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Rethinking decent work: the value of dignity in tourism employment

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ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on establishing a conceptual grounding for the value of dignity in tourism employment for achieving decent work as part of the sustainable development agenda. Dignity is widely acknowledged as a key driver for 'good' work, but little conceptual grounding on the value of dignity in tourism employment has been established. This paper will contribute to the theoretical debate on sustainable tourism by providing a critical review of frameworks for decent work, workplace dignity (or its absence), and understandings of identity. We will explore how the context and conditions of tourism employment are conducive (or not) for offering dignified and sustainable employment. This paper makes two original contributions to knowledge. First, it introduces a psychosocial understanding of dignity in tourism employment, reflecting its deeply rooted individual, organisational, societal and policy aspects, and recognising the actors involved. Second, the critical importance of dignity in tourism employment for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is discussed, with future research directions identified.

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Introduction

This paper aims to present a conceptual grounding for the value of dignity in tourism employment, an area that to date has experienced limited attention in tourism studies. The authors argue for a critical engagement with the role of tourism in contributing to sustainable development. It is timely to address this neglect with focus on tourism's contribution to decent work as part of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (United Nations [UN], 2015). Consequently, and in response to previous calls for critical engagement with sustainable tourism, ethics and decent work (Baum, 2018; Bramwell & Lane, 2014; Jamal & Camargo, 2014), this paper offers a theoretical and conceptual engagement with dignity at work. Further, this paper applies this theoretical engagement to illustrative examples of the tourism employment literature, developing a provisional conceptual framework and series of implications and suggestions for further research on dignity in tourism employment. Our approach and engagement with cross-disciplinary literature and examples from tourism practice was guided by Brookfield's 'Critical Thinking' (CT) (Brookfield, 1987), which allows a better understanding of tourism systems

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in the context of sustainable development (Boluk et al., 2017). Whilst the unit of analysis will be individual workers and groups of workers, there are implications for the sector at large, including sustainable Human Resource Management (HRM) studies (Zaugg et al., 2001), development studies and organisational studies.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (UN, 2015) has made the International Labour Organisation's (ILO) Decent Work Agenda (ILO, 1999) an integral part of the vision for advancing a more sustainable future for all. The quest for dignity in the 17 SDGs, which combined address the environmental, social, and economic aspects of development from 2015 to 2030, is explicitly reflected in the UN Secretary General's Synthesis Report (UN, 2013) which states inclusion, dignity, prosperity and justice as four of the six 'essential elements' required for delivery of the SDGs. Thus, dignity and sustainable development are conceptually coupled.

Dignity, and respect for it, has been centre-stage in cross-disciplinary research on the quality of work (Bal, 2017; Bolton, 2007; Hodson, 2001; Sayer, 2007a). Workplace dignity is "the ability to establish a sense of self-worth and self-respect and to appreciate the respect of others" (Hodson, 2001, p. 3). Dignity is recognised as a fundamental part in the ILO's decent work agenda (ILO, 1999), which underpins Goal 8 of the SDGs (SDG8). The ILO defines decent work as "[p]roductive work under conditions of freedom, equity, security and dignity, in which rights are protected and adequate remuneration and social coverage are provided" (ILO, 1999, p. 15). While decent work touches on all SDGs (ILO, 2017), SDG8 combines the ILO's decent work agenda with economic growth into a goal of achieving "sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all" (UN, 2017, p. 23). The ILO and the SDG documents convey that decent work, together with social justice and gender equality, are at the heart of sustainable tourism (ILO, 2017). However, others suggest that the notion of 'decent work' remains unclear, in terms of both meaning and practice (Sehnbruch et al., 2015), limiting the concept's application.

Although the meaning of 'decent work' remains unclear, most definitions broadly include aspects of respect and self-respect, as well as safe, fair, productive and meaningful work in conditions of freedom (Baum, 2018). Di Fabio and Maree (2016) draw together psychological, organisational and societal dimensions in their definition of decent work (Di Fabio & Maree, 2016, p. 9):

Decent work helps all workers attain a sense of self-respect and dignity, experience freedom and security in the workplace, and (as far as possible) is afforded the opportunity to choose and execute productive, meaningful and fulfilling work that will enable them to construct themselves adequately and without restrictions and make social contributions.

This paper recognises all these dimensions, which enable a critical review of dignified work in tourism employment and its implications for sustainable tourism development. As Baum et al. (2016) argued, employees and work are at the heart of the sustainability debate in tourism.

Despite many references to it, dignity has experienced limited conceptual academic attention from the tourism community, unlike in other disciplines such as nursing and law (Gallagher, 2011; Rosen, 2012). This is particularly worrying for Baum et al. (2016), who argue that the tourism sector often falls short of meeting dignified working conditions and may occasionally operate contrary to the principles of decent work. To address this omission, this paper reviews the role of decent work in tourism employment as part of sustainable development, and then explores the relationship between dignity and identity, two conceptual strands unlinked in discussions on decent work in tourism. This approach facilitates our review of issues in tourism employment and how they relate to the theoretical underpinnings of dignity at work and identity. The paper then applies these concepts to illustrative examples from the tourism employment literature. By offering a preliminary psychosocial conceptualisation of dignity in tourism employment with examples, this paper aims to inform the debate and enhance understanding of dignity in tourism employment as part of the decent work and wider sustainable development agenda. Finally, the implications of the framework and potential avenues for future research are discussed. We conclude that a deeper understanding of, and engagement with the meaning and

value of dignity in tourism employment might open a pathway for industry stakeholders to contribute meaningfully to decent work in tourism and, ultimately, to the SDGs as a “roadmap for peace, dignity and prosperity” (UNDP, 2016).

