

## Article

# Spanish Tourist Sector Sustainability: Recovery Plan, Green Jobs and Wellbeing Opportunity

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**Abstract:** This paper presents an overview on political economy and economic policies into the European Green Deal framework and the Spanish recovery plan, with special attention to the tourism sector and actual opportunities for green jobs in the Spanish tourism market. Firstly, there is a literature review, combining the scientific production with professional and institutional literature, to understand the topic development, from the former restrictive point to the wider current view. Secondly, a case study about the green jobs opportunity in the Spanish hotel industry is presented, taking into account wellbeing economics, for the renewal of the Spanish tourism industry. Methodology combines the qualitative analysis of literature and the qualitative review of the CSR reports from top Spanish hotel chains as well as the feedback of sustainability experts at the hotel industry. This paper provides valuable information to improve the sectorial recovery plan and coordinate the policymakers and the business managers and entrepreneurs.

**Keywords:** political economy; economic policies; European Green Deal; recovery plan; green jobs; wellbeing economics; Spanish tourism and hospitality sector



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## 1. Introduction

The President of the European Commission (EC), Ursula von der Leyen, reaffirmed that climate change is a top priority for the European Union (EU), during the EU Green Week (June 2021) [1]; then recalling the validity of the European Green Deal (EGD) and its extension [2–5]. The original objective of a green Europe is making this continent neutral in terms of greenhouse gas emissions by 2050 and using 32% renewable energy by 2030 [6,7]. The EGD has insisted on the importance of moving towards European sustainability decisively, eliminating the negative impact on health of pollution, promoting responsible production and consumption, and embracing the SDGs set by the UN [8]. The European strategy has placed special focus on the fast growing employment opportunities in the green economy, the so-called green jobs, which have become the most visible flagship of EGD [9,10]. Additionally, the EU is working on the improvement of EGD at large, to extend it to every economic sector, in terms of wellbeing economics: The combination of decent work with life satisfaction in a better environment (3P relation: Profits–planet–people). In this way, this is a great opportunity for the tourism sector, which is growing each year (of course, with the exception of the pandemic crisis and the great lockdown [11], but the forecasts sign a great and fast recovery). In a strategic view, it is a good opportunity to design the green recovery for this sector, to improve the green jobs (in terms of wellbeing) [9,10].

Only jobs related to renewable energies and sustainability were initially considered green jobs: recycling, waste disposal, environmental management, environmental consulting and environmental training. According to the International Labour Organization

(ILO) [12,13], green jobs should be a source of decent work, jobs that offer equal opportunities in conditions of freedom, equity, security and dignity. International institutions and bodies, such as ILO and UNWTO (into the UN), have carried out a wide range of studies and publications about the actual possibilities of green jobs in numerous countries and sectors within those countries, including Spain and its tourism sector [14]. Even though tourism does not quite fit into the original list of green jobs, its relevance in the worldwide economy makes it important to study opportunities for green jobs within the tourism industry. In some international reports and studies, tourism is mentioned briefly, but the opportunities for green jobs in this important area for the Spanish economy are not developed in detail.

ILO has confirmed, on numerous occasions, that the green economy can create new employment opportunities worldwide. What is not so evident is whether these green jobs will be enough to compensate for the loss of other jobs in more traditional industries and sectors, and if all countries and sectors of the economy will benefit equally from the jump to the green economy and the embedded concept of decent work. Whether green jobs can be another source of employment for world tourism is a question that has yet to be fully answered. UNWTO has stated that a more sustainable tourism can provide new green employment opportunities, but studies on the possibilities of green jobs in the Spanish tourism sector have been scarce so far. Therefore, it is important to analyze the real opportunities for green jobs for the Spanish hospitality industry in order to answer a question: Are green jobs a source of employment for the Spanish tourism and hospitality?

Spain is one of the most important tourist destinations in the world, as well as one of the countries in Europe with the highest percentage of unemployment; thus, a study of possible opportunities for green jobs in the Spanish tourism sector is valuable. Tourism revenue constituted 12.4% of Spanish GDP in 2019. In 2019, 84 million tourists arrived in Spain, which positioned this country as the most visited in Europe the year before COVID-19 pandemic crisis [15]. That same year, Spain was also designated as the most competitive country in the world in terms of tourism according to the Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Report 2019 prepared by the World Economic Forum (WEF) [16]. This report takes into account various variables when configuring its ranking. One of those variables refers precisely to the quality of human resources in the sector and the existing labor market in the country. Thus, the WEF report indicates that Spain must improve its human resource policies, so the study does not give it the highest score in terms of tourism competitiveness in the “human resources and people” section. The report also indicates that, despite being the most competitive country in the World in 2019, the growth of its general competitiveness index is slower than that of other countries in the list. These data are an important wake-up call: Spain can and must improve in many aspects of tourism and one of them is precisely the quality of its professionals and the working conditions in the tourism industry. It is a matter of time before Spain can be overtaken by countries with faster growth in tourism competitiveness. This is why the study of human resources in the Spanish hospitality as well as testing the opportunities for new jobs, both decent and linked to sustainability, is a relevant area of research. If green jobs mean an opportunity for better employment at the Spanish tourism business, they are something important to study.

The objective of this work is to analyze the perspectives and challenges that the EGD and the Recovery plan have for the Spanish tourism and more specifically for the hospitality sector, and the real opportunities for wellbeing green jobs in the Spanish hotel industry. The structure of the paper is the following: (1) Theoretical framework and literature review, combining scientific production with professional and institutional materials. (2) Comparative study of the main Spanish hotel holdings and their annual CSR, to check the sustainability and employment trends by these hotels. (3) Application of qualitative tools to study the opportunities for growth of green jobs emergence among most important Spanish hotel holdings.

