Barcelona hotel employees and their conception of fair work. An exploratory study

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Abstract

Purpose – Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) 5 and 8, respectively, indicate that decent work and gender equality are challenges that business organizations must face in order to achieve the social well-being and sustainable development of communities. Considering these goals, the present article aims to define the concept of fair work and examine the current degree of knowledge among staff in the hotel sector in Barcelona about the indicators of the Fair Labor Responsible Hotels (HJLR) certification.

Design/methodology/approach – A mixed methodology is used to analyze the primary data. A survey of 248 employees is complemented by nine semi-structured interviews with experts, general managers and heads of department of independently owned hotels and national and international chains.

Findings – The results show that this certification is necessary for the economic and social sustainability of the hospitality sector and to raise awareness that fair work is an urgent need. However, these currently tend to be little more than artificial actions.

Originality/value – The paper aims to emphasize the perspective of real actors in hotel industry about the actors' considerations of fair work to enhance the actors' job involvement and satisfaction.

Keywords Fair and decent work, Hospitality, Human resource management, Fair labor responsible hotel certification

Paper type Case study

Introduction

The concept of "decent work" was introduced in 1999 at the 87th Convention of the International Labor Organization (ILO) and considers that jobs must provide monetary and non-monetary remuneration, health and safety and professional training, among other requirements. Recently, the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) defined by the United Nations (UN) in 2015, and especially Goal 8 "Decent work and economic growth," which aims to "promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all," show that slow but continuous progress is being made toward this objective. It is also worth mentioning that Goal 5 "Gender

equality," which seeks to end discrimination for gender reasons, is an inequality that continues to affect the fundamental rights of women (Noguer-Juncà *et al.*, 2020). In this sense, the SDG documents convey that decent work, together with social justice and gender equality, are at the heart of sustainable tourism (International Labour Organization (ILO), 2017). Additionally, the ILO guidelines on decent work and socially responsible make suggestions to solve the decent work deficits in the tourism sector, like long working hours, low salaries, limited social protection, (International Labour Organization (ILO), 2017) etc. Thus, it is clear that organizations must achieve work environments that emphasize equal opportunities, the promotion and training of employees, the reconciliation of professional and personal life (Alarcón and Cole, 2019) and the prevention of occupational risks and hazards, among others (Noguer-Juncà *et al.*, 2020), ensuring fair work for all human capital in organizations. As Baum *et al.* (2016) argued, employees and decent work are at the heart of the sustainability debate in tourism. Also the current claim from unions and academy are struggling for the value of dignity in tourism employment (Winchenbach *et al.*, 2019; International Labour Organization (ILO), 2017; Lukas, 2017; Kensbock *et al.*, 2016) due to the excessive presence at workplaces of mismanagement and abuses, overwork, autonomy constraints, inadequate working schedules, insufficient pay, insecure employment contracts, discrimination, humiliations, etc.

As it is known, a motivated and engaged workforce can provide a competitive advantage (Janes and Wisnom, 2011) and is critical to attract and retain talent and keep staff engaged (Reynolds *et al.*, 2021). Values shared by employers and their employees shape corporate culture and have a positive influence on the latter's satisfaction, engagement and performance (Boria-Reverter *et al.*, 2013). In this sense, employee engagement was defined as the psychological experiences and conditions that shape the way individuals employ and express themselves physically, emotionally and cognitively during role performance (Kahn, 1990). Indeed, the employees' emotional commitment to their organization is a key driver of greater empathy with customers in their daily performance (Louzao and Crespi-Vallbona, 2022). Thus, managers of tourism organizations and especially hotels, seek employees who can perform well while providing a high level of quality of service (Crawford and Hubbard, 2018). Meanwhile, tourists are increasingly sensitized and value companies that work in a fair, supportive and sustainable manner (Hernández Flores *et al.*, 2020), even more in the context of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) and the post-pandemic period, in which guests claim for health and safety information and confirm the essence of functional structure and emotional ties in the specific field of hospitality (Liu-Lastres *et al.*, 2022).

The objective of this study is to analyze the concept of fair work from the workers' perspective and examine the current degree of knowledge among staff in the hotel sector in Barcelona, using an academic tool, i.e. the indicators of the Fair Labor Responsible Hotel certification (HJLR, Hoteles Justos Laborablemente Responsables, prepared by Spanish unions and supported and analyzed by academia but not yet been endorsed by the public institutions). The article begins with a review of the scientific literature that has analyzed the concept of decent work in the hospitality industry and the description of the HJLR certification. This is followed by a case study of the hotel sector in Barcelona due to the tourism significance of this city. A qualitative technique is used in this exploratory research. Secondary data on the project were provided by the HJLR certification. Primary data come from in-depth interviews and a survey to hotel employees. Thus, on one hand, we conducted nine in-depth interviews with experts, general managers and heads of department of independently owned hotels and national and international chains. In addition, we did a survey to employees achieving 248 correct answers. The whole primary data were used to test both research questions on the conception of fair work by employees in the hotel sector in Barcelona and their knowledge about the HJLR certification, which are not yet implemented by the Spanish Government. The study concludes with some proposals for practical actions

to tourism managers to consolidate good labor practices in their organizations. The ultimate aim is to produce a definition of the concept of fair work in the tourism sector from the employees' perspective.

