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Ecofeminism and food activism in transformative travel as a tool for change

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the influence of ecofeminism and food activism as agents of transformative change in the context of travel. Poststructuralist feminist theories guided the application of qualitative methodologies. The results demonstrate that incorporating ecofeminist principles into travel contexts disrupts conventional tourism frameworks and fosters significant social and environmental transformation through mindful consumption, support of local economies, and collaboration with women-led enterprises. Challenges such as societal prejudices, greenwashing, and financial constraints impede widespread adoption. This study presents a framework that connects ecofeminism and food activism in the context of regenerative and sustainable tourism, emphasising their joint ability to address issues of environmental conservation, social justice, and ethical consumption.

Introduction

Ecofeminism is a socio-political movement that combines feminist and environmental issues. Ecofeminism examines the interconnected impacts of patriarchy on women, nature, and animals, arguing that the exploitation of the environment is inherently linked to the oppression of women and marginalised groups (Puleo & Blanco, 2019). It critiques the hierarchical dualism that places men above women and humans above nature, advocating for a holistic approach that promotes gender equality and, consequently, environmental sustainability (Gaard, 2011).

According to ecofeminist principles, the oppression of women and the exploitation of nature are interconnected, both rooted in the same social and cultural systems (Foster, 2021; Li, 2007; Ling, 2014). Food activism encompasses many social practices that contest prevailing food systems to promote ethical and

ecologically sustainable food production and consumption (Nowaczek, 2013; Yudina & Fennell, 2013). Ecofeminism and food activism both aim to eradicate many types of oppression, although their capacity to revolutionise the tourism sector has not yet been adequately examined (Freund & Hernandez-Maskivker, 2021). When ecofeminism and food activism come together, they challenge the patriarchal and capitalist structures that are built into both tourism and the global food system. This intersection offers a revolutionary way to promote sustainability. This perspective supports a model of tourism that safeguards the environment while fostering social justice, cultural integrity, and economic development (Taylor, 2017). However, despite tourism being increasingly recognised as a catalyst for economic growth and a key instrument for social change and environmental preservation (Fennell & Bowyer, 2020; Higham & Miller, 2018), the contributions and participation of women remain undervalued, even though they play a pivotal role in driving sustainable transformation.

Both ecofeminism and food activism advocate for the fight against various forms of oppression (Bertella, 2020; Yudina & Fennell, 2013). There is an academic gap in the field of sustainable tourism research that positivistic approaches leave behind. Previous research has shown that ecofeminist criticism can fill that hole. This means that when it comes to sustainable tourism, we need to think carefully about how our actions affect both local communities and the environment (de Jong & Varley, 2018; Seyfi et al., 2023). Tomsa et al. (2021) demonstrate that sustainable consumer behaviour in tourism, like choosing a vegan diet, has a significant effect on social, political, and environmental dynamics. This leads to a more sustainable type of tourism that cares about both community well-being and ecological balance. Doyle (2016) says that veganism is against the unethical parts of food production. This aligns with ecofeminism's comprehensive critique of interrelated oppressions, particularly addressing the exploitation of women, the environment, and animals, which is directly linked to food activism. Besides, exploring the transferability and applicability of feminist economic concepts, such as care, solidarity, and human rights, in the tourism industry across different cultural, legal, and economic systems is a significant yet unexplored area of study (Kalisch & Cole, 2023). After looking at these earlier studies, we can now gain deeper insights into how ecofeminist beliefs and food activist lifestyles influence sustainable tourism behaviours (Doyle, 2016).

To fill these gaps, this study aims to explore how ecofeminism and food activism can work together to promote a more ethical, welcoming, and eco-friendly tourism. Examining the gap between travellers' environmental awareness and their actual behaviours helps identify ways to better align their pro-environmental intentions with sustainable actions (Antimova et al., 2012). Using poststructuralist feminist ideas, this study questions common tourism discussions that don't look at gender and environmental issues (Eger et al., 2022; Wearing & McDonald, 2002; Wijesinghe et al., 2020). These issues have to do with how food is made and eaten. The study employed qualitative methods using different data streams: online interviews with women associated with ecofeminist ideals and data related to an ecofeminist travel initiative were evaluated. The purpose of this qualitative analysis is to find out what drives, stops, and opens possibilities there are for incorporating these ideas into everyday tourism activities. It will also examine how these ideas are used and what practical

effects they have. The findings are examined using the framework of Grounded Theory (Matteucci & Gnoth, 2017; Stumpf et al., 2016). Consequently, the research questions (RQ) are:

RQ1. What are the main pillars of ecofeminism and food activism in the context of travel, and how could they contribute to or challenge the promotion of a more ethical and respectful way of travelling?

RQ2. What specific actions are being implemented by ecofeminism and food activist initiatives to foster transformative, regenerative and sustainable travel experiences, and how do these actions reshape traditional travel practices?

RQ3. What challenges and barriers hinder the integration of ecofeminism and food activism principles within travel practices, and how do these obstacles impact the initiatives?

The novelty of this research lies in the proposal of a framework that incorporates ecofeminism and food activism into the context of sustainable tourism. This work is crucial in addressing environmental collapse by highlighting the interconnected crises of biodiversity loss, resource depletion, and socio-environmental conflicts, reinforcing the urgency of systemic change towards sustainable, regenerative, and justice-orientated models.

Ecofeminism in tourism and its role in advancing equity, ethics and environmental sustainability

Sustainable tourism scholarship has increasingly engaged with critical perspectives that challenge neoliberal and patriarchal structures shaping the industry (Kalisch & Cole, 2023; Munar, 2017). Within this context, ecofeminist and intersectional sustainability frameworks offer alternative approaches that emphasise care ethics, degrowth, and regenerative practices (Cavaliere & Ingram, 2023; Dengler & Lang, 2022; Jamal & Camargo, 2014). Ecofeminism constitutes a philosophical and activist movement that acknowledges the interconnected oppression of women, nature, and other marginalised groups (Camargo et al., 2016). Ecofeminists contend that the ideological structures facilitating the subjugation of women concurrently support the domination and degradation of nature (Bertella, 2018). This symbolises the challenge to patriarchal and anthropocentric ideologies historically justifying the mistreatment of women and the environment (Howell, 1997; Hunnicutt, 2019).

Ecofeminism aims to reframe narratives so that they focus on the biological and cultural diversity that is needed to keep life going. This includes aspects such as recreation and leisure (Henderson, 1995). Ecofeminism raises issues of agency, gender equity, and fairness in ecotourism development programmes for ecologically sustainable communities (Swain & Swain, 2004), prioritising social and environmental justice (Camargo et al., 2016; Shaheer, 2024). Ecotourism addresses gender, race, and class intersectionality to achieve social and environmental justice (Kalisch & Cole, 2023), highlighting intersectionality, decolonisation, and the complexity of women's oppression in the post-colonial Global South, where tourism is a capitalist development tool (Kalisch & Cole, 2023).