## 2. Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

To economize, there is a remission to previous papers, with extended explanations on EGD, Recovery plan and green jobs [9], in the emergence of the Wellbeing Economics (WBE) [10] with digital economy and the change in business culture [17]: The new economic paradigm is based on more productivity (effectiveness and efficiency), sustainability (an optimization by triple-P-relation: people-planet-profits), and wellbeing (personal, with respect to the environment and social context), supported by several international commitments [18,19]:

International forums and organizations and political actors: NN.UU. (beyond ILO initiatives mentioned, see *Workplace Wellbeing, Wellbeing in Future of Work and Global Compact*), OECD (i.e., *Economy of Wellbeing and Measuring Wellbeing and Progress*), EU (i.e., *Economy of Wellbeing, Green Deal and Recovery Plan*), WEF (i.e., *Wellbeing Economy Alliance, Great Reset and Global Human Capital Report*), *Wellbeing Economy Alliance II-WEAII* and *Wellbeing Economy Go-WEGo*, etc.

Think-tanks and Consultant firms: Global Trends in Human Capital-Deloitte (global), Talent Trends-Randstad (global), Wellbeing Knowledge Bank (UK), Well-being Economies-Suzuki Foundation (Canada), Center for Research in Economic and Well-being (Switzerland), Orkestra-Instituto Vasco de Competitividad and Fundación Deusto (Spain), Instituto Pensamiento Positivo (Spain), Happiness Research Institute (Denmark), The qualitative-of-life research center (Denmark), Australian Center on Qualitive Life (Germany), Happiness Research Organization (Germany), Institute for Studies in Happiness Economy and Society (Japan), etc.

Research programs and new indicators: Rankings and metrics by IZA (Germany), *Openmet* (Spain) or *GPTW* (global), polls by *Gallup Global Well-being* (global), working-papers by OECD and its "Better Life Initiative", *The Third Metric*, etc.

The connections and clusters are collected in the following figure (Please see Figure 1).

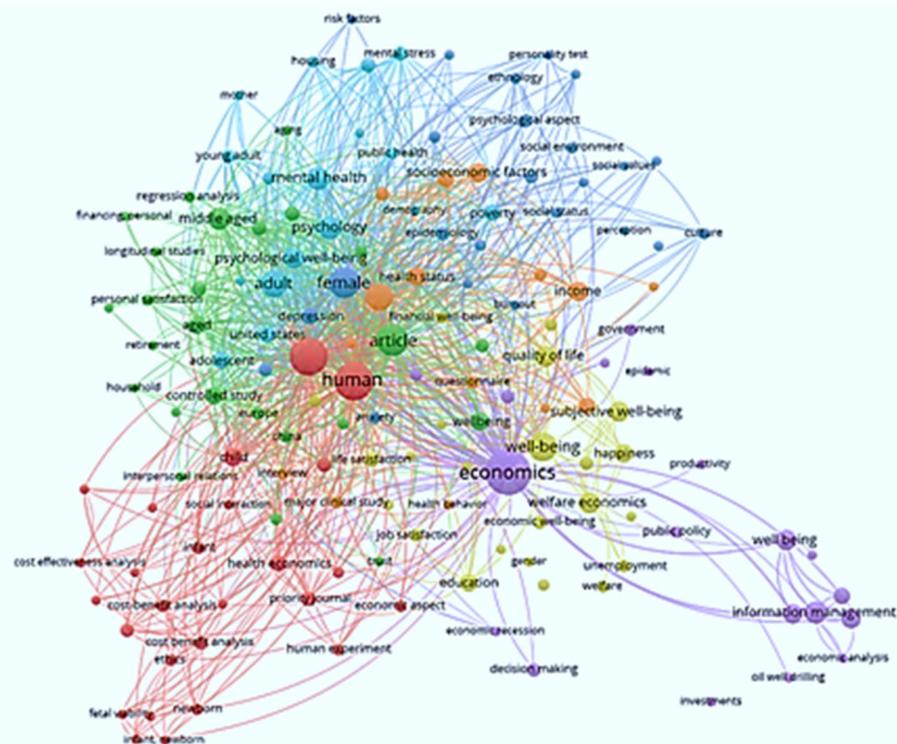


Figure 1. Green jobs, wellbeing and other topics linked. Source: Own elaboration from WoS using VOSviewer [10].

In relation to the green jobs design, their skills and wellbeing standards, as it is mentioned, the international institutions and forums have offered a reference level to establish a minimum and common scenario [14,18–24].

### 2.1. Sustainable Tourism and Green Jobs

Since the release of the Brundtland Report [25] and its proposal for sustainable development, studies on sustainability and its implications for all sectors of the economy have grown in relevance, both in academic research and in political and economic fields. Green jobs, described as those jobs generated around sustainability and EGD, have become “the emblem of this sustainable economy” according to the UNEP report [26]. Studies on green economy and green tourism have increased substantially in the last decade, but it is also true that there is a lack of studies that determine what green job opportunities exist in the Spanish hotel sector under the umbrella of SDGs and sustainability policies.

### 2.2. International Institutions Perspective on Sustainability and Green Jobs

At the beginning of the green deal, the international institutions had a very positive outlook regarding opportunities for decent and green jobs. As the green deal developed, some authorities and authors have started to be more cautious. After analyzing statistics of green jobs in the U.S. [27], Deschenes [28] concluded that the so-called green jobs represented a very small share of the employment in the U.S. and its growth has been weak in the 2010 decade.

