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Mediating power of career adaptability between decent work and quality of life: study with tourism independent workers

El poder mediador de la adaptabilidad profesional entre el trabajo digno y la calidad de vida: estudio con trabajadores independientes del turismo

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ABSTRACT

The promotion of decent work plays a central role in the transformation of tourism into a sustainable activity. The literature on this topic has multiplied, but it is imperative to pay more attention to workers in the potentially most vulnerable sectors, such as those without employment contracts and without formal higher education. The aim of this study on independent workers in tourism is to investigate how they perceive their work as decent and to analyze their quality of life. In addition, the study aims to analyze the mediating effect of career adaptability on the relationship between decent work and quality of life. The sample consists of 228 tourism workers in Portugal, mainly women, aged between 19 and 71 years. The results support the hypothesis that decent work can improve the quality of life of workers in the tourism industry. They also show that decent work is associated with a greater likelihood that workers are able and feel confident to adapt to changing tasks, to engage in continuous training and to manage their careers, which has a positive impact on their quality of life. The importance of prioritizing decent work and psychosocial resources to cope with the changing working and working conditions of the independent workers in the tourism sector in Portugal is discussed.

Keywords: Decent work; quality of life; career adaptability; tourism; independent workers; Portugal; job quality.

RESUMEN

La promoción del trabajo digno desempeña un papel central para transformar el turismo en una actividad sostenible. La literatura sobre este tema se ha multiplicado, pero es imperativo prestar más atención a los trabajadores de los sectores potencialmente más vulnerables,

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como aquellos sin contrato de trabajo y sin educación superior formal. El objetivo de este estudio sobre trabajadores independientes en el turismo es investigar cómo perciben su trabajo como digno y analizar su calidad de vida. Además, el estudio pretende analizar el efecto mediador de la adaptabilidad profesional en la relación entre trabajo digno y calidad de vida. La muestra está formada por 228 trabajadores independientes del turismo en Portugal, principalmente mujeres, con edades comprendidas entre 19 y 71 años. Los resultados apoyan la tesis de que el trabajo digno puede mejorar la calidad de vida de los trabajadores de la industria del turismo. También muestran que el trabajo digno se asocia con una mayor probabilidad de que los trabajadores sean capaces y se sientan seguros de adaptarse a tareas cambiantes, autoformarse continuamente y gestionar sus carreras, lo que tiene un impacto positivo en su calidad de vida. Se discute la importancia de priorizar el trabajo digno y los recursos psicosociales para hacer frente a los cambios en el trabajo y las condiciones laborales de los trabajadores independientes en el sector turístico en Portugal.

Palabras clave: Trabajo digno; calidad de vida; adaptabilidad profesional; turismo; trabajadores independientes; Portugal; calidad de trabajo.

I. INTRODUCTION

Both the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the World Tourism Organization have made the International Labor Organization's (ILO) Decent Work Agenda an integral part of the vision for promoting a more sustainable future for all. The World Tourism Organization (2017) has adopted three of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). One of them, SDG 8, emphasizes the need to pursue decent work and growth to achieve sustained, inclusive, and sustainable economic growth, full employment, and decent work for all (United Nations, 2022).

The existence of substantially low remuneration, exploitative practices, and deficiencies in labor safeguards in the tourism and hotel industry (ILO, 2017a), together with a notable incidence of informal occupations, long working hours, inadequate compensation, gaps in security coverage social situation and the presence of gender disparities (Santos, 2023), presents considerable obstacles to the implementation of the concept of decent work. These challenges represent a threat both to the well-being of workers working in this sector and to institutions operating within the tourism industry. Therefore, it is fully justifiable that the promotion of decent working conditions is incorporated as a crucial component in the SDGs agenda (Bianchi & Man, 2021; Draçi & Kraja, 2023).

However, despite the increasing recognition of this goal and despite a growing body of writing on decent working conditions in hospitality and tourism (e.g. Baum & Hai, 2019a; Baum et al., 2016; Higgins-Desbiolles et al., 2019; Robinson et al., 2019), the literature has generally neglected or underestimated the quality of life of workers in this industry in both professional and academic discourse (Maggi & Vroegop, 2023). Moreover, it remains unknown whether career adaptability has a mediating effect on the relationship between antecedents such as economic constraints (caused by the lack of a labor contract and/or low educational qualifications) and decent work, as has been shown in several studies (e.g., Duffy et al, 2019; Kim et al, 2019; Kozan et al, 2019; Tokar & Kaut, 2018), but whether it can also have a mediating effect on the relationship between decent work and its potential outcomes, such as quality of life.