Theory

Awareness of work quality

Indicators and social policies with regard to decent work have acquired significant importance in recent years. The standards proposed by the ILO are divided between conventions (which can be binding through ratification by each state member) and recommendations (which cannot be ratified and tend to be technical documents) (Koliev, 2021). The International Labour Organization (ILO) (1999) identified four pillars of decent work: (1) employment creation, (2) social protection, (3) rights at work and (4) social dialog. This organization argues 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 organize and participate in decisions affecting their lives and equality of opportunity and treatment for all women and men, especially in the hospitality industry where women are over-represented in the lower paying and lower-status roles (Harris *et al.*, 2011; Williamson and Harris, 2022). That is, decent work means to achieve the social and economic stability for employees, and hence, to improve their quality of life. Furthermore, as Baum (2018) or Di Fabio and Maree (2016) state, decent work include aspects of dignity, respect and self-respect, as well as safe, fair, productive and meaningful work in conditions of freedom.

The European Commission also distinguishes four policy domains related to "fair working conditions": (1) conditions of employment (i.e., flexible employment taking care to the nature, volume or duration of work, decentralized and with autonomy); (2) wages (minimum wages with an adequate level ensure a decent standard of living for workers and their families); (3) health and safety at work (in light of less stable employment relationships, new working patterns and an aging workforce) and (4) social dialog and involvement of workers (with representative partners with the capacity to reach collective agreements). Likewise, ISO (International Organization for Standardization) 26000 on Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) mentions that companies must respect human rights by offering certain decent working conditions that favor occupational health and safety and the human and professional development of workers (Internal Organization Standardization Committee, 2010). Furthermore, the Green Papers of the European Commission stress the need to create a European framework to ensure that companies fully assume their social responsibility (Commission of the European Communities, 2001). Other organizations, such as the European Business Ethics Networks (EBEN) (2021) and Ethisphere (2021), also promote ethical business practices at the European level. Finally, the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) also has its GRI Standards to evaluate the best economic, social and environmental practices of business organizations. This means that there are different initiatives that advocate establishing the criteria of decent work, and all of them consider that it is a construct of soft and hard variables.

Specifically, the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) promotes the Global Code of Ethics for Tourism, where point 2 of article 9 (Rights of the workers and entrepreneurs in the tourism industry) indicates that "Salaried and self-employed workers in the tourism industry and related activities have the right and the duty to acquire appropriate initial and continuous training; they should be given adequate social protection; job insecurity should be limited so far as possible; and a specific status, with particular regard to their social welfare, should be offered to seasonal workers in the sector" (World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), 2001). For the moment, the hospitality industry does not have specific GRI standards like those in other

sectors linked to the tourism industry, such as restaurants and air transport (Global Reporting Initiative (GRI), 2021). Despite of this mentioned interest, decent work or dignified working conditions are not generalized in tourism organizations (Hadjisolomou *et al.*, 2022).

At the Spanish level, there is the *Consejo Estatal de Responsabilidad Social de las Empresas* (CERSE), which is the consultant organization of the Ministry of Work and Social Economy for the promotion and implementation of corporate social responsibility policies (García Mestanza *et al.*, 2019). Likewise, Forética, the representative in Spain of the World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD), which currently has more than 200 members, created the System of Ethical and Socially Responsible Management (*Sistema de Gestión Ética y Socialmente Responsable*, SGE, 21), a tool to evaluate the responsible leadership of business organizations (Forética, 2021). In addition, since 1994, there has been the *Fundación Étnor*, whose objective is to link the business and academic sectors to promote business ethics actions (Fundación Étnor, 2021). Also *Capitalismo Consciente*, which is part of the global Conscious Capitalism movement, works to promote entrepreneurship and commercial transactions based on humanitarian values and seeking a positive impact among all stakeholders (Conscious Capitalism, 2021). There is also the *Observatorio de la Responsabilidad Social Corporativa*, a non-profit organization founded in 2004 with the purpose of creating a collaborative network between different social entities that work toward the application of good corporate social responsibility practices (Observatorio de la Responsabilidad Social Corporativa, 2021). And *FairTur Alianza de Turismo Sostenible*, which was founded in Andalusia in 2015 to promote the participation of different public and private sectors and society, has used the *Fair Tur* label [a certification developed through a system called the *Sistema Integral* (SI) using the standards of the Global Sustainability Standards Board (GSSB)] to develop a platform called FairTur.com, a free website where people can book accommodation that respects the SI system (FairTur Alianza de Turismo Sostenible, 2021).

At the Catalan level, there is also Respon.cat, an organization founded in 2014 that brings together companies that view corporate social responsibility as a strategy to be embraced and which has an ethical code based on the values of responsibility, co-responsibility and trust (Respon.cat, 2021). Also at the local level, the city of Barcelona, in the context of its commitment to tourism sustainability as acquired in 2011 when becoming the first urban destination in the world to obtain the Biosphere certification, has a set of requirements related to labor practices that all tourism companies must fulfill in order to be certified (Biosphere Tourism, 2021) and operate with the local destination management organization (DMO), *Turisme de Barcelona*. Meanwhile, in 2016 the *Kellys Association* was created to defend the labor rights of hotel housekeepers (Fernández-Muñoz and Tomé-Caballero, 2020). *Las Kellys Barcelona* plans to create a website for booking hotels that respect the fair work label. It will only include establishments that they feel meet the requirements of not outsourcing or subcontracting essential jobs such as housekeeping, non-wage discrimination based on gender and compliance with the Collective Wage Agreement and risk prevention laws (Comunicatur, 2021).

Despite all these extended debates, different scholars 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. Thus, Winchenbach, Hanna and Miller (2019) demonstrated that dignity is a powerful concept for assessing workplace experiences, and Higgins-Desbiolles (2006) envisaged that people working in the industry needs to feel recognized as human beings and feel valued both in monetary and non-monetary terms, such as the reconciliation between professional and personal life (Alarcón and Cole, 2019). From a dignity at work perspective, working conditions and feeling valued are at the heart of quality employment (Bolton, 2007). According to Robinson *et al.* (2019), sustainable human resource (HR) practices generate positive benefits for employees and businesses, but it is difficult to demonstrate empirically. That is, to achieve fair works represents a *win–win* proposal

because it increases labor force participation, engagement and productivity and, hence, considerable economic and social benefits for organizations.