Sustainable tourism has been a popular topic in research since the 1990s, both in international institutions and scholars [29–31]. UNWTO [32] defined sustainable tourism as the one that subscribes to SDGs and therefore supports the reduction of poverty, rural development, preservation of local cultures, encourages gender parity, protection of the environment and actions to mitigate climate change.

International institutions (i.e., EU, ILO, UNWTO) have carried out studies on the impact and possibilities for tourism in the green economy. UNDP [33] concluded that, if tourism is not properly managed, “it might have a negative impact on people, planet, prosperity and peace” (in terms of WBE). The role of tourism in sustainability is undeniable. UNWTO, UNEP and WMO reports mentioned in the same conference estimated that tourism alone accounts for 5% of global emissions. In a “business-as-usual” scenario for tourism and without a sustainable approach, 30-year projections show a 150% growth in emissions generated by the tourism industry [34].

The reports of the main international organizations coincide in pointing out that green tourism can bring broad economic, social and environmental benefits, although there are also many challenges and difficulties to overcome. In the same line, the UN Conference on Trade and Development [32] stated the potential of tourism to create jobs and facilitate sustainable development, especially considering that tourism is the main source of income for a third of the least developed economies on the planet [35]. It concluded that sustainable tourism is not a special type of tourism, but that all tourism must struggle to be more sustainable.

Since 2010, UNWTO has also stated the importance of sustainability in tourism and its positive impact on decent work. UNWTO 2030 Sustainable Development Goals Agenda mentions “the need to implement policies to promote sustainable tourism that creates jobs and supports local cultures and products” [36]. According to UNWTO [37], sustainable tourism must meet the triple objective of making optimal use of environmental resources: respect the authenticity of local communities, and ensure the long-term viability of its operations, providing economic benefit and employment opportunities in the communities where it operates and alleviating poverty. These three concepts—providing job opportunities, eliminating poverty and creating decent jobs—are aspects clearly associated with sustainable tourism and enable a wider scope of the possibilities of work linked to sustainability.

Following the previous statement, UNWTO [38] clearly connects sustainable tourism with decent jobs. The organization concluded that tourism has a very important impact on the World economy and job creation, especially for women, youths and immigrants. Additionally, its impact on rural and indigenous communities and their connections with other sectors of the economy is high. Sustainable tourism can and should reduce poverty and create decent jobs. This is especially relevant in tourism, traditionally characterized by monotonous and very demanding job, with high working hours, shifts and unattractive salaries.

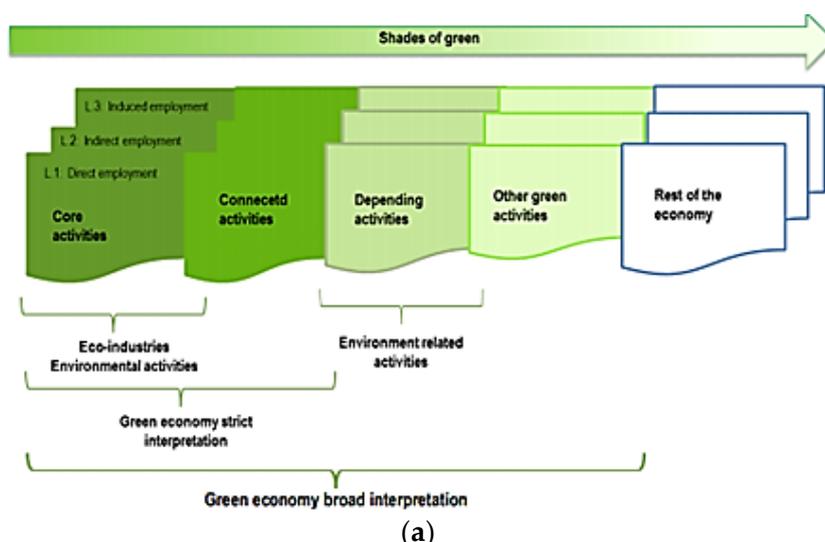
One of the concepts that have generated more discussion in the literature has been precisely the exact definition of green job. The joint UNEP/ILO/IOE/ITUC report [39] defines a green job as any decent job that contributes to preserve and restore the quality of the environment, whether it be in agriculture, industry, services or administration, and it does so by reducing the consumption of energy and raw materials, minimizing pollution and waste, protecting and restoring ecosystems and allowing companies and communities to adapt to climate change [40]. They conclude that green jobs are any employed or self-employed job that clearly contributes to a more sustainable World.

Green jobs are often associated with the concept of decent work. The ILO (2013) concludes that both concepts should be worked together due to their link to the SDGs [41]. Regarding the exact definition of green jobs, ILO reports cite the most widely accepted definition. ILO started the Green Jobs Global Program in 2009 [42]. Jobs are considered green when they help reduce negative environmental impacts and help create socially, economically and environmentally sustainable businesses. Green jobs are all those jobs that contribute to creating a more sustainable World (remember the ILO update on the topic, connecting green jobs with other fields, like WBE, supporting the research of many scientists and scholars, see Figure 1).

Following UNWTO [43], one of the main difficulties that studies on the impact of sustainability and green jobs on tourism must face is the absence of common lists of jobs for the green sector in most countries. This makes it very difficult to measure quality and quantity of green employment in tourism and the actual number of green jobs in the industry. There are no common job classifications to allow researchers to find green jobs in tourism. The conceptual framework of the green economy is suggested as the basis for measuring sustainable tourism, as can be seen in Figure 2a,b.