Additionally, it is essential to understand the dynamics underlying independent workers in the tourism sector. These include professional categories such as independent tour guides and other intermediaries whose product and service offerings have distinctive characteristics aimed at providing personalized and unique experiences to visitors. Frequently, it is these independent professionals who play a crucial role in enriching the tourism landscape and making it attractive and competitive (Baum & Hai, 2019b). Moreover, due to the seasonality of tourism, these workers are called upon to fill gaps in the labor supply during peak travel seasons and provide specific and specialized services (Baum & Hai, 2019b). Therefore, research on independent workers in the context of the tourism sector is of utmost importance for a deep understanding of the labor dynamics in this field and for identifying current opportunities to update the working conditions and quality of life of these professionals (Ferraro, 2023).

Based on PWT, this study addresses these gaps by analyzing the relationship between decent work and quality of life and examining the mediating effect of career adaptability in a group of independent tourism workers without formal qualifications in Portugal.

II. THEORETICAL REVIEW

1.1 Decent work

The concept of decent work is a fundamental idea promoted by the International Labor Organization (ILO, 1999). Refers to the vision that all people should have the opportunity to find productive employment that offers a fair wage, respects basic labor rights and provides safe and healthy working conditions. The concept of decent work aims not only to improve working conditions, but also to promote equality and social justice (ILO, 2017a, 2022).

Developed with the purpose of deepening the understanding of the working lives of individuals belonging to economically disadvantaged and marginalized groups (Hirschi, 2018), Psychology of Work Theory (PWT, Blustein et al., 2016; Duffy et al. 2016) provides an inclusive and social justice-oriented approach to the concept of decent work. At the core of PWT, decent work is a fundamental construct, comprising physically and interpersonally safe working conditions, working hours that enable the enjoyment of adequate leisure and rest, organizational values that harmonize with family and social values, adequate pay, and access to appropriate health care (Duffy et al., 2016).

PWT (Duffy et al., 2016) incorporates contextual and psychological variables that are assumed to have both a direct and indirect influence on access to the concept of decent work. Specifically, marginalization and economic constraints are factors that directly affect the possibility of achieving decent work. The adverse effects of these factors on decent work can be mediated by the presence of career adaptability, a psychosocial construct that refers to an individual's readiness and resources to face present and future tasks in the development of their career path (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012).

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to an individual's willingness and resources to face present and future tasks in the development of their career (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012). These career adaptability resources encompass four main dimensions: concern, control, curiosity, and confidence, which are relevant at all stages of the career path (Savickas, 2005, 2013; Savickas & Porfeli, 2012). Thus, individuals with higher levels of career adaptability are aware of the changing nature of work and the importance of planning and preparing for future career transitions (concern), take responsibility for their career development and deal with career transitions (control), explore diverse career opportunities, identifying different roles and situations that allow them to shape multiple identities and alternative scenarios (curiosity). In addition, they have confidence in their ability to pursue career goals and aspirations, make effective career-related decisions and successfully solve problems related to professional development (confidence) (Savickas, 2005, 2013; Savickas & Porfeli, 2012). Although PWT suggests that career adaptability may precede decent work, studies show that various aspects of decent work, such as job security, fair pay, development opportunities and organizational support, are associated with people's greater confidence in their ability to cope with changes in the labor market and to seek new career opportunities (e.g. Eurofound, 2018).

Finally, PWT recognizes that work is not only a means of earning a living, but also plays a critical role in shaping people's sense of self, purpose, and connection to the broader society. PWT assumes that decent work can improve an individual's well-being and professional achievement. Empirical studies have also shown that decent work can predict job and life satisfaction as well as physical health (Buyukgoze-Kavas & Autin, 2019; Duffy et al., 2019).

1.2 Quality of life

The World Health Organization (1996) defines quality of life as an individual's perception of their position in life, in the context of the culture and value systems in which they live and in relation to their goals, expectations, standards and concerns. This goes beyond physical health and encompasses factors such as the social, economic, and psychological environment in which people live.