Ecofeminist scholars highlight the gendered division of labour in tourism, indicating that women frequently occupy low-wage, service-orientated roles (Camargo et al., 2016).

Traditional tourism models have faced criticism for commodifying women's bodies and the natural environment. This is evident in destinations where women are marketed as attractions, particularly sex exploitation and abuse linked to tourism (Kinnaird & Hall, 2000) and ecotourism practices that neglect the protection of local ecosystems while exploiting the labour of indigenous women (Camargo et al., 2016). Building on this critique, Kalisch and Cole (2023) argue that economic systems are androcentric and ignore female perspectives. A human rights-based economy is a critical feminist alternative to the capitalist neoliberal economic system based on widely recognised ethical and legal norms (Kalisch & Cole, 2023). Kalisch and Cole (2023) suggest feminist and decolonial tourism reform using the Feminist Alternative Tourist Economics (FATE) paradigm. FATE's anti-capitalist economic practices are based on fair and sustainable tourism growth, gender equity, and underprivileged community empowerment (Kalisch & Cole, 2023).

Extending this perspective, the ecofeminist approach to tourism emphasises the ethical responsibilities of travel and leisure activities towards both animal rights and local communities (Sheppard & Fennell, 2019). Wright (2021) examines how ecofeminism and veganism affect tourism and argues that their intersection challenges patriarchal structures that perpetuate exploitation and encourages a change to more ethical and environmentally friendly tourism practices. By connecting these perspectives, ecofeminism not only criticises how mainstream tourism is involved in food systems that take advantage of people, but it also offers a way to rethink tourism through equitable and compassionate practices. This perspective emphasises ethical considerations that extend beyond human communities to include animals and the broader environment, fostering a more holistic approach to sustainability (Bertella, 2020). In this context, tourism also has the potential to inspire behavioural shifts among tourists, encouraging more sustainable and ethical food consumption practices beyond their travel experiences (Mair & Laing, 2013; Orea-Giner & Fusté-Forné, 2023). These transformative potentials underscore the role of tourism as a platform for broader societal change toward ethical, sustainable, and regenerative food practices (Dredge, 2022; McGregor et al., 2024).

Ecofeminism and food activism in the pursuit of care, justice and regeneration

The ecofeminist critique of industrial agriculture and globalised food systems, as articulated by scholars like Vandana Shiva (1990, 1991, 2001, 2016), is increasingly resonating with contemporary food activism movements. This criticism is part of a larger conversation about the moral and environmental imperatives of food-related industries, especially tourism (Bertella, 2020; Nowaczek, 2013; Yudina & Fennell, 2013). Building on these foundational critiques, Gaard (1997) highlights how ecofeminism forms the basis of a critical approach to tourism research, advocating for practices that extend beyond minimising environmental harm to actively integrating food activism into sustainable tourism frameworks. In this sense, ecofeminist care ethics advocates for relational and community-centred sustainability, opposing extractivist food and tourism models (Plumwood, 2002).

Food activism is associated with diverse lifestyles, including vegetarianism, veganism, locavorism, and slow food movements, which contest industrialised food systems and promote ethical and sustainable consumption (Lin, 2020; Salehi et al., 2024). Alternative food production models, such as agroecology and permaculture, represent food activism by opposing corporate dominance in agriculture and promoting biodiversity, ecological resilience, and community self-sufficiency (Roux-Rosier et al., 2018; Siow et al., 2022). Food sovereignty, a key pillar of food activism, advocates for localised, equitable, and ecologically sustainable food systems (Hunt et al., 2023). Bertella (2020) presents an ecofeminist perspective on food in tourism, focusing on the ethics and sustainability of animal-derived food. Mallory's (2013) ecofeminist critique of food systems and locavorism highlights the complexity of locally sourced food consumption. While often portrayed as an environmentally sustainable practice, it may also reinforce systemic inequalities, especially concerning labour, gender, and food access.

Building on this, Johnson (2015) applies ecofeminist perspectives and care ethics to explore how relational consciousness within community-based food experiences can promote sustainable tourism practices. By facilitating ethical and emotional reconnections, these experiences encourage more responsible consumption and production patterns. After critically examining food activism in terms of ecofeminism, Gaard (2002) emphasises the political underpinnings of diet and its effects on science and economics. This study suggests a broader ecofeminist view that considers different kinds of oppression, such as speciesism, to ensure that morals are fair and just for both people and animals (Holy et al., 2021; Winter, 2020). Similarly, Yudina and Fennell (2013) argue that ecofeminist ethics in tourism necessitate a critical reevaluation of animal use, particularly in food tourism. These studies reject the commodification of animals and advocate for their ethical treatment, reinforcing the necessity of tourism models rooted in care, justice, and environmental respect. These critiques align with broader discussions of patriarchal exploitation and emphasise the importance of race, class, gender, and place in fostering more inclusive and ethical tourism models (Chambers, 2022; Lee & Jamal, 2008; Scheyvens & Biddulph, 2018). By integrating these dimensions, sustainable tourism can move away from exclusionary practices and instead promote equitable food systems that benefit both local communities and the environment.