Decent work and sustainable tourism development

In the workplace, recognition of people’s dignity is through the provision of decent work (Lucas, 2017). The ILO (1999) identified four pillars of decent work: employment creation, social protection, rights at work, and social dialogue, arguing that decent work involves:

- Productive work opportunities that deliver fair income.
- Secure workplaces and social protection for families.
- Better prospects for personal development and social integration.
- Freedom for individuals and groups of people to voice concerns, and to organise and participate in decisions affecting their lives.
- Equality of opportunity and treatment for all women and men.

Thus, decent work is not only about job creation, but also about the quality of such employment (ILO, 1999). However, while arguing that decent work is a global concept, the ILO report also acknowledges potential different interpretations of quality jobs in different societies, which “could relate to different forms of work, and also to different conditions of work, as well as feelings of value and satisfaction” (ILO, 1999, p. 4). Yet, from a dignity at work perspective, working conditions and feeling valued are at the heart of quality employment (Bolton, 2007).

There are many reasons for optimism due to the inclusion of decent work as part of the SDGs (UN, 2017), as this provides an opportunity to address some of the challenges and opportunities facing the tourism workforce. While the UN World Tourism Organisation’s (UNWTO) outlook for tourism in relation to SDG8 primarily focuses on economic growth (UNWTO, 2018), and as such on ‘business as usual’ (Scheyvens et al., 2016), the ILO’s guidelines on decent work and socially responsible tourism (ILO, 2017) go further. The guidelines cite tourism-specific targets, including emphasis on non-discriminatory working environments, fair wages and a good work–life balance, as well as worker involvement and social dialogue. The relevance for decent work in tourism lies in the labour intensity of the industry, as well as the opportunities for women, migrants and young people which are higher than in most other industry sectors (ibid). The guidelines make numerous suggestions for developing fairer working conditions and establishing policies and codes of practice for tackling the decent work deficits in the sector. Such deficits include extended working hours, limited social protection, gender discrimination and low wages; all of which the ILO argues are most prominent in the informal sector of the industry and affect women more severely than men (ILO, 2017). This is a concern for an industry with a considerable number of informal workers and where the workforce majority is female, particularly at the lower end of the occupational scale (UNWTO, 2011).

Whilst ILO guidelines propose paths towards sustainable tourism employment as part of the SDGs (Baum, 2018), the situation is rather complex. Firstly, we are some way off developing comparable data on objective measures and outcomes on the quality of work globally (Burchell et al., 2014). Second, critics argue that the concept lacks meaning (Lanari, 2005, as cited in Burchell et al., 2014). Additionally, some scholars have raised concerns about potential conflicts in the visions in SDG8 for economic growth on the one hand and full employment and decent work on the other (Baum, 2018; Frey, 2017; Scheyvens et al., 2016). For example, Selwyn (2013), like Scheyvens et al. (2016), discusses the co-opting of the Decent Work Agenda by powerful elite organisations. However, despite the widely held view that mechanisms that facilitate economic growth provide optimal outcomes, Harvey (2006) argues that neoliberal practices at work,

emphasising competition, progress and profitability (Ayikoru et al., 2009), negatively affect job quality. Further, Crowley and Hodson (2014) found a correlation between neoliberalist organisational practices and reduced job security; increase in humiliation and meaningless work; and lower pay and benefits. Moreover, their study indicates that neoliberal approaches undermine organisational functioning due to increased labour turnover, thus eroding an organisation's foundations for success (Crowley & Hodson, 2014, p. 102).

Extensive research shows that a lack of dignity and respect, unequal power relations and poor working conditions create a sense of alienation and mistrust, negatively affecting the success of the business as well as workers and local communities (Jacobson, 2009; Korczynski & Ott, 2005; Paules, 1991). There are good examples of alternative economic structures addressing unequal power relations and enabling a more humane and fair system, a 'moral economy' (e.g. Bolton et al., 2016; Higgins-Desbiolles, 2012). However, Noronha et al. (2018) argue there is a need to reaffirm the meaning and value of decent work to equip employers in providing meaningful and dignified work.

Dignity features prominently in many tourism-related national and international policies; the Global Code of Ethics in Tourism (UNWTO, 2001) and the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights (UN, 1948) play a critical role in addressing dignity violations across the sector and beyond (for tourism human rights literature, see Cole & Morgan, 2010; Higgins-Desbiolles & Whyte, 2015). More recently, the Berlin Declaration (Transforming Tourism, 2017) specifically calls for respecting workers' dignity and the eradication of exploitation to meet the sustainable development agenda. However, while dignity has been widely embedded at policy level, the review of the literature suggests that what dignity means for decent work in tourism remains elusive. To address this shortcoming, this paper turns to the concept of dignity at work.