The quality of life of workers is crucial regardless of the industry, and the tourism sector is no exception. The nature of the work environment and the work of an employee in the tourism industry not only affects his physical health, but also leads to psychological damage and affects family and social adjustment (Arjona-Fuentes et al., 2022). For example, working time often overlaps with family, social and entertainment activities and is therefore a frequent disruptor of work-life balance (Rathi & Kumar, 2023). Effective promotion of quality of life therefore benefits all stakeholders: employees (physical and mental well-being, motivation, and engagement), companies (productivity and competitiveness, cost reduction, improved image, and reputation) and the destination as a whole (sustainability and tourist satisfaction) (Li et al., 2022).

Given that independent workers lack affiliation with an organization akin to traditional employees and operate without formal employment agreements, they bear an augmented obligation concerning their physical, mental, social, and environmental welfare while executing their work. This arises from the understanding that their capacity to deliver high quality services and ensure customer satisfaction can be compromised if they are not in an ideal state in all these areas of life, which could lead to a loss of this service (Canina et al.,

2006). It is, therefore, of the utmost importance to address the quality of life of workers independent of the tourism industry.

1.3 Independent work and labor market in Portugal

Anyone who has a tax identification number and is legally living in Portugal can work independently or temporarily, i.e.: carry out a professional activity without being subject to an employment contract or a legally equivalent contract or be obliged to provide the results of their activity to others and not be covered by the General Social Security Scheme for Employees (Instituto da Segurança Social, 2023). According to Office of Strategy and Planning (GEP) of the Ministry of Labor, Solidarity and Social Security, there were 552,955 independent workers with paid contributions in Portugal in 2022, an increase of 25.3% compared to the previous year (Lusa, 2023).

On the one hand, being an independent worker has advantages, such as flexible working hours, autonomy in carrying out tasks, the choice of where to work and the ability to provide services to different companies, but on the other hand the instability and job insecurity is prominent. The status of being an independent worker is characterized by the lack of a formal employment agreement, consequently leading to uncertainty regarding the exact remuneration received at the conclusion of each month. Employment opportunities may arise sporadically and variably, necessitating workers to seek employment across multiple locations to sustain themselves financially, consequently fostering wage instability. Moreover, numerous enterprises engage the services of these workers, who undertake their responsibilities akin to regular employees but without availing themselves of contractual entitlements such as provisions for sustenance, vacation periods, and seasonal bonuses, thus delineating a phenomenon recognized as pseudo-temporary employment with false invoice slips (in Portuguese “falsos recibos verdes”), (Soeiro, 2008).

According to a study by the ILO (2017b), Portugal had the second highest rate of false invoice slips (falsos recibos verdes) in the European Union of 27 between 2010 and 2015. This increase does not seem to be due to workers' desire for more flexibility, but rather to the growing influence of companies on workers in precarious employment. Companies are exerting more control over these workers by imposing less favorable conditions and fewer rights on them. Although they are classified as independent workers, these individuals have the same characteristics as employees and work under the strict supervision of contracting companies, (ILO, 2017b).

In 2024, the Authority for Working Conditions (ACT) reported 9,699 companies needed to regulate the situation of 17,701 independent workers who perform more than 80% of their activity for a single company (Observador, 2024), and were not under the definition of independent workers.

In 2022, there were around 379.95 thousand workers in the Portuguese tourism sector (Statista, 2023). There is no data available on the number of independent workers in the tourism sector, but it is known that this sector indirectly employed 950 thousand people in Portugal in 2022 (WTTC, 2022), representing a growth of 5.6% compared to 2021. According to the Labor Market Survey for the Tourism Sector (Costa et al., 2023), workers in the tourism industry have a negative attitude towards self-employment, but members of some professions related to tourism (e.g. tourist guides) report that they must be independent even though they do not want to. Most certified tourist guides in Portugal are self-employed,

providing services to travel agencies (90% of the work is done with these agencies) (Costa et al, 2023). Tour guides play a key role as a point of contact between tourists and destinations, providing essential information, guidance, and a personalized experience during the trip. The competence, professionalism, and ability of these professionals to provide a quality service can have a direct impact on the tourist's perception of their visit to the destination (Çetinkaya & Öter, 2016).

In addition to employment issues, the education, and qualifications of the workforce in Portugal are also a source of concern for the country's employment situation. Portugal is one of the countries in the European Union with the fewest workers with completed secondary education (Pordata, 2023). In 2022, 35% of the working population in Portugal had up to basic education, 30% had up to secondary education and only 35% had higher education qualifications (Pordata, 2023). In the tourism sector, 49% of workers have basic education, 37% have secondary and post-secondary education, and only 14% have higher education (Turismo de Portugal, 2023).