Methodology

Approach and research design

The research approach is deeply influenced by intersectional feminist and ecofeminist theoretical frameworks, particularly considering the previous work of Vandana Shiva (1990, 1991, 2001, 2016), Alicia Puleo (2017; Puleo & Blanco, 2019) and Yayo Herrero (2021a, 2021b). Figure 1 illustrates a systematic yet flexible process for inductive theory development based on empirical data (Charmaz, 2014; Goulding, 2002). Grounded theory was operationalised through an iterative and reflexive approach, ensuring an emergent data analysis. The selection of Goulding (2002) and Charmaz (2014) is justified by their focus on interpretive grounded theory, which prioritises context-sensitive analysis and researcher reflexivity. This approach is particularly relevant for studying activist
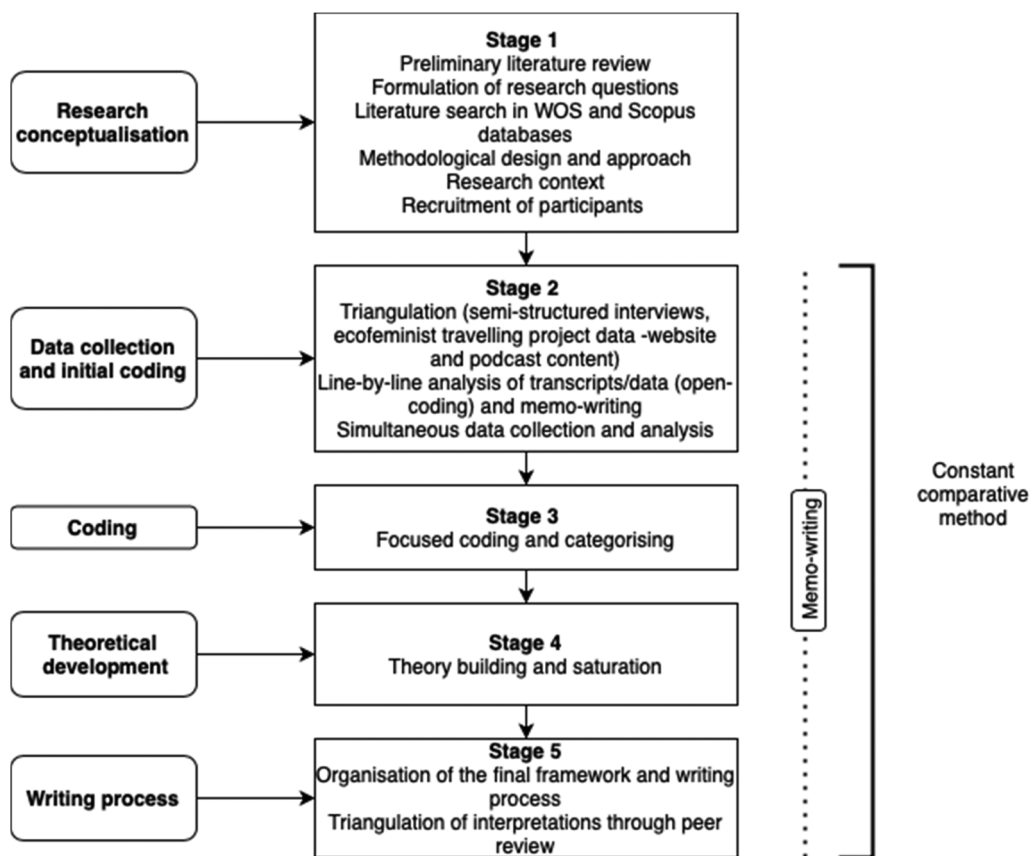
Stage 1
Preliminary literature review
Formulation of research questions
Literature search in WOS and Scopus databases
Methodological design and approach
Research context
Recruitment of participants

Research conceptualisation

Stage 2
Triangulation (semi-structured interviews, ecofeminist travelling project data -website and podcast content)
Line-by-line analysis of transcripts/data (open-coding) and memo-writing
Simultaneous data collection and analysis

Data collection and initial coding

Stage 3
Focused coding and categorising

Coding

Stage 4
Theory building and saturation

Theoretical development

Stage 5
Organisation of the final framework and writing process
Triangulation of interpretations through peer review

Writing process

Memo-writing

Constant comparative method

Figure 1. Research process based on grounded theory. *Sources*: Goulding, 2002; Charmaz, 2014.

movements and their impact on tourism, allowing for a nuanced, co-constructed understanding of ecofeminist food activism. Memo-writing, coding cycles, and theoretical saturation provided a structured yet adaptable framework for understanding the intersections between ecofeminism, food activism, and tourism.

The primary methods used to examine the links between ecofeminism and food activism in the tourism industry are grounded theory, online interviews, and content analysis (Bertella, 2018, 2020; Yudina & Fennell, 2013). The data collection process relied on qualitative methods. The first stream is based on online interviews. The second stream focuses on the analysis of website content and podcasts produced by an ecofeminist travel project identified during the semi-structured interview process. These combined data streams are intended to provide diverse perspectives for proposing a model that integrates ecofeminism, activism, and food systems in tourism settings.

Semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interview design

Semi-structured interviews have previously been used in tourism research (Bertella, 2022; Prakash et al., 2024; Yudina & Fennell, 2013). The interviews covered a range

of topics related to the integration of ecofeminism and food activism principles in tourism, including participants' motivations and experiences, perceived benefits and challenges, and strategies for overcoming barriers. Table 1 outlines the initial interview design, aiming for a semi-structured format. While the listed questions provided a guiding framework, the interview process allowed for flexibility, with modifications and additional questions introduced based on participants' responses and emerging themes. This adaptability ensured a more dynamic exchange, distinguishing it from a fully structured approach.

Selection of participants

The first participants were selected using purposive sampling (Rossiter, 2011). The initial participants were chosen from an initiative known as "Trenzando Cuidados," including 15 projects linked to ecofeminism, agroecology and food sovereignty. The Ecofeminism Area of Ecologists in Action (Spain) has launched this project with the objective of identifying and comprehending the many groups and projects in Spain that actively include ecofeminism principles. The initiative explores the goals and activities of various groups. The objective of this project was to gather names, addresses, contact information, and descriptions of ecofeminism activities throughout

Table 1. Initial interview design.

Question	References
There are many approaches to and perspectives on ecofeminism. Could you describe your involvement in ecofeminism and food activism? Please provide examples.	Gaard, 2002 Mallory, 2013 Twine, 2014 Jain, 2022
How do you understand ecofeminism in the context of travel, and in what ways do you believe it can offer strategies to combat the current tourism model?	Kalisch & Cole, 2023
Regarding food, how do you think food activism can complement ecofeminist principles to promote this change?	Gaard, 2002 Mallory, 2013 Twine, 2014 Jain, 2022 Lorenzini, 2022
How does the ecofeminist approach affect local communities, particularly in terms of economic opportunities, cultural preservation, and social justice? Can you discuss the role of food activism practices in enhancing these impacts?	Yudina & Fennell, 2013 Bertella, 2018, Johnson, 2018 Bertella, 2020 Wright, 2021 Kalisch & Cole, 2023
How can the principles of a feminist ethic of care, social solidarity economy, and human rights-based economy be applied to travel practices, especially through food activism choices? Please provide specific examples.	Wright, 2021 Kalisch & Cole, 2023
How does the commercialisation of ecofeminism and food activism in tourism align with their core values? Is there a risk of diluting these principles for marketing purposes?	Yudina & Fennell, 2013 Bertella, 2018, Johnson, 2018 Bertella, 2020 Gaard, 2002 Véron & White, 2021 Giraud & White, 2022
What are the main challenges and barriers to implementing the ecofeminist approach in tourism, especially in food activism practices?	Yudina & Fennell, 2013 Bertella, 2018, Johnson, 2018 Bertella, 2020 Wright, 2021

Source: Own elaboration, 2024.

Spain to categorise them on a map. This map (Ecologistas en Acción, n.d.) is designed to emphasise and illustrate ecofeminist actions, serving as a point of reference for both individuals and organisations. The objective is to establish a platform for these ecofeminist projects to connect, exchange experiences, practices, and challenges, and to form a network among them.