The primary activities are the most directly linked to sustainability (ecological, agricultural and environmental activities) and sustainable tourism would be included in the group of secondary connected activities or in the third level “dependent activities” (described as other non-sustainable tourist activities). The UNWTO report recognizes the difficulty of correctly discriminating between activities related to green tourism, given that the general data available in reports and censuses do not usually differentiate green jobs. Only a small group of countries have established metrics for green jobs in all sectors [44]. Conversely, in most countries the only jobs considered within the category of green jobs are those included in the basic list of positions and linked to recycling, waste management, environmental management and renewable energy [45].

By the same token, all job categories included in the first ILO list for green jobs are jobs in traditional sectors of the green economy (i.e., environmental conservation, recycling and renewable energy jobs, eco agriculture and farming, as well as environmental training and consulting). That green job list does not connect with a significant number of people at tourism companies. Beyond the teams and professionals who work in large tourism companies on EMSs and related issues: consulting, training, recycling and environmental certificates and audits the figures for green jobs in tourism are limited.



Type	Purpose of protecting the environment	Examples
<b>Core activities</b>	Primary purpose	Environmental protection: air pollution control, protection of biodiversity, waste management Resource management: water management, renewable energy, recycling
<b>Connected activities</b>	Secondary purpose	Hybrid cars, green building, green ICT, organic farming, sustainable tourism, sustainable forestry
<b>Dependent Activities</b>	No environmental purpose but dependent on environmental quality	Agriculture, commercial forestry, tourism
<b>Other green activities</b>	No environmental purpose	Public transport services, ICT

(b)

**Figure 2.** (a) Theoretical framework of green economy. (b) Characteristics of different types of green jobs. Source: UNWTO and IDEA Consultant [42,43].

A primary source of research is precisely the categorization of green jobs within the tourism business. Ladkin and Szivas [46] mention the difficulty of determining what is and what is not a green job. As an example of the large gray area around the concept of green job, a study carried out by the government of Spain [47] asserts that the number of green jobs in Spain was 530,947 workers, equivalent to 2.6% of the Spanish workforce in 2009. The same report remarks that the total number of jobs in the green economy had doubled in a decade in Spain, becoming the average for the EU.

Nevertheless, the actual possibilities of an increase of green jobs in Spanish tourism companies are not easily identifiable. Based on these same data from Spain, the organization Green Jobs and Sustainable Development International Center (2013), also known as GJASD International, ends up concluding that, since tourism is so important in the Spanish economy, it is reasonable to think that a part of green jobs have probably been absorbed by the tourism industry [48], but this statement is only a deduction based on general data provided in a report by the Spanish Ministry of the Environment [49] and not cross-checked with other sources of data on green jobs in the Spanish tourism sector or any other further analysis.

Regarding the actual work opportunities for green jobs, when we review the different documents and employment estimates provided by the EU about employment growth linked to sustainability, the first conclusion is that figures and forecasts are very volatile throughout the years. In the case of the EU, the first statements (1997), related on sustain-

ability and antecedent of EGD, declared that the green economy could create between 950,000 and 1,650,000 green jobs around green energies and sustainability. This very enthusiastic initial estimate has given way to more conservative data over the years. For example, in 2021, the EU estimated that renewable energies could create between 200,000 and 300,000 jobs by 2030, a much lower figure and which is only 12% from the previous data provided by EU authorities.

A report by Szako [50] concluded that there are possibilities for significant growth in job opportunities in the green economy, and as much as 87 million jobs susceptible of been “greeneable”. This does not necessarily mean the creation of new jobs, but the adaptation that many current jobs, mostly in the energy sector, will experience in their way towards a greener economy. Bowen et al. [51] describe a taxonomy with the changes that green jobs could bring. There will be: (1) Existing jobs whose demand will increase in the green economy, (2) existing jobs that will change substantially in tasks, skills and knowledge requiring great re-skilling, (3) emerging new jobs brought up by the demand of the green economy, (4) rival non-green jobs similar to green jobs in different sector, and (5) non-green jobs not very likely to be substantially affected by the green economy. The authors do not mention green jobs for tourism, but they assert that there is potential growth of green jobs in tourism linked to the investments in sustainable tourism. Following the mentioned taxonomy, tourism seems to fit better in the fifth group, that is, non-green jobs not very likely to be affected by the green economy.

The ILO [52] report on opportunities for green jobs mentions Spanish tourism as one of the “areas of opportunities” for the growth of green jobs, given the importance that tourism has for the Spanish economy and the initial impulse of Spanish government towards renewable energies.

The structure of the Spanish labor market is complex, with many more skilled workers than the EU average, but also a higher percentage of unskilled workers than the EU average and far fewer medium-skilled workers compared to the EU, which is interpreted as a difficulty at the time to successfully fill the green jobs, which mostly need medium-skilled workers [53,54].

Beyond the initial assessment on tourism and green jobs, ILO report does not make further analysis about the possibilities of green jobs in tourism and hospitality. In its report *Green Skills for Green Jobs* [55], ILO recommends increasing training in green skills in both job search workers and already employed workers, in the first ones to increase their job opportunities and in the second ones to maintain a high level of employability, because green skills will be important to maintain professional skills and will need to be updated. The report pauses briefly on the tourism sector to mention that people working at tourism will need more training and re-skilling in new knowledges and skills in environmental aspects, especially in topics such as ecotourism, bio tourism and circular tourism and energy management systems, but opportunities for green jobs are not mentioned. Tourism will need skilling and re-skilling on green topics, but not an increase in new and specific green jobs.

