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Tourism Workplaces and Young Adults' Experiences of Socialisation into the World of Work

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Title: Tourism Workplaces and Young Adults' Experiences of Socialisation into the World of Work

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Abstract:

Tourism and hospitality jobs are often promoted positively as accessible and flexible workplaces for young adults, enabling them to combine study with work. At the same time, there is a dissonance as tourism and hospitality workplaces are associated with poor working conditions, exploitative practices, long and irregular hours, high labour turnover, and high prevalence and under-reporting of harassment and bullying.

Despite increasing numbers of students working to cover costs of rising tuition fees, the pressure of the employability agenda and the broader context of youth unemployment, students' working lives remain largely under-researched. This is in part due to their employment being perceived as transient, a stopover to a 'proper' career post-graduation, and thus less worthy of sociological exploration. Yet, a large part of students' early employment trajectory and socialisation into the world of work takes place in tourism and hospitality workplaces which act as work socialisation spaces, impacting on work identity formation and normalisation of certain working practices. Thus, exploring young adults' experiences of work is key to enhance understanding of how future generations of employees are socialised into normalising flexibility and work precarisation.

Drawing on 47 interviews with full-time students employed in UK tourism and hospitality workplaces, this paper explores young adults' meanings and understandings of work formed through their early employment experiences in UK tourism and hospitality. It goes beyond the common discourse of skills acquisition into a broader, and often neglected, understanding of the meaning of work for young people and their work socialisation experiences. In this way, it challenges assumptions around the appropriateness of these jobs for young adults at the beginning of their employment journeys and the kind of work practices they normalize.