All initiatives categorised under agroecology, food sovereignty, biodiversity conservation, and waste management were chosen and contacted based on this map, which identifies only 15 projects in Spain that are purely ecofeminist and directly linked to these areas. These initiatives were directly or indirectly linked to tourism, and they were familiar with rural tourism development because many of them contribute to rural revitalisation by integrating sustainable food systems, fostering connections between visitors and local communities, and supporting agritourism initiatives. This limited number of projects underscores the niche nature of ecofeminist activism in Spain, particularly in relation to food sovereignty and environmental sustainability. A total of 32 individuals were contacted between March and August 2024, inviting them to take part in the study. The invitation message stated that participants must have an ecofeminism and food activist approach. Before concluding the interview, the researcher evaluated the reliability of each participant's decision to participate in the study.

In addition, while conducting interviews, the selected participants recommended other individuals who fit this description, as well as suggesting other ecofeminism initiatives that are connected. This involves the application of the snowball sampling technique as described by Robert (2015).

Interview procedure and participants

The interviews were conducted in Spanish via videoconferencing using the Teams platform between June and September 2024. To verify the accuracy of the interview procedure, a preliminary test was conducted using a sample of three individuals. Prior to conducting each semi-structured interview, the researcher made certain that all participants agreed to the research conditions. Every session was meticulously recorded and then transcribed. The interviews lasted between 30 and 50 minutes.

The study's sample size included 11 individuals based in Spain, selected from a pool of 32 individuals contacted between March and August 2024. These participants were drawn from 15 projects categorised under agroecology, food sovereignty, biodiversity conservation, and waste management initiatives, identified through a targeted map. A snowball sampling technique was also employed, where initial participants referred other potential candidates who fit the study criteria, further enriching the sample by reaching individuals deeply embedded in ecofeminist activism. The final sample comprises women who identify as ecofeminist activists engaged in initiatives related to agroecology, food sovereignty, biodiversity conservation, and waste preservation. Additionally, the study includes women who operate travel agencies and sustainable accommodations in alignment with ecofeminist principles and food activism. Every woman invited had a connection to the development of rural tourism, whether directly or indirectly. Saturation was reached when it became clear that further interviews would not provide additional significant information or variability in the findings (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022), particularly regarding their consistent adherence to ecofeminist principles and involvement in related projects. Table 2 displays

Table 2. Interviewees profiles.

Code	Year of birth	Profession	Specific link with ecofeminism and ethical food consumption
P1	1976	Environmental technician	She actively collaborates in a food cooperative.
P2	1981	Agro-environmental educator	She is part of an initiative focused on cooperativism, social economy and territorialised agri-food systems.
P3	1981	Permaculturist	She has participated in various projects, including a consumer group and the creation of a supermarket based on solidarity and the social economy. She is currently engaged in a permaculture project.
P4	1984	Social Economy Entrepreneur	Entrepreneur in the social economy through a shop selling organic and bulk products, as well as community management services.
P5	1982	Educator	Works on a social economy project through a shop that sells organic and bulk products, as well as community management services.
P6	1981	Organisation, communication and dissemination of trips	Leading a travel project designed by and for women to discover new destinations with an ecofeminist perspective.
P7	1991	Software development engineer	She is engaged in trips with ecofeminist principles, ethical food practices, community-based tourism, and sustainable travel experiences that support gender equity, food sovereignty, and environmental justice.
P8	1975	Hospitality Manager	Manager of a tourism project that focuses on regeneration. This project is collaborating with P6, P9 and P11 to create a specific ecofeminist trip.
P9	1996	Agro-ecological dynamiser	Welcomes tourists while also providing an educational approach to permaculture.
P10	1985	Permaculturist	She initiated a permaculture project in rural areas. This project is linked to receiving tourists as well as providing an educational approach to permaculture.
P11	1976	Agro-ecology outreach worker	She is part of a project whose main pillars are agroecology, sustainable mobility, ecofeminism and food sovereignty. Her project is also collaborating with P6, organising a trip together.

Source: Own elaboration, 2025.

the characteristics of the interviews. The anonymising procedure involves assigning participants a sequential identifier, indicated by the notation P followed by a number (e.g. P1), to ensure confidentiality.

Ecofeminist travelling project analysis

Ecofeminist travelling project context

This study, utilising grounded theory, identified the website and podcast data from the "*Hacia lo Salvaje*" project as the most comprehensive and representative ecofeminist tourism initiative following the interviews, facilitating a deeper exploration of emergent themes while ensuring theoretical saturation. It is a unique initiative in Spain that combines ecofeminism with sustainable travel, offering immersive experiences that reconnect participants with nature while promoting ecofeminist values. Initially, the project did not adhere to an ecofeminist framework, but this approach was adopted in 2023, marking a significant shift in its mission and activities. The project facilitates journeys that explore

the interconnections between women's empowerment, environmental sustainability, and local community engagement. These trips are designed to foster a deep connection with nature, challenge conventional tourism models, and support ecofeminist ideals by collaborating with local women-led initiatives and indigenous communities. The real-world application of ecofeminist ideas within the *"Hacia lo Salvaje"* project provided this research with valuable information and context. This enabled an examination of the project's effects and their relation to the broader ecofeminist movement.

Before data collection commenced, the project lead signed the informed consent form, ensuring that she was fully aware of and agreed to the study's terms and conditions.

Website and podcast content analysis

To further explore the ecofeminist narrative and digital presence of the "*Hacia lo Salvaje*" project (www.hacialosalvaje.net), a web content analysis was conducted focused on the project's official. Complementing the web content analysis, a podcast content analysis was undertaken to examine the audio materials produced by "*Hacia lo Salvaje.*" The project's podcasts, notably episodes 124 to 139 (a total of 15 episodes), were chosen for examination since they were created using an explicit ecofeminist approach. These episodes, available on platforms like Spotify and iVoox, include interviews with ecofeminist activists, discussions on sustainable living, and narratives of personal journeys that emphasise the interrelationship between gender and environmental issues. The podcasts selected lasted between 20 and 45 minutes.

The coding procedure followed a sequential approach, shown by the notation W for the website content and a PD + number for each podcast analysed (e.g. PD124).

Data processing and analysis

The qualitative data were analysed using a grounded theory methodology, with NVivo (2022) used to facilitate the coding process (Hutchison et al., 2010). Data processing involved analysing and categorising the information gathered from the collection streams. During the interviews, every participant responded to the interview questions in Spanish. To minimise the possibility of losing significant implications, the information was evaluated using the same language as the original interview. The website and podcast content analysis followed the same procedure, both in Spanish.

