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Aligning tourism's socio-economic impact with the United Nations' sustainable development goals

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ABSTRACT

Socio-economic sustainability for tourism workers does not play a prominent role in contemporary tourism economic impact studies. Rather, to promote economic growth paradigms, the focus lies on aggregated employment and income effects. To better understand tourism's contribution to *decent work* and *reduced inequalities* (Sustainable Development Goals 8 and 10, respectively), our study assesses tourism's socio-economic impact by focussing on meso-level perspectives from major tourism institutions that are complemented with macro-level results gained through an occupation-based Input-Output model. Although income inequalities across tourism occupations remain relatively low, income inequalities over a period of nine years have increased. Tourism employees continue to work in precarious occupations due to limited training and career opportunities. Employers demand skilled vocational professions and provide non-monetary benefits; however, respective salaries remain average. Altogether, tourism contributes to Sustainable Development Goals 8 and 10 only moderately, and regional tourism institutions need to continue their development strategies for greater sustainability.

1. Introduction

Tourism economic impact studies are regularly conducted to estimate the industry's contribution to economic growth and development (Comerio & Strozzi, 2019). As addressed by the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), it is globally recognized that regional development should aim for environmental, economic and sociocultural sustainability (UN, 2020). However, the SDGs fail to give adequate attention to tourism despite its global economic and societal significance (Hall, 2019). As another cause for critique, the SDGs are rooted in a growth-oriented paradigm that inhibits the long-term notion of sustainability (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2018; Robinson, Martins, Solnet, & Baum, 2019; UNEP, 2021). Thus, tourism's role as a demand-driven industry is currently debated, and its potential to achieve the SDGs is questioned (Bianchi & de Man, 2021; Büscher & Fletcher, 2017; Higgins-Desbiolles, 2020; Mihalic, 2016; Tosun, Timothy, & Öztürk, 2003). In fact, sustainability practices in tourism have not yet shown sufficient contributions to achieve the SDGs (Boluk, Cavaliere, & Higgins-Desbiolles, 2017, 2019); this is particularly evident for aspects related to workforce and employment conditions, which have generally received little attention in the tourism-related SDG discourse (Baum, 2018; Winchenbach, Hanna, & Miller, 2019). Alarcón and Cole (2019) highlighted that precarities in tourism employment are especially related to gender inequalities. Thus, without improving employment conditions for female workers, there will not be any sustainable tourism development. The lack of effort invested into improving employment becomes even more critical when considering Baum's (2015) observation that the status of employment-related issues in the tourism industries has not significantly improved in recent years.

Socio-economic issues related to the tourism workforce, such as low and unequally distributed income, were rarely discussed by contemporary multiplier-based tourism economic impact analyses (Cole & Morgan, 2010). Rather, this research field usually aims at improving the accuracy of impact measurements (Dwyer, Forsyth, & Spurr, 2004) by focussing on aggregated macro-economic indicators (i.e. sales and employment), thus reflecting a growth agenda (Crompton, 2006; Icoz & Icoz, 2019; Tosun et al., 2003). However, a macro-level view alone does not provide a comprehensive picture of tourism's impacts (Elsner, 2010) and carries the risk of overlooking socio-economic grievances because economies are complex social systems. Markets are embedded in a framework of institutions, rules and social norms that constantly emerge, change and adapt (Hodgson, 2000). Employment-related effects

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in particular require additional institutional and individual perspectives to be understood. The institutional perspective is especially relevant because the economy's meso-level of rules, norms and social practices shape the economic system (Dopfer, Foster, & Potts, 2004; Elsner, 2017). In a similar way, internal and external labour markets are social institutions (Zweig, 2015).

Although the importance of tourism for economic growth is evident when looking at global statistics (UNWTO, 2020), traditional impact models contribute little to the broader sustainability agenda. Therefore, our mixed-methods study adds to the discussion on tourism's socio-economic impacts by considering both macro- and meso-level perspectives (Dopfer et al., 2004). The former includes disaggregated employment and income effects, including income inequalities among various areas of tourism occupations. These insights support the analysis of regional tourism employment from the meso-level perspective through interviews with representatives of major regional tourism institutions. In this way, we assess the contribution of regional tourism to SDGs 8 (decent work and economic growth) and 10 (reduced inequalities) in Jämtland County, Sweden.

2. Tourism's socio-economic impact

One means of studying tourism's socio-economic effects, such as income distribution, is econometric methods. Mahadevan and Suardi (2019) demonstrated that tourism growth shows insignificant effects on reducing poverty gaps and income inequalities. Alam and Paramati (2016) showed that tourism even has the capacity to significantly increase income inequalities, studying 49 countries between 1991 and 2012. Beyond econometric studies, another approach to analysing the relationship between tourism and economic growth is multipliers, such as Input-Output (IO) models and Social Account Matrices (SAM). This methodology incorporates inter-sectoral linkages and allows the estimation of direct, indirect and induced effects from tourism demand on other sectors of the economy (Miller & Blair, 2009). The drawback of IO and SAM models is their linear approach, which highlights only positive impacts. These models have therefore been criticised for not considering price changes (Dwyer et al., 2004), implying a potential overestimation of economic effects due to missing economies of scale, substitution effects or resource limitations. These limitations are addressed by Computable General Equilibrium (CGE) models that incorporate price elasticities to simulate behaviours of economic actors based on neoclassic economic theory (Burfisher, 2017). Hence, CGE models are typically considered superior to IO. However, CGE models use SAM tables for underlying data input, which are usually less frequently updated and less publicly available than the IO tables that require fewer resources (Klijs, Heijman, Maris, & Bryon, 2012). Despite their drawbacks, IO models depict core structures of the economy with clear definitions and concise assumptions. Results of IO-based models are therefore valuable and indicative if discussed and interpreted with care (Klijs et al., 2012; Wood & Meng, 2020).

Input-Output and SAM studies on tourism with a socio-economic focus on elements such as income distribution are scant (Mahadevan & Suardi, 2019). Blake (2008) employed SAMs to analyse Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda by disaggregating household income according to pre-defined income classes. The study showed how income from the hotel, restaurant and transportation sectors is distributed unequally in favour of the highest income classes. Similarly, Incera and Fernández (2015) studied household income in Galicia disaggregated into eight income groups and four worker profiles approximated by level of education. Their findings showed that tourism impact does not differ significantly between income groups, but it affects high-skilled workers more positively. Klytchnikova and Dorosh's (2013) study applied a SAM for Panama that distinguished between poor vs. non-poor and urban vs. rural households. Their findings indicated tourism's potential to benefit low-income households, but they stressed that institutional measures are required to ensure that tourist expenditures actually translate into benefits for low-income classes. Similarly, Croes and Rivera (2017) split Ecuadorian households into quintiles of urban vs. rural areas, concluding that tourism has the potential to benefit lower-income households if the industry is institutionally governed. The authors highlight public and private partnerships for facilitating the creation of public tourism infrastructures and employment for low-income households in rural areas. Daniels (2004) and Daniels, Norman, and Henry (2004) examined how tourism's impacts on employment and income are distributed across various occupational areas. This approach allows a detailed analysis of tourism's capacity to generate specific job types and is, therefore, crucial in identifying low-income jobs that often comprise a relatively large share of total tourism employment. Finally, Lacher and Oh (2012) disaggregated employment effects into 10 income classes in three US regions. Characteristically, in each region, the highest share of employment was found in the second-lowest income category, which seems to support the hypothesis that tourism is a low-income and low-skill industry (Baum et al., 2016).

