Bank (2017), stakeholder recommendations include private sector to promote gender equality and women's empowerment and policy makers to proactively include gender in tourism policies, using as a tool their Gender Strategy for Tourism. The strategy consists of analyzing the current situation of women in the country using different available data to find out are there gender gaps in employment, entrepreneurship or the voice/agency of women as well as to understand how and why women's needs are different from men's needs in the tourism sector. Such available data can be World Bank Gender Data and ILO reports. Questions such as if there are social norms or morals preventing women from working alongside men or in roles typically occupied by men, should be asked. In case gaps exists, suggestions for actions in terms of bringing up the number of women employed in tourism or women entrepreneurs in tourism should be planned for. This may include training for gender issues as well as taking into consideration the gender sensitivity in messages or imagery in marketing For monitoring and evaluation, World Bank (2017) has created a framework for Tourism Gender Results that are aimed at improving business results, expanding trade and market opportunities, strengthening productivity and opening marketing and increasing the female voice and agency through measures that recruit, retain, promote and develop female employees in tourism. (World Bank, 2017.)

3.2.1 Women in Oman

Women in Oman in general have officially been invited to take part in building the country and society since 1970 when HM Sultan Qaboos started the rebuilding of the country. Since then Omani women have been increasingly active in education, society and politics. The have equal rights for education, health and job vacancies. They have the right to their own properties and can own government land. Women work both in

the public and private sector comprising 33% of the work force. This is still a little less than 13 % of the total women of working age in 2017. In 2016, 42% of the employees in the public sector are women compared with the private sector of 25%. Education and the health sector are most popular places for employment for Omani women, having 60% in 2016 of the total workforce women. Service sector attracted the least number of women in the same year, representing only 14%. The unemployed rate for women in 2017 was 31 %. In August 2018 there are several Omani women representatives in high places in the government, including the Minister of Higher Education, Undersecretary of the Ministry of Tourism, Minister of Education and President of the General Authority for Craft Industries. Although Oman is an absolute Monarchy, its' political system includes democratically voted consultative council, Al Shura and the State Council which is appointed by the sultan. Women have had the right to vote as the first country in the GCC in 1994 and they have been able to set themselves for candidates since 2000. In the last election of 2015 women received 7 of the 84 seats in the Al Shura Council. Currently 18 % of the State Council are women. (MOSD, 2018.)

A study about Omani Women Employment (Al Hasani, 2015) states that Omani women remain highly influenced by culture, religion and family roles in choosing their careers. The study concluded that third party choice, by the husband's or father's or brother's, conclude their career decisions and that gender role attitudes, that a man is the main supporter of the family and the importance of motherhood, affect their career choice, or the choice of even having a career. Omani women are deeply respectful of cultural traditions, values and norms of what is appropriate for women and what is not. Self-respect and dignity matter them a great deal and the study found that the women considered that these values are more tolerated in the public than private sector. Career decision is affected by constraints of family culture, religion and gender roles as well as social expectations limit the choice of work place choice. Tourism sector and hotels particularly are unwanted, due to "required interaction with people from foreign cultures, the Western lifestyle and bars". Study on current attitudes and perceptions of women's status in Oman society from university students, showed that 63 % of Omani male participants preferred their wives to stay at home to take care of the family. And most of the men also did not want their bosses to be females. (Al Omairi & Amzat, 2012).

Even though all educational fields are open and accessible for Omani women, and they can decide themselves their fields of study, the final decision often heavily influenced by the family.

Family in the Middle East is both defined by Arab culture and Islamic religion. Al-Barwani & Albeely (2007) state that honor of the family is based on the sexual behavior of the woman, fathers choose husbands for their daughters and husbands order wives not to work and tell them how many children they should bear. The interconnectedness of the family ties, the kinship networks, encourage or discourage the liberation of women and their participation in working life, depending on the ethnic and socio-economic background of the family in question (ibid). Al Hasani (2015) argues that most families in Oman do allow their women to work. Omani women are flocking to the private sector and are hugely involved in establishing private investments in pursuit of independence, thus showing that attitudes are changing in Oman lead by the education for girls which has made a change in the goals, attitudes and characteristics of previous generations (Al Barawani and Albeely, 2007). Al Hasani (2015) supports this statement by stating that women under 30s are more open minded and culturally flexible.

Al Barwani and Albeely (2007) in their paper about the Strengths and Challenges of Omani Family, are having a hopeful view of the future of Omani women 'due to the globalization and modernization movement that is taking place in Oman where many of the traditional roles prescribed to men and women are becoming more loosely defined and both men and women are becoming equal partners in marriage'. The confidence and independence of Omani women are increasing, and they are taking more responsibility about their lives. Education and employment opportunities has changed their roles from dependent consumer to independent co-provider. Certainly, the Omani society is undergoing a paradigm shift in the role of women in the society and world of work, and the country is finding its way to define their women more broadly than earlier.

At the government level, the women's development and concerns are dealt at a special directorate called Women's Affairs, under the Directorate General of Family Development in the Ministry of Social Development. The dedicated directorate's

responsibility is capacity building of women, encouraging women to take actively part in development programs, family life and community affairs, plan and conduct programs for women and initiate as well as conduct studies and research related to women's role in the society (MOSD, 2017). The directorate is also responsible for the Omani Women's Associations, which have been influential in women empowerment in Oman (OWA, 2017). There are currently 58 associations around Oman. The associations are in high regard by the Omani community and are by default always consulted in activities targeted at women.

In the business context, the women are represented at the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI), in the Women's Entrepreneur Committee. The committee encourages the women to set up businesses and supports business women through conferences and networking events (OCCI, 2018).

Omani media has actively presented the female Omani achievers. For example, the country's only English magazine for women, The Women Magazine (2018), holds an annual awards ceremony for female showcasing the accomplishments of Omani women in different fields. Muscat Daily newspaper (2018) holds an annual celebration of Oman Woman of the Year, including women achievers from different backgrounds and fields. The coverage of Omani women is not only during the award ceremonies of during Omani Women's Day events, but through out the year,

Women's rights and issues at the world or work are represented at Oman's General Federation of Trade Unions (GFTU). It has a special committee called The Committee of The Working Women in place to encourage more women to join the world of work, especially to the private sector and to improve their social, cultural and health wellbeing. The Committee has been in place since 2010 and has actively lobbied for a new addition to the Omani labor legislation for employers to provide a day-nursery area for female workers' children and to arrange for breast-feeding breaks for mothers. The chairperson of the committee is also a representative of the implementation follow up group for CEDAW. Oman has signed the ILO declaration of Elimination of All forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 2005, meaning Oman supports the universal

rights of women to work, right to have same job opportunities and same salaries for same jobs as men and that Omani women can freely choose their career and job (Al Gharibi, 2017). Legal researcher for the General Federation of Labor Unions (GFTU) of the country is pointing out in his article about how far Oman has reached CEDAW aims, that although the country has made good progress there is still development areas for example, Omani women are restricted from working during the night, except for public services, and that the maternity leave of 60 days is for three births only as for the fourth delivery the mother has to use either sick leave or unpaid leave (Al Gharibi, 2017).

Women and men, as per Al Omairi et al. (2012) are equally respected in Oman as participants of the society and they share the responsibility of country's progress as has been called for by the leader of the Sultanate, HM Sultan Qaboos. His speech about women representing half of the country's potential and acknowledging that if Oman doesn't give women equal rights it would be only using 50% of the resources, is widely quoted and serves as an inspiration for further continuous development of women's rights in the country. As a recommendation to enhance the women's status in Oman, Al Omairi et al (2012) suggested that the government should supervise the private sector to protect equal job opportunities for women and to give women the same political power as men.

3.2.2 Omani Women in Tourism

Currently there is limited research data about Omani women in tourism, regarding who they are, at what level they work and what kind of challenges they face at work place and in the society. In 2016 there were a total of 4495 women employed in tourism, representing 3% of the tourism sector employees (MOT, 2018).

Al Mazroei (2017), studied in her doctoral thesis women entrepreneurs in tourism SMEs by exploring if the activity empowers them. Previously she did her master's degree thesis by interviewing Omani women in tourism industry (Mazroei, 2010). She developed a conceptual framework for explaining the empowering and disempowering

factors affecting the lived experiences of Omani women in Tourism Entrepreneurship, as shown in Image 6.

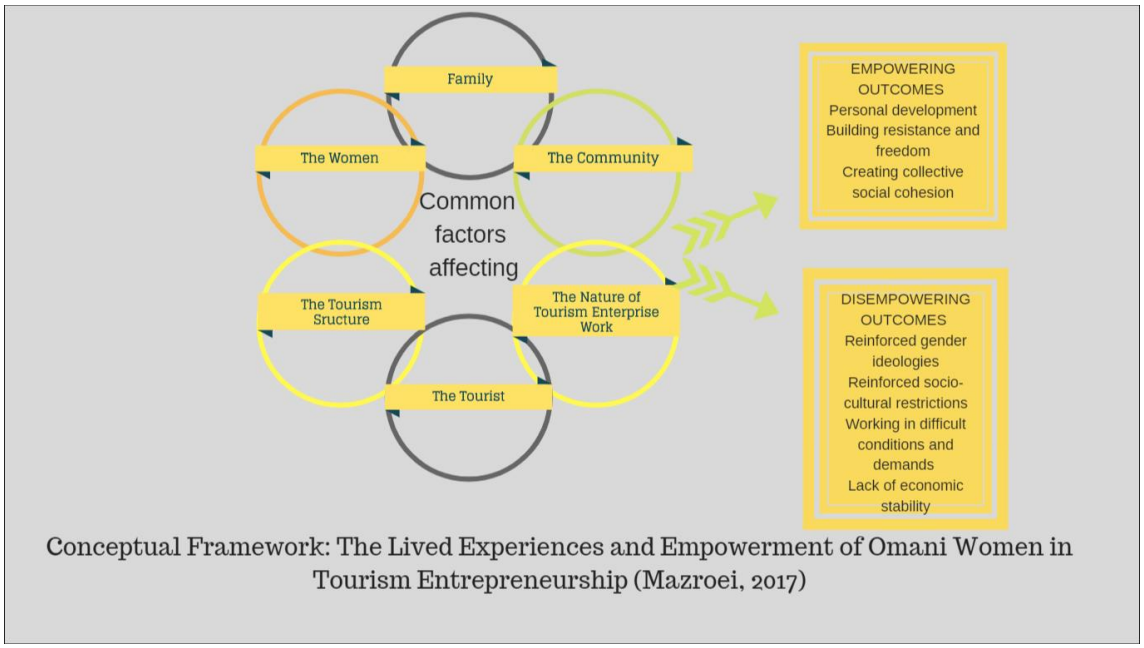

Image 6. Conceptual Framework: The Lived Experiences and Empowerment of Omani Women in Tourism Entrepreneurship by Al Mazroei, (2017) based on original framework.

The disempowering factors for women's empowerment in tourism entrepreneurship, she listed the family, elaborating that it had negative effect as families were considered enforcing patriarchal power as well as enforcing traditional gender roles and responsibilities. She argues that the existing gender ideologies and socio-cultural restrictions related to the social institution of the family, are difficult to remove or challenge.

Al Mazroei's (2017) findings about the disempowering factors for women's empowerment in tourism entrepreneurship, similarly to the family, she listed society, elaborating that it had negative effect as society was enforcing existing conservative power structures. The community plays a strong cultural and social role in women's lives in Oman. Conservatism is an existing socio-cultural restriction that is found in the general society of Oman towards women's progress and development (Mazroei, 2017). There is a conflict between modern western tourism and Islamic cultures, with tourism

seen to dilute the interpretation of Islamic culture by continuing to explain that the behavior and dress of tourists, sexual permissiveness, gambling and consumption of pork and alcohol are seen to be in appropriate (Burns & Cooper,1997). A careful approach has thus been adopted by many Muslim societies as they want to protect their communities and culture from the western influence of in-coming modern tourism (Mazroei, 2017, as cited in Raum and Conlin, 1997).

Al Mazroei's (2017) research findings about female empowerment through tourism entrepreneurship included some positive effects such as overcoming gender challenges by forming a positive identity, proving themselves and finally gaining their families support. The positive effects also included developing cultural exchange with tourists by educating them about the heritage and culture of Oman and promoting their modern identity thus changing perceptions of the tourists about Omani women and benefiting others by giving back to the country in promoting Oman internationally and preserving Omani culture and heritage. (Mazroei, 2017.)

Afifi and Al Sherif (2013), in their research about Women's Occupational Empowerment in Oman's Tourism Sector concluded that the shortage of the tourism awareness exists as a major reason for misunderstanding the context of women's work in tourism. This is confirmed by Al Mazroei's (2017) findings that educational campaigns are needed to create awareness and understanding among families and wider community about opportunities for women in tourism entrepreneurship, thus possibly helping in promoting better acceptance towards women's entrepreneurial activities and encourage other women to start up a business in tourism industry.

At a national level, it is feasible for Oman to support the access of women to the world of work in general, and to ensure that the women's career choices are supported by the society and families. Private sector has lacked behind in employing and attracting women, and it needs to step up their efforts. Tourism sector has not been considered a respectable and reliable career choice for women and to change the current situation, the perception of the sector in the minds of the society, family and women including tourism students themselves need to be influenced. Raising the awareness about

tourism sector in Oman in general and the available jobs with career paths can be a start in the long journey of changing perceptions.

3.3 Linking CSR and SDGS in Tourism

Tourism sector has been one of the pioneering sectors in embarking on CSR programs. The sector is now also among the pioneering sectors which is aligning their CSR goals with the global sustainable development goals (SDGs) of the United Nations.

Corporate Social Responsibility is defined in various ways. World Business Council's version is commonly used:

> The commitment of business to contribute to sustainable economic development, working with employees, their families, the local community and society at large to improve their quality of life (WBC, 2018)

A more recent definition by United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO, 2017) defines CSR as:

> The company's aim to balance their social responsibility, environmental protection and economic progress of operations while meeting the different ethical standards and the stakeholder expectations.