Dignity and work

Dignity has been conceptualised in multiple ways (Debes, 2009). However, while not uncontested (Macklin, 2003; Spiegelberg, 1971), there is wide support for the inherent, universal and unconditional dignity of humans simply by virtue of being human (Lucas, 2017; Misztal, 2013; Sayer, 2011). While this view implies that the meaning of dignity is self-evident (Lucas, 2015), several thinkers have investigated what constitutes a form of dignity that can be promoted or violated in social interactions at work.

Immanuel Kant, arguably the most commonly cited influencer of interpretations of dignity, set the moral case for equal treatment and the non-commodification of humans during modernity (Kant, 1998). According to Kant (1998), there is a moral obligation to treat people not as mere instrumental objects (with a finite value), but as ends in themselves, respecting the value and dignity of oneself (self-respect) and others (respect) (Kant, 1998). Thus, Kant makes the link between individual and societal aspects of dignity, and further explains that dignity is a value beyond price, a perspective that arguably conflicts with the predominant neoliberal structure of tourism. Kant's Categorical Imperative demands the respect of dignity as a moral law based on the inherent status of being human, and places responsibility for moral actions on the rational individual as a binding command with no exceptions. Ultimately, in a Kantian sense, a distinction is needed between economic value, that is the monetary exchange for something, and the intrinsic value of humans qua being human. However, modern thinkers established value, including compensation for work, as an intrinsic aspect of dignity (Bal, 2017; Berg & Frost, 2005).

Drawing on the Kantian understanding of the non-commodification of humans, post-modern thinkers of the industrial revolution such as Marx, Weber and Durkheim, and increasingly the global socio-economic challenges contemporary society faces, has led to questions about workplace quality via various cross-disciplinary inquiries concerned with dignity and work (Bal, 2017; Bal & de Jong, 2017; Bolton & Boyd, 2003; Bourdieu & Accardo, 1999; Fox, 1994; Gallagher, 2004;

Hodson, 1991, 1996, 2001). The seminal publication of Randy Hodson's *Dignity at Work* (2001) facilitated a renewed interest in dignity from the academic community, inspiring multiple publications (e.g. Bal, 2015; Bolton et al., 2016; Lucas, 2015, 2017; Lucas et al., 2013). In this context, dignity has been associated with, inter alia, value, worth, recognition, respect, self-respect, autonomy, freedom, rank, and equality (Bolton, 2007; Hodson, 2001; Lamont, 2009; Sayer, 2007a).

In his seminal analysis of over 100 workplace ethnographies, Hodson (2001) established four core behavioural domains for attaining and defending dignity at work: resistance to overwork and exploitation, organisational citizenship (taking pride in one's work and contributing successfully and efficiently), the pursuit of meaning through control and mastery, and group relations and social aspects of work life, including friendships and unions (Hodson, 2001, p. 19). Others have conceptualised dignity at work in terms of economic security, fair treatment, and satisfying work (Berg & Frost, 2005), taking subjective and objective dimensions of dignity into consideration (Bolton, 2007; Sayer, 2007b). Bolton (2007) makes an important contribution by distinguishing between dignity *at* work ("structures and practices that offer equality of opportunity, collective and individual voice, safe and healthy working conditions, secure terms of employment and just reward") and dignity *in* work (respect, autonomy, meaningful work and job satisfaction) (Bolton, 2007, p. 8). Thus, as Bolton explains, it is "not either material reward (dignity at work), or dignity in work that is required, but both; not either/or, but and" (Bolton, 2011, p. 378). Finally, for Sayer, dignity at work can emerge in conditions that foster "integrity, respect, pride, recognition, worth and standing or status" (Sayer, 2007a, p. 567). That moral management is good management has been argued elsewhere (Baum, 2006; The Guardian, 2015a). The multitude of definitions to describe workplace dignity discussed above, highlight the flexibility of the concept and illustrates the challenges of defining this powerful, yet "complex, ambiguous and multivalent" (Moody, 1998, p. 14) concept in other disciplines (Debes, 2009; Gallagher, 2011). Thus, there is a need for establishing a conceptual grounding for dignity in tourism employment.

In addition to links between work and dignity, scholars have outlined the beneficial characteristics of tourism employment (Airey & Nightingale, 1981; Baum et al., 2016). These benefits include opportunities during economic transition (Szivas & Riley, 1999) and livelihood diversification (Stead, 2005), offering opportunities for the less skilled, minorities, and women (Ashley et al., 2000), providing new knowledge and skills, meeting new people, and enabling social and labour mobility (Ladkin, 2011). Examples of studies on dignity in tourism employment include the research of Cockburn-Wootten (2012) on integrating dignity in hospitality workplace practice through communication and manager education, and highlighting the role of organisations in providing meaningful working environments. Further, Kensbock et al. (2016) established that room attendants find self-respect and dignity in employment by taking pride in their work as a meaningful contribution to the hotel's success. Here, individuals actively re-affirm their own values and capabilities to counter their low social standing inside and outside of work. Another insight is in Higgins-Desbiolles' (2012) study, showing how a more humanistic and collaborative approach to running a hotel created a powerful and dignified mode of employment, in which solidarity, equality and autonomy in business decisions went alongside respect for the contribution of individuals as well as care for the community. This case study demonstrates that, in addition to identity-affirming aspects such as being in work and feeling valued, various actors, and organisational and wider societal dimensions play a role in dignified work. The three examples resemble prominent features of dignified work established by Hodson (2001) and Bolton (2007), such as resistance, pursuit of citizenship and meaning, which are affected by, and affect individual, organisational and societal aspects of work life.