The discussed literature has contributed to shifting the analytical focus from traditionally growth-oriented economic impact models towards socio-economical models considering the relevant income and distributional aspects of tourism's impact. However, all of these studies remain on the macro level. Thus, our study focusses on the meso-level perspectives of tourism institutions and is complemented by insights from macro-level impact estimates.

3. Tourism's impact and the role of institutions

As noted, basic IO methodology largely neglects the role of institutions and, instead focusses primarily on monetary flows and transactions among the producing sectors of the economy. In contrast, SAM and CGE models incorporate institutions, at least in terms of organisational entities, such as households and governments. These entities are considered additional agents in the economic system together with the industry sectors and factors of production, namely land, labour and capital (Hara, 2008). Institutions complement traditional economic impact models only as institutional organisations that contribute to the monetary flows in the economic system (Kozyreva, 2015), not as platforms for evolving rules, social arrangements, norms and practices (Lakshmanan & Button, 2019). These rules and social arrangements shape economic activities and significantly affect their outcomes (Elsner, 2017; Groenewegen, Spithoven, & Van Den Berg, 2010; Mellon & Bramwell, 2018). Actors within the economic system do not behave independently but rather are embedded in a broader societal framework defined as a socio-communicative network of relationships (Fuchs & Baggio, 2017; Searle, 2005). These relationships refer to a collectively accepted system of rules, procedures and practices resulting in preliminary and stable institutional arrangements. Some authors argue that institutions are the key elements of any economy; thus, a major task is to study institutions and the process of institutional conservation, innovation and change (Elsner, 2017; Hodgson, 2000; Söderbaum, 2014). In this regard, Dopfer et al. (2004) highlighted,

> *Macro-level perspectives on economies through statistical aggregates are simply measures of output flow or asset value aggregations that arise from the existence of interacting populations of meso rules. The essential point to grasp here is that macro is not a behavioural aggregation of micro, but, rather, it offers a systems perspective on meso viewed as a whole.* (p. 267).

In other words, a dichotomous macro-micro view of the economy that does not consider social rules, norms and practices on the meso level fails to reveal relevant insights into structural and societal processes and dynamics. In fact, current economic impact assessments consider only the macro perspective (Mazumder, Al-Mamun, Al-Amin, & Mohiuddin, 2012), showing limitations to fully comprehending social and institutional realities beyond employment and monetary aggregates and their

changes over time. However, branch-specific policies and (in-)formal rules as well as industry-specific practices are major drivers for sustainable regional development (Bramwell & Lane, 2011; Mellon & Bramwell, 2018).

Söderbaum (2014, 2017, 2019) pointed out that the predominant neoclassic economic paradigm defines 'development' according to the growth of gross domestic product (GDP), while employment is only a secondary concern. Indeed, neoclassical economics has been highly influential in the domain of tourism's economic impact modelling (Lee, 2009). Focussing on aggregated monetary indicators, contemporary economic impact models feed the growth agenda and support sectoral efficiency thinking and utility maximisation (Crompton, 2006). Societal benefits are assumed to be achieved through trickle-down effects. Thus, impact frameworks are suffering from '*monetary reductionism*' (Söderbaum, 2017, p. 33) by aiming to approach and monitor regional development merely in monetary terms. In contrast, an institutional perspective on the economy addresses (regional) development as an open issue by explicitly incorporating the United Nations SDGs. Actors in the economy are related to each other and are not reduced to their self-interest-driven motives and behaviours. Sustainable impact assessments should, therefore, comprise multiple perspectives instead of being a technocratic process that tries to find one solution maximising monetary outcomes. Likewise, the SDGs should be understood and interpreted in multi-dimensional and disaggregated terms in which socio-economic impacts cannot easily be dismissed because of monetary impacts (Boluk et al., 2017, 2019; Söderbaum, 2019).

Elsner (2017) discussed the concept of *social* institutions that formally aim to solve social dilemmas, such as the exploitation of people. To address these dilemmas, both individuals and societies contribute to a collective good or goal by sacrificing short-run maximisation in favour of optimisation in the long run. This ethical attitude needs to be cultivated, applied and agreed upon by consensus. Conversely, short-run maximisation involves the usual axiomatic assumptions of impact studies that produce 'large numbers' to support the predetermined positions of major economic actors and dominant economic paradigms (Crompton, 2006; Söderbaum, 2017, 2019). Furthermore, impact models reflect the regional economy only as a snapshot in time, usually a one-year period. Long-run perspectives would require a study of the economic impact over multiple periods, which has rarely been done in IO-based literature (Kronenberg, Fuchs, & Lexhagen, 2018). Hence, studying the sustainability of a regional economy makes sense only when considering their institutional embeddedness and possible restrictions through social rules, norms and practices that dynamically evolve over time (Elsner, 2017; Higgins-Desbiolles, 2018; Mellon & Bramwell, 2018).

Following the assumptions of institutional economics, Zweig (2015) interpreted internal and external labour markets as a set of social relationships and social institutions. While the workforce is involved in the production of goods and services, the production process itself is similarly considered a social process. Thus, employees do not act individually in the production process but, rather through classes where socio-communicative as well as power relationships mutually shape the unpredictable social reality of the production sphere. In the same way, workforce-related grievances such as income inequalities should be overcome by institutional measures such as schooling and further training. Structural inequality, however, limits upward economic mobility, which cannot be overcome by education. Thus, to find solutions for inequality, institutional and political actors need to intervene (Söderbaum, 2014, 2019).

The sustainability of regional tourism employment is primarily a social matter that cannot be fully grasped and understood by means of macro-economic aggregates and monetary indicators. Winchenbach et al. (2019) put particular focus on the importance of dignity for the tourism workforce. In fact, human dignity is a crucial part of the decent work concepts formulated in SDG 8 and has also been defined by institutions such as the International Labour Organization and the European Union (Burchell, Sehnbruch, Piasna, & Agloni, 2014). Dignity for tourism workers refers to the individual level (micro), the organisational level (meso) and the wider socio-economic context (macro). Assessments of tourism employment and the industry's contribution to generating and sustainably maintaining employment positions should therefore include work-related features that are either capable of promoting or preventing harm to or violation of human dignity. On the meso level, safe working conditions, economic security, collegiality, or participation and co-determination contribute to dignity, whilst insecure working agreements, bad working conditions and unethical leadership clearly violate workers' dignity. At the macro level, prestige and social image of the job, income equality, and minimum wage levels contribute to dignity. In turn, inequality and the treatment of people as resources or means to an end are signs of low dignity at work (Winchenbach et al., 2019). The economist and Nobel laureate Amartya Sen (2013) argued that the essence of sustainability is not only built on intergenerational justice but refers to human freedom and implies the liberty to define one's meanings and to autonomously pursue one's goals and capabilities. Since humans are reflective and reciprocal social beings, a sustainable employment position in tourism should include the freedom and participation for workers, thereby ensuring a maximum of meaningfulness at work (Jamal & Higham, 2021; Roessler, 2012).