The last definition is widely known as the triple bottom line, established by Elkington (2018), who as a sustainability consultant recommended companies to extend their traditional reporting which concentrated only in the financial performance of the business in the form of profit and loss account. The extension included planet account and people account. Planet account reports the environmental responsibility of the company and people account the social responsibility of the company. Elkington has, tough, explained in his recent article in Harward Business Review, that after 25 years of having coined the concept of triple bottom line, he feels that the companies have still not adapted the concept seriously (Elkington, 2018).

The common notion in all the different definitions of CSR is that it is voluntary by nature and that the companies can opt how and what they want to report about the CSR efforts.

CSR activities should be more than just the bare legal requirements for the companies (Banerjee, 2008).

3.3.1 CSR in Oman

The meaning of CSR in the Middle East can be seen different to what is has been understood to be in the Western countries. CSR is used in the region in the context of assisting with social and economic issues that are seen to hinder the development of the country's progress. It has not been focusing much on the consumer and the environmental sustainability. The status of CSR in Oman is a norm in doing business and companies acknowledge the importance of their impact on social development. (Informa Middle East, 2015).

Oil and gas sector in Oman have developed in cooperation with the Omani government a sector-wide program to enhance the socio-economic benefits through its' core and value chain activities and social investment programs. The program is called In Country Value (ICV) Development Program. The program establishes the total funds used within the country (where the business operates, in this case Oman) that can benefit business development, contribute to human capacity development and stimulate the country's economic productivity (Ministry of Oil and Gas, 2018). All oil and gas companies, including subcontractors, need to have a strategic plan for ICV including areas such as Omanisation, training of Omanis, local sourcing of goods and subcontracted services, development of Omani suppliers and development of training, education and research & development institutions (ibid). A recent research has recommended that a similar program should be initiated in the tourism sector in Oman (Jansen, Halbe, Van Blitterswijk & Niewenhuijsen (2017).

3.3.2 Linking CSR with UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

In 2015 United Nations member states signed the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development together with 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The aim of the goals is to fight the global economic, social and environmental challenges that the planet faces together with governments and businesses. This is the first time that the business community was involved widely in the process of establishing the goals, as the previous United Nations Millennium Development Goals from 2000 to 2015 were mainly an affair between the developing countries, governments and development agencies (UN, 2017).

SDSs consist of 17 wider goals across a wide range of interconnected topics from the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development. Each goal is further divided into targets, which total 169 together. Each target has been set with 1-2 indicators. The goals can be used both in developing and developed countries as they are universal. The UN member countries' governments have included them into their national strategies and economic plans. The businesses can play and are expected to play an active part in realizing the SDGs in the countries where they operate. (UN, 2018.)

Image 7. United Nations Sustainable Goals (UN, 2017).

United Nations Global Compact, an initiative by UN aiming to ensure that the businesses worldwide would be socially responsible and adopt sustainable policies, is describing themselves as 'The world's largest corporate social responsibility initiative – a call to companies to align strategies and operations with universal principles on human rights, labor, environment, and anti-corruption and take actions that advance societal goals' (UN Global Compact, 2015). The Global Compact is offering various ways in which they are assisting to adopt the SDGs, such as platforms to advance responsible business activities and fill in the gaps in meeting the SDGs, offering inspiring best practice stories and encouraging companies to partner with UN. Global Compact has partnered with the leading CSR reporting company Global Reporting (GRI) and World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD) in compiling a guide for companies on how to adopt the SDGs called SDG Compass. The main message of the guide is that SDGs can be interpreted into making business sense as the companies can identify business opportunities, enhance the value of CSR, strengthen the stakeholder relationship as well as keep up with the policy developments as well as stabilize societies and markets. SDGs encourage companies to reduce their negative impact while enhancing their positive contribution. The business case is that by integrating sustainability across the value chain of the company can protect and create value for themselves by increasing sales, developing new markets, strengthening their brand, improving operational efficiency, stimulating product innovation and reducing employee turnover (UN Global Compact, 2015).

United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) urges tourism companies worldwide to adopt the SDGs in the form of responsible tourism. The organization assists tourism companies to do this by initiatives such as Tourism and Biodiversity, Tourism and Climate Change, Hotel Energy Solutions, Ethics and Social Responsibility Programs and Pro-poor Tourism ST-EP. (UNWTO, 2017). Tourism is considered an important tool in reducing poverty and ensuring economic growth in the world. This is reflected in SDG 8, the goal about Sustainable Development and Economic Growth, as it has a dedicated objective to Responsible Tourism (UN, 2018).

In 2017, KPMG included for the first time SGDs in their annual Survey of Corporate Responsibility Reporting by looking into if the companies were including SDGs in their reporting and how they were accomplishing it (KPMG, 2017). The survey concluded that two years into the SDGs, the companies are in increasing numbers integrating SDGs into their corporate social reporting, with 43% of the world's largest corporates and 39% of the national largest companies having done so. The survey predicts that the SDGs will be playing an increasing part in the corporate responsibility reporting in the next two to three years. (KPMG,2017.)

Similarly, PriceWaterhouseCoopers in their Make it Your Business: Engaging with the Sustainable Development Goals (2015) reports that 71% of the companies are planning to engage with the SDGs and 41% are including the SDGs in their strategies within five years. The view of the public was that 90% stated that they considered it important that the businesses adopt the SDGs. (PriceWaterhouseCoopers,2015).

Oman's efforts to adopt the SDGs is spearheaded by the Supreme Council for Planning. The council is responsible for developing strategies and policies to achieve sustainable development in the Sultanate of Oman. His Majesty, Sultan Qaboos's words act as a guiding principle for sustainable development in the sultanate:

> Development is not an end in itself: it is for building human; Its tool and its maker. Then sustainable development should not stop on the concept of wealth and building the economy, it should go beyond that to accomplish human's progress and to find the citizen who is capable to contribute greatly and consciously in constructing the country

All the different ministries in the sultanate must submit their projects for the 5-year plans to the Supreme Council for approval. The Council reviews the plan from the sustainability side, in addition to the social and economic aspects, before they are approved by the Cabinet and Parliament. The Supreme Council is keen in streamlining the Oman's sustainable development in line with the SDGs. The sultanate's digital

government projects such as the E-Admissions System for education has been aligned with SDG 4; Quality Education, Endangered Turtle Tracking System has been aligned with SDG 14; Life Below Water and Control of Desertification Project has been aligned with SDG 15; Life on Land. The Sultanate has also already signed several partnerships for SDGs, such as the Global Partnership for Sustainable Tourism. (Al Burtamani, 2017).

The higher education sector in the sultanate has highlighted the role of the higher education in achieving the goals of the sustainable development 2030 by hosting a workshop in April, 2018 about 'urging academics and those in higher education to share their views and suggestions for best ways of transforming knowledge in higher education institutions to support the goals of sustainable development' (Muscat Daily, 2018).

3.3.3 Closer look at SDGs for Lady Leaders in Tourism Network

Linking OTC Lady Leaders in Tourism Network with the SDGs when establishing it as CSR program would give added value for the tourism industry, stakeholders and Oman Tourism Colleges. In addition to forming an important platform for advancing women's careers in tourism, the added value is the easiness of reporting the program in line with the initiatives that they are involved with already as a part of their CSR efforts to work towards the global SDGs. The above is especially applicable to the international tourism and hospitality companies in Oman. For those companies who do not yet have an established CSR program, Lady Leaders in Tourism Network Program would be a ready-made solution as a start. For Oman Tourism College the CSR program when aligned with SDGs presents the college's forward- thinking approach as a leading tourism education provider that is keen on developing responsible tourism in partnership with the public and private sector.

Out of the 17 goals, three are best suited for the OTC Lady Leaders in Tourism Network as CSR Program; goals 4 – Quality Education, goal 5 - Gender Equality, and number 8 – Decent Work and Economic Growth.

The goal of SDG 4, Quality Education, is to 'Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all' (UN, 2017). Among the goals is a target to achieve gender equality through education. It has been generally acknowledged that SDG 4, can be the key for accelerating to reach the other SDGs. In UNESCO's Framework for Action for SDG 4 – Education 2030 (2015), the baseline statement sees education as:

> Inclusive and crucial in promoting democracy and human rights and enhancing global citizenship, tolerance and civic engagement as well as sustainable development. It facilitates intercultural dialog and fosters respect for cultural, religious and linguistic diversity; which are vital for social cohesion and justice

Among the UNESCO suggested strategies for achieving the SGD 4, is to develop partnerships between public and private sectors, including employers and unions (UNESCO, 2015).

As OTC Lady Leaders in Tourism Network is a concept by Oman Tourism College, an educational establishment and as the aim of the network has been to promote education and employment for women in tourism sector through partnerships with the tourism industry and stakeholders, as it supports targets 4.3, 4.4 and 4.7. The first target calls for equal access for all men and women to affordable and quality education at all levels. The second target calls for substantially increasing the amount of youth and adults to employment, decent work and entrepreneurship. The last one calls for ensuring sustainable development to be taught for all learners through education for sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development. (UN, 2017).

UN Global Compact (2017) suggests several suitable business actions in line with SDG 4 including engaging with educational institutions, providing incentives for employees to continue their studies, articulating company's business care for women's empowerment

and the positive inclusion for men as well as women and including information about gender equality and sustainable development in internal policies. United Nations World Tourism Organization's (UNWTO) suggestions for tourism companies for the same goal includes conducting training programs for tourists, employees and society about awareness on how to practice tourism in a sustainable way. The organization is urging companies to be establish and be involved with community development projects as means to work towards the goal. (UNWTO, 2017.)

The goal of SDG 5, Gender Equality, is to 'Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls' (UN, 2017). The below targets can be seen as suitable for OTC Lady Leaders in Tourism Network as one of the main aims has been to increase the number of females in the tourism sector in Oman in all levels of the businesses, thus supporting two specific targets; 5.1 and 5.2. The first target calls for ending all forms of discrimination against women and girls everywhere. The second one calls for ensuring full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision making in political, economic and public life. (UN, 2017.)

Supporting women's leadership and implementing gender-sensitive recruitment and retention practices are among the suggested business actions for companies to work towards goal 5 (UN Global Compact, 2017). Companies are suggested to actively empower women through community investment programs such as female leadership programs as well as supporting women-owned enterprises (ibid). UNWTO suggests tourism companies to promote measures that guarantee the same labor rights and opportunities for women, ensuring access to qualified jobs for them. UNWTO further suggests that the companies pay special attention to the communities where they operate to work together with them to ensure equal opportunities for women and girls (UNWTO, 2017.)

Goal of SDG 8, Decent Work and Economic Growth is to 'Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all' (UN, 2017). Targets 8.5, 8.6 and 8.9 suit the network objectives. The first target calls for achieving full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men,

including young people and persons with disabilities and equal pay for work of equal value. The second one calls for substantially reducing the proportion of youth not in employment, education or training. The last one calls for developing policies to promote sustainable tourism that creates jobs and promotes local culture and products. (UN, 2017.)

UN Global Compact's (2017) suggestions for business actions main aim is to foster productive local employment through supporting vocational education, job-oriented training programs and building partnerships with educational institutions to create a pipeline for skilled workers, to identify future skills needs and to create jobs in the supply chain. UNWTO's (2017) suggestions support the same actions by stating that companies should ensure jobs are provided throughout the value chain by hiring local people and using enterprises. The fact that one target has been allocated to responsible tourism alone, emphasizes both the importance and the potential that tourism has in creating jobs and fostering sustainable prosperity.

To conclude three of the SDGs, suit very well the aims and objectives Lady Leaders in Tourism Network: 4 Quality Education, 5 Gender Equality and 8 Decent Work and Economic Growth. Linking OTC Lady Leaders in Tourism Network with the SDGs when establishing it as CSR program would give added value for the tourism industry as well as stakeholder partners. The added value, in addition to participating in the important platform itself, is the easiness of reporting the program in line with the initiatives that they are involved with as a part of their CSR efforts to work towards the global SDGs. Furthermore, the activities of the Lady Leaders in Tourism Network itself, can assist in raising awareness of the other SDGs as well, especially in line with responsible tourism which relies heavily on the beauty and preservation of the natural resources of the sultanate.

3.3.4 Example from Hospitality Industry – Hyatt CSR Program

Hyatt Incorporation, with their 13 brands, over 600 properties in over 50 countries with staff of 45,000 has been a trendsetter in CSR in the hospitality sector. In 2017 the company aligned their CSR efforted with the SDGs. (Hyatt Corporation, 2018).

The chain has continuously featured as among the top companies worldwide in international workplace awards having ranked 2nd for Great Places to Work 100 Best Workplaces for Diversity 2017, 23rd Great Places to Work 50 Best Workplaces for Giving Back 2017 and 9th for FORTUNE 100 Best Companies to Work For 2018. Their CSR program, called Hyatt Thrive, has been in operation since 2011. Hyatt explains that to be able to create world class guest experiences, the company needs to support their staff, enrich the communities where they operate, look after the planet, source products sustainably and protect the human rights. (Hyatt Corporation, 2018.)

Hyatt supports their staff by promoting well-being and fostering inclusion and diversity. The company has established a Well-Being Council to guide the development of their well-being program. The program currently consists of efforts to assist the staff to take care of their mind, body and spirit with continuous learning opportunities, exercise and relaxation spaces and volunteering possibilities, to name a few. Hyatt's diversity and inclusion framework are based on their statement:

"the more globally inclusive we are, in terms of culture, race, ethnic origin, gender, sexual orientation, age, abilities, perspectives and styles of thinking, the stronger, more culturally invested and valued Hyatt will be globally as we continue to care for people to be their best" (Hyatt Corporation, 2018.)