In sum, although there are different initiatives in place to encourage companies to assume ethical responsibilities with regard to employees and communities, none of them has legal or supranational value. There is still no commonly accepted definition of fair work. It is worth mentioning that a decent perspective in tourism employment could positively influence staff retention and customer satisfaction (Baum *et al.*, 2016) but also is a key issue to achieve sustainable tourism development (Winchenbach *et al.*, 2019). In addition, Rich *et al.* (2010) pointed out that when employees are engaged, they use their hands, head and heart in their performance. On the contrary, when individuals are actively disengaged, they retire from their work roles and adopt strategies of emotional detachment. This employee's dissatisfaction and disengagement affects client experience and indirectly impacts on economic viability (Bernhardt *et al.*, 2000; Chi and Gursoy, 2009). Quality of service in employee–customer relationships in the tourism and hospitality industry has proven to be crucial to success and play a crucial role influencing customer engagement and loyalty (Louzao and Crespi-Vallbona, 2022). In consequence, in the hospitality sector, it is extremely necessary to ensure for decent and fair work for the whole staff to avoid massive labor drains, as if it happened during the summer of 2022 in Spain when companies like Melià launched a campaign in February to hire more than 2.000 employees (Gutiérrez, 2022).

Fair labor responsible hotel certification
In 2019 and with the aim of achieving fair labor responsible hotels, the Spanish trade unions [Comisiones Obreras (CCOO) and Unión General de Trabajadores (UGT)] together with researchers from the Tourism Faculty at the University of Malaga, created a system of indicators on which to base the subsequent design of the HJLR certification. This proposal is included in the international *Fair Hotels* project that includes eight countries: Canada, the USA, Ireland, Sweden, Denmark, Norway, Croatia and Slovenia. The objective is to offer a tool for hotel organizations to measure their policies and demonstrate that they are socially responsible (García Mestanza *et al.*, 2019) and based on sustainable business models. This indicator system focuses on six dimensions: relationship between organization/employees, work, health and safety at work, training and professional development, diversity and equality of opportunities and equal retribution. These issues are related with ILO pillars of decent work as well as fair working conditions of the European Commission, even using the same items.

The first indicator ("*Relationship between Organization/Employees*") focuses on how organizations consult their employees and their representatives and how they communicate significant changes at the operational level. The first of its four subsections on the "application of sectorial agreements or similar company agreements" establishes that all hotel establishments must apply the referenced sectorial agreements. In the event that company agreements apply, they must at least satisfy the requirements of the sectorial agreements in their entirety, both socially and economically. In the case of subcontracting-outsourcing, the conditions of the sectorial agreement will apply. The following subsection refers to "freedom of association," which validates the absence of final resolutions or sentences on violations of freedom of association in the last three years. The third subsection ensures free exercise of the functions of "union representation." And the final subsection deals with "information and consultation with the Legal Representation of Workers."

The second indicator, "*Work*," considers the organization's approach to hiring, recruiting and retention of workers and working conditions. It evaluates "permanent and temporary personnel," i.e. the proportion of fixed and discontinuous fixed contracts out of the total number of workers contracted by the establishment, as well as "full-time and part-time staff," i.e. the proportion of full-time contracts out of the total number of contracts.

The third indicator, "*Health and Safety at Work,*" measures analysis and control of health and safety risks, training programs, the registration and investigation of health and safety incidents in the workplace and strict standards to achieve a safe, healthy work environment. There are four units of measurement. The first is "the prevention manager", i.e. verifying the existence of prevention delegates and/or management-employee committees that help monitor and advice on occupational health and safety programs. The second refers to "preventive health and safety plans and measures" that must guarantee the prevention of occupational risks, evaluate specific psychosocial risks, and plan health surveillance. The third unit is "temporary disability due to common contingency," i.e. the percentage of temporary disability caused by common and occupational diseases in the last three years. Finally, the fourth is the "occupational accident rate," i.e. the percentage of accidents at work and professional illnesses in the last three years.

The fourth indicator, "*Training and Professional Development,*" considers aspects regarding employee training and skills improvement, as well as evaluations of performance and the professional development of the workforce. It also includes the provision of continuous training, continued employability and support following retirement or dismissal. The first measurement value is the existence of a "training and professional development plan" that includes a study of training needs and an evaluation of the training received by the staff. The second is the "average training rate" or percentage of the workforce that has received training.

The fifth indicator measures "*Diversity and Equality of Opportunities*" and is limited to equal treatment and opportunities between men and women at work. It has three subscripts. The first is "measures to reconcile family and work life or existence of an equality plan" and the second, the "gender pay gap," assesses the ratio of total payroll between women and men. And finally, the "composition of the workforce by gender" breaks down the number of male and female workers in each of the three professional categories included in the State Labor Agreement for the Hospitality Sector (*Acuerdo Laboral de ámbito Estatal para el sector de Hostelería* -ALEH-).

Finally, the sixth indicator refers to "*Equal Retribution*" and assesses whether workers' payments are distributed equitably in a given period of time and in accordance with merit. The first unit of measurement is the "maximum remuneration over average" or ratio of the highest salary with respect to the average salary of the workforce. And the second is the "maximum over minimum remuneration" or ratio of the highest salary with respect to the minimum salary of the workforce.

