

# Poor employment in tourism threatens sustainability

February 12 2019, by Laura Butler

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A new study in tourism employment finds that many jobs are failing to provide dignity in employment. The tourism sector, which accounts for nearly 10 per cent of global employment, risks undermining rather than contributing to the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals, according to three academics from the University of Surrey.

Anke Winchenbach, Dr. Paul Hanna and Professor Graham Miller have co-authored a paper, published today in the Journal of Sustainable Tourism, which reveals examples of where the [tourism](#) sector is failing to offer 'decent working practise' to employees, contributing to their sense of self-worth and overall performance.

Travel and tourism are viewed as drivers for economic growth and job creation, with employees and quality of work at the centre of the sustainable tourism debate, yet compared to professions such as nursing, there is limited research on the experiences of the tourism workforce.

Identifying dignity as a powerful concept for assessing workplace experiences, the authors have linked the concepts of dignity and identity to investigate how 'decent work' in tourism [employment](#) can be understood – and what can be done to make it a reality for more employees.

The paper illustrates how positive professional identities play a key role in the decision to remain working in the tourism sector and contribute to lasting careers at all hierarchical levels, and that ensuring dignified and

decent work positively impacts on the bottom line of organisations and the economy at large, boosting staff retention and future recruitment engagement.

By drawing on [case studies](#), the paper examines individual worker experiences and suggests that the tourism sector can fall short of offering dignified, meaningful working conditions. For tourism to address the increasing skills shortage, tourism workers need to feel recognised in both financial and non-financial terms.

When discussing how her research will benefit society Anke Winchenbach, teaching fellow and ESRC Ph.D. scholar in Sustainable Tourism, said: "Our research highlights where tourism employment practices verge on, or are indistinguishable from, exploitation. The sector needs to adapt and improve its treatment of all of its workforce, as the current model can see workers suffer, which in turn has a detrimental impact on customer experience and business success.

"A deeper understanding of, and engagement with the meaning and value of dignity in tourism employment is critical for [policy makers](#) as well, in order to motivate the creation of more supportive working environments within the tourism sector and enable the industry to become a rewarding employment opportunity, contributing to the wider global sustainability agenda."

**More information:** Anke Winchenbach et al. Rethinking decent work: the value of dignity in tourism employment, *Journal of Sustainable Tourism* (2019). [DOI: 10.1080/09669582.2019.1566346](https://doi.org/10.1080/09669582.2019.1566346)

Provided by University of Surrey

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