To conclude, Robinson et al. (2019) critically observed that the SDGs are expressed within a framework that still targets the current growth paradigm's economic efficiency goals; this creates difficulties in maintaining and strengthening regional autonomy, subsidiarity and economic subsistence (Bengtsson, Alfredsson, Cohen, Lorek, & Schroeder, 2018; Fuchs, Fossgard, Stensland, & Chekalina, 2021; Söderbaum, 2019). Boluk et al. (2019) highlighted the prevalent social inequity in tourism that undermines its capacity to contribute to SDG 8 and SDG 10. The authors (2019) proposed that sustainable tourism development should place greater focus on governance and move away from growth-oriented paradigms. Promoting sustainable regional development requires social equity, decent working conditions and quality jobs (Lee & Chang, 2008; Söderbaum, 2014, 2017). But this is challenging because current approaches to tourism management and analysis are rooted in neoclassic economics (Ghoshal, 2005; Gretzel et al., 2020), even while many tourism workers are exposed to precarious working conditions (Bramwell, Higham, Lane, & Miller, 2017; Ioannides & Zampoukos, 2018). The various socio-economic crises in recent years have shown that government and institutional intervention is necessary to cure market failures (Bengtsson et al., 2018). Against this background, our paper aims at highlighting the importance of institutional perspectives in contemporary economic impact assessments of tourism.

4. Methodology

We conducted this study in Jämtland County, a region located in the centre of Sweden. The proportion of people employed in tourism is larger than in other Swedish regions, which makes tourism a significant sector for the regional economy (SCB, 2019). The sparsely populated region is concentrated around the capital city Östersund and a few mountain destinations. The region highlights nature-based attractions in distinct summer and winter seasons, various sport events and a rich gastronomy (JHT, 2020). We approached this study using mixed methods (Khoo-Lattimore, Mura, & Yung, 2019) and placed the analytical focus on the institutional perspective of tourism's impact on employment and income distribution, aiming to better comprehend tourism's contribution to SDGs 8 and 10.

4.1. Quantitative impact estimations on the macro-level

Our proposed methodological approach started with estimating tourism's contribution to regional employment and income based on tourists' expenditures in Jämtland County for the period from 2008 to 2016. To estimate direct and indirect economic effects, we employed a

regionalised IO model with annually updated IO tables that reflect each year's price and wage level from 2008 to 2016 (Flegg & Webber, 2000; Kronenberg & Fuchs, 2021). The regional IO model is based on transaction tables with 57 industry sectors. We obtained raw data from the Swedish Statistical Central Bureau (SCB; SCB, 2020). For each sectoral input (i.e. demand from other sectors and sectoral wages) and output (i.e. supply to other sectors and final demand), the linkages were defined as monetary-based transactions. Formally, the IO model is expressed as.

$$\Delta x = (I - A)^{-1} \times \Delta y$$

where *x* represents the vector of total sales of each sector, *I* is the identity matrix and *A* indicates the degree of inter-industry transactions as coefficients. Vector *y* indicates final demand represented by tourist expenditures excluding local consumption. We obtained tourist expenditure data from official regional tourism statistics, which also served as the data input for the Swedish Tourism Satellite Account (TSA). We aggregated expenditure categories to match the three IO sectors of Accommodation and food services, Wholesale and retail trade, and Sporting services, amusement, recreation. For manufactured goods, we deducted imports and considered only 38% of the share of expenditures that accrue to the region. In contrast, all services accrue in the region with equivalent purchaser and producer prices (Kronenberg & Fuchs, 2021; Stynes, 1999). The matrix for employment multipliers *L* is derived by multiplying $(I\text{-}A)^{-1}$ with the sectoral employment per total output ratio *w*:

$$L = (I - A)^{-1} \times w$$

Inspired by Daniels et al. (2004), we subsequently broke down the single IO-based sectoral employment results into occupations as percentage shares to identify occupation-specific employment and income effects for the accommodation and food sector. Periodical changes in shares were implicitly captured through annually updated numbers. By applying the following model, we obtained the total amount of income *I* generated for each occupation *o* in sub-sector *s* of year *t*:

$$I_{o,s,t} = A_{o,s,t} \times R_{o,s,t} \times E_{s,t}$$

A is the weighted average income level as measured by the SCB (SCB, 2020), and *R* represents the share of total sectoral employment in percentages. *E* is the amount of full-time equivalent employment (FTE) estimated through employment multipliers in the regional IO model. The occupations are classified according to the Swedish Standard Classifications of Occupations (SSYK). The 25 most frequent occupations cover approximately 95% of all occupations in the accommodation and food sector between 2008 and 2016.

As a further step, we estimated income inequalities across these occupations using both a Lorenz curve and Gini coefficients (Lacher & Nepal, 2013). The Lorenz curve illustrates the relationship between the cumulative share of the population (*x*-axis) and the cumulative share of total income earned (*y*-axis). The diagonal line depicts total equality. The further away the skewed Lorenz curve from the diagonal line, the more unequal the distribution. The Gini coefficient *G* numerically refers to the area between the diagonal and skewed curves and takes a value between 0 and 1. The higher the values for *G*, the higher the inequality.

4.2. Qualitative meso-level perspectives on tourism employment

As stated, the quantitative impact results supplement the insights of the meso-level perspectives from tourism representatives of major regional tourism institutions (Baum et al., 2016). We conducted in-depth interviews with tourism representatives from private and public institutions, namely the regional division of a gastronomy association (Oskar), the regional destination management organization Jämtland Härjedalen (Johan), the municipality of Östersund (Melissa), the regional tourism association (Helena), the regional labour union for the accommodation and food sector (Christina), and the regional division of the public employment service (Sebastian). To protect participants' identities, all names are pseudonyms. Interview partners were chosen according to their competencies and knowledge of employment realities in the regional tourism industry. All interviewees hold leading positions and deal with strategic and institutional aspects of the regional tourism industry in general and the food and gastronomy sector in particular. We introduced our study but did not inform the interviewees about detailed quantitative findings from the IO-based impact study so as not to influence their responses (Hesse-Biber & Johnson, 2015). The interviews were semi-structured and included open-ended questions related to region-specific socio-economic development trends for the tourism workforce (see appendix A). Four main topical areas with respective sub-questions referred to general working conditions, income and benefits, career opportunities and work-life balance. The interviews lasted between 45 min and 2 h. The data was transcribed, translated from Swedish into English, organised and coded with the qualitative data analysis software NVivo12. By means of triangulation, we analysed the emerging themes from the interviews together with quantitative data from the IO model.

5. Results and discussion

Table 1 presents the results from the impact analysis for the year 2016 in the regional accommodation and food sector. For each occupational area, we estimated tourism's contribution to employment measured as full-time equivalent (FTE), its average income levels and its total income effects. The SSYK codes reflect nine groups: group 1, or CEOs and top-management; groups 2 and 3, or occupations that require advanced higher education; group 4, or administration and customer service; groups 5, 7 and 8, or vocational professions; and group 9, or elementary occupations without educational requirements, which also includes group 0, or those with elementary occupations not registered under a specific SSYK code (SCB, 2019).[1] Group 6, or agriculture and forestry occupations, was not represented in this sector.