Undignified work

It has been argued that dignified employment is difficult to achieve in the unequal employment structures and relationships in neoliberal organisations and societies (Bolton, 2007; Sayer, 2007a),

particularly for people working at the lower end of the hierarchy facing the indignities of precarious working conditions (Berg & Frost, 2005; Sayer, 2007a). Similarly, Jacobson (2009) established that dignity violations are more likely in settings of unequal power, including financial, educational, social, cultural, hierarchical and emotional disparities occurring on micro, meso, and macro levels. Denial of workplace dignity consists of one or all of the following: mismanagement and abuse, over-work, autonomy constraints, and contradictions of employee involvement (Hodson, 2001, p. 19), as well as discrimination, harassment and humiliation (Lucas, 2017).

Whilst the tourism sector is widely seen as a promising driver of economic growth and job creation globally, empirical studies on experiences of tourism employees paint a mixed picture of the perceived quality of work, working conditions and practices when viewed from a 'decent', or indeed 'dignified', work perspective (e.g. Higgins-Desbiolles, 2012; Kensbock et al., 2016; Wijesinghe, 2009). At an extreme profit maximisation end of a spectrum of responsibility, companies undertake unethical business practices by exploiting their workforce (Bal, 2017). Frequently cited negative features of tourism work are inadequate working schedules, insecure employment contracts, overwork, and insufficient pay, as well as lack of progression opportunity (Baum, 2015; Lindsay & McQuaid, 2004). Moreover, tourism workers report a lack of respect and recognition from managers and co-workers, limited workplace autonomy and monotonous tasks, poor communication, and inadequate fixtures and fittings, alongside issues relating to people's identity at work (Faulkner & Patiar, 1997; Kensbock et al., 2016). Robinson (2013) even claims that the labour requirements of commercial tourism transactions are structurally connected to human exploitation.

Examples of undignified work in tourism employment include: sexualised labour (Wijesinghe, 2009); sex tourism (Berkman, 1996); racism (Mbaiwa, 2005); gender discrimination; low wages, long shifts, narrow job functions (Choi et al., 2000), seasonality and low occupational standing (Richardson & Butler, 2012). Such issues can occur simultaneously and be supported by management (Orido, 2017). The UK trades union Unite show the breaching of basic human rights of hotel workers in global luxury hotel chains in London, with employees regularly missing meal-times and being owed money (Unite, 2016). As reported elsewhere (e.g. The Guardian, 2015b, 2018), many workers described physical and emotional strains leading to stress and depression, and some reported feeling dehumanised altogether (Unite, 2016). These findings echo previous reports, which found that a low level of recognition of trade unions, income insecurity, split-shifts, unpaid overtime, physical violence, sexual harassment and stress are day-to-day experiences for hotel workers (Beddoe, 2004).

In such problematic working conditions, employees adopt strategies of emotional detachment to protect their dignity at work. Examples in tourism employment include Poulston's (2015) study with hospitality workers and Kensbock et al.'s (2016) research with Australian room attendants, with one interviewee describing her work as "walking into the Tardis" (Kensbock et al., 2016, p. 112), referring to a fictional time and space dimension. Further, in an example of how sexualised and commodified labour affects workers' experiences and perception of dignity at work, Wijesinghe (2009) describes a receptionist's experience of sexual harassment by a guest, highlighting the physical and emotional intimidation, how co-workers failed to support her, and, critically, how she felt unable to report the incident, indicating organisational acceptance of such a situation. The findings flag important issues relating to frontline tourism work and the commodification of attractive female workers to gain corporate competitive advantage (Folger & Fjeldstad, 1995). Another study found that mountain-porters largely perceive their occupation as humiliating and demeaning, feeling "their dignity remains constantly under attack because of the harsh physical working conditions and their acute awareness of being treated unfairly by the industry and its affluent consumers" (Arellano, 2011, p. 115). Arellano (2011) asserts that the porters' increased earnings from their participation in tourism activities do not compensate for their daily humiliation, a concern also flagged by Tourism Concern (2015).

Table 1. Spheres of dignity-promoting and dignity-violating features of work.