As a key element in their diversity and inclusion efforts, Hyatt has established dedicated groups called Diversity Business Resource Groups (DBRG), to bring together and empower staff members with similar cultural background, gender, race, age or interest. The groups have links to different areas of Hyatt operations such as supporting recruitment, CSR activities, staff mentoring and building Hyatt brand externally within their focus groups. Existing DBRG groups include Hyatt Women, Hyatt Black, Hyatt Disabilities and Hyatt HyPride, among others. Hyatt aligns their support for staff CSR efforts with SGDs 5 – Gender Equality, 8 – Decent Work and Economic Growth and 10 – Reduced Inequalities. (Hyatt Corporation, 2018.)

Enriching the communities according to Hyatt means that the company shares their time and resources to help the local people and community where they operate. This includes

volunteering by staff, funding local NGOs, creating opportunities for youth and responding to disasters. In 2017 Hyatt's charitable donations summed 12.4 Million USD. Hyatt's Global Month of Community Service initiate collects together all the Hyatt hotels in the month of April each year to give back to local community. Hyatt is aligning these CSR efforts with SDG 4 – Quality Education, SDG 8 – Decent Work and Economic Growth and SDG 10 – Reduced Inequalities. (Hyatt Corporation, 2018.)

Caring for planet initiatives by Hyatt is set out in their 2020 environmental sustainability vision whereby the company aims to reduce energy, greenhouse gases emissions and usage of water by 25% by the end of 2020 from 2016. Diverting landfill waste, recycling materials as hotels are being renovated and reducing food waste are also key focus points. Hyatt is aligning these CSR efforts with SDGs 6 – Clean Water and Sanitation, 7 – Affordable and Clean Energy, 12 – Responsible Consumption and Production and 13 – Climate Action. (Hyatt Corporation, 2018.)

As a part of Hyatt's human rights commitment, the company trained 51,000 staff members about combatting human trafficking as well as included the human trafficking training as a brand standard. Hyatt is aligning these CRS efforts with SDGs 8 – Decent Work and Economic Growth, 10 – Reduced Inequalities and 16 – Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions. (Hyatt Corporation, 2018.)

Sourcing products sustainably at Hyatt is looked at both across the supplier chain where their major suppliers have already established sustainability policies as well as at brand standard level where all Hyatt companies are to incorporate sustainability in their purchasing criteria by the end of 2018. As a key focal point Hyatt has taken the responsible seafood purchasing, together with World Wildlife Fund (WWF) as they have worked together since 2012 in establishing holistic global sustainable seafood goal. Hyatt also has initiatives for sourcing food from local and organic food suppliers. Hyatt is requiring their own properties to be LEED or equivalent certified and others to follow their sustainable design guidelines which have been included in the brand technical standards for owners and developers. The company has aligned these CSR efforts with

SDGs 8 – Decent Work and Economic Growth, 12 – Responsible Consumption and Production, 14 – Life Below Water and 15 – Life on Land. (Hyatt Corporation, 2018.)

4 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

This research was designed using the principles of applied insider action research. The data collection was conducted through focus group discussions which were then transcribed and analyzed using inductive thematic analysis. Literature review was carried on during the entire research process. The findings of the 1st focus group discussions were later validated by another focus group'

The approach of action research focuses on action and research, at the same time, in a participatory way (Coghlan & Brannik, 2010). As per Gray (2014) there are different types of action research, but all share the below features:

There is a demographic partnership between the researcher and research participants and the research subjects are also researchers
The research can be seen as a change agent
The direct experiences of the research participants are used as data

Out of the different types of action research, the author has used insider action research. In insider action research, the researcher is usually aiming at developing (Coghlan & et. Al., 2014). The advantages are seen that the researcher can use the accumulated personal information about the workplace and is familiar with the people and culture of the organization. The disadvantages are that the researcher might have difficulty of maintaining a sense of detachment. Furthermore, the researcher may experience difficulties in crossing departmental, hierarchical or network boundaries. (Gray, 2014.)

Action research method was chosen as the aim of the research was to develop the OTC Lady Leaders in Tourism Network so that it could be used as a tool to assist the female students of OTC to start a career in tourism industry. Insider action research reflected the authors work as Director of Quality for Vocational and Professional Studies, in which capacity she had developed the network initially.

4.1 Action Research Process and Application in This Research

Action research process is cyclical, consisting of often overlapping phases of planning, action, observation and evaluation of action (Gray, 2014, as cited in Stringer, 2013). Thomas (2009) views the core of action research as:

> The research is done by practitioners at their own initiative and will
> The focus is on developing the practice and empowering practitioners
> Commitment for change and action, based on reflection
> Involves moving forward building on the results by using the cycle of planning, action, reflection and re-planning.

Participatory approach is essential to the successful action research endeavor. The people in the organization who are concerned with the topic or area being researched should be invited somehow to be involved in the process. Other important collaborative sources can be critical colleagues, advisor or mentor, action research colleagues, managers or fellow professionals who would comment on the research in its various phases. The stakeholders should be involved in the planning phase so that the goals of the research can be further clarified, and possible permissions and research action plan can be agreed upon. (Gray, 2014.)

The author had decided early on in her MBA studies in the autumn of 2016, on the topic of her thesis to be involved with OTC Lady Leaders in Tourism Network and had obtained the permission of the college management for this. The key research question in the beginning was to formalize the network and an element of that had remained in the research, even though the research questions did evolve limiting the topic to a feasible size. Instead of looking at how the network can be developed to better respond to the needs of all its members, the focus was kept at OTC female students. Instead of including the organizing of the 2017 network event, only data collection part in the event was kept in the plan. Female students and staff were involved in planning of the event, where the data collection took place.

4.1.1 Focus Group Discussion as Data Collection Technique

Focus group can be defined as an organized discussion among chosen participants with the objective of obtaining their views on a chosen topic (Gray, 2014). As per Harrel and Bratley (2009), the consensus in the research about focus group, is that the interaction should include research. The academics in various fields adopted the research tool of focus groups from the marketing industry, which had initially used it for gaining understanding of the customer views of products in the 1940's.

Benefits of focus groups as per Steward et al (2015) include the 'Robust versatility for sharing light on almost any topic or issue'. This is possible through the collective interactive method of the tool, as the participants are engaged not only with the moderator but with the other participants as well, thus enabling a broader examination of the various viewpoints. The moderator's role remains then to facilitate the discussion. Gray (2014) adds to the list of benefits the researcher being able to 'explore the feelings, attitudes, beliefs, prejudices, reactions and experiences of subjects, in a way that would not be accessible through other approaches such as observation, interview or survey.' Lindlof and Taylor (2002) explain one more key benefit called the cascade effect, where the conversation triggers ideas in other participants through listening to other people's memories and lived experiences about shared common experiences. Halcomb et al. (2007) lists among the strengths the potential to become the catalyst for change both during and after the focus group.

Limitations of focus groups generally are if the results can be generalized, is the sample frame representative enough and are the moderators capable to create a confidential and open environment (Gray, 2014).

4.1.2 Data Analysis – Inductive Thematic Analysis

Krueger (2015), a widely respected authority on focus groups, states that focus group analysis needs to incorporate four qualities: systematic, verifiable, sequential and consequential. For the analysis to be systematic there must be a clear, transparent and

logical analysis plan that then has been followed. Verifiable means that in case another researcher would examine the data, the researcher would come to the same findings and conclusions. A verifiable flow of documentation evidence should be shown from the focus group discussion transcripts to the final conclusions. Sequential analysis takes into consideration the plan for recruitment strategy for the most suitable participants, training of moderators, choosing appropriate discussion questions, debriefing of moderators and securing that the capturing of the data. Analysis is consequential as the data is being analyzed continuously. When one focus group is over the rough data can be used to develop the questions and themes for the next groups. (Krueger, 2015.)

Inductive thematic analysis helps to identify and analyze patterns within the data. A patterned response reflects something important in the data in relation to the research question. The researcher needs to evaluate when there are enough instances to be counted as a theme, as quantity doesn't necessarily reflect the importance or value of the theme. (Braun & Clarke, 2006.) The possible limitations as according to Braun and Clarke (2006), are that the researcher might just paraphrase the focus group discussion or that the analysis is weak, instead of developing an analytic narrative.

In analyzing the data, Braun and Clarke (2006) have identified 6 phases in using the inductive thematic analysis; familiarizing with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing the themes, defining and naming the themes and producing a report.

The data collection was carried out in three simultaneous focus group discussions in conjunction with the 2017 network event. The preliminary results were distributed within OTC after one month by email. Based on the results, the author suggested changes in OTC, but the changes did not materialize. After having unsuccessfully initiated actions for the changes several times with lukewarm replies and promises, the author concluded to embark in the next phase in insider action research cycle: re-planning. Having analyzed the results of the focus group discussions in depth, the author decided to include the results in the next 2018 network event. The presumption was that with the support and pressure of the tourism industry members, the change in

actions would happen at the college. Thus, a new cycle started with re-planning. To get the support from the industry members of the network, the author formed an advisory group with a few key network members, to take the results of the focus groups further and ensure that the network is developed accordingly. The advisory group functioned in line with the insider action research recommendations for including validating colleagues to review the research results. The discussion with the advisory group was a dialogue. In this case the action and reflection happened at the same time, thus overlapping of phases materialized. The advisory group discussion notes were used as data collection method, but he discussion itself yielded results and recommendations for actions on how the network can be developed to suit the purpose. Literature review continued throughout the research process, as new angles emerged, and new data was published. Research data was collected through focus group discussions and advisory group dialogue. The data was analyzed using inductive thematic analysis

4.1.3 Inductive Thematic Analysis in This Research

Familiarization with the data phase was conducted through listening to the audio recordings of the three focus group discussions and doing the transcript. Generating initial codes phase materialized through rewriting the three transcripts by summarizing the content of each focus group into key words and keeping some of the most powerful quotes. The three summaries were then combined. Emerging themes were identified through using a mind map (Appendix 7) of the key words. The themes were reviewed by drafting a new summary table based on the mind map results reallocating some of the codes to another theme or merging some together. (Appendix 6). The themes were defined and names, and in some cases renamed, to better reflect the stories that the themes told. Finally, a brief preliminary report was produced by revisiting the transcripts to identify more quotes fitting the themes to reflect the original research questions and the literature review that supported the research findings.

4.2 Organizing Focus Group Discussion and Participant Recruitment

After having identified the research problem or question, Gray (2014) identifies the following steps in focus group approach: identifying sample frame, recruiting participants, identifying moderator, arranging the premises for the group discussion, generating and piloting discussion questions, conducting the group, capturing the data and finally analyzing and interpreting the data. The population used for the research is called a sampling frame. Sampling frame for focus groups doesn't need to be extensive, as the results often cannot be generalized beyond the focus group, but it should represent a fair estimate of the population (Stewart et al, 2015). The participants are recruited by identifying the participants from the sample frame and inviting them. The identification is based on screening the participants for eligibility against set criteria taking into consideration the needs to the research. Having a level of homogeneity eases the group interaction. This may result in a need for more than one focus group to be able to capture the views of different stakeholders. Demographics of the participants need to be considered too, with one aim being the consideration of what would be foreseen as promoting the discussion. (Gray, 2014.)

The invitation for the participants should identify the aim of the focus group discussion. The recommended participant number ranges between 6 – 12, depending on the source. As there might be some participants who will not come, this needs to be planned for. (Gray, 2014.)

The moderator should be familiar with facilitating groups and understand group dynamics. The moderator should ideally be from the same ethic group or culture (Halcomb et al, 2007), as the similarity might assist in reducing communication issues. Moderators should be briefed to understand the main aims of the research, how the focus group discussion helps in it and what are the ground rules during the event both for the group as well as the moderator. They need to able to keep the discussion focused in a structured way with the help of probe questions.

The venue for the focus group discussion can be either virtual or on site. Virtual focus groups can be conducted via conference or video call using a variety of programs. To facilitate dynamic interaction between participants, on site premises are usually preferred. A specially designed focus group room with one-way mirrors and recording equipment is rarely available, but basically any meeting room can suit the purpose U-shape seating arrangement is recommended as then all can see each other. (Gray, 2014.)

The moderator's role is to allow the group to take the lead in the discussion while ensuring the discussion stays in the topic. As aids in this, the moderator can use focus material such as pictures, videos, objects and so on (Thomas, 2009). The moderator should be given a guideline for the questions that should be covered. As per Harrell et al (2009), the first question usually is about the background of the participants or an icebreaker question to get the participants comfortable in the group setting and get them geared towards the discussion. The research questions for the focus group participants may vary between general and specific, using the funnel approach (ibid)

According to Krueger (2015), the data from the focus groups can be captured in different forms for analysis. The date can be captured by transcript based, abridges based, note based or memory based. Transcript based uses the audio recordings of the discussions that have been written word for word. Krueger (2015) recommends that the researcher is the person that transcribes the data, as the process enables the researcher to get deeply familiar with the data. Abridged transcript is abbreviated transcript where only the relevant discussions are included, which is useful in situations where the discussion has been lengthy and when resources have been limited. Both may be supplemented by field notes. Note based data collection uses field notes to capture the data. Normally this would be the task of the observer in the group, if there is one, rather than the moderator. Memory based data collection requires skillful researcher who can operate professional focus group discussion rooms. (Krueger, 2015.)

4.2.1 Focus Group Journey in This Research

The sampling frame for the focus group was the network members, which was total 120. that had registered for the event. They represented well the female population in the various sectors of tourism industry. The participants were from different hierarchical levels in the industry, as well as OTC female students and staff. Most of the participants were Omanis, with a few expatriate women mainly from Asia. Recruitment of the participants was completed through email invitations (Appendix 3) to the 2017 network event #Proud2WorkInTourism, as the discussions were programmed to take place in the event for the sake of convenience for the participants as well as easing the accessibility to the participants for the researcher. Thus, convenience sampling was applied. As discussions were programmed for after lunch, based on previous experience it was estimated that not all those who had registered for the event would. The event received a total of 130 registrations.