The analysis began with open coding (line-by-line analysis), where interview transcripts were thoroughly examined to identify initial concepts and categories. During this phase, the data were broken down into separate semantic units through constant comparative analysis, allowing for the identification of new categories and dimensions (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). After that, focused coding was used to improve and combine the most important and recurring codes. This made it possible to create sub-themes that showed how the categories were related (Charmaz, 2014). During selective coding, these sub-themes were further integrated into broader, overarching themes, aligning with the iterative process of grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014; Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

This study ensured trustworthiness and credibility by employing triangulation through the integration of multiple data sources, including interviews, content analysis,

and memo-writing. Researcher reflexivity was upheld via continuous memo-writing to critically reflect on emerging interpretations. Taking notes during the analysis helped the researcher think about what they were doing and made sure that their interpretations were based on the participants' real-life experiences and ecofeminist principles, rather than being too influenced by strict theoretical frameworks (Charmaz, 2014). The data underwent a thorough review to ensure reliability and precision while adhering to grounded theory protocols. Additionally, a peer review was conducted with two external readers who actively provided feedback on the interpretation of the results. Table 3 presents the coding framework.

The findings and discussion section demonstrates how the data analysis was linked and critically analysed together to give a fuller and more in-depth look at the results. The quotes in the findings section were translated into English without altering their original meaning, as preserving the participants' intended meaning was essential.

Findings and discussion

The findings were analysed by employing grounded theory to integrate and critically evaluate the data, focusing on the links between emergent themes. This method helps grounded theory's ongoing comparison and theoretical saturation by comparing and improving categories over and over to get a better grasp of the data (Charmaz, 2014; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This method ensures descriptive, analytically rich findings that illuminate the phenomena under study.

Table 3. Coding framework.

Aggregated themes	Themes obtained after focused coding	Focused coding	Examples of data excerpts
Ecofeminism and food activism practices as a tool for transformative travel	Actions to promote change in the current tourism model	- Ecofeminist forms of travelling - Change of paradigm - Need to think about the interdependence and ecodependence - System based on sisterhood - Critical analysis of the current tourism model	"Our main challenge is the need to shift this change towards the systemic paradigm because of social challenges." (PD131)
	Ecofeminism and food activism experiences and narratives	- Travel as a tool for personal transformation - Travelling as a means of escape from reality - The importance of being critically informed - Clear and transparent pre-travel information - Need for rest and reflection while travelling	"[It's] an invitation to escape the accelerated, productive, and linear rhythm" (PD124)
	Holistic perspective of care	- Caring for the planet / others - Taking care of others - Need for self-care - The need for work-life balance - Improve life conditions through care	"My vision of care is not only to care from one side but to observe and see what people, animals, and even the plants I have need." (P1).

(Continued)

Table 3. Continued.

Aggregated themes	Themes obtained after focused coding	Focused coding	Examples of data excerpts
Redefining travel through food activism, ethical consumption and sisterhood	Actions to promote change in the current tourism model	- Ecofeminist approaches to travelling - Change of paradigm - Need to think about the interdependence and ecodependence - System rooted in sisterhood - Critical analysis of the current tourism model	"Our main challenge is the need to shift this change towards the systemic paradigm because of social challenges." (PD131)
	Conscious and committed consumption actions	- Actions against mass tourism - Conscious consumption actions - Committed consumption actions - Critical consumption actions	"You have to buy consciously; you have to consume consciously." (PD127)
	Ethical and healthy food consumption actions	- Alignment with food sovereignty actions - Vegetarian and vegan diets as food activism responses - The impact of toxic chemicals on women's bodies	"Therefore, it is about stopping viewing food as merchandise and focusing on the people who produce it and the people who consume it.'" (PD127)
	Actions to promote a social and circular economy	- Dignifying tourism work - Responsible financing options - Circular and social economy initiatives	"An alternative to the capitalist economy that [...] not only serves as a beacon in this journey towards the wild but also as a network and support to continue advancing" (PD137)
	Sustainable actions	- Sustainable mobility - Reducing the carbon footprint - Promoting off-peak travel and long stays	"We only allow one flight per traveller per year." (W)
Building relationships and learning while travelling	Empathy, cooperation, and interculturality measures	- Creating alliances with other projects/women - Establishing a network of collaborators - Using inclusive and anti-speciesism language	"We form alliances with initiatives related to agroecology, conservation, and regeneration of nature, women's and girls' empowerment, or circular economy, to name a few examples." (W)
	Actions to share and connect with other women	- Emotional link with ecofeminist projects - Connecting through adventure - Sharing personal experiences	"The support of more women who are on the same quest, new friends, companions who want to rekindle that fire in the community…" (W)
	Actions to transfer knowledge	- Training on the impact of travel - Exchange and learning through personal experiences	"I look for committed women who, when they return, will transfer what they have learnt." (W)

(*Continued*)

Table 3. Continued.

Aggregated themes	Themes obtained after focused coding	Focused coding	Examples of data excerpts
Navigating challenges in food activism while travelling	External barriers and challenges	- Greenwashing done by other businesses - Elevated prices in products or services linked to this ethical approach - Rural environments can be judgemental	"We can't compete with […] the big company to get the products to your house super cheap, without transport costs." (P3).
	Internal barriers and challenges	- Issues to make visible their projects - Difficulties connecting with such a specific target	"I am a solo entrepreneur, but I am having a lot of trouble getting visibility in mainstream media." (P6)

Source: Own elaboration, 2024.

Ecofeminism and food activism practices as a tool for transformative travel

Ecofeminism enriches our understanding of the complex relationships between gender, nature, and tourism, providing a framework for envisioning a more equitable, sustainable, and inclusive tourism industry (Camargo et al., 2016). In this context, food activism challenges industrialised food systems and promotes sustainable, locally rooted practices that align with ecofeminist principles, fostering awareness of food justice and ethical consumption while travelling. The information available on the "*Hacia lo Salvaje*" website reveals how they characterise their initiative, which goes beyond what one may expect from a travel organisation, as the following extract highlights:

> The main goal […] is not economic profit. It is for travel to be a tool for transformation, one that helps us become aware of the eco-social impact of our existence, one that helps us glimpse new paths toward a more empathetic, just, and sustainable model with all the beings we coexist with, and that tourism can assist those who have already embarked on this journey. (W)

Considering the findings, tourism can foster positive social change when it prioritises ethics and justice rather than profit (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2006). Collaborating with local women and communities fosters equitable, sustainable models by redistributing power and promoting social and economic empowerment (Kalisch & Cole, 2023). Additionally, integrating food activism through local food production can further strengthen these efforts. Reflection and learning enhance the travel experience while maximising positive impacts. A critical assessment **of** how these initiatives are implemented is essential to prevent these practices from reinforcing inequality. The content analysed highlights that travelling following ecofeminist principles can transform travellers and empower women. This pertains to the formation of alliances with other projects, particularly those led by women focused on rural regeneration. This fragment encapsulates the concept:

> Our obsession is that the journey itself also becomes a tool for empowering rural women. We always hire women whenever possible as guides, collaborators, or managers of accommodations, both in Spain and beyond our borders. (W)

The interviews showed that participants avoided using the term "tourism." They use terms like "travel," "journey" and "experience" to emphasise their connection with places

and people. This linguistic shift suggests a shift from superficial engagement and consumerism to meaningfulness, respect, and ecofeminism in tourism. In this sense, the term "transformative travel" highlights how travel can foster personal growth and a deeper understanding of social and environmental issues, inspiring travellers to advocate for change (Reisinger, 2013). This approach encourages off-season travel, longer stays, and reflection over excessive activities, shifting from extractive tourism to regenerative models that strengthen community and ecosystem well-being (Bellato & Pollock, 2023).