Sphere	Dignity-promoting features	Dignity-violating features
Individual worker	Self-respect, meaningful and satisfying work, pride, autonomy, mastery, efficiency, recognition of contribution, job satisfaction and flourishing	Humiliation and abuse, constraints on personal autonomy and voice, violations to physical and mental health
Organisational context	Respect, equal opportunity, safe and healthy working conditions, economic security, fair remuneration, collegiality and solidarity, participation and co-determination in organisational matters	Constraints on workplace autonomy (i.e. how to approach tasks), disrespect, hazardous working conditions, overwork and underpay, insecure work agreements, suppression of friendships and collective voice, constraints on co-worker relations, strict hierarchies
Wider socio-economic and policy context	Prestige and social standing of job, equality, economic growth as a means for achieving dignified work, minimum wage legislation, moral economy, dignified work recognised and promoted through international agendas and policies	Low social standing of job, inequality, treatment of people as a means to an end, and commodification of humans, weak legal and policy structures

While such issues and the inequalities between customers and employees (Sayer, 2007b) have long been acknowledged, examples continue to be reported (Ladkin, 2011). The Global Code of Ethics for Tourism (GCET) asserts that the exploitation of people “conflicts with the fundamental aims of tourism and is the negation of tourism” (UNWTO, 2001, article 2, section 3). More personally, the consequences of such exploitative employment practices are severe, often leading to employee dissatisfaction and disengagement, high absenteeism, and finally, resignation. Such a feeling negatively affects client satisfaction and indirectly affects economic viability (Bernhardt et al., 2000; Chi & Gursoy, 2009). Yet, dignity in employment is not considered as part of the claims about the number of jobs created by the tourism sector, albeit this threatens future recruitment, engagement and retention (Baum, 2015; Hoque, 2013). Lindsay and McQuaid (2004) identify people who felt they would prefer to be unemployed than join the hospitality workforce based on its negative image.

From the review of the literature above, three core areas of dignity can be identified, each with particular features (Table 1).

While dignity has received limited attention, many tourism studies implicitly give insight into workers’ dignity, aligning with previous findings on features and dimensions of workplace dignity (Bolton, 2007; Hodson, 2001).

Dignity – A universal concept?

It has been argued that, in addition to an individual’s values, norms and experiences, socio-economic, cultural, ethnic and political contexts play a role in how dignity and tourism employment might be experienced (Baum, 2018; Sayer, 2007a). Thus, it might be more difficult to achieve dignity at work for some people than for others, based on inequalities (Lucas, 2017). However, there is wide agreement on shared humanity of all people, with human rights, respect, fairness and equality recognised as universal human values that transcend groups, time and place (Hodson, 2001; Liu, 2003). Furthermore, there is considerable conceptual overlap between the dignity-promoting features presented in Table 1 and understanding of dignity in other cultures. For example, research within an African Ubuntu style of management found that “a sense of self-worth and dignity” (Browning, 2006, p. 1331) is achieved through supporting team spirit, fairness, autonomy and empowerment, and demonstrating respect (Browning, 2006). Thus, Ubuntu, similar to dignity, “tries to capture the essence of what it means to be human” (Murithi, 2007,

p. 281) and shares a concern for non-exploitative working conditions and emphasis on moral values, mutual respect and recognition (Pietersen, 2005).

Thus, while differences undoubtedly exist, the concept of dignity might have sufficient universal currency to contribute to a better understanding of decent work in tourism employment. This view aligns with interpretations of dignity in international frameworks which deem it globally applicable (e.g. UNDHR, SDGs) while also acknowledging vulnerable populations (e.g. ethnic and gender equality). To build understanding of dignity in tourism employment, and before investigating further the features and spheres of dignity in relation to tourism employment by way of engaging with exemplary tourism workplace studies, we turn to the concept of identity, which is widely established as a key aspect of dignity at work (Hodson, 2001; Jacobson, 2009; Sayer, 2007b).

Self, identity and the psychosocial subject

Attempts to understand the 'self' can be traced back as far as the late medieval period (11th–15th century), when 'self' was primarily realised through social relationships and religious beliefs. As traditional structures deteriorated through industrialisation, and religion became less centralised, social understandings of 'self' proliferated through an individual's social position in relation to production (Baumeister, 1987), and later also through goods consumed and practices adopted (Bourdieu, 1984). Within the social sciences, a number of theoretical perspectives have arisen conceptualising identity; for example, gender (e.g. Butler, 1990); class (e.g. Skeggs, 2004); and discourse (e.g. Billig, 1995); through to more specific theoretical models (e.g. Social Identity Theory; Tajfel & Turner, 1986).

Whilst production is no longer central to understanding and expressing the 'self' (Adams, 2007), there is a plethora of research exploring the relationship between notions of 'self', 'identity' and 'production/work' in marginalised roles (e.g. Crang, 1997; Snow & Anderson, 1987). In this paper, we adopt an understanding of the self that engages with the complexities involved in human behaviour, interaction, experience and choice (Gergen, 2009). We utilise the work of Kornberger and Brown (2007), which suggests that self and identity should not be understood as an 'essence'; rather, they are the result of complex power relationships within which an individual's identity is actively constructed yet also passively ascribed. Burkitt (2008, p. 242) provides a framework through which the individual can be understood in this way:

... the agent of resistance could be understood as the social self of everyday life, formed in the relations of the everyday world, both official and unofficial; a self that is a subject of power in some respects yet open to the possibility of immersion in alternative social worlds, or to the influence of the values and beliefs of various ideologies. A subject of power, certainly, but power that is heterogeneous, embedded in the relational contexts of everyday life with its various cultures and sub-cultures, social networks and groups, out of which emerge fully-rounded, if always unfinalized, selves.