The sampling frame for the advisory group was the key stakeholders representing the national tourism development organization, Ministry of Tourism, tourism industry and OTC faculty member. The stakeholder members were considered to represent wide experience in the research topic. One of the members had completed her PhD on women entrepreneurs in tourism in Oman, one was expert in CSR programs dealing with females in the tourism industry and the other two were representing international hotel chains with diversity management programs. OTC faculty member was representing the staff of OTC. A female student representative, OTC Student Council President, had been invited but she was not able to join. However, she expressed her interest to join next meetings. All were Omani, so they understood by default the cultural context and had lived experience as a woman in tourism in Oman.

In the spirit of participatory insider action research and for the sake of cultural considerations, Omani Oman Tourism College female employees were asked to be the moderators of the three focus groups. The ladies who took the challenge had already been participating in the planning of the event, thus they were familiar with the overall goals of the research. All ladies were well educated and experienced in handling groups.

The moderators were briefed about the management of the focus groups and were given written guidelines, including probe questions (Appendix 4). They were introduced to the consent form that all participants were to fill in as well as about the fact that the discussions would be audio recorded by using mobile phones. For the advisory group, the researcher herself acted as a moderator.

As the three focus groups were planned to happen simultaneously in the afternoon program of the event, the venues were chosen so that they were close to the main event. One venue was a small ballroom and the two other ones were training restaurants. The seating was arranged in a U-shape, with chairs only. Flipchart was arranged as tool for the moderators. The advisory group meeting was arranged in a quiet corner of a hotel lobby, to be close to the participants due to their tight schedules. As the group was only 5 participants and the researcher, all were able to sit around a table.

The focus group discussions began with welcome, personal introductions and as an ice-breaker and to inspire conversation as well as to influence the student participants (to think more positively about career in tourism), an industry participant had been asked to give a brief talk on their own career path story. After this the moderators followed the set of questions given to them in the guideline sheet. The researcher moved between the venues, visiting each group 2-3 times while observing the conversation and the atmosphere. The advisory group discussion followed a set agenda that was emailed to the participants by email. The main aim of the discussion was to review the findings of the first three focus group discussions and to plan for the 4th network event considering the findings.

The data analysis followed the six phases according to Braun and Clarke (2006). The three audio recordings were transcribed personally by the researcher to allow familiarizing with the data. They were then rewritten summarizing the content of each focus group data into key words, while keeping the most powerful quotes by the participants. After having combined the 3 summaries into a mind map, initial codes were created. Looking at the mind map emerging themes were identified (Appendix 6). The themes were reviewed by drafting a new summary of the mind map results where some

codes were reallocated, merged or renamed. The themes were then refined, and in some cases renamed to better reflect the stories that were told by the themes in the context of the whole picture. In the end a power point presentation was made to reflect the major findings, including the recommendations from the advisory group discussion (Appendix 7).

4.3 Ethical Considerations

Consent forms were used to get the agreement from the participants that the focus group discussion can be used as a part of the research and that the participant names will not be used when the research is published (Appendix 5). The form explained the research purpose and the main questions to be discussed, as well as informed that the participants were chosen as they were participating in the 3rd OTC Lady Leaders in Tourism Event, either as OTC female staff or student or as a tourism industry or stakeholder female representative. The form explained that the discussion is voluntary, and that the participants can leave anytime, in case they feel uncomfortable. By signing the form, the participants agreed that the discussion will be audio recorded. The advisory group members consent for using the discussion in the research was confirmed in the beginning of the meeting and followed up in writing by emails. All advisory group members expressed their interest in continuing in the advisory group for OTC Lady Leaders in Tourism Network in working together to form the network as a CSR program.

The audio recordings are stored in Oman Tourism College server in the private drive of the researcher. All other documents have been stored in the private files of the researcher. The recording will be deleted immediately after the approval of this thesis and the private files will be kept until September 2020.

5 ANALYSIS

The analysis of the focus group discussions was firstly looked at from the point of view of the individual quotes, in reply to the discussion questions. The most powerful or most descriptive ones were kept to then demonstrate the emerging themes from the analysis itself. A framework for lowering the threshold for tourism students to choose tourism industry as a career was drawn as a result of the analysis. To activate the framework using the activities of the OTC Lady Leaders in Tourism Network, the network is proposed as CSR program.

5.1 Setting the scene – OTC Lady Leaders in Tourism Network Event 2017

Established in 2015 by Oman Tourism College, OTC Lady Leaders in Tourism Network currently about 60 female industry participants from 30 different companies and stakeholders, in addition to the OTC female staff and students (Appendix 1). The industry members range from entry level to CEO level representation. The membership is a voluntary one and the network activities have been set around one bigger annual event. The employers of the members represent the diverse tourism industry in Oman including tourism developers, international hotel chains, local accommodation providers, travel and tour operators, aviation companies, culture and sports tourism providers, exhibition and event organizers as well as SMEs and governmental agencies and tourism training providers.

The network was envisioned to support the OTC with its engagement with the tourism industry by promoting it as a respectable, reliable and interesting career choice with clear career paths, by supporting female tourism managers at different levels with peer support and other network activities and by encouraging more OTC female students to join the tourism industry (OTC, 2016)

The past two annual events have been held at OTC with HE Undersecretary of Tourism Maitha Al Mahrougi as the 'first lady' in tourism opening the events. The theme of the event in 2016 was Responsible Tourism together with NGO exhibition and networking

lunch (OTC, 2016., Times of Oman, 2016). The data collection for this thesis was set in the program of the event in 2017 with the theme #Proud2WorkinTourism (Appendix 3).

5.2 Perception of Tourism Sector as a Career Choice for Females

The focus group discussions started with an ice-breaking and inspiration session where one or two of the industry participants shared their career stories. The first question directly after was about their brief views on what their personal experience on how the tourism sector is perceived as a career choice for Omani women.

All focus groups referred to tourism industry as being 'haram' in one way or another. Hotels were seen especially problematic, since they have both alcohol and unknown men.

A few quotes from the participants about how tourism is currently viewed by families of the ladies who work or study tourism:

> That is because of the reasons, because of the concept of hotel that it is related, linked to alcohol or haram or halal thing. So, I believe, that is at least what my family said when I joined the hotel
>
> Industry participant

> If I am telling I am working at Oman Air, the first thing that comes is that I am working at the airport, so there is bad mentality barrier, that women cannot work with uniformed men
>
> Industry participant

> Imagine one week this story happened to my student, they were having training in the hotel. One of her family, maybe relative, or cousin, he saw her in the hotel and you know what happened? He went and told his father and you know what happened? Immediately he came and took her papers. He said this is it. I don't want you to work in the hotel.

OTC staff

> I have been here quite some time and this is a very big problem. I had Brothers. Very big challenge. They were watching me where I am going.
>
> OTC student

Furthermore, one focus group had a lively discussion about the kind of marketing that especially hotels are doing, as some of the marketing by hotels was seen culturally inappropriate. A quote from industry participant:

> The most important thing or key, is the marketing. Actually, the way of marketing. How do they market, especially, let's say the hotel, they do marketing, but it could not be the right way of marketing, especially to the parents and families in Oman, because they (hotels) are not sensitive to these things. Let's say in marketing they show the things that are really not very close to our religion. Actually, I am not talking about haram or halal, but at least mention something which is good to the society. When you see pictures near swimming pools and this, you know the families are already thinking; look at this environment. How my daughter, nobody would like their daughter or sister to work in this environment. So why don't they take the other way of marketing. Marketing beneficial things or the right picture, the right decision of marketing. As we know marketing is today the most important thing. It is the eye attacking thing.
>
> Industry participant

5.3 Lowering the Threshold – Influencing Perceptions

On the activities that the network would do to assist in changing the perceptions about the tourism industry so that the Omani women in general and the tourism students particularly to choose a tourism career, raising general awareness featured the most. All three focus groups stressed on the importance of increasing the general awareness about tourism industry in Oman and about the opportunities it offers for both men and

women. They suggested to show success stories of ladies who have made a career in the industry and to show the spectrum of tourism, not just hotels. When asking about whom or which institutions in the society to target, they suggested to work together with the wali (governor of a region), Omani Women Association, SME funds and different ministries.

The most common suggestions of concrete actions were:

- Awareness walk in the interior of Oman
- Social media campaign
- Industry to offer low position jobs for the unskilled unemployed women

A few quotes from the participants about how tourism is currently viewed:

> When we speak about the society, we speak about the mindset. We target, or influence, the entities that really have influence (over) our parents, our grandmothers. Something like Omani association. Let's look at who do the parents trust most, for example the women association, or something that our parents look up to, so we can change their mindset, we need to change it now because we need change very soon.
>
> Industry participant

> You should all be celebrities. Media, highlighting their success stories, bringing out how successful they are, how much good this industry is
>
> Stakeholder participant

For the long- term effect, all focus groups suggested to target the primary schools, like in the following quote:

> Now there is something very simple, catch them young. We go to schools, at the age 7 – 10, we adapt them, we bring them to hotels. We show how the hotels work
>
> Industry participant

All focus groups considered the family support extremely important. There was a general understanding that there is a lack of awareness still with the families about what exactly the tourism industry means in Oman, how it is growing and what kind of careers are available.

The most common suggested concrete activities were:

- Industry to offer jobs for the graduates
- Invite families to visit the students at the companies during their internship period
- Invite families and the industry during registration of new students at OTC

A quote from industry participant:

> It should start when they are registering at the college. It should be 100% clear for the students and families. Because some of them thing tourism, it is only in the offices
>
> Industry participant

In influencing student perceptions, the two focus groups suggested internships in the end of the training as well as more cooperation with the industry in terms of joint activities. The student focus group participants feedback was that the tourism education should be more practically oriented. The importance of awareness of career path choices was also stressed.

The most common suggestions for concrete actions were:

- Industry to submit open vacancies to OTC and offer jobs for the graduates
- Internships for OTC students in the end of the training

- Workshops and other functions at OTC together with the industry
- Guest lecturers from the industry to visit OTC

Some of the quotes from the participants regarding influencing student perceptions:

> It's not only community, it is the stakeholders all. I mean, this should be like a chain from the beginning, how are you going to change these people's perception. It will not work alone. It should be like graduate, alumni, how you contact them, how you find them a job. I mean if you graduate without having a job, it will not work. You should show them, show the community, where is your job, where they can find your job. Like this will be sustainable. So, it is a communication process, I cannot just point to the community itself, you should point to all members
>
> OTC staff

> A lot of functions like today, workshops, allowing us to see different types of jobs. Like I didn't know a lot of tourism, all I was thinking was front office, like receptionist. So, I don't know HR or finance, I don't have much information. We should have a lot of functions, workshops.
>
> OTC student

5.4 Advice from the Industry Ladies to the Students

The industry and stakeholder participants shared their experiences with the student participants by offering advice about starting a career and working in tourism. The also discussed about the important role of the industry and their own example.

The advice to students:

- Have attitude goals in life
- Choose husband well

- Be assertive
- Be close to families and listen to them, but make your own decisions

Some of the quotes by industry participants to the students:

> After I study, and I see tourism, I like it. I am very, very happy. In this college, because, you know, I found myself here. My personality changed, everything changed.
>
> Industry participant, OTC Alumni

> Because a lot of young ladies want to work, but you need to know that in order to succeed, it is commitment, it is hard work, it is long hours. It is a lot of things before you achieve your goals. We work on our attitude goals, on what we want.
>
> Industry participant

> If you are passionate about it (tourism work), you are going to do whatever it takes to convince your family to make sure that they agree with you do. And later on, not with your families, but with you, the young ladies, it is very important to choose who you are married to. Because, that makes or breaks you. The man, your partner, will play a very important role in what you can achieve. And if you cannot achieve, then you can leave him (laughter in the audience).
>
> Industry participant

The discussion on the role that the industry ladies play:

- Changing themselves and leading by example
- Being open about the kind of work they do
- Taking initiative to invite their own family members to visit their work places
- Take pride in their work and promoting their own country

The following quotes are on the role of the industry ladies themselves in changing perceptions:

> In order to change the bigger picture, we should be changing ourselves, we who work in tourism. We have challenging people around. For example, working in the golf course, we do have liquor, we do have clients not fully covered. So I should show my parents, my neighbors, that regardless I work very late hours, I could spend nights outside my house, I could be surrounded by boys and alcohol, but that won't necessarily influence me in a negative way. So, If we start leading by example, changing ourselves, the people around us, our families, our kids, our parents. Then it will slowly spread.
>
> Industry participant

> We are working in the hotels, we need to send this clear message to the society. What I did to my family, just to clear the message, I invited them to the hotel. They saw my workplace my team. Little bit they started to feel converted. It is ok, she is working in this society. That is what we need to do, we need to promote actively what we are doing. Otherwise the society will be blind. They cannot see whatever we are doing. So, it is our responsibility to send this message.
>
> Industry participant

5.5 Emerging Common Themes and Links to Previous Research

There are four major common themes emerging from the findings; female empowerment, increasing awareness, tourism training development and the concept of honor, as described in the below pictogram.