1.4 Hypotheses

Based on the points mentioned in the literature review, a research model was created according to the procedure for analyzing the mediating effect of the model in PROCESS Macro (see Figure 1) and based on the following research hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: Decent work has a positive and significant effect on the quality of life.

Hypothesis 2: Decent work has a positive and significant effect on career adaptability.

Hypothesis 3: Career adaptability positively and significantly mediates the relationship between decent work and quality of life.

II. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Participants

The study participants were 228 employed adults who met the following criteria: They were over 18 years of age, did not have a formal university degree, and worked as independent workers in the tourism industry in Portugal in the last six months.

They were between 19 and 71 years old (mean age = 44.47 years, SD = 11.27), 8.4% belonged to Generation Z (1996–2012 - 11-27 years), 27.6% belonged to Generation Z (1996–2012 - 11-27 years old), 27.6% to Generation Y (1981-1995 - 28-42 years old), 52.9% to Generation X (1965-1980 - 43-58 years old), and 11.1% they belonged to the Baby Boomer generation (1946-1964 - 59-77 years old). Participants identified as women (n = 136; 59.6%) and men (n = 92; 40.4%). Two hundred and eighteen (95.6%) participants reported their nationality as Portuguese and ten (4.4%) as another (e.g., Brazilian, Italian, Spanish, Pakistani, etc.). Participants' monthly income varied between less than 750 euros (7.5%), between 750 euros and 1000 euros (35.5%) and more than 1000 euros (57.5%). The average monthly income in Portugal is 760 euros (2023 data).

The workers' sector of activity varied between travel and tourism agencies (35.2%), tourist entertainment companies (31.6%), local accommodation (23.6%), and tourist enterprises (9.6%).

2.2 Ethics and procedure

The research was approved by the European University Ethics Committee. In addition, the nonexperimental, self-administered survey was conducted with complete anonymity of the participants. No personal or sensitive information was collected that could be used to identify respondents. Respondents were asked for their consent to participate in the online survey, including an electronic consent form explaining the purpose of the study, the importance of their participation, and the confidentiality and freedom to voluntarily participate in the survey or withdraw from the study at any time on the online survey form.

Recruitment for research involved sending an email, with the presentation of the study and the link to the online questionnaire, through the Google Forms platform, to all tourist enterprises, tourist entertainment companies, travel and tourism agencies and local accommodation establishments, registered in the National Register of Tourism, tourism in Portugal, inviting those who met the three inclusion criteria study to participate: (i) to be over 18 years old; (ii) do not have a formal university degree; and (iii) to be independent workers (i.e. carrying out a professional activity without being subject to an employment contract or legally equivalent contract, or obliged to make the results of their activity available to third parties, and not covered by the general social security scheme for employees) in the tourism industry in Portugal in the last six months. From a total of 3.350 emails sent, 238 responses were received that met the study inclusion criteria, which equates to a response rate of approximately 6.8%.

The questionnaire was administered online, through the Google Forms platform, and included questions on social demographic (e.g., gender, age, education, current work, wage), and the measures about Decent Work Scale, Quality of life and Career Adaptability. The questionnaire was piloted once with three individuals.

2.3 Measures

Decent work was measured using the Decent Work Scale (DWS; Duffy et al., 2017, adapted for Portugal by Ferreira et al., 2019), a 15-item measure consisting of five subscales: safe conditions, access to health care, adequate pay, leisure and recreation, and complementary values. Items were measured on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). Sample items are “I am not properly paid for my work” and “I have free time during the work week”. Higher scores indicate more decent work. Ferreira et al. (2019) reported internal consistency reliability for the total score of 0.81 and for each component .80 (safe conditions), .94 (access to health care), .83 (adequate compensation), 0,85 (leisure and recreation), and .92 (complementary values). In the present study, internal reliability estimates for the subscales ranged from $\alpha = .76$ to $.87$, and the estimate for the total scale was $\alpha = .80$.