Burkitt writes here about the individual, and its formation in the contemporary world acknowledging how individuals are positioned within neoliberal power relations that constitute the individual as a subject of work and consumerism. However, Burkitt also suggests that this is not a straightforward relationship, but rather involves the subjective interpretation of how one understands their own sense of self and potential alternative lifestyles and values in order to exercise their agency. It is on this understanding of the self that this paper is based; the self as a psychosocial subject (Adams, 2016) which is formulated through interpersonal exchanges whilst also emphasising subjective interpretations of 'right' and 'wrong', 'good' and 'bad' (Gergen, 2009), or, in our case, 'dignified' and 'undignified'.

Dignity of identity can be threatened by others when individuals are humiliated or treated as mere objects (Wainwright & Gallagher, 2008), but, it can also be protected and regained through actions of resistance (Hodson, 2001). One form of resistance for people to protect their self-worth

and meaning is through identity work (Lucas, 2011); for example, Nelson and Lewis (2016) found that early childhood teachers negotiated their lack of professional recognition and low status through acting overly bureaucratic, which gave them a sense of high moral standards. Such standards serve as protection of dignity where economic aspects of success and external recognition are limited (Lamont, 2009; Lucas, 2011).

Thus, how people perceive dignity, even in marginalised occupations, is, like notions of the self, partly self-constructed, offering workers the opportunity for making sense of their lives (Dwyer et al., 2009). However, there is also a strong social aspect that plays a role in whether somebody experiences themselves as dignified or not (Statman, 2000). As Sayer (2007b) concludes: “being treated not purely as a means to someone else’s end or as invisible, but as an end as oneself, a person in one’s own right, is thus crucial” (2007b, p. 20), and makes a difference to people’s experience of work. Therefore, we suggest that a perspective on dignity at work in tourism must be rooted in a holistic multilevel psychosocial analysis of tourism employment.

A missing piece?

In light of the examples presented above, it becomes clear that structural and psychological dimensions play a role in understanding dignity in tourism employment, which, taken together, point towards the potential benefits of an interlinked psychosocial understanding of dignity in tourism employment. It is therefore important to consider not only the identity-related aspects of dignity, but also the organisational setting and the overarching social, economic and political structures that influence employment culture, policy and practice (Bolton, 2007, p. 8; Sayer, 2007a). For example, the health scientist Jacobson (2009) suggests that interaction-based dignity, such as in work environments, is influenced by the positions of, and relationships between, various actors (individual or collective), features of the organisational setting, and the wider social order. While Jacobson’s analysis largely resembles the features of dignity established by others (Bolton, 2007; Hodson, 2001); and in Table 1 she more clearly identified two levels of dignity violation and promotion: the individual and the collective. The ‘dignity of self’ benefits or harms the self (e.g. identity, self-respect, feeling valued etc.), moral agency, the body, and personhood (humanness). The other level, ‘dignity in relation’, which collectively affects groups of people or even humanity, is concerned with autonomy, status (e.g. visibility, social standing) and citizenship (the relationship between the state and an actor) (Jacobson, 2009, p. 7). Jacobson concludes that these dimensions are interconnected, in that a violation or promotion of dignity for one affects all and vice versa (Jacobson, 2009, p. 8). Taken together, dignity in tourism employment consists of psychological, physical, structural as well as socio-economic and policy aspects, involves different actors, and can affect individuals as well as groups of people or wider society; yet, circumstances on one level can influence the other. For example, in a neoliberal system, it is more likely that organisations operate within a competitive environment, which might put pressure on wages and working conditions, leaving workers in a vulnerable position where negative dignity encounters between the individual and different actors might occur, despite the individual having a strong sense of dignity of self. Alternatively, policies such as the ILO’s decent work agenda and SDG8 can offer protective structures and guidance if a common understanding of the meaning of decent and dignified work is achieved, helping to counter the neoliberal context.

Drawing on the work of Jacobson (2009) and the spheres of dignity established in Table 1, Figure 1 proposes a theoretical framework of a psychosocial understanding of dignity in tourism employment.

Psychosocial in action

The interlink between psychological, organisational and social dimensions of workplace experiences in tourism has been established previously by Kensbock et al. (2016), as well as in other

Figure 1. Conditions of a psychosocial understanding of dignity in tourism employment (adapted from Jacobson, 2009).

disciplines (Bolton & Laaser, 2013; Gallagher, 2004). One of such examples is Jacobson's (2009) taxonomy on the conditions in which dignity promotions or violations might occur in the context of health and human rights. Her model has been slightly modified, contextualised and theorised to reflect the multi-layered conditions and various actors in regard to dignity in tourism employment. While Jacobson (2009) also discusses implications for *the self* (italics in original), in the context of decent work and dignity in tourism employment the individual worker is at the forefront of the discussion; therefore, *the self* takes centre stage in our revised model. Second, the literature reviewed indicates that the individual's experience of dignity of identity is closely tied to, and to an extent dependent on, the organisational context and setting. Additionally, the positionality of and relationship with the actors involved play a role for dignity encounters; actors might include clients, managers and co-workers. Lastly, similar to Jacobson's (2009) graph, these elements are embedded in the wider social order; but the socio-economic and policy dimensions are drawn out more explicitly here. The following sections further explain the psychosocial view for achieving dignity in tourism employment; with a focus on the interplay between self, professional identity and actors, and the organisational and wider social contexts.