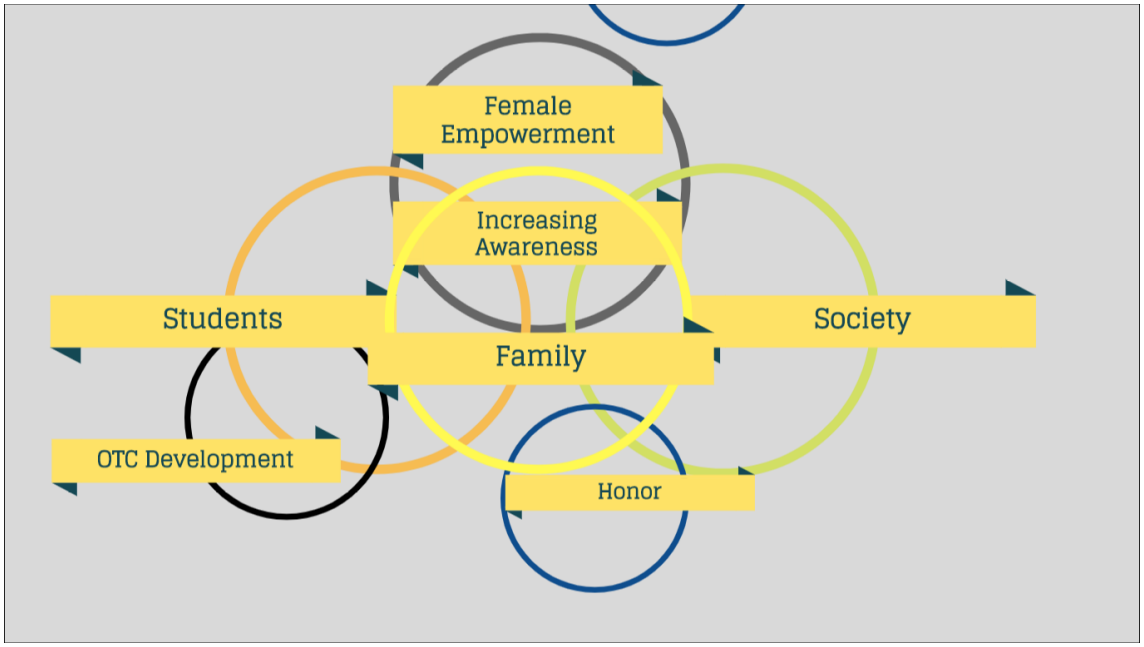

Image 8. Framework: Lowering the Threshold for Oman Tourism College Students to Choose Tourism as Career – Pictogram of Focus Group Results – Emerging Themes. Raisanen, 2018.

5.5.1 Female Empowerment

The focus group discussion atmosphere was notable warm, and the industry participants had adopted a supportive, almost like a sisterly or motherly role towards the students. They offered advice to the students about trusting in themselves, being passionate and working towards winning the support of the family and possible spouse. The industry participants also recognized the responsibility that they have in bringing about a change in the perception of their extended families, friends and society about their own work in tourism. They were sharing their own success stories how they had accomplished this. In recognizing their responsibility, they also expressed their willingness to share their experiences more widely and to be more open about their lives and careers. The

suggestion of having a social media campaign that features these stories was met with enthusiasm. The industry participants showed that they felt empowered by their work, were proud of what they were doing now and proud of having overcome many challenges to reach where they were now.

The above is in line with Al Mazroei's (2017) research findings about female empowerment through tourism entrepreneurship. Positive identity formation, proving themselves and finally gaining their families support, after having overcome challenges were among the positive effects of working in tourism.

5.5.2 Increasing Awareness

As a common theme in how to influence the perception of the students themselves, their families and society in general was increasing the awareness of tourism in Oman among them. There was a consensus about a general lack of awareness about the scope and diversity of tourism in Oman, the different careers available as well as career paths in tourism. Different awareness methods were suggested for the three different target groups with some overlapping.

Increasing the awareness through an image campaign has been strongly featured in the studies about human resources challenges in Oman. For example, ILO report (2017) suggested a campaign to show the social acceptability for working in the sector so that more Omanis would join tourism and related sectors, including women, especially in the rural areas. Similarly, Al Mazroei (2017), states that an effort to create awareness and understanding among families and wider community about opportunities for women in tourism entrepreneurship should be sought through educational campaigns. Afifi and Al Sherif (2013), in their research about Women's Occupational Empowerment in Oman's Tourism Sector concluded that the shortage of the tourism awareness exists as a major reason for misunderstanding the context of women's work in tourism.

5.5.3 Developing Tourism Training

Third common theme was continuing to develop tourism training so that the students get more practical experience of the tourism industry, more exposure to the tourism industry as well as more general knowledge about the different careers and career paths available in the industry. There was a general quest for involving the tourism industry more in tourism training and education and a more visible presence of them in the college itself.

Khan & Krishanamurthy (2015) research support the same finding and the study recommended that the tourism and hospitality educational institutes should include more practical exposure, including study visits and tours. ILO report (2017) encourages hotels to interact more closely with the tourism education providers regarding what are the exact skills that are needed and what exactly do the different jobs in hotels entail

5.5.4 Concept of honour

The last common theme was the perennial question of what kind of work is perceived honorable for women in Oman. There was a consensus that the general view of the society at large is that since the sector, especially the hospitality industry, involves alcohol and unfamiliar men, it is not suitable for Omani women. This was also related to the way the hotels market themselves as some of the marketing was considered not culturally sensitive. This view is supported by the World Bank report (2017) which recommends tourism companies to take into consideration the gender sensitivity in messages or imagery in marketing.

Honor of the family is based on the sexual behavior of the woman, fathers choose husbands for their daughters and husbands order wives not to work and tell them how many children they should bear (Al-Barwani & Albeely, 2007).

The replies from the participants echoed the research that has been previously conducted about the reasons why tourism is not a career choice for women. Similar

results were found out in ILO (2017) report which concluded that Omani females are largely not encouraged to work in hotels due to the job image, working hours, job itself, alcohol and haram food. the behavior and dress of tourists, sexual permissiveness, gambling and consumption of pork and alcohol are seen to be in appropriate and offensive (Mazroei, 2017, as cited in Henderson, 2003 and Ritter, 1975).

Working in the service role is undesirable and reflects badly on person's public image and on their family's image. The religious implications of especially women working or being around unknown men, alcohol and haram food as well as activities also hinder the interest of working in hotels (GRA, 2017).

5.6 Advisory Group Recommendations

To ensure that the findings of the focus groups are taken forward, the author organized for a smaller focus group discussion. The group consisted of two participants from the tourism sector, one from CSR, one from government and one from OTC. The advisory group commented briefly on the research aims by confirming that the decision to focus on creating change in perception of the tourism industry as a career choice for Omani women had been well founded as they agreed that there is already enough research providing evidence of the reasons behind the current situation. They also commented positively about focus group discussions as a research tool in conjunction with the 3rd Lady Leaders in Tourism Event from the point of view of having had Omani Ladies as facilitators and having included participants from OTC students and staff as well as industry and stakeholder participants in each of the three focus groups. The advisory group comments about the findings of the research, the emerging themes with the general feedback that the group could identify with the main findings, validating the results.

5.6.1 Recommendations for 4th Network Event

The group suggested to launch the OTC Lady Leaders in Tourism Network as a CSR program in the next network event. The event had been scheduled to coincide with the annual Omani Women's Day, on the 17th of October 2018. Out of the suggested awareness activities that the focus group discussion results showed, the group recommended to include awareness walk, social media campaign as well as releasing the code of conduct for employing Omani women in tourism, as activities in the event of 2018. The social media campaign was suggested to include success stories of the women in tourism now. The awareness efforts that were targeted towards the OTC students and their families were discussed briefly with new suggestions from the group being inviting the parents to the orientation days at OTC, in addition to the already established procedure of inviting industry representation. The group also suggested that the industry presents itself already during the registration days. To take further the idea from the focus group discussion for inviting parents to visit the industry during internships, the group suggested that the parents could be invited to join the orientation day in the company together with the students.

5.6.2 Recommendations for Network as CSR Program

The group supported the view of the researcher in recommending establishing the network as a CSR program so that it can best assist in reducing the threshold for Omani female tourism students, and other Omani women to join the industry. As the network aims are in line with the general CSR aims and objectives current initiatives, especially of the international chain hotels, adding the network as CSR program in the same basket would be natural.

The group stressed the relevance of not forgetting to include men in the network, as in their view the support of men is important in Omani society. The group recommended to ensure that the men would have a role to play in the network.

To be able to successfully launch the network as CSR program, the group advised that it would be best to obtain the official support from the Ministry of Tourism as well as from the Ministry of Manpower. The group agreed both to work together for a proposal and present it through their personal contacts to the undersecretaries of the ministries, if needed.

5.6.3 Discussion on Increasing Awareness

The awareness efforts that were targeted towards the OTC students and their families were discussed briefly with new suggestions from the group being inviting the parents to the orientation days at OTC, in addition to the already established procedure of inviting industry representation. The group also suggested that the industry presents itself already during the registration days. To take further the idea from the focus group discussion for inviting parents to visit the industry during internships, the group suggested that the parents could be invited to join the orientation day in the company. The group supported the view of the focus groups of the need for more awareness for the students about the different career paths available to them, including entrepreneurship and agreed that it would be beneficial to involve the SME funds in this respect. The group also mentioned that one way of getting valuable work experience and exploring the different career options would be engaging the students with part time work in the industry.

For the long-term effect, the group agreed with the focus groups that the network should aim to influence the parents and the society through the primary schools. The idea from the focus groups that the industry should adopt a school per company was considered interesting and the group suggested that the companies would work with a school which is geographically close to their operation. The advisory group also supported the idea of awareness walk in the interior of the country by reiterating that the perception in general about tourism there is worse than in Muscat, let alone the perception of females working in the tourism industry. Instead of planning for one walk, the group suggested having several simultaneous walks, for the maximum impact, including media impact.

Regarding the awareness campaign, the group pointed out that there has been general discussion about the need for a tourism awareness campaign, but that there has not been joint action between the different stakeholders. They commented that since Omanis use social media a lot, using social media for the campaign would be an effective way of spreading awareness. The language of the campaign was suggested to be both in English and Arabic.

According to the group's view, the industry plays an important role in employing women and retaining them in their companies. Their experience was that the society in general doesn't know the Omani Labor Law related to the rights of the female employees, such as no late evening or night shifts, maternity leave and breastfeeding breaks. In addition to that the companies have their own best practices, such as employing waiters for breakfast shifts. The group suggested that the network could establish a code of conduct for employing Omani women in tourism, to be including the labor law and best practices. Their suggestion is in line with the research findings by Al Hasimi (2017) about Women in Employment in Oman, as she found out the women did not know their rights in the Omani labor law.

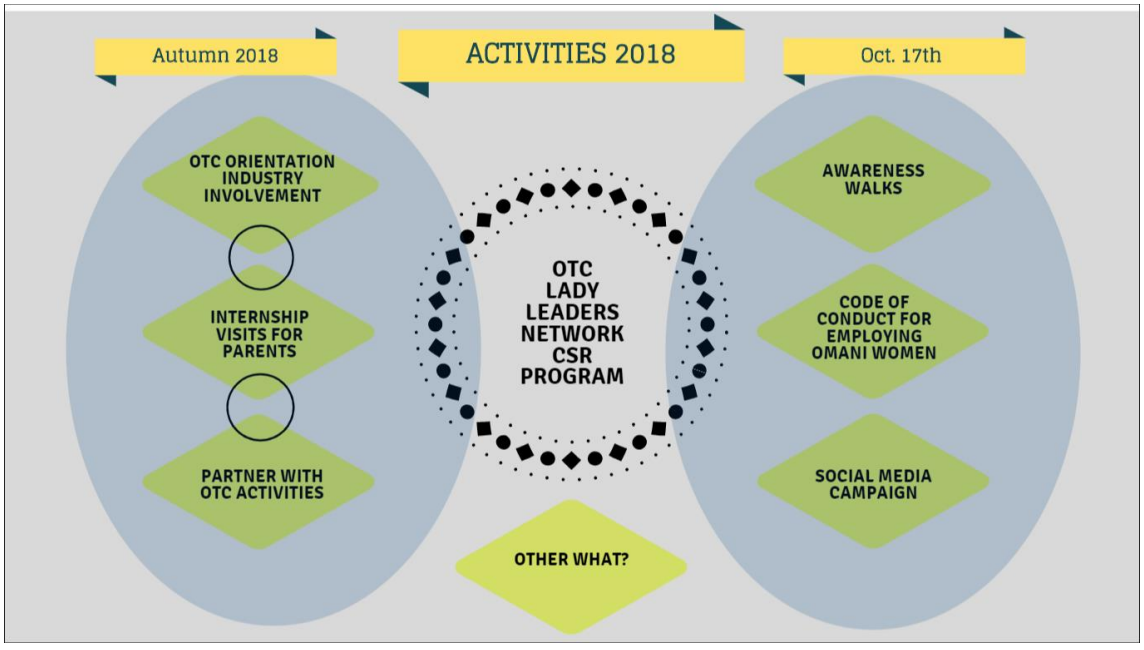

Image 9. OTC Lady Leaders in Tourism Network as a CRS: Proposed Activities for 2018 (Raisanen, 2018)

5.7 Lowering the Threshold to Join the Tourism Sector – Final analysis

Raising awareness about the tourism sector as a respectable and reliable career choice for Omani female tourism students' needs to be targeted at the students themselves, their families and the society in general. Omani society is changing, and the younger generation is more open minded, however the country is still quite traditional and patriarchal. The decision of the female students about their careers, what to study and where to look for employment, is influenced by the family and often the male family members. Changing their perceptions about the sector is vital, to see real change in the career choices of the female tourism students, and indeed women in general. The suggested awareness activities included a social media campaign, in which the existing Omani women in tourism would give their faces to share their stories to the society is also a sign of female empowerment. The message in the discussion groups and the advisory group was that the ladies are now ready to be open and proud about where they work and what they do. They also understood their own responsibility to act now and to do what is needed. The warm, motherly advice that the industry participants gave to the students was another sign of female empowerment. As the families and the wider society see the life and career stories of these pioneering women in tourism, their perception will start to slowly change for the more positive towards the sector. The awareness activities targeted towards the families of the students included inviting the families to OTC during registration and orientation, preferably so that the tourism sector would be represented in the same event. The families were also suggested to be invited to visit the students in the tourism companies while they are completing their internship programs. The relationship between OTC and the tourism sector is getting closer and the above suggestions have been already taken into consideration at the college for academic year 2018-2019. The students were calling for more practical training, more exposure and events together with the industry and this message has also been taken seriously as OTC continues to develop its tourism education. The industry participants

were also keen on working closer with the college. OTC Lady Leaders in Tourism Network is one of the initiatives through which the college works together with the industry.