Redefining travel through food activism, ethical consumption and sisterhood

Ecofeminism can be used both in theory and in practice to examine how human and non-human rights, as well as environmental justice, are connected in tourism (Shaheer et al., 2024) and how they need to change, as shown by the progress made in ecofeminism, food activism and travel. Ecofeminist principles of conscious and responsible consumption underpin this transition (Bertella, 2020; Wright, 2021). This view holds that travel goes beyond leisure. It requires deep reflection and critical analysis of current consumption patterns, particularly the tourism model. As shown in the following excerpt, food activism alone may struggle to bring about systemic change:

> All this that I am participating in is one of the ways to create another future, not to change the system, as that is very difficult. (P3)

Redefining travel through ecofeminism and food activism requires sisterhood, mutual support, empathy, cooperation, and interculturality, fostering connections that empower women and strengthen their roles in the communities they visit. Within this framework, conscious and committed consumption (Bertella, 2018; Yudina & Fennell, 2013) becomes essential, as it encourages travellers to avoid overcrowded mass tourism destinations and instead support ethical and healthy food initiatives, including self-supply systems and producer exchanges linked to food sovereignty (Robins, 2015). A crucial aspect in this context is the concept of food sovereignty, as highlighted by one of the interview participants:

> We saw that ecology, food sovereignty, ecofeminism, degrowth, and sustainable mobility—since we use bicycles as our means of transportation—were four essential pillars for us. (P11)

In this context of redefining travel, the findings highlight the promotion of plant-based food during travel as a transformative strategy for driving systemic change. Most participants in this study prioritised plant-based diets while travelling, though not consistently. Their concerns revolved around the ethical and environmental implications of food choices, including the origins of animal-based products, production conditions, and labour dignity. This form of food activism is significant, as respondents expressed a preference for organic and locally sourced products. These excursions often take place in areas with few restaurants, forcing travellers to cook with local ingredients. This excerpt illustrates it:

> When we travel by bike visiting initiatives, we don't follow any tourist circuit or anything like that. We go wherever we need to meet the people we want to see. We encounter

numerous food-related challenges, particularly when traversing areas with sparse populations and limited services. We must prepare meals daily for 20 people using two camping stoves. (P11)

However, food choices were often context-dependent, with some participants acknowledging that in certain locations, such as remote islands, sustainably sourced animal products might be the most viable option. Additionally, some interviewees stressed the crucial role of animals in permaculture projects, highlighting their connection to alternative forms of food activism, as the following excerpt summarises:

> I understand that other people want to follow plant-based diets, but I believe that for a faster regeneration of soils, animals are part of the system. (P3)

The proposed actions emphasise the importance of educating travellers on minimalist, non-toxic, and zero-waste packing—such as using ecological and multi-purpose natural cosmetics—while also supporting local economies and making conscious transportation choices. This approach aligns with slow tourism (Oh et al., 2016), which fosters deeper connections and reduces environmental impact. The following excerpt highlights several of these aspects:

> We provide training to travellers on the impact that travel generates, how to minimise it as much as possible, how to pack sustainably, and the importance of supporting the local economy at the destination or encouraging the shared use of transportation. (W)

These educational aspects are linked to personal reflection while travelling. Through journalling, individuals can internalise these values, deepening their awareness of their impact and fostering more responsible tourism practices. As one participant noted, dedicating time to journaling at the end of the day allows the journey to transcend beyond its surface level, offering both personal insight and a valuable resource for fellow travellers:

> In all our trips, we try—at least in the international ones where we have more time—to dedicate about 20 minutes at the end of the day to make a kind of travel journal that helps us reflect on what the day has meant. In this way, the trip transcends beyond its surface level and also serves as a valuable resource for the women who have participated. (P6)

Navigating challenges in food activism while travelling

A key external barrier is the bias against ecofeminism and food activism, leading many initiatives to avoid explicit alignment. Misconceptions and negative stereotypes (Pritchard, 2014; Swain & Swain, 2004) reduce public support, making it harder to secure funding, build partnerships, and attract people. However, the interviewee's engagement in educational activities with students can help counteract these barriers, as this excerpt illustrates:

> We try to present projects [...] that are successful, that are well-known, that work, so that the students realise that all that works and [...] that it is also recognised as ecofeminism. And then we introduce that word at the end to show them that ecofeminism is also all those things and to avoid the initial rejection it generates. (P11)

Furthermore, ecofeminism and food activism initiatives often face challenges related to insufficient media coverage or misrepresentation in public discourse, which complicates efforts to promote awareness of their objectives and activities. This excerpt highlights it:

> I am venturing out on my own, and I'm having quite a few problems gaining visibility in conventional media outlets. (P6)

Another external barrier identified is that these initiatives are frequently met with resistance in rural areas (Fhlatharta & Farrell, 2017). One interviewee describes this as their primary challenge, which is also linked to their sexual orientation, as two women who identify as LGBTQIA+. The interviewee emphasises:

> We are a couple of girls who are breaking many social barriers. Fortunately, we don't have to rely on the people of the village […] Their comments are often very difficult for us, as is the institutional rejection. (P10)

Another category of barriers is associated with the greenwashing practices employed by various companies within the travel and tourism sector (Papagiannakis et al., 2024). Interviewees indicate that the impact of greenwashing occurs when large companies exploit niche markets by mimicking ethical or eco-friendly initiatives without true commitment. Additionally, as the following excerpt indicates, small companies may abandon their foundational values for capitalist gains as they grow, leading to a dilution of original principles and fostering consumer scepticism towards genuine sustainable efforts.

> There is a kind of greenwashing and capitalism's monopolisation of terms close to food activism, to agroecology, to everything we are seeing. (P9)

Both trip organisers and travellers identified the price as a barrier. These trips prioritise fair compensation for all visited projects and adherence to ethical principles regarding food consumption, transportation, and accommodation, which leads to higher costs compared to mass tourism alternatives. The culture promoted by social networks that encourages the sharing of extensive travel information is identified as a barrier. This trend compels individuals to visit the same popular locations as others, thereby reducing the opportunity to participate in genuinely distinct or unique experiences. This excerpt exemplifies the point:

> You must take the Instagram photo at the trendy spot X […] so as not to be less than others. Or in the end, you'll want to go to the same place; this makes it very difficult to do things truly differently. (P7)

Lastly, another barrier identified by the interviewees is the perception that travel serves as an escape from routine. Within this routine, individuals often engage in activities associated with environmentalism or ethical considerations, such as food activism. The following excerpt exemplifies this result:

> Our routines align with our ideals and ethics. In our routine and in our day-to-day life, we make efforts to maintain and support them, but suddenly we go on holiday, and we forget all that. It's like all that disappears because we live it as an effort. I try, and now that I'm on vacation, I don't want to not try. (P11)

This temporary disengagement from sustainable practices is often seen as an opportunity to momentarily step away from daily responsibilities, with travel providing a

pause from these activities (Anciaux, 2019). This insight highlights how various projects and initiatives integrate sustainability and ethical practices into tourism experiences in ways that encourage participation without imposing a sense of obligation.