Regarding green jobs in the tourism sector in Spain, Sánchez and Poschen [56], in their technical note for ILO, initially estimated that only renewable energies could generate 20 million jobs throughout the EU. Several years later, the report sponsored by the Government of Spain *Green Employment in a Sustainable Economy* [57] concluded that the sustainable economy could allow Spain to create 1,153,000 total green jobs. The same study estimates that the green economy could create up to 24,000 new jobs in Spanish tourism, a very humble figure, especially when compared to the total green jobs forecasted for Spain.

According to a study by the Biodiversity Foundation sponsored by the Spanish Ministry of Environment [45], one of the most important conditions for governments to decide to promote policies and actions related to sustainability largely depends on the impact of these measures on employment. According to the same study, almost 4.5 million people (full-time equivalent-FTE) in the EU worked in the green economy in 2016, 1.4 million more than fifteen years ago. However, overall employment estimates provided by the 2009

Spanish study, later mentioned by ILO, does not coincide with the recent data issued by the EU regarding green jobs. In the case of Spain, after the shift in the Spanish legislation about renewables energies in 2015, cutting back subventions to those energies, estimation for new green jobs fell down to 46,534 direct jobs and 29,121 indirect jobs in 2015, a very modest figure when compared with 2009 predictions of about 530,947 green jobs.

### 2.3. Academic Literature on Sustainable Tourism and Green Jobs

Sustainable tourism has had broad resonance in tourism research, being perceived as an opportunity to address new issues beyond the negative impacts of the activity, which were present in the literature in previous decades of research [58]. Buckley [59] estimates that more than 5000 papers on sustainable tourism have been published in the last 25 years, confirming the great interest of scholars in sustainability and its implications. Hall [31] considers that the relationship between tourism and the environment has become increasingly problematic as it is accepted that tourism leads to a degradation of natural resources in both the short and long term. The author asserts that tourism is essentially about renting a place in another country or another location for a given agreed time, so the risk for the environment in those rented locations can be high if it is not controlled.

Torres-Delgado and Palomeque [60] analyze the policies and studies on sustainability carried out up to that year. His first conclusion is that the proliferation of documents in sustainable tourism has not led to a proportional advance either in theoretical or practical aspects of this concept. Sustainability in tourism research has been first associated with environmental aspects to progress later towards more holistic approaches, seeing sustainability as a tool for economic development, wellbeing and preservation of the environment. The authors also concluded that research on sustainable tourism has more interest in the environment and less in social and economic aspects.

Branwell and Lane [61] agree that research on sustainability in tourism has been important in the academic world and has become increasingly robust and varied thanks to the support of public sectors, national research councils and the private sector that they have provided. funds to support research in sustainable tourism.

Other authors are still critical of the prevailing trends in tourism research and sustainability, defined by Hall [31] as neoliberal. After reviewing the studies on tourism and sustainability, this author laments the paucity of research on the true contribution of tourism to sustainability, all at a time when tourism seems less sustainable than ever. However, studies on green jobs are still scarce.

Regarding academic research on sustainable tourism and its impact on employment, it is important to highlight that there is no consensus among the different authors regarding the positive impact on the labor market of sustainability policies. The work of Álvarez et al [62] is skeptical with respect to the real possibilities of the green economy to create employment without destroying it in other sectors of activity.

According to the author, following the first EU announcements about employment opportunities in green jobs in 1997, many voices rose above the general euphoria to point out that sustainability policies might create jobs in the green economy, especially renewable energies, but it will also destroy jobs in other sectors, due to the loss of competitiveness in other businesses due to the higher cost of renewable energies and the transfer of funds to that green energies in detriment of other areas of the country economy. Thus, each megawatt obtained through renewable sources destroys an average of 5.05 jobs, given the high cost of generating that green energy and the risk of company's closures and relocations. In other words, the jobs created by sustainable energies are created by destroying jobs in other sectors. A study by Sulich and Rutkowska [63], on green job opportunities for young people in three European countries (Poland, Belgium and the Czech Republic), concluded that more than 15% of new youth jobs in Poland and Belgium were green jobs. However, the proportion was much lower in the Czech Republic, where only 2% of job offers for young people came from the green economy. Opportunities in the green economy are unequal depending on each country, its productive sectors and the available workforce.

Research on sustainability in tourism has enjoyed a boom in recent years and the number of articles and papers has grown dramatically. Niñerola et al. [29] confirm that the number of publications on the subject has reached publications. There is a growing interest both in sustainability in tourism and in all related concepts: circular tourism, blue tourism, blue tourism, bio tourism and ecological tourism. However, few studies have focused on the impact of measures related to sustainability on human resources and the impact of employment in tourism industries.

A good share of studies focuses on the different concepts of sustainable tourism and their implications. Ruhanen et al. [30] confirm that sustainability is a topic of extraordinary interest. However, the specific topic of decent work and sustainability in the tourism sector is still low in studies. Bianchi and DeMan [64] point out that the vision of legislators and governments on tourism work is in many cases superficial, concentrating above all on the possibilities of a constantly growing sector and less on aspects of justice and work equity at tourism companies.