Quality of life was measured with the World Health Organization Quality of Life – Bref (WHOQOL-BREF; World Health Organization, 1996, adapted for Portugal by Canavaro et al., 2006), a 26-item measure consisting of four domains of quality of life: physical health, psychological health, social relationships, and environmental health. The WHOQOL-BREF is a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (very poor) to 5 (very satisfied). Sample items are “Do you have enough energy for your daily life?” and “How often do you have negative feelings such as sadness, despair, anxiety and depression?”. Higher scores indicate higher quality of life. Vaz

Serra et al. (2006) reported internal consistency reliability for the total score of .92, and for each component, they determined .87 (physical health), .84 (psychological health), .64 (social relationships), and .78 (environmental health). In the present study, the internal reliability estimate for the total scale was $\alpha = .86$ and for the subscales it ranged from $\alpha = .78$ to .88.

Career adaptability was measured with the Career Adapt-Abilities Scale - CAAS–Portugal Form (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012, adapted for Portugal by Duarte et al., 2012), a 24-item measure consisting of four dimensions of career adaptability: career apprehension, career control, career curiosity, and career confidence. The CAAS–Portugal form is a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (not strong) to 5 (strongest). Sample items are “Thinking about what my future will be like” and “Making decisions by myself”. Higher scores indicate higher career adaptability. Duarte et al. (2012) reported an internal consistency reliability of .90 for the total score and identified .76 (career worry), .69 (career control), .78 (career curiosity), and 0,79 (career confidence) for each component. In the present study, the estimated internal reliability for the total scale was $\alpha = .91$ and for the subscales ranged from $\alpha = .86$ to .90.

2.4 Data Analysis

The returned questionnaires were checked for completeness before data entry. The data collected for this study were analysed using SPSS Ver. 26.0 and PROCESS Macro Ver. 4.2 as follows. First, frequency analysis was conducted to understand the characteristics of tourism workers, and descriptive statistics, such as mean and standard deviation, were generated to confirm the level of decent work, quality of life, and career adaptability. In addition, internal consistency analysis was conducted to ensure the construct reliability of the data, and correlation was analysed to confirm the relationship between the variables. Then, the structural validity of the research model was tested using PROCESS macro for SPSS v.4,2 proposed by Andrew Hayes (2013). PROCESS macro is a path analysis modelling tool with a regression plug-in used for mediation, moderation, and conditional process analyses. If there is no zero value “0” between the lowest confidence level (BootLCCI) and the highest confidence level (BootULCI), the path analyses performed with the process macro are considered significant (Hayes, 2018).

The macro PROCESS has the advantage of eliminating multicollinearity by automatically providing the average centralization function of the independent variable and the mediating variable and allowing a detailed examination of the significance of the simple slope, which is the direct effect of the independent variable on the variable outcome given the mediating variable. When conducting mediation analyses using the macro PROCESS, we can obtain estimates of the total effect (the combined direct and indirect effects) as well as the specific indirect effects due to the mediating variable. These indirect effects quantify the effect of the independent variable on the outcome variable acting through the mediating variable. In addition, the PROCESS macro provides bootstrap methods for estimating the significance of these effects, calculating confidence intervals for indirect effects, and testing their significance based on the empirical distribution resulting from the resampling procedure (Hayes, 2013; Hayes et al., 2017). Finally, the macro PROCESS shows essentially identical results to structural equation modelling (Hayes, 2018; Hayes et al., 2017).

III. RESULTS

3.1 Descriptive Statistics and Correlation Analyses

Table 1 shows the means, standard deviations, and correlations for the variables in the study.

The results show that decent work was positively associated with quality of life ($r = .515$, $p < .01$) and career adaptability ($r = .406$, $p < .01$). In addition, quality of life was positively related to career adaptability ($r = .519$, $p < .01$). Thus, the correlations showed preliminary support for our hypotheses. For the correlation between all variables, the maximum coefficient value was .519, indicating that the discriminant validity between variables was satisfactory, assuming that there is no common variance bias (Bagozzi et al., 1991; Podsakoff et al., 2003).

Table 1. Descriptive statistics, correlation coefficient matrix and discriminant validity

Variable	Decent work	Quality of life	Career adaptability
Decent work	1		
Quality of life	.515**	1	
Career adaptability	.406**	.519**	1
M	4.507	3.142	4.300
SD	.762	.509	.462

** $p < 0,01$

Source: own elaboration

Portuguese tourism workers had similar levels of decent work ($M = 4.507$, $SD = .762$) and career adaptability ($M = 4.300$, $SD = .462$), while quality of life levels was relatively low ($M = 3.142$, $SD = .509$).

3.2 Results of Difference Analysis

Before testing the research models/hypotheses, difference analyses were conducted to determine whether decent work, quality of life, and career adaptability differed on demographic characteristics such as gender, age, length of service, and monthly income. Table 2 shows the results of further analysis.