5.1. Regional employment effects and the distribution of income

Tourist expenditures in the region contributed to approximately 2200 FTE positions in 2016 (Kronenberg & Fuchs, 2021). The majority of jobs were allocated to elementary occupations (ca. 915) and vocational jobs, such as chefs and supervising positions in restaurants (ca. 542). Leadership positions (ca. 187) and other occupations that require higher education (ca. 105) represent the minority of the tourism workforce. The weighted average income of the sector lies at circa 223,500 kr.[2] The right column indicates each occupation's income rank from 1 to 25. Not surprisingly, the highest ranked occupations belong to CEOs and senior managers, with the highest income level up to 472,000 kr. In contrast, cleaners, kitchen assistants and other elementary occupations are ranked the lowest, with a weighted average income three times smaller than those with leadership positions. Interestingly, the pay for vocational professions only lies at the level of the weighted sectoral average or slightly above. In total, tourism generated approximately 497 million kr of income in the accommodation and food sector in 2016. The majority is earned by kitchen assistants (ca. 87 million kr), chefs (ca. 64 million kr) and managers in service occupations (ca. 52 million kr).

Income inequality among the occupations for the 2008–2016 period is numerically expressed by the Gini coefficients, and changes to the respective previous year are represented by delta Δ (Table 2). The values closer to 0 indicate a relatively weak income inequality. During the period, the coefficients range between 0.122 in 2009 and 0.148 in 2012.

The annual changes in Gini coefficients fluctuate strongly between

[1] Group 6, or agriculture and forestry occupations, was not represented in this sector.

[2] The exchange rate of the Swedish kronor to € is ca. 10:1 and to US $ ca. 9:1.

Table 1
Occupation-specific effects in the *accommodation and food* sector 2016.

SSYK	Occupation	Employment (FTE)	Income (weighted average)	Income (total)	Income (rank 1–25)
1	Managers				
11	Politician, CEO, Senior official	13	472,219 kr	6,291,661 kr	1
12	Manager in finance, HR, marketing, sales, administration	20	367,270 kr	7,503,161 kr	2
13	Manager in IT, logistics, research, real estate, construction	7	238,172 kr	1,692,430 kr	14
17	Manager in other service occupations	147	354,596 kr	52,284,481 kr	3
2	Occupations requiring advanced levels of higher education				
23	Advanced qualification in education	22	197,497 kr	4,385,617 kr	21
24	Advanced qualification in finance and management	7	207,698 kr	1,475,885 kr	17
3	Occupations requiring higher education qualifications (or equivalent)				
33	Qualification in finance and management	37	281,420 kr	10,498,701 kr	7
34	Qualification in culture, and social work	39	257,370 kr	10,058,685 kr	10
4	Administration and customer service				
41	General administrative support	32	286,445 kr	9,159,570 kr	6
42	Customer service	118	205,734 kr	24,304,634 kr	18
5	Service, care and shop sales workers				
511	Travel attendant, conductor and guide	4	183,933 kr	653,506 kr	23
512	Chefs	256	249,509 kr	63,827,682 kr	11
513	(Head-) waiter and bartender	234	223,671 kr	52,251,093 kr	16
515	Building and housekeeping supervisor	52	245,461 kr	12,863,699 kr	13
52	Sales in retail	115	203,461 kr	23,313,138 kr	19
53	Personal care	75	169,612 kr	12,655,120 kr	24
541	Protective security	21	301,143 kr	6,419,701 kr	5
7	Building and manufacturing workers				
71	Construction and civil engineering	15	257,738 kr	3,891,872 kr	9
72	Metal and repair	32	304,596 kr	9,739,967 kr	4
761	Butcher, baker and food processor	17	225,977 kr	3,813,718 kr	15
8	Mechanical manufacturing, transport				
83	Driver and mobile plant operator	44	246,700 kr	10,737,329 kr	12
9	Elementary occupations				
911	Domestic, hotel and office cleaner	157	195,801 kr	30,783,611 kr	22
941	Food preparation assistant	429	202,166 kr	86,733,319 kr	20
96	Refuse worker, newspaper distributor	20	272,128 kr	5,559,444 kr	8
0	Miscellaneous	309	148,784 kr	45,990,283 kr	25
Total		2223	223,495 kr	496,888,306kr	25

Table 2
Gini coefficient – Development and annual changes.

	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2008–2016
Gini	0.130	0.122	0.137	0.145	0.148	0.144	0.145	0.145	0.144	
Δ		−6.6%	12.5%	6.3%	2.0%	−3.0%	1.2%	−0.2%	−0.9%	10.4%

the years. It is particularly worrying to observe that the overall development from 2008 to 2016 indicates a negative trend, with a total increase in the Gini coefficient of 10.4% during this nine-year period; this implies that the gap between low-income occupations and high-income occupations has increased. The graphical illustration of income inequality is expressed by the Lorenz curve in Fig. 1, using the year 2016 as an example (Kronenberg & Fuchs, 2021).

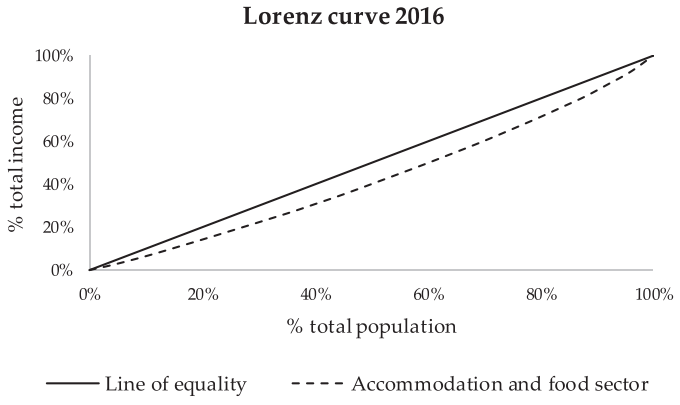

Fig. 1. Lorenz curve – Accommodation and food sector 2016.

Following the quantitative analyses, the interviews with representatives of major regional tourism institutions yielded qualitative data on meso-level perspectives. The qualitative data revealed three critical themes related to socio-economic dimensions of tourism work as highlighted by the SDGs (UN, 2020). These themes are complemented by additional quantitative results.

5.2. Education, training and recruitment

Education in tourism is a crucial part of regional development (Airey & Tribe, 2006) and a means of tackling income inequalities (Brandt, 2018; Gregorio & Lee, 2002). Accordingly, one major theme that emerged from the interviews was internal skill development and training of the tourism workforce along with the formal education provided by public institutions, such as universities or professional tourism and gastronomy schools. Helena argued that sustainable development of the tourism industry needs to start within the company through education and long-term leadership positions:

If you think a bit more long-term and strategically, I think that the regional industry must re-think leadership education. If you don't sufficiently consider this locally on the company level, then there will be no change either. Then, it doesn't matter what others do and talk about on the regional level. I think one must continue to work with leadership questions.