Dignity of identity

Several scholars have established the interconnectedness between dignity and self (Dwyer et al., 2009; Statman, 2000). The literature highlights the importance of considering workplace identity-affirming actions for tourism employees, as dignity is intrinsically linked to identity; acting as a "bridge [between] self and society" (Berger, 1970, p. 342). This explicit link has also been established in other studies. Defined as "the dignity that we attach to ourselves as integrated and autonomous persons, persons with a history and persons with a future with all our relationships to other human beings" (Nordenfelt, 2004, p. 75); dignity of identity then becomes a critical component of workers' experience, allowing feelings of self-respect and pride (Hodson, 2001). Mooney et al. (2016) found that positive professional identities play a key role in the decision to remain in the tourism sector.

As concept 'identity' does not flow in isolation; rather it has long been conceptualised as being inextricably linked to notions of the 'self' (Baumeister, 1987). Whilst there is much debate as to the extent to which 'self' and 'identity' are 'fixed' (McCrae & Costa, 1997) or 'fluid' (Potter and Wetherell, 1987), contemporary theorists largely agree that there is a social element to both (Burkitt, 2008). The questions arise whether customer-facing jobs in tourism face larger pressure from pleasing customers, and whether there is a greater risk of being dehumanised if people are more dependent on their job due to the absence of alternatives. Typically, people in more physically, mentally or economically constrained situations, or lower hierarchical or less skilled occupations, have less autonomy and choice, putting them at greater risk of being exploited and of experiencing undignified working conditions. For instance, Baum (2013) explained that people,

especially women, are often forced to take up precarious work in the hospitality sector. While they might not challenge their situation overtly, their continued working under dehumanising conditions must not be interpreted as consent, but is a result of their choosing to provide for their families rather than feel greater indignity from being unable to do so (Baum, 2013). Further, questions of identity-related workplace dignity are particularly relevant in times of social change (Adams, 2007; Sennett, 1998), and when new types of employment such as tourism take the place of previous livelihood opportunities (Di Domenico & Miller, 2012; Morgan, 2013).

Organisational context

Viewed from a dignity perspective, the organisational context considers workplace characteristics such as level of respect, autonomy, trust, collaboration and worker democracy, as well as fair pay, recognition of contribution, manageable workload and interesting work (Bolton, 2007), which are all associated with positive work experiences for tourism workers (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2012; Kensbock et al., 2016). Thus, a work environment that enables positive social connections with managers, co-workers and clients, and the formation of a professional self-identity (self), contributes to lasting careers at all hierarchical levels (Mooney et al., 2016).

It could be argued that the purpose of any employment relationship is to compensate for goods and services with money (Sayer, 2007b); however, taking the example of the porters, who feel that being paid does not compensate for humiliation, it becomes clear that dignity is not something that can simply be bought. Instead, in line with Kantian ethics, Sayer (2007a) argues that dignity is above price, something that enables meaningful experiences for workers through relationships embedded in mutual respect and recognition. It is not only Kantian ethics that highlight mutual respect and recognition; indeed, central to Foucault's (1988) understanding of how individuals 'cultivate the self as an ethical subject', is an appreciation for reciprocal relationships with others. Thus, such an understanding appears imperative to consider in future tourism research. Then again, respect and reciprocity may be absent, for example when guests want more than money can buy or where respect for others is made obligatory regardless of their abusive behaviour (e.g. the 'customer is king' mantra). In these circumstances, a person is devalued and their dignity is under threat (Korczynski & Evans, 2013; Sayer, 2007b). There might then be a reciprocal benefit to create a client-employee relationship that is beyond the purely transactional, based on mutual respect and value of service. Thus, research on customer-employee encounters, and the role of dignity-impeding norms such as ownership structures, might benefit from taking a dignity perspective.

An example of psychosocial forces is Harris's (2009) study of a longstanding female Samoan executive housekeeper and her approach to managing staff in a luxury hotel. While housekeeping is widely considered as 'dirty work' (Hughes, 1971), symbolising a potential threat to workers' dignity and status, Harris (2009) provides an insightful account of how housekeepers build and retain a sense of pride and value in their work. Key factors are the executive's own progression within the hotel and her work-identity as 'Mama' (p. 156), as well as her commitment to nurturing a sense of community amongst Samoan co-workers; respecting them as individuals, empowering decision-making, and recognising their contributions. In this way, workers experience a sense of belonging and meaningful work, which, in turn, positively influences emotional engagement and trust and, ultimately, staff turnover rates (Harris, 2009). Here, the interlink between spheres of identity, organisational structures and the wider sustainability agenda, in which decent work is concerned with economic security and opportunities for women and minorities, becomes apparent from possibly unlikely conditions.