5.8 Proposing OTC Lady Leaders in Tourism Network as a CSR Program

The author proposes to establish OTC Lady Leaders in Tourism Network as a CSR program to be able to best assist students in entering the tourism sector and build a career in tourism. As the network already has received a warm reception and is widely appreciated and not considered political, it has potential of becoming unique tool. The advisory group that participated in the second focus group discussion is committed in continuing to support the network when it is formed as CSR program (Image 10).

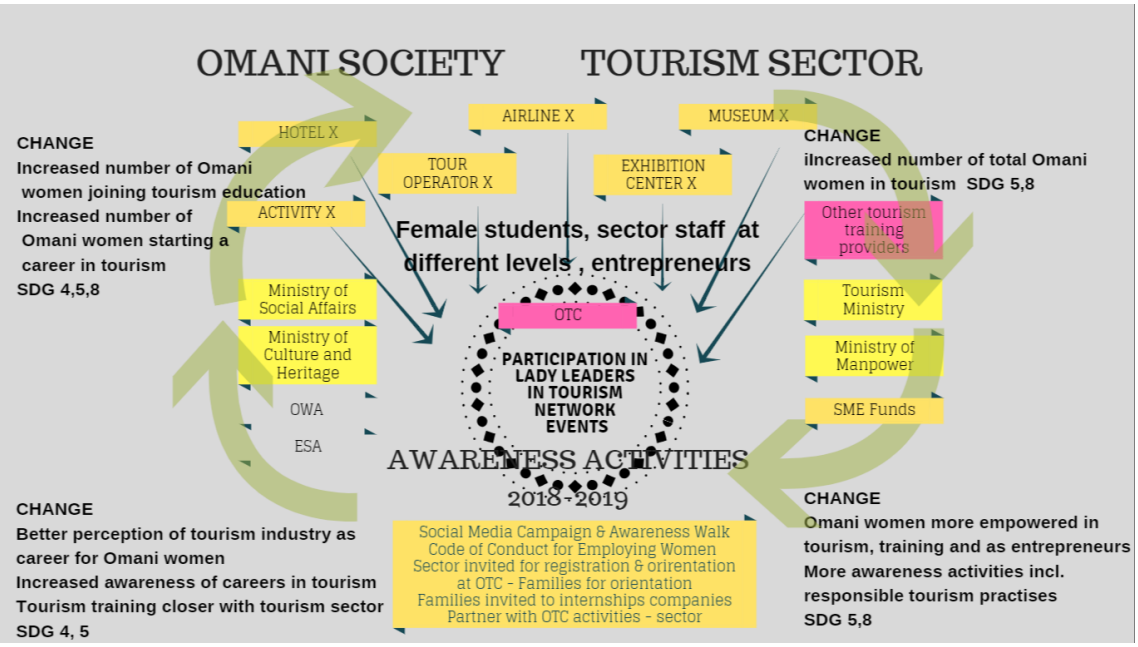

Image 10. Systems Change Initiation by OTC Lady Leaders in Tourism Network as CRS Activities (Raisanen, 2018).

Companies representing the tourism sector spectrum as well as government organizations and not for profits are considered as partners in the program, sending their female staff to participate in the network activities. The framework for the network explains the systems change initiation cycle through the joint activities to increase of number of Omani women joining tourism education and starting a career in tourism, to

the increase of the overall number of Omani women in tourism, to women being more empowered in tourism, tourism training and as tourism entrepreneurs. As the cycle repeats itself, the perceptions of tourism would be likely to change (Image 10). The strategy and action plan of the program is proposed to be drawn collaboratively together with the partners. As a CSR program, the goals of the network are proposed to be in line with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SGDs) so that the program is following international recommendations for aligning the CSR efforts as well as the sustainable development of a country with the global sustainable goals. Three goals are especially suited for the program: 4 Quality Education, 5 Gender Equality and 8 Decent Work and Economic Growth. Furthermore, the activities of the Lady Leaders in Tourism Network itself, can assist in raising awareness of the other SDGs as well, especially in line with responsible tourism which relies heavily on the beauty and preservation of the natural resources of the sultanate. The added value of aligning the program goals with the SDGs, is that the partners can more easily report the impact of the program. Some of the international tourism sector companies, such as Hyatt Inc, are already doing so.

A proposal has been given to the college management (Appendix 9). As the group consisted of participants from high levels both from public and private sector, their continuing interest and dedication has been, and is important to the credibility of the program. With the help of the advisory group, the 4th OTC Lady Leaders in Tourism Network event is planned for the 17th of October 2018, on the annual Omani Women's Day with the working theme Omani Women in Tourism. The event is planned to include the focus group proposed activities of awareness walk and social media campaign (Image 9).

In planning the strategy and annual action plan for the network as CSR program, the author recommends a participatory approach together with the companies, students and staff as well as other stakeholders. In line with systems thinking, the network participants could be trained in Systems Intelligence (SI) approach to maximize the effectiveness of the network as contributing to the change in perception of tourism as a career choice for women in Oman. According to the developers of the concept (Saarinen

& Hamalainen, 2004), 'SI is intelligent behavior in the context of complex systems involving interaction, dynamics and feedback and acting as a part of the system, trying to understand and look for constructive ways from within the system'. It is a higher-level cognitive capacity embedding both emotional and social intelligence. The participants of the network who are from the tourism industry, and who are potential influencers in initiating change in the society and inspire the tourism students, have an extremely important role to play and SI can help them to realize that task to the maximum. The impact of the program activities needs to be measured against set tangible and intangible goals. The tangible goals are the more conventional ones, such as the increase in the number of female students employed by the tourism industry or number of students starting tourism education. Intangible impact is measured by social return on investment (SROI) that takes into consideration social and environmental impacts as well, as opposed to the mere financial ones. To ensure ownership and commitment to the network goals, again participatory approach should be used, involving participants from relevant stakeholders.

The network is recommended to connect and cooperate with similar networks. Globally there are several women in tourism networks that have sprung up within the last three years (Appendix 2). Previously, there were very few specialized networks within tourism that were targeted only for females. This reflects a change in the society in general, as feminism is becoming more widely accepted and the economic empowerment of women is seen as one of the key issues in developing responsible tourism. A brief analysis of the networks reveal that they are mostly set up by the tourism industry professionals and are geared towards supporting their career growth as well as offering a platform for the participants for learning, awareness and discussion. Most are paid membership-based networks. Practically all have an annual even as a part of raising awareness of the women in tourism industry. OTC Lady Leaders in Tourism Network would benefit from benchmarking the programs and activities of the existing networks as well as form links with them, for mutual inspiration and learning., thus also raising international awareness of women in tourism. None of the networks had been established as a corporate social responsibility program, but most had partners in the industry and some had partners with the tourism education sector. OTC Lady Leaders in

Tourism Network would thus be the very first one to be established as a CSR program between tourism training, tourism industry and other stakeholders, a fact that can raise interest regionally and internationally. The network has all the potential to be a best practice for those countries who are in similar situations in their tourism human resources development and who want to encourage their tourism industry to contribute to the SDGs.

6 CONCLUSION

6.1 Summary

The aim of this thesis was to find solutions how the perception of the society, family and tourism students can be influenced to assist in lowering the threshold for Oman Tourism College female students to choose tourism sector as a career. Furthermore, thesis explored how Oman Tourism College Lady Leaders in Tourism Network could be best developed so that it would be best equipped to assist in the above process, in partnership with the tourism sector and other stakeholders.

The research part of the thesis was carried out as insider action research, as the author was working as a Director of Quality for Professional and Vocational Studies at Oman Tourism College and had initiated the network. The Network's 3rd event was used as a scene for the data collection by arranging three simultaneous focus group discussions with female participants from the student body, faculty and staff as well as from the tourism sector and government bodies

Framework for Lowering the Threshold for Oman Tourism College Students to Choose Tourism as Career (Image 8) summarized the analysis of the focus group discussions. Female empowerment through tourism emerged to the author as an unexpected result, but it was very apparent through the atmosphere of the discussions, the advice that female tourism sector participants gave to the students as well as through the understanding that they had about the importance of their own role in changing the society perception about tourism as a respectable career choice for Omani women. Raising awareness was the most important change agent in the long journey of influencing the change in perceptions of tourism in the minds of the students, their

families and the society in general. The awareness is needed about tourism in general and specifically about the kind of jobs and career paths there are available for women. The preferred way, among many suggested activities, was to have a social media campaign showcasing success stories of the current Omani women in the sector, aimed at the entire Omani society. This touches another topic in the framework which is deeply rooted in the Omani society and culture: the concept of honor. The previous research cited in the thesis confirm that although Oman is changing, it is still very traditional, religious and patriarchal society. How Oman wants its society to view tourism in the context of being perceived as an honorable place for work for the daughters, sisters and wives, would best be decided at a very high level with a concrete action plan (in line with the economic diversification program Tanfeedh recommendations for attracting women to the private sector in general).The framework also included an element of developing tourism training and education in cooperation with the tourism sector with the understanding the cooperation for the benefit of the students. Among the activities that were suggested were the sector companies' presence at the college during registration and orientation, arranging more events together, ensuring jobs after graduation, offering part-time jobs for students and working towards having a longer internship period in the industry.

For the OTC Lady Leaders in Tourism Network to be able to be used as a successful tool to take the suggested awareness and other activities further to initiate a change in the perception of tourism, the network is proposed to be established as a CSR program between OTC and the sector companies and stakeholders (Appendix 8). Companies representing the tourism sector spectrum as well as government organizations and not for profits are considered as partners in the program, sending their female staff to participate in the network activities. The framework for the network explains the systems change initiation cycle through the joint activities to increase of number of Omani women joining tourism education and starting a career in tourism, to the increase of the overall number of Omani women in tourism, to women being more empowered in tourism, tourism training and as tourism entrepreneurs. As the cycle repeats itself, the perception of tourism is likely to change (Image 10). The strategy and action plan of the program is proposed to be drawn collaboratively together with the partners. As a

CSR program, the goals of the network are proposed to be in line with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SGDs) so that the program is following international recommendations for aligning the CSR efforts as well as the sustainable development of a country with the global sustainable goals. Three goals are especially suited for the program: 4 Quality Education, 5 Gender Equality and 8 Decent Work and Economic Growth. Furthermore, the activities of the Lady Leaders in Tourism Network itself, can assist in raising awareness of the other SDGs as well, especially in line with responsible tourism which relies heavily on the beauty and preservation of the natural resources of the sultanate. The added value of aligning the program goals with the SDGs, is that the partners can more easily report the impact of the program. Some of the international tourism sector companies, such as Hyatt Inc, are already doing so.

6.2 Theoretical and Practical Implications

Theoretical implications of the research are not so much the new data about how to change the perception of the society, family and students into more receptive of the tourism sector as career choice for OTC female students, but the realization that Oman currently has limited efforts to engage women in tourism employment or entrepreneurship. Taken the huge potential that there is in women who are currently unemployed, and the international recommendations to engage more women in the economy, the realization can be taken further to the Ministry of Tourism, Tanfeedh, Ministry of Manpower and other stakeholders.

Tourism sector developers and new companies could review their internal processes how they are taking into consideration attracting and retaining Omani females in line with the World Bank stakeholder recommendations which include private sector to promote gender equality and women's empowerment and policy makers to proactively include gender in tourism policies.

The research result, the proposal to establish the OTC Lady Leaders in Tourism Network as CSR to be used as a tool to make a positive change in the perception of the Omani society of tourism sector as a respectable and real career choice for Omani women, is

now backed up by a solid case to the College management as well as the stakeholders in the tourism sector and government (Appendix 8). The network has also all the potential to become a best practice for those countries who are in similar situations in their tourism human resources development and who want to encourage their tourism industry to contribute to the SDGs.

6.3 Limitations of the Research

The research topic, how to influence the perception of tourism as a career choice for female tourism students in the eyes of tourism students themselves, their parents and the wider society may have at first seemed a straightforward topic. The realization by the author that the topic is in fact quite complicated and would have required more information regarding a society and religion that was not hers by birth and from a political system that is unfamiliar to her and quite often in a language that she doesn't know. Although the research is for business studies, the context is also related to social studies and ethnography – and the later were touched only passing in the research. Being an outsider in the society that is being researched, certainly had its limitations and the author hopes that no major misconceptions or misinterpretations are left in the work.

The research could also have focused more on women's empowerment from the feminist point of view, but the researcher decided in the midway not to concentrate on it. The decision was based on the realization that feminism is in its very early and tender age in Oman and is best left at the hands of the talented, intelligent and empowered Omani women themselves. However, the research touched upon diversity management and that area could have also been explored more.

The adaptation of SDGs escalated immensely during the research period from 2016 to 2018 and new data emerged on a continuous basis, especially in the tourism sector but also at the country level of Oman. Due to time limitations, it was not possible to continue including the flow of new information into the literature review.

6.4 Final Reflexive Thoughts

The author is extremely happy to have been able to accomplish a meaningful research, the results of which will hopefully encourage more OTC female students (and other Omani women) to start and build a career in tourism. OTC Lady Leaders in Tourism Network as a CSR program has potential of becoming a source of inspiration, support, empowerment and awareness to the current and aspiring females in tourism.

Although not a practice in thesis work in Finland, the author would like to honor the Omani culture and express her sincere gratitude for the wonderful support from the management and team at Oman Tourism College, especially to the Dean of the College, Dr. Abdulkarim, Mohammed Al Rawahi and the talented ladies who moderated the focus groups: Jihad, Fatma and Shafia. I was very inspired by Dr. Al Mazroei's research and would also like to thank for her support. The advisory group ladies also merit a special thanks for their inspiration, dedication and honestly in guiding the forming of the network as CSR program and in planning the 4th network event. With all the amazing, talented and intelligent Omani women in tourism that the author has had the pleasure to meet during the research process, she is convinced that with the success stories of these pioneering ladies, more women and men will follow and build their career in tourism.