The tourism industry has a reputation for employing a large share of low-skilled labour with few career opportunities (Baum, 2015), and education and training of employees remains a challenging task for most companies considering the micro- and small-sized company structure in the region (Yachin, 2019).

Sebastian observed that '*Only a few bigger companies have internal staff training, but many companies are small, where the owner themselves is the main operator. They rarely find the time to both develop the business and to further train and educate their staff*'. As a result, eventual promotions from one position to another happen through learning by doing, without further education. As Oskar describes,

There is the tradition that after three years, the boss says 'Okay, tomorrow you're going to be the head of reception'. So, employees change their title, still the same person, no education, and the next day you have to lead your friends'.

When local capabilities do not fit the competences for employment positions that are vacant, Liu and Wall (2006) observed that companies are more likely recruiting well-educated staff from abroad instead of hiring and training existing local employees. However, this is mainly the case for large-scale international chains with well-elaborated standards in working tasks and training processes. Furthermore, tourism companies still prefer Swedish language skills, which strengthens their incentive to recruit and promote the existing regional workforce. Nonetheless, the risk of unprofessional recruitment practices can result in employees being overwhelmed by their tasks, as Helena points out:

There are quite a lot of businesses, where one employee has several tasks, as a waiter, receptionist and kitchen assistant. This can be a good beginning … and then you become the head of reception because you are good. This person is glad to be acknowledged, but sometimes this happens without sufficient training and support. This must change, because there are also expectations when you are promoted. If the one who appoints the person does not sufficiently understand what is expected of them, then I think there is a risk that it is not as good as it possibly could be. Not in the long run.

The issue of high staff turnover, further amplified by seasonality, contributes to semi-professional internal promotion practices. Sebastian commented,

There are challenges when many people are newly employed every year and have to be introduced – challenges regarding recruitment, leadership, wage and salary negotiations and everything that comes with it.

In fact, working in the industry still implies low entry and exit barriers (Solnet, Baum, Robinson, & Lockstone-Binney, 2016), because the industry offers a large share of jobs that do not require high levels of education (Fig. 2). Graduates are often interested in working in the hospitality sector to gain experience in working life (Baum & Hai, 2019). Thus, further training and introduction schemes are required due to workers' limited work experience. However, existing initiatives among public institutions to introduce working in tourism through apprenticeships and internships have been temporarily removed. As Sebastian argued,

School teachers and principals meet with tourism employers and discuss how to smooth entry into professional life. This is mutually beneficial because internships during school, called practical working life orientation, have been removed. They removed it but will now introduce it again. So, hopefully, things will become better.

Regional university programs that provide tourism education exist, but public awareness of these programs is generally low, as noted by

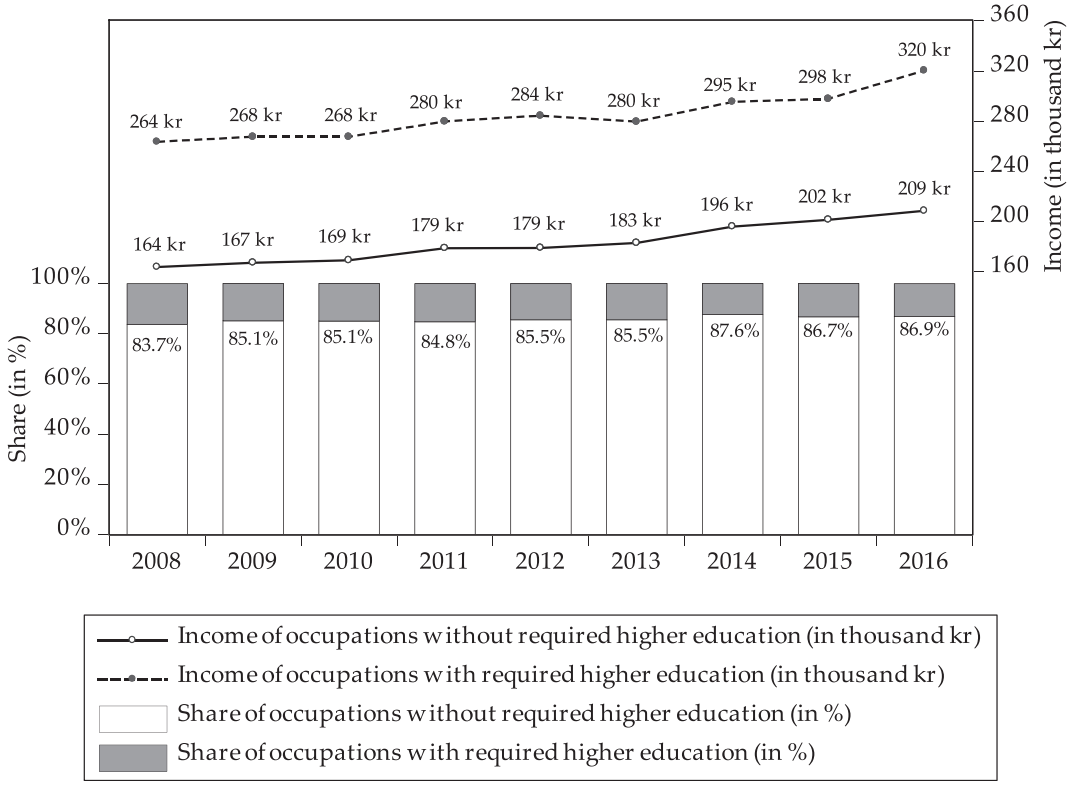

Fig. 2. Occupations with and without higher education requirements.

Oskar: '*Many people do not even know that there is a university here in town that offers a tourism program*'.

Actually, the share of employment positions that require higher education (i.e. college or university degrees) decreased in the nine-year period (Fig. 2).

In contrast, the share of low-skilled occupations increased from 83.7% in 2008 to nearly 87% in 2016; this indicates that the regional tourism industry still tends to employ non-educated staff, thus promoting limited career opportunities. Fig. 2 further illustrates that average income grew for both education groups. Compared to 2008, income levels increased by 27% (ca. 45,000 kr) for occupations without required higher education and 21% (ca. 54,000 kr) for occupations that require higher education. Increasing salary levels are likely welcomed by tourism workers, but meaningful and satisfying work requires long-term perspectives and the opportunity to pursue a career within the industry (Sen, 2013; Winchenbach et al., 2019; Zweig, 2015).

With this long-term focus, the tourism industry is undergoing a technology-induced transition where employment opportunities appear that require specified skills: '*We see different jobs within the industry that we didn't have several years ago, such as marketing, communication and social media*'. (Oskar). However, these signs of development have not yet been fully translated into the current employment situation given the decreasing shares of jobs for university graduates (Fuchs & Höpken, 2020).

5.3. The role of income for skilled occupations

Figs. 3–4 illustrate employment and income effects between 2008 and 2016 for two occupational groups, namely chefs and restaurant supervisors with required education and staff responsibilities, and kitchen and restaurant assistants without additional education. The profession of kitchen chefs is an ongoing major debate in Jämtland County. Institutional representatives observe that there is a lack of well-educated chefs in the region, resulting in competition among employers. Melissa explained, '*A major challenge for hotels and restaurants is finding kitchen chefs. There is very strong competition among the employers. Our [institutional] role is to help make this profession more attractive to increase educational enrolment in gastronomy schools*'.