Such research highlights that people might hold different values and perceptions of what comprises a 'good' or 'bad' job, including their understanding of dignity at work. This gives rise to the question as to what extent socio-economic and cultural contexts matter when talking

about dignity at work, and whether tourism jobs relative to other possible employment, or to no employment, might indeed offer a sense of dignity.

Socio-economic and policy context

How individuals perceive the quality of their work might be contingent on the socio-economic and cultural setting (Baum, 2018), as well as the wider sustainability agenda and its practical applicability (Sharples, 2000).

First, as highlighted in the 'decent work and sustainable tourism' section of this paper, we acknowledge that the current neoliberal approach in which tourism organisations operate can lead to alienation and exploitation, and a work situation in which the worker is deprived of their individuality. By prioritising commercial over human interests, a structural dehumanisation and disempowerment of workers, and indeed society takes place (Adams, 2007). Such concerns have previously been highlighted by writers such as Marx (1867), Foucault (1988), and Polanyi (1957), who all questioned dignified working conditions in hierarchical, profit- and consumption-driven societies, which is relevant to tourism. As such, an emphasis on a 'moral economy' might pave the way for achieving decent, and indeed dignified, tourism employment. While dignity and neo-liberalism may seem irreconcilable, it might be the non-monetary dimensions of dignity (e.g. mutual respect, self-respect, value and identity) that provide an opportunity for dignity to be experienced by tourism workers and translate into improved profit for companies; leading to increased staff retention, less absenteeism, and improved visitor experiences. In the words of Higgins-Desbiolles; "if proponents of the sector do not wish to face concerted criticism, opposition and resistance in a world increasingly characterised by insecurity and tension, then contemporary dynamics require a radical rethinking" (2006, p. 1206). Thus, an emphasis on moral values "must be fostered and protected against the harmful distortions which can be brought about by economic factors" (UNWTO, 1980, p. 3), thereby contributing to social stability and sustainable development as envisaged in the SDGs.

Second, Mattson and Clark (2011) assert that dignity can be of universal utility for appraising policy and identifying global interests. They also acknowledge the likely differences in how policies will be translated into local contexts, and further highlight that despite strong guiding policies and frameworks, "only real people in real places can provide the answers and actions" (Clarke, 2011, p. 316). As such, a renewed understanding of decent work, that promotes dignity-affirming actions and fosters mutual positive encounters in organisational settings, with the aim of protecting and enhancing dignified work identities of tourism workers, could be key for achieving decent tourism employment as part of the sustainable development agenda as envisaged in SDG8.

Conclusion

This article provides a critical review of publications on dignity and identity, and how these concepts are interlinked and applicable to tourism employment. The aim was to conceptually interrogate the grounding of the value of dignity in tourism employment for achieving 'decent work' in tourism, as envisaged in SDG8 as part of the wider sustainable development agenda. The review demonstrated that dignity is a powerful concept for assessing workplace experiences; such as respect, self-respect, professional identity and autonomy, but with limited application to issues in tourism employment and sustainable development. When applied to tourism studies at micro, meso and macro level, dignified work with an emphasis on the value of each individual and the contribution they make individually and collectively has been found to positively influence staff retention and customer satisfaction (Mooney et al., 2016), ultimately contributing to tourism businesses' success and SDG8 - economic growth and decent work.

The authors have established dominant features of the quality of tourism employment and linked the concepts of workplace dignity and identity to investigate how decent work in tourism employment can be understood and what can be done to achieve it. This has been achieved by introducing a multi-faceted psychosocial understanding of dignity in tourism employment, which considers employees' identity, the organisational context, and the wider socio-economic and policy context as well as the various actors involved at each of these levels. By applying examples, this article showed the interconnectedness between actions on various levels, but also showed how dignity encounters can appear in seemingly adverse conditions.

In conclusion, it is our contention that an engagement with the concept of dignity by the tourism community enables a deeper insight into the lived experiences of tourism workers and can help better define what decent work might mean for tourism employment and the wider global sustainability agenda. A next step should be to test the proposed model in empirical studies.

Furthermore, the authors indicated several promising future directions of tourism research. These include: research exploring dignity in relation to customer satisfaction and profit prioritisation; investigations seeking to understand the universal applicability of dignity in light of individual and cultural interpretations; and how a comprehensive understanding of *decent work* might inform tourism policy and practice. Moreover, as sustainable HRM (Zaugg et al., 2001) encompasses individual and social dimensions of sustainable development in relation to work, it offers another promising avenue to contribute to the limited body of tourism workforce research (Baum et al., 2016).

Finally, a dignity perspective in tourism employment could benefit the analysis of power in employment relations, and the debate on how the reputation of working in the sector could be enhanced, which can help address increasing skills shortages. Moreover, adopting dignity as a core value in tourism employment and considering its psychosocial dimensions has wider societal implications. For tourism to become a force for good, as envisaged by Higgins-Desbiolles (2006), people working in the industry will need to feel recognised as human beings, and feel valued both in monetary and non-monetary terms. Arguably, moving towards sustainable development is critically dependent on dignified work, as it forms the foundation of achieving both, decent work and economic success as envisaged in SDG8 and beyond, but more significantly is about recognising the lived experience of the person.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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