Table 2. Difference Analysis Results with t-Tests and ANOVA

t-test results for gender	Women		Men		t	p
	M	SD	M	SD		
DW	4.381	.7861	4.693	.6869	-3.092	.001
QV	3.046	.5168	3.283	.4661	-3.524	<.001
CA	4.258	.4765	4.361	.4360	-1.661	.046
ANOVA	Age groups		Monthly income groups		Service time groups	
	F	p	F	p	F	p
DW	1.487	.219	6.693	.002	2.210	.088
QV	4.998	.002	17.283	<.001	1.393	.246
CA	2.066	.106	6.412	.002	.922	.431

Source: own elaboration

There is a significant difference between decent work, quality of life, and career adaptability on demographic characteristics such as gender (favorable to men) and monthly income. There is also a significant difference in quality of life with respect to age groups (or generations X, Y, and Z) ($F = 4.998$; $p = .002$). There is no significant difference in all variables related to service time groups.

3.3 Process Macro Analysis Results

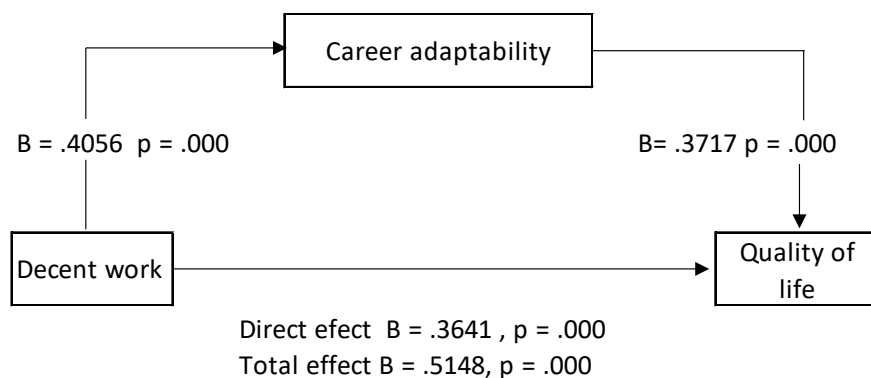
The research model has the same structural characteristics as Model 4 (Hayes, 2018).

Bootstrap was used for verification, the confidence interval was 95%, and the number of samples was 5000. Thus, regression analysis by the simultaneous entry method was used to investigate the effect of decent work on quality of life and to confirm the mediating role of career adaptability. The results of the process macro-analysis to test the structural validity/hypotheses of the research model are shown in Table 3.

Table 3 shows that decent work was significantly positively associated with quality of life ($B = .3641$, $SE = .574$, $p = .000$, $95\% CI = [.2510, .4772]$) and significantly positively associated with career adaptability ($B = .4056$, $SE = .608$, $p = .000$, $95\% CI = [.2857, .5254]$). These results support hypothesis 1 and hypothesis 2.

Table 3 also shows that the positive effect of decent work on quality of life was mediated by the career adaptability ($B = .107$, $SE = .035$, $95\% CI = [.048, .185]$). Thus, hypothesis 3 was supported.

Figure 1. Theoretical model



Source: Own elaboration

Table 3. Process Macro Analysis Results for Testing the Research Model/Hypotheses

Model 4	Decent work (X)		Career adaptability (M)			Quality of life (Y)	
Model summary	R	R-sq	MSE	F	df1	df2	p
	.4056	.1645	.8392	44.4884	1.0000	226.0000	.0000
Outcome variable: career adaptability		coeff	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
Constant		.0000	.0607	.0000	1.0000	-.1196	.1196
Decent work		.4056	.0608	6.6700	.0000	.2857	.5254
Model summary	R	R-sq	MSE	F	df1	df2	p
	.6168	.3805	.6250	69.0920	2.0000	225.0000	.0000
Outcome variable: quality of life		coeff	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
Constant		.0000	.0524	.0000	1.0000	-.1032	.1032
Decent work		.3641	.0574	6.3424	.0000	.2510	.4772
Career adaptability		.3717	.0574	6.4747	.0000	.2586	.4848
Model summary	R	R-sq	MSE	F	df1	df2	p
	.5148	.2651	.7382	81.5047	1.0000	226.0000	.0000
Outcome variable: quality of life		coeff	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
Constant		.0000	.0569	.0000	1.0000	-.1121	.1121
Decent work		.5148	.0570	9.0280	.0000	.4025	.6272
Indirect effect of decent work on quality of life			Effect	BootSE	BootLLCI	BootULCI	
			.1507	.0418	.0758	.2359	
Ind1: Decent work -> Career adaptability -> Quality of life							