Case study and methodology
The tourism labor market
According to Melián-González and Bulchand-Gidumal (2020), tourism is currently a key economic sector in many countries and regions. In 2018, one in ten organizations in the non-financial business economy of the European Union (EU) belonged to the tourism industry and employed 12.3 million people (Eurostat, 2021). In the same year, more than three out of four companies in the EU tourism sector were operating in hospitality (14%) or food and beverage services (61%) (Eurostat, 2021).

In 2020 in Spain, tourism-related businesses generated 2.23 million jobs, which is 11.8% of total employment. Hospitality occupancy increased more than 1.5% in that year (Instituto Nacional de Estadística (INE), 2021). In 2020, because of the travel restrictions due to the COVID-19 pandemic, 308,000 jobs were lost in Spain. On 31 June 2021, the hospitality services had 90,689 employees on the Spanish furlough scheme (ERTE) (Instituto Nacional de Estadística (INE), 2021). The tourism sector is evidently important to the world economy and, therefore, the Spanish economy too. However, work in the sector has been classified as a low-quality occupation (International Labour Organization (ILO), 2017) and Spain is no exception.

The city of Barcelona is an excellent example to study which is the employee's perspective of decent and fair work, due to its specialization in tourism and one example of a top-rated tourist destination. The data in Figure 1 show the increasing demand for international tourism, which started with the Olympic Games in 1992 and is because of the municipal strategy of global urban renewal, both physically and socially (Alabart Vila *et al.*, 2015). The number of hotel beds in the city of Barcelona shows an increasing trend, from 10.265 in 1990 to 73.700 in 2020. More than 33.500 individuals work in the hotel sector.

Barcelona hotel employees' fair work

Methodology
The objective of this research is to analyze the concept of fair work as well as the degree of knowledge of the HJLR certification and its advantages and disadvantages among the hotel sector in the city of Barcelona. To do so, a mixed methodology, combining quantitative and qualitative data analysis, was performed. This involved both a survey of employees in the whole level structure of the hotel sector and in-depth interviews with experts and heads of different departments in the hospitality industry.

The questions of the survey emerged from the literature review, specifically from the HJLR that bases on decent work and fair working conditions conceptions of ILO and the European Commission. The questionnaire (in the Appendix) includes seven questions: an initial one asking the subjects how they would define fair work; three about the HJLR certification and its indicators (knowledge of the certification, rating of the indicators from 1 to 7 and lack of indicators) and three on the effects on the business organization of the implementation of this certification (internal organization, repercussions among workers or internal clients and external clients or customers and communication channels).

Quantitative data analysis was performed by the eight questions defining fair work, and concretely confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was carried out in order to determine whether these variables belong to a unidimensional latent variable, namely fair work. Validity and reliability are also calculated.

Before the formal survey, a pretest of the measurement items was conducted. First, five academics of tourism management were invited to evaluate the questionnaire to analyze suitability, readability and ambiguity. Finally, a pilot test with 20 employees was carried out. Based on the inputs provided by the group of experts and the pilot test, minor adjustments were introduced to ensure the questionnaire's validity and relevance.
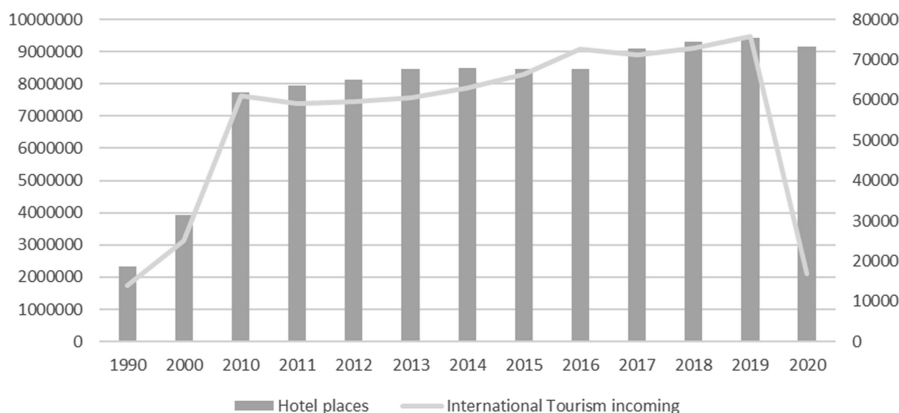
Figure 1.
International tourism evolution and bed places in hotels of Barcelona (1990–2020)

Source(s): Figure by authors based on data from Turisme de Barcelona and Statista

Then, the survey was conducted by the authors using a Google Form held between October and December 2021 with employees of the hotel sector using snow-ball methodology. The supervision of the survey was done also by the authors. A total of 255 responses were initially obtained. Finally, 248 responses were deemed valid and 7 surveys were discarded due to inconsistencies in their response. The demographic characteristics of the sample are shown in Table 1. Of the 248 valid questionnaires collected, 88 (36.8%) were from men and 150 (63.2%) were from women. Most respondents (78–32.5%) were aged between 18 and 30 years. The majority (127–52.9%) had a college or university education.

Additionally, the need to adopt an exploratory approach led the researchers to also use a qualitative design since it is appropriate to analyze the situation from a local perspective (Mey, 2022) in order to capture in-depth details about the phenomena (Bryman, 2015). The validity of the research is achieved through the description of the interviewee speeches (Tracy, 2010), which are analyzed in the next section. Using a non-probability purposive sampling, invitations to participate in in-depth interviews were emailed to 26 individuals holding key positions in HR departments. After follow-ups, a total of nine interview acceptances were received (36.9% response rate) between October–December 2021. Of the total number of interviews, six were virtual and recorded, with the prior consent of the participants and three were held in person. The convenience sample allowed the researchers to establish rapport quickly with the participants because of the comfortable and trustworthy environment (Belina, 2022) that emerged from a positive relationship between the interviewer and the interviewees (McConnell-Henry et al., 2010).