Although the lack of chefs concerns industry representatives, the monetary benefits for the workforce in these professions have shown constant positive change over the years, from 187,000 kr in 2008 to 238,000 kr in 2016 (Fig. 3). This is equal to an average annual income increase of approximately 2.7%. However, compared with the average income of all occupations in the sector, which is approximately 224,000 kr, this amount still does not seem high enough given the high demand for this profession.

At the same time, tourism increased employment for chefs and restaurant supervisors from 356 FTE positions in 2008 to 542 in 2016, a growth of 52%. The significance of this occupation is further expressed by the share of this occupation in the sector's total employment. This trend indicates a positive growth from 20% in 2008 to 24% in 2016, with fluctuations in the years between. The graph shows that the occupation is developing in a direction that is strongly desired by institutional representatives. Whether working as a chef is decent or dignified work is also a matter of participation and co-determination (Winchenbach et al., 2019). As Johan pointed out, '*The industry cannot pay much. If you have these young and skilled people who want to stay, we must involve them more. They should also feel like they are part of the development when they come up with their own ideas*'.

Especially in micro- and small-sized businesses, participation and co-determination play a crucial role for both the staff's and the company's development: '*I don't say it [participation] works for all [companies and staff] … but the right people with the right attitude can do it [strengthen participation], and it will also be a boost for the company's development*' (Johan). Some small-sized businesses go even further and allow core staff to become shareholders. As Johan explained, '*there is stronger engagement and participation when they [staff] strengthen their bonds with the company*'.

Still, such a strategy should be critically assessed as there is a risk for employees forfeiting other (non-)monetary benefits in favour of

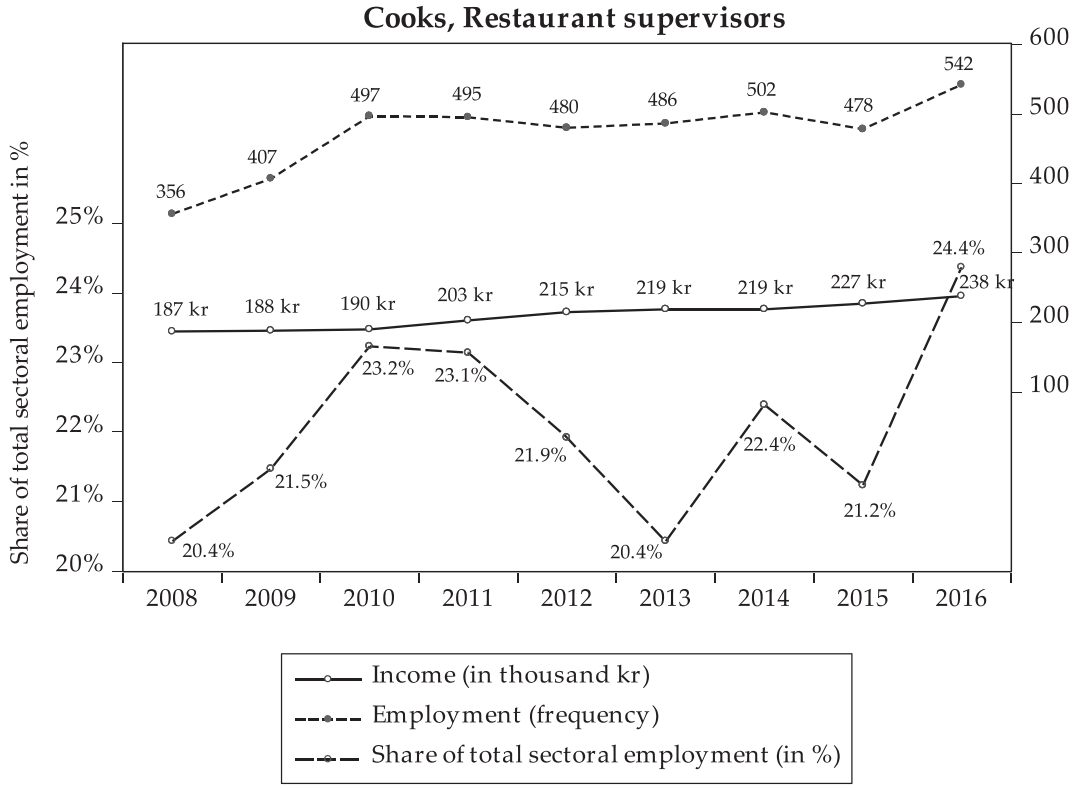

Fig. 3. Socio-economic effects for chefs and restaurant supervisors.

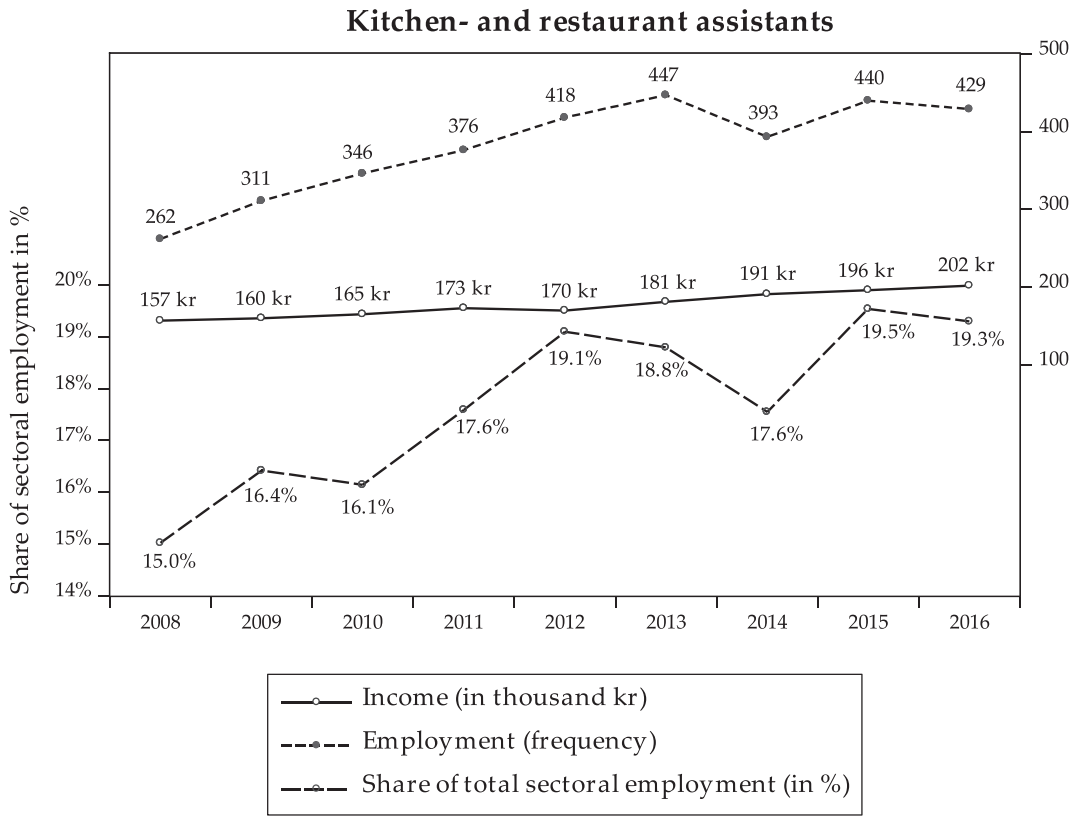

Fig. 4. Socio-economic effects for kitchen and restaurant assistants.

shareholding (Prassl, 2013). Therefore, the goal should be a fair balance between employees' and companies' financial interests. The interviews further revealed that the relatively low average income for skilled and demanded occupations such as chefs and kitchen supervisors is partly offset by strong collegiality within the industry, which contributes to decent and dignified work (Fuchs, 2019; Minett, Yaman, & Denizci, 2009; Winchenbach et al., 2019).