Connecting with nature and rethinking relationships with ecosystems

Nature is connected to food production and consumption, highlighting the interdependence between human and ecological systems. Engaging with nature through food—whether by growing, harvesting, or mindfully consuming—reinforces the idea that sustainability is not just an abstract principle but a lived practice embedded in daily choices. This aligns with Plumwood's (2002) critique, as the participants' narratives demonstrate that connecting with nature through food makes people more aware of ecological cycles, ethical consumption, and the strength of both individuals and communities. This perspective is reflected in the analysed narratives, where participants highlight the significance of reconnecting with nature as a means of well-being and resilience, as illustrated in the following excerpt:

> Escape to nature is the easiest, fastest, and cheapest medicine, but we don't value it. Small doses of Vitamin N (nature) offer immense physical, mental, and emotional benefits. (W)

In this connection with nature, the environmental impact generated by travel is also considered, striving to reduce it to the minimum possible and committing to respect for the territories and the local population. This aligns with ecofeminist demands for environmental justice and equitable, community-based approaches to sustainable development (Alarcón & Cole, 2019; Lee & Jamal, 2008; Swain & Swain, 2004). In this context, food activism supports sustainable production, ethical consumption, and local food systems, empowering communities and reducing environmental harm. Prioritising locally sourced, plant-based foods helps travellers minimise their footprint while promoting food sovereignty and social justice. Some of the examples highlighted through the interviews linked to this principle are presented below:

> As ecofeminism says: […] we are interdependent and eco-dependent. (PD128)

> One of the things I know is that reducing the environmental impact when we travel has repercussions on improving the lives of the people in those territories, and specifically of women, because women predominantly handle caregiving. [Reducing the environmental impact when we travel] pertains to the management of natural resources and the establishment of caregiving relationships with the local population. […] If the water is contaminated, women will have to buy bottled water more often, which affects their finances, time, and caregiving for others. (P2)

Women need to balance work and life, and tourism can make caregiving more challenging. This connects to the holistic concept of care. Kalisch and Cole (2023) suggest integrating the FATE model, which emphasises care, solidarity, and human rights in economic practices. According to P2, tourism-related environmental degradation, such as water contamination, directly impacts women, who manage household resources and care for children. This excerpt shows how a permaculture project chooses visitors to benefit their community and avoid mass tourism's negative

effects. This excerpt illustrates how a permaculture project carefully selects visitors to ensure they benefit the community and avoid the negative effects of mass tourism:

> We also really like to select the people; we 'collect' the clients we have. We'd like people to come who are conscious that they want to learn or are interested in seeing projects and who are respectful of the territory. Above all, it's super important for us that this mindset is in the people who come to do tourism. (P8)

This selective approach underscores the need for a deeper connection between tourists and locals in ecofeminist travel. However, it is essential to critically assess these interactions to ensure they genuinely benefit local women and do not reinforce power imbalances or a sense of tourist superiority.

Building ecofeminist relationships and learning while travelling

Travel fosters connections among women, facilitating knowledge exchange and meaningful interactions with local communities. These experiences often lead to personal transformation, deeper engagement with local projects, and lasting emotional bonds (Camargo et al., 2016). In this context, food activism plays a key role by preserving local food traditions, supporting small-scale producers, and promoting ethical consumption to strengthen community resilience. The subsequent excerpt encapsulates these elements:

> We promote contact and communication with local people, focusing on mutual exchange and learning, with respect and collaboration. The journey becomes a cultural bridge, a means to foster empathy and cooperation. (W).

Travelling, therefore, serves as a platform for ecofeminist and food activism, where women actively engage with local communities, learn from their practices, and share knowledge to promote sustainable and equitable food systems (Swain & Swain, 2004). This excerpt expresses this view:

> I have been a vegetarian for more than 20 years […] Those of us who are ecologically aware always go local because we are saving a lot of unnecessary costs and because we are also against the relocation of things. […] I believe that this model of tourism, this model of consumption, seeks to have a positive influence on the local population. (P1)

Ecofeminism and food activism in transformative travel as a tool for change framework

Figure 2 illustrates how ecofeminism and food activism shape transformative travel by integrating ethical food practices, social justice, and ecological interconnectedness, challenging dominant neoliberal tourism paradigms. It highlights key actions such as conscious consumption, nature engagement, and community-building while acknowledging structural, cultural, and consumer mindset challenges that hinder systemic change. Given that this framework is derived from the findings, it advances theoretical discussions on activism in tourism by linking individual ethical choices to broader

systemic transformations, fostering alternative, care-centred, and socially just travel models.

Conclusion

This study advances the theoretical discourse on ecofeminism and travel by elucidating how ecofeminist and food activism principles collectively inform alternative travel practices beyond mainstream tourism. The results show that travel can be a place of personal and collective change when shaped by ecofeminist and food activist ideas, as demonstrated through the lived experiences of the participants. The rejection of the term "tourism" in favour of "journey" or "experience" reflects a conscious shift from consumptive, commodified tourism towards a relational, process-orientated approach to movement (Bertella, 2020). This linguistic and conceptual shift underscores the need to reconceptualise travel theory by integrating eco-ethics, food sovereignty, and ecofeminist critiques of capitalism, which together redefine traveller identities, motivations, and the meaning of sustainability.