As observed in Table 2, all the respondents hold key HR management positions (e.g. managers, directors and executives) and most of the participants had a considerable amount of experience both in their current organizations and in general. For this research, it was interesting to involve respondents who could have a partial influence on the future decisions. In tourism and hospitality sector, women are majority in most of departments, mainly in the housekeeping department (Mantovano, 2015; Crespi-Vallbona, 2022); thus, they were selected in the interviewees' sample to better understand their perceptions about fair work; furthermore, they are the core service in the accommodation sector (Crespi-Vallbona and Noguer-Juncà, 2023).

The interviews were conducted by the authors themselves and lasted between 30 and 50 minutes. Data analysis was carried out in Catalan, and the quotations presented in this paper have been translated from the original language into English. The data were coded separately by the two authors and the content was also individually examined. The process of

Characteristics		Frequency (%)
Gender	Male	88 (36.8%)
	Female	150 (63.2%)
Age	18–30 years old	78 (32.5%)
	31–40 years old	49 (20.4%)
	41–50 years old	60 (27.5%)
	50 years old and +	49 (20.4%)
Education	Technical school	26 (10.8%)
	Graduate degree	101 (42.1%)
	Master	113 (47.1%)
Positions	Front and back desk	59 (23.8%)
	Housekeeping department	60 (24.2%)
	Food and beverage department	56 (22.6%)
	Supervisor/intermediate level	73 (29.4%)
Source(s): Table by authors		

Table 1.
Demographic characteristics

Interviewee	Professional area	Gender
I1	CEO in a consultancy specialized in the hospitality industry	Female
I2	Hotel deputy director	Female
I3	Corporate Social Responsibility Specialist	Female
I4	Researcher of responsible tourism	Male
I5	Human Resources Director 4 × national hotel chain	Male
I6	Founder of Las Kellys housekeeper movement	Female
I7	Housekeeper. 5 × National hotel chain	Female
I8	Sub Housekeeper. 4 × national hotel chain	Female
I9	Floor supervisor. 4 × sup. National hotel chain	Female

Source(s): Table by authors

Table 2.
Interviewee profiles

codification and categorization was inductive and based on the direct observation and the analysis of the responses of the interviewees. The interviews were transcribed, and the information was organized according to the following topics: the concept of fair work, the concept and characteristics of the HJLR certification and the positive and negative impacts of the implementation of the aforementioned certification (see the Questionnaire at the Appendix). The responses were also cross-examined by co-authors to reduce personal reflections and settle on mutually agreed topics. According to Marks and Yardley (2004), through the use of thematic analysis, the researchers can fully understand the analyzed topic.

The interviews consisted of open questions arising from the literature of decent and fair working condition conceptions of ILO and the European Commission and more specifically from the Spanish HJLR that also bases on these mentioned approaches. Specifically, the interviews are structured into five blocks of questions: (1) concept of fair work, (2) assessment of the system of indicators of the certification HJLR, (3) implementation of the certification and changes in the business organization, (4) impact of the certification on internal and external clients and (5) marketing and promotion of the certification.

Results and discussion

This research is based on a mixed methodology with primary data obtained from a survey and in-depth interviews. The results are, therefore, structured between the results of the surveys and of the interviews. Both results indicate that the degree of knowledge in the hotel sector of the HJLR certification is mostly low.

Survey results

The respondents consider fair work to be diverse and inclusive and to guarantee equal opportunities, dignified salaries, flexible timetables, etc. This is evidenced by different answers, such as "a hotel where clients and workers are respected and have their rights"; "a hotel where all departments are important"; "a business that is based on diversity and respects gender, sexual orientation, ethnic characteristics" and "a hotel that unites workers and clients and contributes to and cares about society." In other words, a hotel that ensures its employees' professional and emotional satisfaction (Crespi-Vallbona and Mascarilla-Miró, 2018; Louzao and Crespi-Vallbona, 2022), promotes legal and social justice and has shared values and ethical capital (Cloke and Goldsmith, 2001; Boria-Reverter *et al.*, 2013). To conclude, it is a job that allows achieving the professional aspirations of people in their working lives, as well as stable emotional well-being.

The surveys also reveal that the HJLR certification is barely known among people who work in the hotel sector in Barcelona. Only 18.95% of employees working in reception, guest

relations, revenue management, HR, food and beverage department, etc. know about the project.

Concerning fair work, respondents had to rate the appropriateness of fair hotel indicators as shown in Table 3. Those rating were evaluated with a Likert scale from 1 (completely non-adequate) to 7 (completely adequate). Table 3 shows the percentage from each answer category from 1 to 7. The statements of "health and safety at work" and "diversity and equality of opportunities" were answered as completely adequate by 65% of the respondents. Table 3 also shows the average (taking the answer categories from 1 to 7) of those statements. The highest average is from "health and safety at work" and "diversity and equality of opportunities" with 6.14 and 6.13, respectively. In contrast, "work" is the statement with lowest adequacy (average = 5.59), followed by "organization/employees' relationship" (average = 5.87).

It is worth mention that working in the hospitality sector means a trilateral employment relationship with oneself, the employer and the customer (Hadjisolomou *et al.*, 2022) and it definitely exerts an emotional and mental wear if organizations do not provide fair work to the staff.

In order to evaluate whether the adequacy statements (Table 3) belong to a single factor, CFA is carried out, and moreover, validity and reliability are also computed. Mplus 7 software was used to determine the CFA. Results are shown in Table 4, where they show the adequacy of a single factor for "fair work" since factor loadings of items with standardized values range between 0.92 and 0.85, which are greater than the recommended lower bound 0.50.