The author would also like to honor the custom in the sultanate, where the words by HE Sultan Qaboos always serve as guidance and inspiration, by sharing as final word, the below quote from His Majesty Sultan Qaboos on the announcement of Oman Women's Day:

> We are continuing on this path, God willing as we are, that the country, in its blessed march, needs both men and women because no doubt it resembles the bird in relying on both its wings to fly high on the horizons of the sky. How can this bird manage if one of its wings is broken? Will it be able to fly?
>
> (Ministry of Information, 2015)

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8 APPENDICES

8.1 Appendix 1: OTC Lady Leaders in Tourism Network

Oman Tourism College Lady Leaders in Tourism Network

Established by Oman Tourism College in 2015, The Lady Leaders in Tourism network has currently about 70 outside members from 30 companies in addition to the female students and staff of Oman Tourism College. The industry members range from entry level to CEO level participants. The employers of the participants range from entrepreneurs, international and local hotels and hotel chains, tour operators, aviation companies, sports and activity tourism companies, tourism developers, tourism training providers and governmental agencies

The network is envisioned as supporting the college's partnership with the tourism industry by:

- Promoting tourism industry as a respectable, reliable and interesting career choice with clear career paths to the top management level for the society in Oman
- Supporting current female leaders in tourism industry at different levels with peer support and other network activities
- Increasing the number of female graduates getting employed from Oman Tourism College as aspiring female leaders in tourism

The activities conducted have been the opening of the network in 2015 with the short coffee morning with networking which was followed by another full day event in 2016 based on the feedback questionnaire of the first event. The topic of this event was Responsible Tourism Seminar which was organized together with a NGO exhibition and networking lunch. The feedback replies to the e-questionnaire was very positive. 3rd event in 2017 with the theme #proud2workinTourism with female initiatives from tourism and hospitality industry in Oman as well as group discussions on how to encourage more females to join the industry, especially OTC students. The following activity ideas from the group discussions will be taken further together with the industry in 2017/2018: image campaign #Proud2workintourism showcasing success stories, awareness walk in the interior, family invitations for orientation days & on-the-job training, international get-together event for families, students and international community.

The network has now been established as having one bigger annual event with HE Maitha Al Mahrouqi, the Under Secretary of Tourism as an unofficial guardian.

The network will be formalized during 2017 with a vision, mission and strategy with action and activity plan. The management of the network will be restructured so that OTC female faculty and staff would be increasingly more involved in the management. The 3rd network event was already a joint effort between the Director of Quality for Vocational Studies (who has had the main responsibility for the management of the network) and mainly four Omani female faculty members and staff.

Summary of Participants Numbers

	Participants	Companies/ Stakeholders	OTC Faculty&Staff	OTC students	Total
2015 – 1st event 15.1.2015	33	30	10	5	48
2016 – 2nd event 21.2.2016	78	38	8	5	91
2017 – 3rd event 27.3.2017	70	30	23	37	130

8.2 Appendix 2: Summary of Female Networks in Tourism

Women Networks in Tourism

A number of women in tourism networks have sprang up within the last 3 years globally. Before that there were very few specialized networks in tourism, only for ladies. This can be seen as a change in the society, where feminism is becoming more widely accepted. Further research would be needed to draw the links from campaigns such as #metoo. However, in the Gulf Cooperation Countries, where Oman belongs, there isn't any tourism related networks for women. In Oman there even isn't a network for female entrepreneurs.

The Young Tourism Network (YTN) is an Australian paid, membership based networking group for young people in tourism industry. The network has industry and stakeholder partners who help the network to operate by funding events and initiatives. The partners consist of the major stakeholders in the area where the network operates, Victoria, including visit bureau, tourism industry council, universities and tourism institute.

Women in Tourism and Hospitality is a Canadian organization bringing women in tourism and hospitality together, now aiming for opening global chapters too. Annual conference with "innovative ideas, immersive learning and unforgettable networking. The network has been founded by two well established female tourism professionals. It event has international hotel chains as sponsors and is in cooperation with an international hospitality industry magazine, Hotelier (WITHorg, 2017).

American Hotel and Lodging Association has a forum called Women in Lodging with the aim of offering the members an opportunity to network with industry professionals, get discounts for the association's learning material as well as events, obtain legal updates regarding the industry and apply for women of the year award. The membership is free for those who work in an establishment that belongs to the association (AHLA, 2017).

Association of Women in Tourism in Tanzania is founded by 7 ladies has now grown their paid membership base to 40. Their vision is "to become an exemplary women organization across Africa". Their long list of mission statement includes: aim "to advocate for the rightful positioning of women in tourism development, to provide access to first class tourism education and to expand work opportunities for school children students and rural communities" (AWOTTA, 2018).

Women in Tourism is a paid membership organization based in Scotland looking to open international chapters. It was established in 2015 by ladies who work in Scottish tourism destination management with the aim to work with all women who are at different levels in their career across the tourism sector by motivating, mentoring and supporting both their development and career growth. The members get free mentoring session, a skillswap, a dedicated smartphone app and discounts at events, to name a few (WIT, 2018)

A brief analysis of the networks show that they are mostly set up by the industry professionals and geared towards supporting their career growth as well as offering a platform for learning, awareness and discussion. Most are paid membership based. All have an annual event which can been seen as part of raising awareness of the women tourism industry. None of the

networks had been established as corporate social responsibility programs, but most had partners in the industry and some with the education sector.

8.3 Appendix 3: OTC Lady Leaders in Tourism 3rd Event Program

Program

March 27

#Proud2WorkInTourism

كلية عمان للسياحة
OTC Oman Tourism College

8:30Am	
Registration	
9:00Am	
Welcome Speech	Dr. Shoba Zachariah, Assistant Dean of Academic Affairs, OTC
Guest of Honor Speech	H.E. Maitha Al Mahrouqi, Under Secretary of Tourism
9:20Am	
OTC Lady Leaders Network & Goals for the Day	Jaana Raisanen, Director of Quality for Vocational Studies
9:30Am	
Exceptional Story	Ms. Shatha Al Balushi, Pilot (2nd officer) Omanair
10:00Am	
Best Practices of Women Initiatives in Tourism and Hospitality in Oman	
Balanced Leadership Initiative	Vianney Antonio, PR and Marketing Manager, Park Inn by Radisson Hotels in Oman
Exposing the Omani Women's Association in Hospitality	Safa Al Balush, Learning & Development Coordinator, InterContinental Muscat
World of Handicraft	Zuwaina Al Rashdi, CEO of Dar al Hefya
11:15Am	
Group Photo	
11:30Am	
Networking Lunch	
12:15Pm	
Proud2WorkInTourism - Career Stories and Ideas for Activities for Encouraging More Students to Join Tourism and Hospitality Industry (division into 3 groups)	Samiya Al Balushi, HI Learning and Development Manager Amal Mohammed Salim Al Harthi, Tour Executive, Zahara Group Sameera Al Ghafry, Director of Human Resources, Al Bustan Palac Afra Hamed ALMamri, Tour Coordinator, Bahwan Tourism LLC Tahra Al Ajmi, Sales and Marketing Executive, Al Mouj Golf
1:15Pm	
Presentation of Ideas	
1:30Pm	
Way Forward	
1:45Pm	
Vote of Thanks	OTC Student Representative

8.4 Appendix 4: Focus Group Discussion Facilitation Guide

GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDELINES FOR MODERATORS

Lead by Jaana Raisanen

Group 1: Assisting Moderator Jihad Al Harassi – identified with color pink – Ballroom 2

Group 2: Assisting Moderator Fatma Al Daghari – identified with color blue – Training Restaurant 2

Group 3: Assisting Moderator Shafia Al Malki – identified with color orange – Training Restaurant 3

Set up of the rooms is chairs only in U-shape in Ballroom 2 and in Training Restaurants chairs only in circle.

Aim of the group discussions is to brainstorm:

What kind of activities (together with the network: OTC & Industry partners) would be most beneficial for the tourism students in order to reduce the threshold for them to enter the tourism and hospitality industry? The group will meet for one hour and the result of the discussion should be concrete activity ideas that can be presented to be big team at 1:30 p.m. There will be follow up on the ideas for implementation by the OTC Lady Leaders Network.

Different research show that we need to influence the students, their families and society.

Flow of the discussion

Two ladies from the industry will share their career stories why they enjoy working in the tourism and hospitality industry. Time allocated per story is 10 minutes. The students are encouraged to ask questions from the ladies.

Influencing students:

Probe questions from moderator:

1. To students: How many of you have already decided that you will be looking for a job in tourism and hospitality when you graduate?
2. To students who have NOT considered tourism and hospitality as a career, are there any reasons they would like to share why they have made that decision?
3. What do you think are the biggest obstacles why the students (OR YOU OR YOUR FRIENDS, in case of students) hesitate to choose tourism and hospitality as a career?
4. How do you think we can influence the students (OR YOU, in case students are replying) to think that the tourism and hospitality industry offers them great career prospects? (ideas)

–

Influencing the families of the students:

Probe questions from moderator:

1. To students: Does your family's opinion matter when you choose in which industry you will apply for work?

2. If YES, how do you think they view the tourism and hospitality industry as a career for you?
3. …positively or negatively, please elaborate
4. In case negatively, how do you think we can influence the families (OR YOUR FAMILIES, in case students are replying) to consider tourism and hospitality industry more positively as a workplace for their daughters? (ideas)

Influencing the society at large:
Probe questions from moderator:

1. How do you think the society views the tourism and hospitality industry as a career choice for females?
2. Do you think that the way the society looks at tourism as a suitable place for females to work impacts the decision of the girls to choose the industry negatively?
3. If so, who are the people or institutes in the society whose opinion matters the most?
4. How do you think we can affect the way the society views tourism and hospitality industry as an industry of choice for Omani women? (ideas)

General advice for the moderator:

- Encourage conversation but ensure conversation stays focused.
- Try to get ideas and comments from all parties: students, industry, OTC staff and faculty
- Do not offer your own ideas, be impartial and objective
- As this is brainstorming, the ideas can be crazy and out of the box
- The discussion should be recorded
- The participants will get a consent form to sign

8.5 Appendix 5: Consent Form

كلية عمان للسياحة
OTC OMAN TOURISM COLLEGE

Researcher Name: Jaana Raisanen, HAMK University of Applied Sciences
Research Study: Developing a Professional Network for Female Managers in Tourism – Oman Tourism College Case Lady Leaders in Tourism Network

FOCUS GROUP CONSENT FORM

We would like you to take part in a group discussion on what kind of activities could the network do in order to reduce the threshold for students to enter the tourism and hospitality industry

What is the Research?
You have been asked to take part in a research study about developing a professional network for female managers in tourism.

The purpose of the study is:
Would formalizing a professional network for the ladies working and studying in the industry promote more women to join the industry? **What kind of activities would be most beneficial for the women** who are already managers and those **who are aspiring to be managers, either tourism students** or entry level employees in the tourism industry? How could the network be best managed to be sustainable, active and be fulfilling the different needs?

Why have I been asked to take part?
You are participating in the 3rd Oman Tourism College Lady Leaders Network Event either as

- Oman Tourism College Female Student or Staff
- Tourism or Hospitality Industry female representative

Voluntary Participation
This discussion is *voluntary*. If any questions make you feel uncomfortable, you do not have to answer them. You may leave the group at any time for any reason.
Privacy
Your privacy will be protected and your name will not be used in any report that is published.
Audiotape Permission
I agree to be audio taped ___Yes ___No
Questions
I have been given the opportunity to ask any questions I wish regarding the discussion.
If I have any questions about my rights as a research subject, I may contact Jaana Raisanen at jaana.raisanen@otc.edu.om.

Please write your name below and check yes or no. If you want to take part Sign your name at the bottom.

_____
NAME SIGNATURE DATE

_____ Yes, I would like to take part in the focus group and agree that the discussion will be recorded.

I want a copy of this form _____Yes _____No[1]
_____ No, I would not like to participate in the focus group.

_____

8.6 Appendix 6: Summary of Focus Group Thematic Analysis

Q1 How is tourism and hospitality industry viewed as a career choice for females

Group	Emerging theme " Haram"
G1 Society	Hotels, Culturally inappropriate marketing
G2 Family	Men, Alcohol
G3 Students	Not for Omanis, Not respectable, Hotels

Q2 How can we change the perception?