Regarding sustainability in the Spanish hotel sector, Ayuso [65] indicates that the tourism sector is less regulated in Spain than other sectors, which has led tourism and hotel companies to establish voluntary sustainability instruments, as they are more flexible, innovative and easy to implement. The voluntary practices that are mentioned as more frequent at tourism companies are mainly codes of conduct, implementation of best practices, eco-labels, environmental management systems and environmental performance indicators. Many small hotels have embraced a wide range of ecolabels to show their commitment with the environment and create a competitive advantage, but also big hotel chains use a combination of all available tools, from EMSs to ecolabels. In large Spanish hotel chains, sustainability and CSR reports include sections dedicated to their people, with numerous measures that fit into the category of decent work (and beyond, with motivational actions and CSR 3.0 [66,67]). Although there are not mentions about green jobs, main Spanish hotel chains are implementing a wide list of initiatives for decent work, as described by ILO, as we will explain later.

Rodríguez-Antón et al. [68] analyzed the sustainability tools of Spanish hotels, confirming the interest of this sector in establishing voluntary sustainability tools that coincide with those mentioned in the previous Ayuso's study: eco-labels, implementation of good environmental practices and certifications. Rubio [69] confirms that the Spanish hoteliers are involved in different actions related to sustainability, with a vast majority of companies having an interest in the positive impact of environmental policies and practices on the hotel's corporate reputation and its brand image. The authors also highlight that there is much more interest in eco-labels and only the large hotel chains opt for more sophisticated environmental management systems (EMSs) integrated in ISO norms or similar standards.

Coles et al. [70] point out that studies on sustainability on many occasions ignore the implications for workers in the tourism sector themselves and are surprised by the low interest of employment offered in tourism in relation to quality jobs. Baum et al. [71] declare that many tourism companies have changed their human resource strategies to be aligned with their corporate social responsibility in order to improve their recruitment and training practices, and the working conditions of their employees. The same authors indicate that research on sustainable tourism on many occasions ignores aspects related to workers in the tourism sector and conclude that the most popular lines of research have not studied enough the implications of sustainability on the workforce and the possibilities of decent work associated with green jobs. An important topic in a sector characterized by temporary and precarious conditions. Other authors remark the importance of sustainable practices linked to the right people's management. Winchenbach et al. [72] point out that poor working conditions in tourism create feelings of mistrust that negatively affect both workers and the business itself when sustainability measures are launched without considering other HR aspects [73].

Thus, another line of research in Spanish hospitality addresses the growing importance of GHRM (Green Human Resources Management) in Spanish hotels. Úbeda-García et al. [74]

mention the increasing relevance of all CSR and green practices for Human Resources Management at Spanish hotels. GHRM is linking its main activities to a green management of people with green recruitment, training and employee's management. When GHRM is put in place, employee's satisfaction increases and happier employees are associated in literature with better company's performance.

Sustainability policies and practices are an important tool to attract new generations to hospitality. The tourism industry has traditionally had great difficulty in attracting and retaining good professionals. The jobs offered are, in many cases, monotonous, with long working hours, shifts and unattractive salaries [75,76]. Hospitality is less attractive for the new generations joining the job market. That is why tourism companies worldwide, and especially hotel companies, have made a great effort to increase their attractiveness as employers, shifting from being invisible in the year 2000 to hit top positions in most prestigious lists. Hilton hotels were ranked among the best places to work at on the Fortune 2020 list [77], and many other hotel chains such as Marriot or Kimpton also ranked high.

Another aspect to consider is the positive impact of green strategies and green credentials on the image of hotels to attract and retain best. Hospitality is interested in attracting the best candidates and the right sustainability and CSR can create a competitive advantage. The study of Goh et al. [78] confirms the interest of the new generations in working in companies that are committed to sustainability. New generations value very positively all aspects of CSR in their potential employers. Tourism companies must compete for the best professionals [79]. Green practices increase employee satisfaction and productivity [80,81]. A green company is more attractive and generates higher levels of satisfaction and commitment in its employees and this is fundamental for the hotel sector (in the way of WBE [10]).

Research objectives:

1. Determine whether the initial and very optimistic prospect about green jobs as announced by the EU during the Green Deal have been achieved years later in the hospitality sector, which is very relevant for the Spanish economy, providing many green jobs.
2. Analyze whether main Spanish hotel chains (as a substantial part of the tourism industry in the country) are aligned with Sustainable Development Goals and the other international initiatives in WBE.
3. Analyze whether Spanish hotel chains are putting in place sustainability systems and EMSs (Environmental Management Systems).
4. Analyze whether Spanish hotel chains are creating green jobs in both the first definition of green jobs (works in recycling, renewable energies, energy saving and waste disposal, etc.) and in the latest and more generic definition (decent and sustainable jobs and other points related with WBE).

### 3. Case Study: Green Jobs and Wellbeing Opportunity in Spanish Hospitality

Spain had, in 2019, right before the COVID-19 crisis, nearly 16,000 hotels with more than 3,500,000 rooms, with 11% of the total hotel supply in Europe, so its importance within the Spanish tourism sector and its contribution to Spanish GDP ranges between 1.5% and 1.7%. Spanish hotels employ more than 200,000 people [82].

Until the 1990s, the hotel sector was not very active in sustainability and environment issues, but as of the 2000s, the annual reports of the main companies began to steadily dedicate more time and resources to green topics.

According to their yearly turnover, the top Spanish hotel chains in 2019 were those detailed in Table 1.

The study is qualitative and it has two phases. (1) Firstly, we analyze the CSR annual reports to detect more outstanding aspects in relation to sustainability and green jobs. We were interested to find out whether Spanish hotel chains were conscientious and proactive about SDG, both textually mentioning the SDG and also writing down all the practices and policies put in place to comply with as many SDGs as possible. We were interested to

check. Information about green jobs is not available on Spanish databases, so we need to use a more indirect approach through the analysis of hotel chain reports and documents.

