



PRESS RELEASE
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NAWIC Releases Findings of IWD Scholarship 2020 Winner

The 2020 NAWIC International Women's Day Scholarship winner, Sarah Lawlor has released the findings of her research paper at the 2021 NAWIC NSW IWD Breakfast, held in Sydney this morning (March 11).

Sarah, who is a proud NAWIC Member and Registered Senior Architect at fjmt studio, utilised the Scholarship funds to explore her timely and relevant research topic *Is Sustainability Leadership in the Built Environment 'Women's Business?'*

Her paper was based on the premise that gender equity and diversity in leadership has been proven to improve business profitability and explored whether this trend extends to sustainability related roles in the built environment.

It also aimed to explore the diversity of the sector and to promote diversity in leadership as a mechanism to improve sustainability outcomes.

Overall, the study uncovered a diverse sustainability sector, in which women participate at higher levels than in other areas of the built environment.

"While I was pleasantly surprised at the diversity this study uncovered, I found that gendered perceptions still affect women, and men, operating in the industry," says Sarah.

"Sustainability has its own challenges in interacting with the established structures of the construction industry, where problematic and often gendered perceptions of the sustainability field are evident. Each of these perceptions is concerning, as they undermine and devalue the field, reducing the efficacy of sustainability outcomes in the built environment."

Her report recommended continued efforts to improve gender equity and diversity in the built environment, drawing lessons from an ostensibly diverse sustainability sector.

"Equity demands mutual respect, and pervasive cultural change is required in the broader built environment to break down negative perceptions of the sustainability field, and improve the integration and uptake of sustainability," she said.

Each year the NAWIC IWD scholarship awards \$20,000 to a woman focused on contributing towards the enhancement of women's careers in the construction industry.

“The IWD scholarship offered an opportunity for me to explore a nexus between gender equity and sustainability. The scholarship opened doors for me to have conversations with industry leaders, which broadened my mind to the scope of our impact, and reaffirmed to me the criticality of sustainability.”

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**For more information or interview opportunities please contact
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

Is Sustainability Leadership in the Built Environment ‘Women’s Business?’
A Study of Diversity in Sustainability Leadership in the Built Environment

Over the last few decades, the business case for gender equity and diversity in leadership has been proven to improve business profitability. The research undertaken in this study is based on the premise that diversity must similarly improve other business outcomes, such as sustainability goals. The built environment industry continues to be male dominated. This study investigates whether this trend extends to sustainability related roles in the built environment, with an aim to explore the diversity of the sector and promote diversity in leadership as a mechanism to improve sustainability outcomes.

What this study has uncovered is a diverse sustainability sector, in which women participate at higher levels than in other areas of the built environment. Gender representation in sustainability was found to be fairly balanced, with significant representation of women in leadership positions role-modelling and encouraging increased participation in the industry.

Evident in the sustainability sector is a strong interconnectedness between environmental and social aims, with diversity seen as fundamental to sustainability. The sustainability field demonstrates practices that support diversity, including flexibility, mentoring and a commitment to social equity. As a new field with a culture distinct from the construction or engineering sectors of the built environment industry, the sustainability field is unburdened by entrenched gender stereotypes and rigid hierarchical structures that have been historically evident in other areas of the built environment.

However, sustainability has its own challenges in interacting with the established structures of the built environment industry, where problematic and often gendered perceptions of the sustainability field are evident, such as in its perception as a ‘soft’ field, with connotations of nurturing or ‘greenie’ types. Each of these perceptions is concerning, as they undermine and devalue the sustainability field, reducing the efficacy of sustainability outcomes in the built environment.

The research presented in this report recommends continued efforts to improve gender equity and diversity in the built environment, drawing lessons from an ostensibly diverse sustainability sector. Equity demands mutual respect, and pervasive cultural change is required in the broader built environment to break down negative perceptions of the sustainability field, and improve the integration and uptake of sustainability.

To answer the title question, is sustainability leadership in the built environment ‘women’s business?’ Of course not, it’s everyone’s business. In the context of the climate crisis, we need to collectively take action, in the most effective ways possible, ensuring all voices are heard.