Group	Emerging theme "Self"& "Advice"
G1 Society	Change ourselves – be open about kind of work, Don't ignore society/family, Lead by example, Be passionate, Invite family members to visit workplace
G2 Family	Promote the country, Don't follow other students, Be close to families, Be passionate, Have attitude goals, Lead by example, Choose husband well, Introduce family to workplace, Be assertive
G3 Students	Listen to family – but you decide, Your own example, Take internships seriously

Group	Emerging theme "General Awareness"
G1 Society	Organize shows; Master Chef Show success stories; Lady Leaders; Social media Show career path; also to currently employed Offer jobs for women in low positions
G2 Family	Show spectrum of tourism; not only hotels&dry hotels Show different departments in the hotels Show Success Stories
G3 Students	Show spectrum of tourism; not only hotels, different departments

Group	Emerging theme "Awareness towards schools"
G1 Society	For long term target towards schools; adopt them show how hotels work
G2 Family	Target towards schools; open days in hotels, invite schools to industry, CSR visits to schools and orphanages
G3 Students	Target primary schools and families

Group	Emerging theme "Awareness towards OTC students"
G1 Society	Career path Industry to offer jobs for graduates; open job vacancies to OTC
G2 Family	Convince students first, guest lecturers, tourism workshops for foundation, international opportunities

G3 Students	Internships in the end of the training, more functions/workshops with the industry, more practical, international opportunities

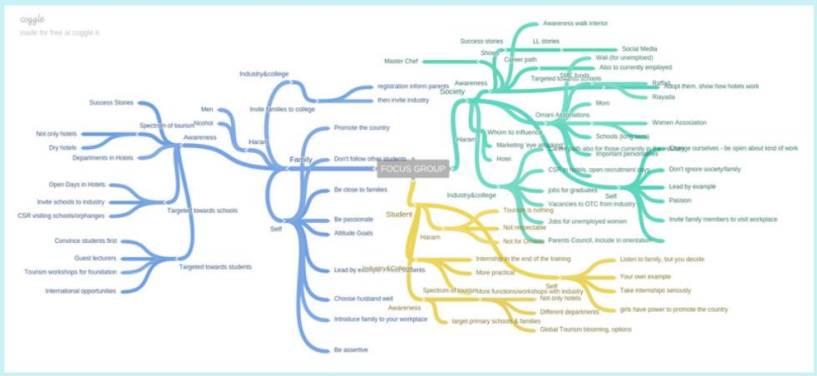
Q Ideas for influencing families to consider tourism and hospitality industry more positively as a workplace for their daughters

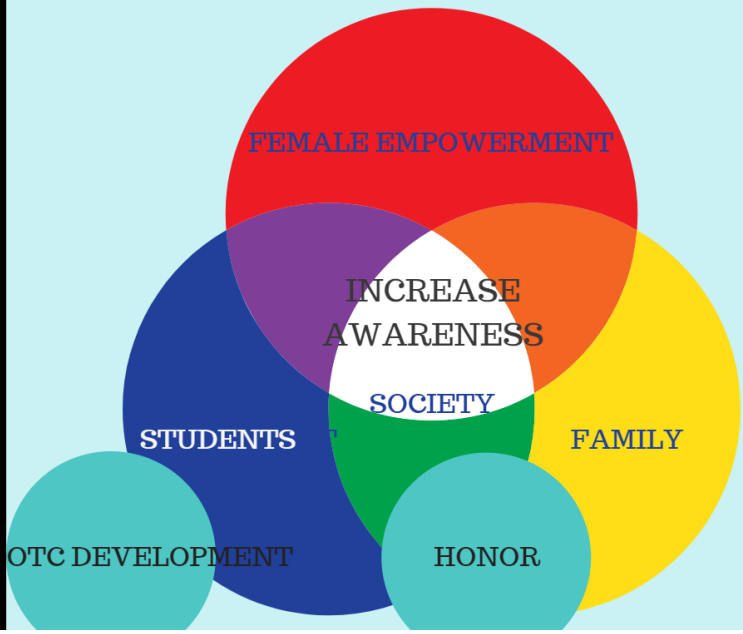
Group	Emerging theme " Awareness towards Families of OTC students"
G1 Society	Parents council Invite in orientation Industry to offer jobs for graduates Industry to host open recruitment days where families can come, CSR
G2 Family	Invite families to college; the invite industry At registration inform the parents
G3 Students	

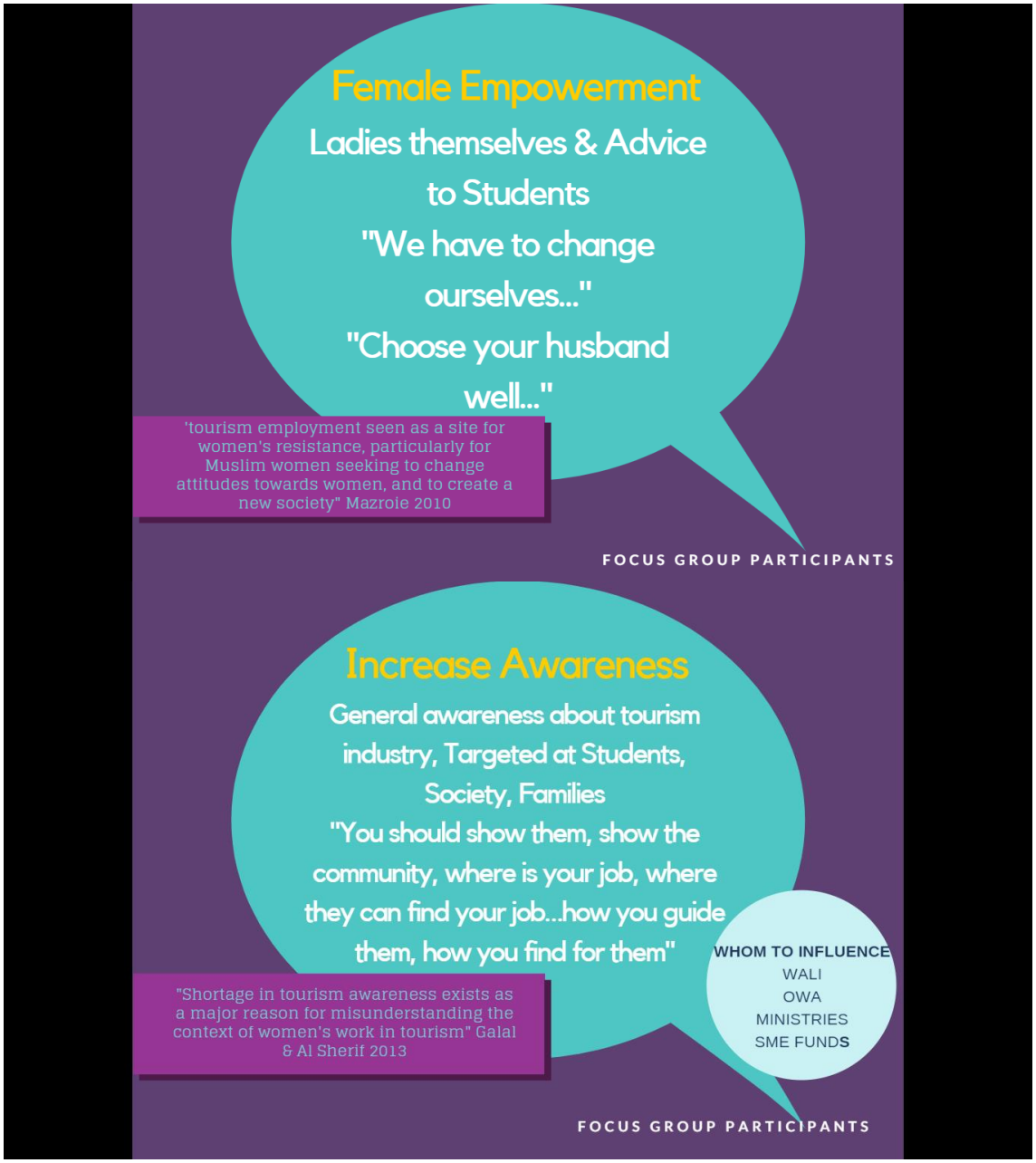
Q Who are the people or institutes in the society whose opinion matters the most?

Group	
G1 Society	Wali (for unemployed) SME funds;Raffad, Riyada Ministry of Manpower Omani Associations; Women Association Schools (long term) Important personalities

8.7 Appendix 7: PPT presentation of Research Results


FOCUS GROUP
Family
Society
Student
Awareness
Industry&college
Haram
Self


FEMALE EMPOWERMENT
INCREASE AWARENESS
SOCIETY
STUDENTS
FAMILY
OTC DEVELOPMENT
HONOR


Female Empowerment
Ladies themselves & Advice to Students
"We have to change ourselves..."
"Choose your husband well..."
'tourism employment seen as a site for women's resistance, particularly for Muslim women seeking to change attitudes towards women, and to create a new society" Mazroie 2010
FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS
Increase Awareness
General awareness about tourism industry, Targeted at Students, Society, Families
"You should show them, show the community, where is your job, where they can find your job...how you guide them, how you find for them"
"Shortage in tourism awareness exists as a major reason for misunderstanding the context of women's work in tourism" Galal & Al Sherif 2013
WHOM TO INFLUENCE
WALI
OWA
MINISTRIES
SME FUNDS
FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS

Students
OTC training development - more practical & closer to industry
Show Career options/path
"A lot of functions like today, workshops, allowing us to see different types of jobs, like I didn't know a lot of tourism"
"Encourage hotels to interact more with educational institutions on exact skills they need and what job entail"
GRA & ILO 2016 Recommendation
Students lacked awareness of the types of work available and the work conditions in the tourism industry Bontenbal&Aziz 2013
FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS
Honor - What kind of work is perceived honorable for women
"...because of the concept of hotel that it is related, linked to alcohol or haram or halal thing..."
"As we know marketing is today the most important thing. It is the eye attacking thing"
There are several disempowering factors: enforced gender ideologies and enforced socio-cultural restrictions that affect women entrpreneurs in Tourism in Oman
Mazroei, 2017
FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS

Increase Awareness
For long term effect target primary schools
"Now there is something very simple, catch them young, we go to schools, at the age of 7 -10, we adapt them, we bring them to hotels"
"Education is the most powerful weapon to change the world"
Nelson Mandela
FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS
CSR IN OMAN
OIL SECTOR IN COUNTRY VALUE
TOURISM INDUSTRY
NORM IN OMAN
2nd LADY LEADERS IN TOURISM NETWORK EVENT
THEME AS RESPONSIBLE TOURISM FEATURING
CSR PROJECTS & EXHIBITION OF NGOS

CSR as the company's aim to balance their social responsibility, environmental protection and economic progress of operations while meeting the different ethical standards and the stakeholder expectations.
UNIDO 2017
CSR & SDS & SROI
RESPONSIBLE BUSINESS -> CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY --> ECONOMIC, SOCIAL, ENVIRONMENTAL ---> TRIPLE LINE ---->IN LINE WITH SDGs 4,5.8 ---->useful for CSR PROGRAM for INDUSTRY ----->MEASUREMENT SROI
"The world's largest corporate social responsibility initiative – A call to companies to align strategies and operations with universal principles on human rights, labour, environment, and anti-corruption and take actions that advance societal goals
Un Global Compactt
ADVISORY GROUP RESULTS:
AS A CSR PROGRAM - TOGETHER WITH INDUSTRY --> CAN MAKE A CHANGE IN INFLUENCING THE PERCEPTION OF TOURISM INDUSTRY AS A CAREER CHOICE FOR WOMEN
Include men somehow in the network
To be Launched at 4th LL Event 17.10.2018
Activities to include multiple Awareness Walks, Social Media Campaign, Code of Conduct to Employ Omani Women
Involve Ministry of Manpower & Ministry of Tourism
Working groups to be established to plan for the activities
Research police/hospitals how they made similar change
Framework for the CSR program - as recommended

8.8 Appendix 8: Framework for OTC Lady Leaders in Tourism Network as CSR

OTC Lady Leaders in Tourism Network as CSR Program – Proposal to College Management

To change the current situation and lower the threshold of Omani women, especially OTC students to join the tourism industry, the network aims to assist in raising awareness about both about tourism as a respectable employer of Omani women and about the different careers available in tourism.

Working group proposal for vision, mission and values:

Vision: To nurture Omani ladies to drive responsible tourism in Oman by 2028

Mission: Hosting an active platform in partnership with stakeholders that contributes significantly to increasing and maintaining Omani ladies participation in the tourism sector and by driving a paradigm shift to the acceptance of the diverse tourism sector as an industry of opportunity for Omani ladies thus positively impacting Oman's economy, socio-cultural development and environment.

Values: Inspire, support, empower and educate

Background: OTC Lady Leaders in Tourism Network has been in operation since 2015 with the aim of offering the females in the industry a platform for discussion and networking. The network has had one event annually and has attracted up to 100 ladies representing 30 companies from a wide spectrum of tourism companies. The event has been planned and sponsored by OTC.

Main reasons for establishing the network as CSR program (backed up through thesis and supported by working advisory group for the network) are the following:

- For the past 2 years OTC student profile has been female dominant with ¾ women.
- Tourism industry faces challenges to recruit Omanis and especially Omani women – Realized Omanisation % for the past 2 years has been at 12%, out of which ¼ have been women.
- Recent research show the Omanis in general prefer other industries over tourism as a career and the industry is not viewed as a respectable choice for women by students, families and the society in general.
- The network aims are in line with the concept of CSR in the Middle East "to assist with social and economic issues that are seen to hinder the development of the country's progress (Informa Middle East, 2016)".
- The added value, in addition to partnering for an important cause, for the participating companies and stakeholders is easiness of reporting the program as a part of their CSR efforts to work towards the global SDGs. Social Return on Investment will be used for measuring the impact.
- An increasing number of tourism companies in Oman are embarking on CSR efforts and there is an international call to link the efforts with the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). 3 Goals (Gender, Education, Economic Groth) are in perfect alignment with the network aims. Companies and stakeholders participating in the network can easily justify adding the network

as CSR program into their overall CSR efforts and be sure of the impact of the program through SROI.

- The positive publicity that OTC and Oman would get nationally, regionally and internationally can be remarkable, as the network would be one of a kind in the world and can be used as a best practise.

The Network will have an annual program agreed by the advisory group and confirmed by OTC College Council. For 2018-2019 the proposed outside OTC activities include: awareness walk, code of conduct for employing Omani Women in Tourism, Social Media Campaign and internally including families and tourism industry in registration and orientation and arranging family visits to the internship places.
Management: Resourced either as a % of working time, or a certain number of hours equivalent to teaching hours by OTC Omani Female employee and supported by the working group which will be officially formed as an advisory group with members from industry, stakeholders and OTC.
The members for the Network as CSR: Ministry of Tourism and Ministry of Manpower representation will be asked for in addition to building up the on database of participating companies and stakeholders from previous network events. For the first year the membership is proposed to be free with access to networking events with possible event participation fees to cover costs.

Budget: Either to include the manpower or without, estimate is minimum on average 4 weekly hours. Internal activities to be included in departmental budgets or marketing budget as corporate relations and external activities to be sponsored by stakeholders.