**Table 1.** Top Spanish hotels by turnover.

Hotel	2019 Turnover (Millions of Euros)
Meliá Hotels	2.846
Iberostar Hotels and Resorts	2.353
RIU Hotels	2.240
Barceló	2.2184
NH Hotel Group	1.1783
Bahía Principe Hotels and Resorts	800
Palladium	752
H10 Hotels	660
Eurostars Hotel Company	620
Princess Hotels	2868

Source: Own elaboration based on Hosteltur 2019 data [83].

The Spanish tourism industry shares a great deal of information, but the most sensitive information we were looking for (growth of green jobs, human resources policies towards decent jobs and wellbeing) was not available at any database. Most important Spanish hotel chains provide substantial information about SDGs, environmental practices and quality of employment throughout many different sources: internal and external communications, press releases, etc. Most of the documents are scattered through different sources and sometimes difficult to reach and even more difficult to compare. However, a good document to try to compare “pears with pears” is precisely the CSR report. These documents are shared with the general public and stakeholders, and they are accessible through the hotel website, having a lot of information that can be extracted and, more importantly, compared. Even though every hotel chain has a different approach towards content management, the good news is that all of them share wide and diverse information about sustainability, sustainable development goals achieved and human resources policies aimed towards decent and quality jobs.

Topic to analyze:

1. Textual adhesion to SDG: Mention of specific measures and actions put in place by the hotel chain to achieve these goals within their scope.
2. Sustainability practices: A sample of different sustainability measures regarding recycling, waste disposal, renewable energies, energy savings and/or environmental training are mentioned.
3. Environmental Management Systems mentioned by the hotel: Any environmental certification system used by the hotel chain and mentioned on the CSR report (ISOs and eco-labels).
4. Human resources practices linked to decent jobs: Mention of fair wages, equality-diversity management, non-discrimination and justice.
5. Green jobs: Any mention to increase of green jobs or green job opportunities on the CSR.

(2) In the second part of our study, we interviewed three managers of human resources and/or quality and environment certifications in the sector to obtain expert opinions and confirm if there are prospects for an increase in hiring related to green jobs and what other measures hotel chains are implementing in these fields. Additionally, we interviewed two experts in sustainability working within the ITH (Instituto Tecnológico Hotelero) [84], a non-profit organization that supports innovation and technology initiatives within the Spanish hotel sector, delivering a wide range of reports and support to the hospitality industry. This institution has its own department of sustainability, so experts’ feedback reflects main trends into the industry. The verbatim of both interviews is stored and can be shown when requested. We asked two sets of questions:

1. Perspectives for green jobs within Spanish hotels. Is there a significant increase in green jobs at Spanish hospitality? Are Green skills and green profiles important in the hiring processes? Are green skills and competencies more sought after by the Spanish hospitality by now? Is this going to change for the better in the coming future?
2. Are Spanish hotels complying with SDG? What measures are they implementing?

For the purpose of this study, we selected the top five hotel chains (Meliá, Iberostar, RIU, Barceló and NH, see Table 2), given that their business volume and number of employees can allow a fairly accurate view of the degree in which the Spanish hotel sector is committed to sustainability, green practices and fair employment. Our study analyzed whether there are mentions of green jobs in its corporate reports, understanding green jobs as decent jobs committed to sustainability. We have chosen these companies because the quality and detail of their reports make for easier data analysis and comparisons.

**Table 2.** Top Spanish hotels leading the transition.

Hotel	Total Hotels	Adhesion to SDG	Sustainable Practices	EMS	Decent Jobs	Mention/Visibility of Green Jobs
Meliá Hoteles	367	YES. Many actions mentioned in all SDG	YES. Energy saving, waste disposal, recycling. Renewable energies	YES	YES. Fair wages, rewards and recognition, non discrimination, diversity management. Employees' wellbeing	NO textually. Training in environmental and sustainability mentioned
Iberostar	118	YES	YES. Waste disposal, recycling, energy saving	YES	YES. Non discrimination, diversity, fair wages. Employees wellbeing	NO
RIU	92	YES	YES. Waste disposal, recycling, energy savings	YES	YES. Non discrimination, diversity, fair wages	NO
Barceló	265	YES	YES. Waste disposal, recycling, energy saving	YES	YES. Non discrimination, diversity, employees' well being	NO
NH Hotels	361	YES	YES. Waste disposal, recycling, energy saving	YES	YES Diversity management, fair wages based on individual and group performance	NO. Training sustainability

Source: Own elaboration based on Hosteltur 2019 data [83].

The studied Spanish hotel chains have international presence, with hotels in numerous world destinations, and they publish very complete sustainability and CSR reports, with additional information on their human capital and the actions taken to guarantee decent work environments (many of them are part of Global Compact-UN, Wellbeing Economy Alliance-WEF, etc.). For the purposes of this study, we reviewed companies' latest CSR reports.

Aspects analyzed:

- Adherence to the SDGs and how they are applied at the hotel chain;
- Good sustainability practices (recycling and energy saving);
- EMSs or Environmental Management Systems and certifications (ISO 14000 and ISO 15000);
- Human resource practices linked to decent work: non-discrimination, equality, justice and fair wages;
- Mention of green jobs in corporate documentation.