Validity is the accuracy in the measurement; thus, it refers to the extent the correlation between the intended measure and other measures used to measure the same construct (Carmines and Zeller, 1979); it is assessed by the average variance extracted (AVE) that is 0.74 which is greater than the minimum recommended of 0.50 (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). Then, validity holds. Composite reliability is 0.94, which is higher that the minim recommended of 0.7 (Hair *et al.*, 2020). Thus, reliability is also confirmed for the construct "fair work." Individual reliability or internal consistency of the scale from the same construct must be > 0.3. In this case, correlations vary from 0.611 to 0.844, therefore internal consistency also holds.

| | Answer categories | | | | | | | |
	1: Completely non-adequate	2	3	4	5	6	7: Completely adequate	Average
Health and Safety at Work	1.61%	2.42%	5.65%	5.65%	5.24%	14.52%	64.92%	6.14
Diversity and Equality of Opportunities	0%	1.61%	8.06%	2.82%	6.45%	14.11%	64.92%	6.13
Equal Retribution	2.02%	3.63%	6.85%	4.03%	8.06%	12.50%	62.90%	6.04
Training and Development	2.82%	2.82%	5.65%	6.45%	9.68%	18.95%	53.23%	5.89
Organization/ Employees Relationship	2.82%	3.23%	8.47%	4.44%	8.87%	17.34%	54.84%	5.87
Work	2.82%	3.63%	8.47%	6.85%	11.69%	27.02%	39.11%	5.59

Table 3. Adequacy as an indicator of fair work

Source(s): Table by authors

The overall fit of each of the model is tested using different goodness-of-fit indexes: χ^2 = 13.570, 8 degrees of freedom (p = 0.09), relative χ^2 value to degree of freedom (χ^2/d.f) = 1.70 (generally accepted<3), Tucker–Lewis index (TLI) = 0.975 (generally accepted>0.90), comparative fit index (CFI) = 0.987 (generally accepted>0.90), standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) = 0.019 (generally accepted<0.06) and root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = 0.054 (generally accepted<0.08). Thus, the fit of the model is acceptable, and we can determine "fair work" as a unidimensional construct.

Despite the scarce knowledge of the HJLR certification, the results also illustrate that 35.89% of respondents consider a certain indicator to be missing from its proposal. The lack of requirements related to other stakeholders, such as external customers, suppliers and the third sector, is mentioned in such answers as "not only with the employee but also towards the environment," "everything related to customers and suppliers" and "something about the social benefits for the environment" among others. Hence, it is clear that employees in the hotel industry feel that sustainable business models need to involve all stakeholders as Short *et al.* (2012) note. In addition, the lack of indicators related to the employability of disabled people is also mentioned, such as "disability should be considered," and the emotional benefits of the job, such as "the added value that the employee experience could bring to the company" or "intangible benefits." That is, the surveyed people consider that there is a lack of soft indicators.

Likewise, more than 90% of the respondents believe that the implementation of the HJLR certification would impose temporary and economic costs for the organization, mainly during the certifying process, but in the long term it would offer a competitive advantage since the workforce would be more motivated and, consequently, more efficient. This idea is confirmed with answers such as "perhaps it will be the cost of time linked to the verification and confirmation of the indicators . . . However, although there are economic costs, in the medium/long term they will be a benefit" and "yes, but the company must view the cost as a long-term benefit." In short, these costs would be quickly amortized due to the increase of employee engagement (Rich *et al.*, 2010).

In addition, most respondents agree that although the implementation of the HJLR would mainly benefit internal customer, while benefiting external ones as well. It is evident that if employees are motivated, they provide a better service and are more empathetic, which generates high satisfaction among external customers, as highlighted by the answer, "Very positively. As a guest, to see that the employees are valued and well-considered . . . It is everything one could wish for, to stay in a hotel where there are values." Human capital should be viewed as a strategic concern of hotel organizations since they offer a service given by and for people and the role of its employees is important for the company's competitiveness (Kusluvan *et al.*, 2010; Louzao and Crespi-Vallbona, 2022). The respondents also indicate that the certification would represent benefits for corporate image and business reputation as reflected by the answer, "improvement of the brand/

Barcelona hotel employees' fair work

	Factor loading	p-value
Health and Safety at Work	0.922	***
Diversity and Equality of Opportunities	0.917	***
Equal Retribution	0.874	***
Training and Development	0.850	***
Organization/Employees Relationship	0.850	***
Work	0.741	***

Note(s): ***p-value<0.05
Source(s): Table by authors

Table 4.
CFA for "fair work"

company's reputation." Hence, these companies should perform as a network in their quest for a sustainable business model (Lüdeke-Freund, 2010; Short *et al.*, 2012).

Also regarding the instruments to communicate and promote the certification, the respondents believe that use should be made of digital platforms, such as hotel websites and social networks, placing QR codes in different places at the hotel, for instance the lobby and the bar, and also through networking, such as meetings between business partners. These proposals appear in responses like, "It could be promoted on social networks (website, Instagram, Facebook . . .), as well as at strategic points in the building (such as the reception or restaurant)" and "corporate magazine" and "in the channels to attract and retain talent."

Interview results

Regarding the first objective, only two out of nine interviewees know about the HJLR certification. This is because it is still a proposal from the unions that is being supported and analyzed by academia but that has not yet been endorsed by the public institutions, so there is a long process to go through before this certification will be widely promoted among both employers and employees from the sector, and it will be even longer before it reaches customers, suppliers and society, i.e. where CSR plays a definitive role in terms of a sustainable business. In any case, when the interviewees are presented with the indicators, they are unable to suggest any other items that could define and evaluate the concept of fair work as explained by I5 when saying, "[the HJLR system] addresses all issues."