* p < .05. *** p < .001

Source: own elaboration

IV. DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The aim of this study is to contribute to improve the lives of independent workers in the tourism sector by empirically analyzing the factors that influence their lives. To this end, we investigated the impact of decent work on quality of life and examined career adaptability as a mediator in the relationship between decent work and quality of life, considering it as a consequence of decent work.

Firstly, the results show that the tourism workers surveyed tend to consider having a decent job (even if this agreement is not strong or complete) and have good professional adaptability. However, in terms of quality of life, they seem to have a neutral attitude (neither satisfied nor dissatisfied). The results also showed a significant positive correlation between decent work and participants' quality of life. Employees who stated to have a decent job also appeared to have a higher level of quality of life.

Secondly, the results showed detailed differences between men regarding the variables decent work, quality of life and occupational adaptability. These results can be explained by the fact that women, for example, may perceive a lower quality of life (even with similar working conditions) due to other obstacles such as family responsibilities and challenges in balancing private and professional life. In addition, women may attenuate the mediating relationship with adaptability, possibly due to their greater adaptability (Cazella et al., 2019; ONU, 2021).

Thirdly, career adaptability seems to have a mediating effect on this relationship between decent work and quality of life. The work environment created by decent work appears to promote the development of workers' career adaptability by guiding them towards career development tasks and encouraging them to actively engage in managing current tasks, preparing for future tasks, as well as promoting the development of planning skills and providing a sense of control over their career future. In addition, decent work appears to foster workers' curiosity about the educational and career choices they can make. This leads to greater competence in self-knowledge and career information and creates a sense of confidence in the ability to execute the necessary behaviors to make career decisions and solve problems that may arise in their implementation. The sense of professional self-efficacy fosters the acquisition of problem-solving competencies (Savickas, 2005, 2013; Savickas & Porfeli, 2012), subsequently exerting a favorable influence on the quality of life experienced by workers. Conversely, the absence of equitable employment opportunities may create a pessimistic and unrealistic attitude toward both work engagements and career progression. Professionals may blame external factors such as luck or circumstances for their career progression and avoid exploring new opportunities. This leads to a loss of confidence in their ability to achieve career goals and aspirations (Savickas, 2005, 2013; Savickas & Porfeli, 2012), which in turn negatively affects their quality of life. Therefore, decent work is seen as a facilitator for the enhancement of these resources, acting as a mediator in the relationship between decent work and quality of life and influencing the way workers perceive and respond to the positive and negative aspects of their work experience (Eurofound, 2018).

These findings suggest that promoting and facilitating decent work can have a significant impact on the quality of life of independent workers in tourism. By ensuring fair and decent working conditions, we help to improve the physical, mental, social, and

environmental health of workers. This factor can lead to a higher quality of the services provided, with positive consequences for the companies commissioning the services, as well as enhancing the competitiveness and perceived quality of the tourism sector as a whole (Li et al., 2022; Xu et al., 2022).

Workers who are dissatisfied and demotivated with their working conditions may reflect this dissatisfaction in customer service, negatively impacting the tourist experience and leading to negative reviews (Shiri et al., 2015). This increased engagement is crucial in the tourism industry, as the quality of interpersonal interactions and the service experience can differentiate one destination from another (Zvaigzne et al., 2022). Tourist guides, for example, are important players in the tourism industry. The quality of their work can directly influence tourists' experiences and shape their opinion of the destination they visit (Çetinkaya & Öter, 2016). This scenario can create challenges for the sector. If tourists have negative experiences due to poor service quality, this can affect the reputation of the tourism destination (Akbar et al., 2020). Negative online reviews and unfavorable comments can drive away potential visitors and harm tourism, thus reducing the economic impact of tourism (Yang et al., 2023).