All the hotels analyzed mention numerous sustainable practices in the areas of recycling, waste management and energy saving. All the companies implemented EMSs, most of them with ISO 14000 certificates. Their reports, published in 2020, reflect an interest in

keeping human teams motivated and engaged during the pandemic through numerous communication and training actions (in the way of WBE). Additionally, all of them mention varied collaborations with numerous NGOs and charitable organizations. They all present aspects of fair treatment, support for diversity, benefits, work–life balance measures, training and equal opportunities. None mention job opportunities in green jobs. In the case of chains such as NH Hotels, they mentioned appearing in the Dow Jones Sustainability Index as best in its class. Launched in 1999, the Dow Jones Sustainability™ World Index (DJSI World) is the first set of global indices to track the largest and leading sustainability-driven publicly listed companies. It measures social, environmental and economic dimensions for the listed companies [85].

After interviewing the experts, they confirmed that the number of possible green jobs, at least as defined by the ILO in the most restrictive definition, is relatively small in large hotel chains, focusing above all on the relatively small teams in charge full time of environmental management within organizations, and mostly at HQ level, with the delegation of some activities on hotel directors. The operational jobs at the heart of the business remain traditional and important in number within the Spanish hospitality industry. The greatest impact of actions associated with core sustainability practices, such as recycling and waste disposal, are frequently outsourced through external companies that are in charge of recycling waste from hotel establishments and other sustainability support services. Thus, most of the basic green activities (waste disposal, recycling, energy saving and use of renewable energies) is subcontracted, with the exception of Meliá, which has a team of engineers that design and measure main sustainability activities, even though they also externalized the main basic processes with external companies. Personnel costs is a critical issue in hospitality, so the trend is keeping these technical and very specialized activities outsourced.

#### 4. Discussion and Conclusions

The scope of this article was to analyze whether the very optimistic prospect for green jobs announced by the UE have been achieved in 2021, and whether green jobs are relevant in the tourism industry in Spain by now. Although UNWTO and ILO state that there are good opportunities for green jobs in the tourism sector, an analysis of the Spanish hospitality confirms that green jobs in their original definition (recycling, renewable energies, waste disposal, environmental training) are still limited in the Spanish Tourism industry. However, the prospects for future increase are important, as awareness about green and environmental issues is steadily increasing in large Spanish hotel chains, as is shown through the analysis of their CSR reports and numerous environmental actions put in place by the top players at the Spanish hospitality industry. In addition, international pressure and EU policies to increase sustainability will have an impact on European hospitality.

Regarding the increase of green jobs, if we embrace the wider definition, that is, a decent job which allows a reasonable quality of living, the analysis of the practices of main Spanish hotel chains show a consistent effort to increase the amount of quality jobs, by improving key human resources aspects such as salaries, benefits, rewards and recognition systems and work–life balance policies, all of these aspects mentioned in the Eurofund Workind Condition Reports.

Regarding the increase of traditional green jobs, both lines of information, the one provided by the experts in sustainability at Instituto Tecnológico Hotelero (ITH) and hotel directors, and the analysis of CSR reports show that green jobs (in their most restricted definition) are mostly circumscribed to HQs, with some activities delegated in hotel managers. The access to specific numbers at the hotel industry are very difficult to obtain, in part because this information is kept confidential by every hotel chain and because the amount of full green jobs is still low in the industry, with many traditional green jobs (recycling, waste disposal, renewable energies, etc.) outsourced in different suppliers. What it is also clear in the industry is that the majority of the current hotel jobs will include aspects of sustainability. Thus, we will not see a great increase of “pure” green jobs, at least not at

the present moment, but rather a “greenazation” of the traditional jobs in the hotel industry, with the inclusion of green tasks and activities in a wide range of hotel jobs.

The largest Spanish hotel holdings are making a great effort on key sustainability issues such as waste disposal and wellbeing issues. In the first step of this strategic reconversion, the Spanish hotel holdings are putting in place environmental management systems backed in all cases analyzed by ISO 14000 certificates and a commitment to generating decent and sustainable jobs. These efforts have a triple benefit: They contribute to sustainability, increase hotel reputation among customers and candidates and increase employee’s pride of belonging. More than the creation of new positions linked to green jobs in hospitality, what most likely happens in the sector is the addition of green skills in already existing job profiles, that is training in new skills and knowledge linked to the green economy. Job descriptions of most of the professional positions in the hotel sector would increasingly include green skills and sustainability awareness, but, at the moment, a significant increase in green jobs within the hotel industry is not noticeable.

This transformation of the sector is necessary. Additionally, and because of the changes brought back by digital transition and its impact in the business culture, the hotels and their employees cannot be more focused on quality of service. The reconversion of the sector has to deal with the first step of the digital economy—the gig economy—which includes the collaborative and circular economy, the autonomous economy and the orange economy. The next step of the digital economy is WBE: The new green jobs (according to the Ricardo’s effect or readjustment) have to attend to an industry of emotions and experiences; so it is necessary to connect with talent-collaborators, who are more productive, and they keep the sustainable 3P relation in a motivational way (not as a coercive issue, better as a win–win game with higher satisfaction and wellbeing for everyone [8–10,17,64,65,86]).

About the limitations of this paper, one is that this is case study, because it is based on a qualitative analysis of available data, literature reviews and institutional working-papers. Therefore, data provided from the Spanish hotel industry is mostly qualitative and not comparable with quantitative data from other countries or industries. Future research should be able to analyze quantitative information and the situation of green jobs among all EU countries and across different industries.

A complementary study (as a future research line) should analyze the sector of small hotels and rural and ecological hotels that have doubled in number in the last decade and that can bring out more than 100% of green jobs and more varied and flexible environmental management systems.

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