Despite their ignorance of the HJLR certification, the interviewees have a clear idea of the concept of fair work. A hotel that offers fair work is one in which all employees have the same job opportunities regardless of their gender, educational level or social status, where they have working conditions that allow them to balance their personal and professional lives and that offers a decent salary that makes them feel that they are important for the organization. That is, the organization ensures the well-being of the workforce (Crespi-Vallbona and Mascarilla-Miró, 2018) and the respect and significance of all workplaces and the supportive feedback from managers or supervisors. For example, I7 says, "a fair hotel is one in which all of its workers are hotel employees. This is basic. The hotel does not outsource employees, neither for cleaning, maintenance, nor food and beverage. Nothing outsourced." For I1, "a company offers fair jobs when performance is evaluated objectively, using standards and procedures that are written and known by the employees. In addition, the employee and the company must accept and sign certain agreements and codes of ethics and work behavior." Or as I2 points out, "a fair job is one that allows you to live without renouncing your professional career."

Likewise, for I6, an organization that offers fair work is one that has "employees in decent working conditions (no work overload, a professional and vocational workforce . . .). The agreement notes many topics, but they do not close the doors to professional exploitation. Application of the agreement does not mean that the workers won't be exploited. You must pay enough for people to live. It is wrong for someone like me to earn 1,095.00 euros for half a year and to be on unemployment benefit for the other half of the year. The hotel has a quality certification, quality of what? It is pure marketing, but the reality is different." In this regard, the respondents demand comparable salaries to all other staff in similar positions or job categories (internal equity) and that are also competitive and attractive in comparison to those paid by other organizations (external competitiveness).

Getting organizations to offer fair jobs means ensuring that they scrupulously comply with the legislation, and at the same time, the regulatory framework has to improve working conditions, recruitment, labor relations, gender equality and the inclusion of people with disabilities. However, as I3 points out, "the word 'fair' is very dangerous and manipulative. It is not a pleasant word and it will never be fair to everyone either." I5 adds that "[fair work] is

utopic because hotels are very complex structures. We are still in a very precarious sector. The salaries for the basic positions (reception, housekeeping, etc.) are not enough to cover essential needs . . . And there are still many feminized and masculinized job positions. In our hotel, we are trying to change that by combining the two genders, and the results are excellent because the work is more efficient, especially in the housekeeping and reception departments. We also want to implement this in the human resources and marketing departments."

There is clearly a desire to work in sustainable companies that offer fair, responsible jobs. And, at the same time, there is concern about the difficulty to achieve this due to organizational changes and costs, because hotel chains, both national and international, already have their standards. As I5 says, "we still haven't implemented the Equality Plan, although fortunately we do not have large salary differences. But the main positions are held by men. The only woman is the chief financial officer." I1 is also very clear about "the need for a lot of changes. Big hotels and international companies already have their standards. Small hotels should invest time, and perhaps hire or outsource. It takes time to make sure that the hotel can meet the criteria."

However, there is an agreement that a certification for fair jobs would have a very positive impact not only on internal customers, but also on the organization's external customers. It would mean a better work environment, a more motivated workforce and, consequently, the provision of an excellent service to the external client. The emotional engagement described by Louzao and Crespi-Vallbona (2022) would be reinforced. This is what I1 affirms when commenting that "the worker will be happier and more motivated . . . and if the company invests time in the employee, it will be more positive for the client. And the client will receive that positive experience . . . If you want to create customer experiences, you must first create experiences for the employees. And so the staff turnover could be reduced because it is also a cost in terms of time and resources." I9 also notes "the staff would be happier, more dedicated, more willing . . . Now they feel unconnected to the interests of the hotel . . . like second-class employees." In short, fair work, as well as the implementation of a system of measures to evaluate its levels in an organization, boosts the accommodation industry through the creation of sustainable business models (Lüdeke-Freund, 2010; Short et al., 2012).

It is important for a fair work certification to take into account all employees, both those who are part of the structure itself and external ones. As I2 says, "for sure the client would perceive this positively, but only as long as the organization is forced to implement the certification for the employees of the house and outsourced staff too." I8 adds, "Yes, a lot of changes. In our housekeeping department, the staff are outsourced. Perhaps this should change . . . Nobody can hold this job for a long time."

Concerning external clients, an interesting issue to evaluate is the communication and promotion strategies to show that the hotel offers fair jobs. I1 proposes "you could use the employees as testimonies . . . and use a QR so people can listen to and watch these testimonies . . . or have a meeting directly with them [with the employees]." I2 also mentions "this has to be explained very well on the website . . . giving real data and real testimonies." I9 shares this opinion when pointing out "the quality certification should be visible on the hotel's website and in the establishment." Furthermore, I4 refers to the active attitude of the external client when it comes to the good and bad practices of hotels stating "quality certifications are based on the clients making a transfer of trust. The client must leave comments, use the complaint forms . . ."

Hence, the results confirm that the certification would be well accepted by the hotel sector in the city of Barcelona as a means to end the job insecurity that characterizes the current hospitality industry, despite the potential costs. However, there is some skepticism about the real implementation of the certification, the general consensus being that such indicators are a utopia and will not actually be applied and will end up being no more than a greenwashing or social washing strategy.

Conclusions

The objective of this research is to propose a definition of the concept of fair work from the point of view of workers and to analyze the degree of knowledge of the HJLR certification and the perception of the advantages and disadvantages of its application among the hotel sector in the city of Barcelona.