In addition, the importance of career adaptability should not be underestimated. In an ever-changing world, people who are able to adapt and constantly learn are more likely to successfully overcome challenges, gain a sense of purpose and fulfillment in their careers, and find well-being and quality of life (Douglass & Duffy, 2015; Kvasková et al., 2023). Workers with more adaptability resources, who are constantly learning, are better able to adapt to new market demands, adopt new technologies and offer innovative solutions to tourists, which could lead to a more personalized, efficient, and satisfying experience for tourists, which can increase the destination's competitiveness. In summary, prioritizing decent work and the adaptability of workers in self-employment in the tourism sector contributes to the creation of a virtuous cycle in which happier and more capable workers provide higher quality services, leading to memorable tourism experiences and the long-term sustainability of the sector. The tourism sector struggles with intense competition in attracting workers (ILO, 2022). If employees perceive their roles within the tourism sector as lacking in decent attributes, impeding career advancement, and offering a diminished quality of life, the sector may struggle to attract new professionals.

This can affect the tourism industry, which in turn impacts the economy. It is important to look at decent work and recognize that it means more than a good salary: workers do not believe that a higher salary contributes directly to quality of life and career enhancement (Buyukgoze-Kavas & Autin, 2019; Duffy et al., 2019; Parry & Unwin, 2021). To mitigate these negative effects, it is important that the tourism sector values its independent workers and ensures that they have access to decent work and career adaptability and thus a good quality of life (Douglass & Duffy, 2015; Savickas & Porfeli, 2012).

Companies providing services to independent workers in the tourism sector must offer decent working conditions to independent workers providing services. In the case of false invoice slips (*falsos recibos verdes*), who have the same tasks and duties as salaried workers but not the same rights (Santos, 2023), must regulate the situation and include these workers as dependent workers in the organizations (Costa et al, 2023), structure work content, schedules, salaries, and worker well-being fairly, in addition to creating a free and enjoyable work environment (Duffy et al., 2016; ILO, 2017a), and invest in training and development

programs that foster resources for career adaptability, such as concern, control, curiosity, and trust (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012).

The Portuguese government must continue to monitor companies that abuse the independent worker status and promote decent work by investing in education and training, social protection, and the regulation of the independent labor market in the tourism sector in Portugal. It is also important to disseminate information about the importance of decent work and job adaptability to employers and employees in order to promote a culture of valuing these aspects (ILO, 2022).

4.1 Limitations and Future Directions

The present study has several limitations that should be considered. First, we used cross-sectional data in the current study and therefore cannot draw causal conclusions. Future studies could use longitudinal data to validate the theoretical temporality of the relationships in the model. Second, although our sample size is consistent with some recommendations of $N < 200$, the sample size issue is complex and expert recommendations often contradict each other (Kyriazos, 2018). It is possible that our current sample size limits our ability to detect some significant effects; therefore, future studies should aim to recruit larger samples. Third, expanding the sample to include workers from different regions and sectors of the tourism industry and including gender as a moderator variable in the model may improve the understanding of the results to guide future interventions. The reinforcement of stereotypical gender roles is particularly noticeable in tourism (Ferguson & Alarcon, 2015). In Portugal, tourism and hospitality emerge as the predominant fields of study for women with 60% of female enrolment, and they exhibit heightened academic success, constituting 66% of graduates from these programs (Correia, 2018). Furthermore, future investigations could also incorporate qualitative methodologies such as interviews or focus groups to gain more comprehensive insights into the life experiences of independent workers in the tourism industry. Finally, it's important to investigate how technological advances and economic changes affect the job security, working conditions and career adaptability of independent workers in the tourism industry. It is crucial to assess the effectiveness of current policies to promote decent work and identify opportunities for improvement based on empirical evidence. This approach can increase the relevance and usefulness of research for policy makers and lead to more effective and sustainable measures to ensure the well-being and safety of workers in this constantly evolving sector.

4.2 Conclusion

The results of this research indicate that decent work - physical and interpersonal safety in the workplace; work schedules that allow for leisure and adequate rest; organizational values that complement family and social values; adequate compensation; and access to appropriate health care (Duffy et al., 2016) - in the tourism sector in Portugal is positively associated with independent workers' perceived quality of life. Career adaptability proves to be an important mediator in this relationship, as it allows professionals to face the ever-changing challenges of the sector and take advantage of opportunities for personal and professional growth and development. These linkages are not just a matter of individual well-being but can extend significantly to the organizations and broader competitiveness of the tourism industry itself. This double benefit underlines the importance of decent work as a

strategic priority in the development of sustainable and competitive tourism, promoting a viable future for occupations in the tourism sector that will be more attractive for future generations (ILO, 2022).

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