Oskar elaborated on the perceived meaningfulness of employment.

> *Why do people end up staying longer than they thought despite a low income? Because they create a workplace where you almost feel like a family and everyone is important. They are creating teams. Although it is a small restaurant or hotel, the staff learns to multi-task. You are employed as a bartender, but when the cleaning staff can't come today, you jump in for them. So, you are building a strong team feeling, and that's what makes these companies successful.*

Creating this sense of collegiality relies on particularly young people's attitude to the notion of ethical leadership. As Oskar commented, '*Young leaders have a different mindset than the traditional hierarchical way of leading. They create a sense of family, where everyone feels equally important*'. Despite the drawbacks discussed previously, these leadership positions are often informally filled by promoting internal staff. Previous colleagues become bosses but maintain strong connections within the team.

The proximity to nature and opportunities for outdoor activities (Margaryan & Fredman, 2017) further strengthens the collegiality and social ties among workers (Janta, Brown, Lugosi, & Ladkin, 2011). As Sebastian observed, '*If you look at Jämtland, there are many who come up here and want to work in the tourism industry for the lifestyle you can have. A lot of solidarity, social activities and outdoor events.*' In fact, in Jämtland County, with its small-sized tourism firms, networking and solidarity among the companies and staff is especially important (Fuchs & Baggio, 2017). To address seasonality issues, companies find creative ways to ensure all-year employment for key staff. Oskar explained, '*Networking is very important here. Some companies share chefs during low seasons. They work half of the week there and the other half here. I would say especially among restaurants and hotels, there is a tradition of staff networking*'.

At the same time, such an internal strategy prevents outside individuals from being employed. Good networking and collegiality have additional implications for staff mobility (Zampoukos & Ioannides, 2011) because recruiting processes are rather informal. Oskar noted, '*We have a tradition that staff quickly change their workplace through word-of-mouth. We don't use traditional means; it happens more informally. Therefore, networking is crucial*'.

Following a collaborative strategy based on mutual knowledge generation and sharing, networking and social capital instead of a competitive strategy is considered a more sustainable way for tourism companies, hotels and restaurant to operate (Fuchs, Abadzhiev, Svensson, Höpken, & Lexhagen, 2013; Fuchs et al., 2021; Novy, Martinelli, & Moulaert, 2013). Oskar echoed this idea, stating, '*It is a strategy of surviving in a small town, to have more friends than enemies, because you do not want to be known as the restaurant owner who's not playing fair. Then your days are numbered*'. However, this wisely balanced strategy does not apply to all occupations, as the following results reveal.

5.4. Secure, stable and long-term employment

A crucial aspect of sustainable and decent work in tourism is secure, stable and long-term employment (Robinson et al., 2019; Winchenbach et al., 2019). Due to the distinct winter and summer seasons of many tourist destinations in Jämtland County, a considerable share of tourism workers are exposed to unstable and irregular employment with low income levels (Baum & Hai, 2019). These workers do not necessarily include young seasonal workers who made an active choice to live this lifestyle but rather less educated workers with limited mobility who have few employment alternatives (Zampoukos, 2018). The group of kitchen and restaurant assistants stands out among occupations that do

not require previous education. In fact, our IO-based findings revealed that the number of these workers increased from 262 FTE positions in 2008 to 429 in 2016. The significance of this occupation in terms of volume is even more evident when considering its share of total employment in the sector, which grew from 15% in 2008 to 19% in 2016. Respective income levels grew from 157,000 kr in 2008 to 202,000 kr in 2016, which is an average annual increase of 2.8% (Fig. 4). Although the income level of kitchen and restaurant assistants constantly grew, their income nonetheless pertains to the lowest earning groups of the sector (Table 1).

The low income levels of low-skilled positions further contribute to serious employment grievances (Baum & Hai, 2019; Robinson et al., 2019). Christina was particularly concerned about the wide implications of low income:

> *No one thinks about these workers' plans and dreams. Maybe they want to have a house someday. People work 6–7 days a week but still do not have a high income. If you work that much, you can easily become ill. If they had a good salary, they wouldn't need to work so hard and much all the time, and there are many who also don't work full-time and are part-time workers, which is not good for sustaining one's livelihood.*

Seasonality and the low income level for occupations with no required education clearly has negative socio-economic implications because these workers become easily replaceable (Winchenbach et al., 2019); this causes insecurity among employees, especially when only high-skilled staff is employed permanently.

In recent years, Jämtland County took important strategic steps towards becoming an all-year round destination covering most parts of the winter and summer months: '*Only recently have we had so many people working during the summer*' (Johan). Striving to develop a previously seasonality-dependent regional tourism destination into a society that can offer a living all year is a strong indication of sustainable employment conditions (Baum & Hai, 2019), especially when less educated staff can benefit as well. Johan shared, '*We are supporting the industry in creating year-round employment. We are fully aware that this doesn't happen overnight, but the aim is that people who live here will have more reliable year-round employment*'.

Despite these efforts, signs of sustainable long-term employment are rather limited for this group with elementary occupations. As Christina reflected,

> *Kitchen assistants and hotel cleaners are the ones that have it the worst. How can the working conditions become better when the staff is replaced all the time? It will not happen. When you start your first job, you don't make demands – not unless you are permanently employed and able to say 'The situation here is not good*'.

Usually, working conditions as well as wage and salary levels are ensured by collective agreements between labour unions and employers (Burgess, Connell, & Winterton, 2013). These agreements also cover additional benefits, such as sick pay, pension or accidents at work. However, employees in precarious positions simply do not have access to these benefits if their position is not covered by these agreements. There are also companies that sign agreements but do not implement them. Christina lamented, '*It is the employer's responsibility to follow the agreement. There are many employers who signed collective agreements but never looked at them … they don't know what kind of rules are written in there*'.