Related to the theoretical contribution, this paper proposes a definition of fair work as that which fosters the personal and professional well-being of the employee. Four dimensions contribute to this: (1) fair remuneration (internal equity and external competitiveness); (2) provision of a professional career (training and development and equal opportunities); (3) decent labor conditions (no work overload, flexible hours, healthy and safe positions) and (4) conciliation of professional and private life. As is constantly stated, the offer of fair jobs is synonymous with having more motivated, engaged and efficient employees that are committed to the organization (Rich *et al.*, 2010; Baum *et al.*, 2016; Crespi-Vallbona and Mascarilla-Miró, 2018) and, consequently, reducing staff turnover. Employee commitment is especially relevant in the hospitality industry as it is a service given by and for the people. In short, the satisfaction of a hotel's internal customers – i.e. employees – has positive effects on the satisfaction of its external customers (Louzao and Crespi-Vallbona, 2022). Hence, there is an imperative need to define fair positions and offer decent work conditions that can reduce the job insecurity that characterizes the hotel sector (Zhao and Ghiselli, 2016) and increase the emotional and physical well-being of employees, which will positively affect their involvement within the company (Shin *et al.*, 2016; Asfaw and Chang, 2019; Jung *et al.*, 2021). Not in vain, as the interviewees state, hospitality sector involves a huge self-demand from workers' side, as they have to maintain an outstanding face and mood for eight hours despite of their personal and emotional concerns. Furthermore, not all the customers treat and respect them in the same way, as usually they are perceived as "low-skilled" professionals and not deserving of an equal and appropriate treatment (Winchenbach *et al.*, 2019; Hadjisolomou *et al.*, 2022). Definitely, it is needed a change into the organizations and societal perceptions regarding the scarce and low consideration that workplaces in hospitality receive. Actually, implementation of fair work in hospitality sector still has a long way to go.

With regards to the managerial implications, it has been demonstrated that the HJLR certification is not well known in the hotel sector in Barcelona. Such certifications are also viewed as business strategies used to boost reputation and corporate image, being utopian rather than a reality. Nevertheless, these indicators are necessary to provide well-being to the human capital of an organization, so HR managers should strategically insist on the implementation of such measures to achieve fair jobs in their organizations and, consequently, be more competitive. As it is highlighted, it represents transparent and fair salary policies to avoid inequalities and gender biases, decent labor conditions, conciliation of professional and private life and explicit and supportive feedback and professional recognition. To sum up, in line of Bolton (2007), dignifying employees' working conditions is essential to get healthy organizations.

The results also indicate that certifications such as HJLR mean changes in the organization, both in terms of the restructuring of processes and the implementation costs, such as auditing fees and the temporary costs of employees who are in charge of development or reorganization. However, these costs have to be seen as a long-term investment to the company as it will operate more efficiently, since employees play an essential role in a company's success (Kusluvan *et al.*, 2010; Louzao and Crespi-Vallbona, 2022). Although the advantages of offering fair jobs have been verified, unfortunately the difficulties and reluctance to implement them are also confirmed. It is nothing new for changes to organizations to be slow and regarded as fearsome. Not in vain, few respondents knew about the HJLR certification. Then a serious media campaign is needed to create a social debate and support fair work conditions. In the end, as Hernández Flores *et al.* (2020) stated, customers begin to be sensitized and value companies that work in a fair manner.

There have evidently been numerous initiatives to define and establish processes that guarantee fair jobs but each proposal is developed independently and they tend to end up being no more than cosmetic, artificial operations, making it difficult for them to be actually implemented. Also the international rating criteria do not consider the issue of employment conditions. It is, therefore, necessary, considering the economic relevance of tourism and hospitality industry in the world's economy, to unify criteria at the international level, which might be a job for the ILO, but each government will need to ratify them and be committed to ensuring that fair jobs are really achieved. However, job fairness also depends on the culture, law and labor conditions of each country, but certainly, to achieve fair work.

Limitations and future research

This research entails several limitations that need to be addressed by future scholars. First, it focuses on the views of the hospitality industry in the city of Barcelona. Future scholars could broaden the proposed conceptual design by investigating the perception of the hotel sector in other Spanish tourist destinations. Second, this research is focused on the HJLR certification, but there is a wide range of other initiatives that are seeking to develop systems to achieve and verify fair work in the hospitality industry. Thus, future studies will need to link all these initiatives and organize a holistic system that could be applied internationally. Third, the current study analyzes the opinions as a single unit of analysis. Future investigations could examine views by departments and also by hotel category. Fourth, this research examined traditional hotels, but future studies could be addressed at hotels that promote sustainable development, use eco-friendly energy and food, etc. Finally, this analysis adopts a qualitative perspective and future studies could use a quantitative methodology.

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Further reading

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Appendix

Variable	Category
Academic background	Vocational training
	University degrees
	Masters
Age	18–30
	31–40
	41–50
	+50
Gender	Male
	Female
	Non binary
How would you define a fair hotel?	
Do you know about the indicator system of fair hotels that are responsible for their employees?	Yes
	No
Do you consider these indicators appropriate? Rate their appropriateness as fair hotel indicators from 1 to 7	
Organization/Employees relationship	1–7
Work	1–7
Health and safety at work	1–7
Training and professional development	1–7
Diversity and equality of opportunities	1–7
Equal retribution	1–7
Do you think any indicators are missing?	Yes
	No
If so, what is missing? (if not, do not answer)	
Do you think that the implementation of the "Fair Hotel Certification" would involve changes and/or costs to the business organization?	
Do you think that the "Fair Hotel Certification" would affect the organizations' clients (internal and external)?	
How would you report that your organization offers fair positions?	

Source(s): Table by authors

Table A1.
Questionnaire

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