Moreover, the study expands the understanding of how food activism operates beyond dietary choices, positioning it as a catalyst for alternative travel models.
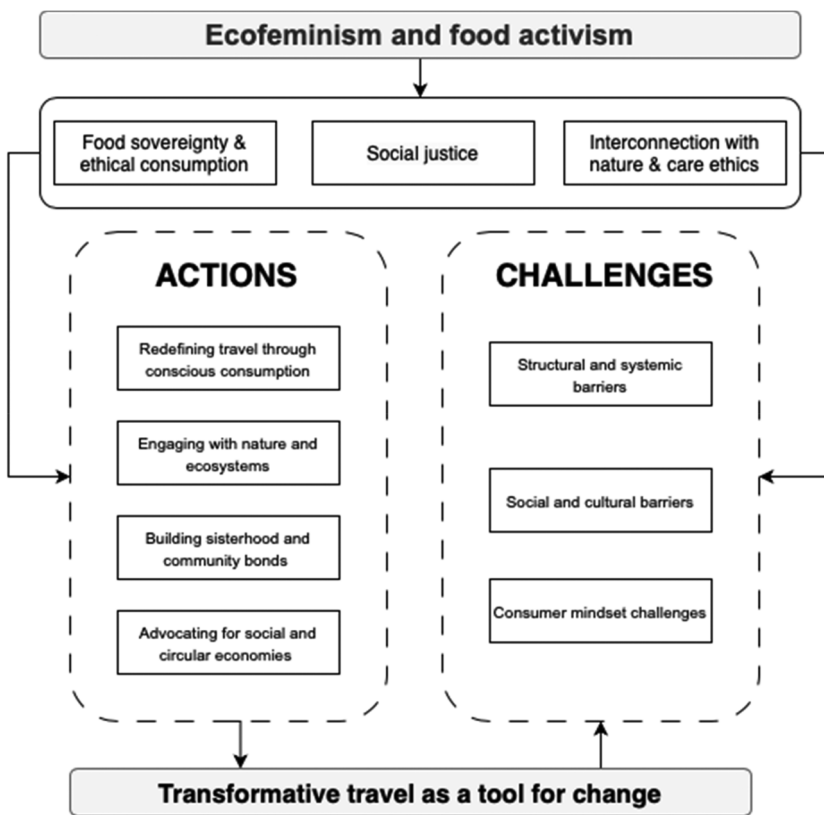
Figure 2. Ecofeminism and food activism in transformative travel as a tool for change framework. *Source*: Own elaboration, 2025.

Participants' engagement with local food systems, food sovereignty, and ethical sourcing suggests that food activism in travel is not limited to consumption patterns but is deeply interwoven with issues of justice, land use, and community empowerment. Additionally, the findings illustrate how travel intersects with feminist solidarity and local empowerment. The emphasis on sisterhood, mutual care, and ethical collaboration demonstrates how woman-led travel initiatives actively redistribute power by prioritising community-led tourism development, hiring women as guides and hosts, and fostering long-term alliances (Kalisch & Cole, 2023).

These results support earlier research on tourism as a means of driving social change. However, they also bring up important questions about how to protect these different models from being co-opted by sustainability discourse driven by market interests (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2006). However, the perception of travel as an escape from ethical responsibilities underscores a key paradox: while travel can foster critical consciousness, it can also serve as a temporary suspension of ethical commitments, reinforcing the capitalist logic of leisure as detachment from everyday activism.

Theoretical implications

The findings highlight how ecofeminism and food activism reshape travel as a transformative and justice-orientated practice, expanding theoretical understandings of activism beyond consumer ethics to include systemic change, relational engagement, and power redistribution in tourism (RQ2). The emphasis on ethical food practices, support for local economies, and collaboration with women-led initiatives aligns with social and solidarity economy principles (Wright, 2021), demonstrating how alternative travel models can challenge extractive tourism paradigms and foster community-driven, care-centred economies. This stands in direct opposition to neoliberal tourism models that prioritise profit maximisation and commodification of destinations, illustrating the capacity of ecofeminist activism to implement sustainable development and degrowth principles in travel contexts. Such actions go against the dominant capitalist framework and improve theoretical frameworks that link small-scale actions with large-scale systemic change. This fights against the neoliberal tendency to take advantage of communities and natural resources for quick money (Kalisch & Cole, 2023).

Including food sovereignty and ethical food practices in travel experiences enhances our understanding of food activism in the context of ecofeminism. The study emphasises the significance of local, organic, and plant-based foods by highlighting the relationships among dietary choices, environmental sustainability, and social justice. This reinforces Twine's (2014) argument regarding the role of veganism in ecofeminist praxis and expands it by contextualising these choices in travel, thereby addressing gaps in the literature on the intersection of food activism and sustainable tourism. Resisting the capitalist food industry and prioritising ethical, sustainable consumption exemplifies a form of anti-neoliberal resistance that challenges prevailing global food systems based on exploitation and environmental degradation.

Identifying key challenges, such as societal bias against ecofeminism and the prevalence of greenwashing, is crucial for understanding the barriers and resistance that ecofeminist projects face. The prevalence of greenwashing in the tourism industry

reflects the commodification of sustainability narratives under neoliberalism, where superficial environmental efforts are marketed while deeper, systemic change is avoided. This adds to the theoretical discussion about the cultural and institutional barriers that make it hard to incorporate ecofeminist ideas into mainstream tourism (Yudina & Fennell, 2013). The study brings these problems to light and makes us rethink our ideas about how to bring about social change and new tourism models. It also highlights the need to develop strategies to navigate these systemic obstacles (RQ3).

In the end, the "Ecofeminism and food activism pillars, actions, and challenges linked to travel framework" provides a conceptual foundation for understanding how ecofeminist principles are integrated into travel practices. It lays the groundwork for further theoretical research and empirical validation.

Practical implications

This study highlights the necessity of integrating ecofeminism and food activism principles into travel to foster transformative, ethical, and sustainable experiences. Tourism serves as a catalyst for change by promoting conscious consumption, ethical food practices, and environmental stewardship, thereby emphasising the crucial relationship between travellers and local communities. To fully realise this potential, policy frameworks must adapt to support ecofeminist tourism models that prioritise gender equity, food sovereignty, and community-driven sustainability. Awareness campaigns must be structured to confront gender biases and alter consumer perceptions regarding ethical travel options that promote socially and ecologically equitable tourism frameworks.

Policy reforms should require transparent sustainability reporting to mitigate corporate greenwashing and ensure accountability within the tourism sector. Tourism companies should build ethical supply chains, collaborate with women-led food cooperatives and agroecological projects, and ensure fair compensation for local producers. To reduce greenwashing, certification systems and regulatory policies must be improved to align sustainability claims with quantifiable actions.

Ecofeminist principles should be integrated into tourism education. Hospitality and tourism management programmes must consider gender-sensitive sustainability, food ethics, and tourism's socio-environmental implications on marginalised communities. By fostering critical thinking in future tourism leaders, education can help them to challenge exploitative practices and develop regenerative tourism models.

Limitations and future research lines

This study, while providing valuable insights, has certain methodological limitations. The exclusive focus on Spain may introduce regional bias, as cultural contexts shape ecofeminist tourism practices in ways that might differ across other geographical settings. The selection of participants from specific networks may further limit the diversity of perspectives within ecofeminism and food activism. Additionally, the reliance on snowball sampling could introduce sampling bias, as participants were

primarily drawn from existing activist and professional networks, potentially excluding alternative or dissenting perspectives within ecofeminist and food activist movements.

Given these limitations, future studies could incorporate longitudinal research to trace the evolution of ecofeminist and food activist initiatives over time. Ethnographic methodologies offer a valuable lens for examining these initiatives, while comparative ethnographic studies across different regions or countries could further illuminate how ecofeminist principles are adapted to specific local environments and communities.

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