Over the years, fewer tourism workers have joined labour unions. Kjellberg (2017) reported that union membership rates in the Swedish accommodation and food sector decreased from 40% in 2008 to 28% in 2016; this is a worrying trend because union members are more likely to discuss grievances (Burgess et al., 2013). Christina commented,

> *Oftentimes everything is fine … but if you are not paid for the right number of hours, you will be alone and must request a review by yourself from the employer, which many people in elementary positions cannot manage to do. Then they must contact the unions.*

For this reason, both unions and bigger employers provide so-called *union clubs*. In these clubs, employees and employers regularly meet to discuss precarious aspects of current employment. Open dialogue in the group strengthens collegiality and solves employment grievances in a timely manner. These initiatives are particularly valuable for workers in positions that do not have union representation because they provide opportunities to make their collective voice heard. Precarious conditions also have negative consequences for workers' health (Burgess et al., 2013). The institutional representatives noted the '*high risk for burnout*' (Johan) and the fact that '*75%–80% of [these workers] take painkillers every day to be able to perform their tasks*' (Christina). Not many precarious workers can bear the high workload and unsustainability in the long-run. As Christina pointed out, '*Look at the hotels in Sweden and look how many workers are over 55. You'll not find that many. You find some who are around 60, but … few work until retirement in this sector, and this means something*'.

Since markets do not seem capable to solve socio-economic problems (Novy et al., 2013; Söderbaum, 2014), it is important to provide institutional support. Helena declared, '*We must dare to talk about these issues. It is crucial to find dialogues between the private and the public sectors*'. Recently, regional institutions initiated a collaborative project aiming to assess challenges related to employment, competence and the needs of the regional tourism industry (Elsner, 2017; Söderbaum, 2019). Interestingly, the main objective is not to secure the competencies needed by employers but the needs of employees, especially in lower income groups (McLennan, Ritchie, Ruhanen, & Moyle, 2014). As Helena said, '*It is clear that we want to have a positive development, but it must be sustainable as well – in every way, especially socially*'.

6. Summary and conclusions

The United Nations SDGs are crucial to addressing social, economic and environmental sustainability globally (UN 2020). Understanding tourism in relation to the SDGs is a challenging task (Bianchi & de Man, 2021), and the fulfilment of the SDGs involves complex and lengthy processes that go beyond the ideas and concepts presented in this study. Oftentimes, economic analyses remain within the macro-micro dichotomy and neglect the meso-level perspective (Dopfer et al., 2004), especially for economic impact models with a traditional focus on aggregated, macro-economic and monetary indicators (Klijs et al., 2012). Economic impact studies focussing on sustainable employment are scant (Daniels et al., 2004; Lacher & Oh, 2012).

Using a mixed-methods approach, we aligned socio-economic effects and implications for the tourism workforce with SDG 8 (economic growth and decent work) and SDG 10 (reduced income inequalities). Findings from IO analysis revealed that tourism contributes to positive regional job growth in the accommodation and food sector, with a total of 2223 jobs in 2016. However, the majority of employment consists of elementary occupations such as cleaners and kitchen and restaurant assistants. Thus, representatives of tourism institutions have a strong drive to increase the education levels of staff in order to fill leadership positions. Informal recruitment processes should be professionalised through educating staff who have the capability to further develop the tourism offer in the region. However, findings show that the share of occupations not requiring previous education has increased over the years – a development contrary to the pursued sustainability goals of the region as well as the SDGs (UN, 2020). Since these elementary occupations with low income levels are more likely to be affected by precarious working conditions, it remains challenging for the industry to contribute to decent work, as formalised in SDG 8.

Interestingly, income inequalities among the various occupations are rather weak according to the overall low Gini coefficient (Lacher & Nepal, 2013). In other words, the income levels between the occupations

do not show extraordinarily wide gaps. This is a positive sign for sustainable tourism development and can be attributed to collective agreements that determine wage and salary levels for most tourism occupations (Brandt, 2018). In this regard, the industry shows its contribution to SDG 10 and confirms previous findings that institutional support is crucial for low income households (Klytchnikova & Dorosh, 2013). In the global south, for example, implementing collective agreements can have a positive effect on income inequality and improves the socio-economic situation particularly for low-income occupations.

Despite on a relatively low level, the Gini coefficient increased by more than 10% during the study period; this is a worrying trend given that income in some elementary occupations negatively affects working conditions and makes it difficult to pursue a sustainable livelihood (Zampoukos, 2018). Declining union membership rates also do not help to alleviate these grievances (Burgess et al., 2013; Kjellberg, 2017). In contrast, institutional representatives pointed out that well-educated vocational chefs play an important role in pursuing the decent and meaningful work addressed in SDG 8. Although the income level of these professions remains around the sectoral average, they are considered key staff with strong participation opportunities and increasing responsibilities beyond their ordinary engagements. Their collegiality, networking opportunities and work-life balance are considered crucial to outweighing the potential negativity of an average income level.

The major implication of the study is that institutional economics provide a valuable theoretical framework for understanding tourism's contribution to the SDGs (McLennan et al., 2014; Mellon & Bramwell, 2018; Söderbaum, 2014). Analysing economic activities by estimating aggregated monetary-based indicators is insufficient without considering the underlying norms and social practices that add meaning to these numbers (Dobusch & Kapeller, 2009; Elsner, 2017; Searle, 2005). Triangulating macro-economic results with institutional meso-level views about the socio-economic impact of tourism helps to identify root causes of current grievances related to the tourism workforce (Baum, 2015; Söderbaum, 2019). For policy decision makers, this approach enables a more effective way of monitoring and identifying institutional solutions for socio-economic shortcomings of the regional tourism workforce (McLennan et al., 2014; Mellon & Bramwell, 2018).

Since tourism is a sociocultural phenomenon, the industry's development should primarily focus on the people who are involved in the process of co-creating tourism products and experience-based tourism service encounters (Fuchs et al., 2021; Kozyreva, 2015; Zweig, 2015). With disaggregated macro-, meso-, and micro-level perspectives and the consideration of *new monetary* indicators beyond aggregated growth indictors (Söderbaum, 2017), we can deepen sustainability analysis of work and employment as per the SDGs (UN, 2020). Otherwise, the risk of systematically overlooking major grievances remains, especially regarding those elementary occupations that play a significant role in tourism and hospitality work. As Herzog (2018) emphasised, all occupations play a crucial role in society and therefore deserve appreciation and a guaranteed living wage, no matter the level of education accumulated.

As with each work of research, this study has its limitations, which mainly relate to the methods used to quantify the socio-economic impacts of tourism. A large body of literature advocates CGE over IO models for evaluating feedback effects and price elasticities (Dwyer et al., 2004). Therefore, future research that aims to understand the socio-economic impacts of tourism by using mixed methods should consider CGE-based estimates (Burfisher, 2017). Furthermore, the qualitative data of this study is based on interviews with six major regional tourism institutions. Additional institutional representatives should also be included, such as the regional government (Söderbaum, 2019) and the regional tourism education system (Sheldon & Hsu, 2015). Future research might also consider other methods of data collection, such as focus groups. Finally, integrating the micro-level perspective, or tourism employees and entrepreneurs, into the analysis would give an even broader picture of socio-economic implications for the regional tourism workforce.

Declarations of interest

None.

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Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tmp.2021.100831.

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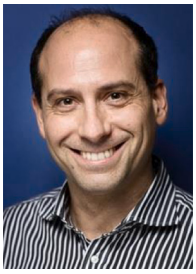

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