

# Can't wait for the winter: Self-reported effects of seasonal employment on hospitality workers' wellbeing and job satisfaction

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# Croatia



**Can't wait for the winter: Self-reported effects of seasonal  
employment on hospitality workers' wellbeing and job satisfaction**

**Ante Vukasović**

**Dubrovnik, 2018.**

**RIT Croatia**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Atypical forms of employment, particularly seasonal work, are becoming more common in the hospitality industry because of seasonal nature of the destination and therefore, it is important to research the effect of this type of employment on workers well being. This paper investigates and compares the self-reported effects of various seasonal work arrangements on employees' physical and mental well being and job satisfaction.

Questionnaire was delivered to 100 Dubrovnik hospitality workers, measuring physical and mental well being and job satisfaction. Results show that workers feel that atypical employment causes damage to their physical and mental well being, while self reported job satisfaction is lower compared to permanent employment models. The greatest damage was reported in lack of sleep, tiredness, nervousness and general life satisfaction among seasonal and permanent seasonal workers. This represent major problem in tourism sector, workers are feeling unhappy, tired and overloaded by the amount of work. If these practices continue Croatia may experience lack in seasonal workforce, especially when European Union opened foreign job markets available. Croatia should increase the number of permanent contracts and introduce better job conditions for seasonal workers. Keywords: hospitality employees, seasonality, atypical employment, physical wellbeing, mental wellbeing, job satisfaction

## **INTRODUCTION**

### *Seasonality and atypical employment in tourism*

Tourism is a highly seasonal business. When talking about seasonality in tourism it is defined as "Shift in the demand during the different periods of the year. It can be expressed in the number of visitors, the expenditure of the visitors, the traffic on highways and other forms of transportation, the employment or in the number of admissions to attractions."(Butler, 1994).

Focus of this paper will be on the employment in and during the season, more precisely on the individual well being of seasonal workers as opposed to permanent workers.

There are two causes of seasonality, natural and institutional. Natural causes are driven by natural effects, temperature, sun, snow and weather conditions in general. Institutional factors are "man-made"; they can be characterized as social-convection connected with religion, culture and popular holidays (Weidner, 2006).

Dubrovnik is example of seasonal destination driven by natural causes, while Zagreb is perfect example of institutional seasonal destination, because of famous winter festival during the December and January. Dubrovnik records more than 50% of tourist overnights in July and August, while Zagreb records increase in the December and January (Croatian tourist agency).

To meet the changing demand for tourism services during different times of the year, hotels, restaurants and other tourism businesses use several types of temporary employment in addition to permanent, full time workers: seasonal employment, agency temporary, contingent and fixed contract employment (Dawson et al., 2014). Seasonal employment refers to positions in the certain organization that are available for only one part of the year. For example ski industries will hire workers when the slopes and mountains are covered with snow (Money Zine). Agency temporary employment is considered as temporary employment, where certain agencies which are specialized to match suitable jobs with skilled people, for short – time period. For example if a hotel needs waiters for a special event, an agency can find suitable workers (Euro Found). Casual or contingent employment is, working when called; employer and employee have relationship based on the work needed to be done (Mighty Recruiter). Fixed contract employment serves to fill certain “gaps”, it is a contract with given duration, and expiration date is known in advance. For example, if hotel

receptionist takes maternity leave, the substitute receptionist can fill in the gap for agreed period (The Economic Times, Fixed-term Employment). All of the types above involve intensive work rhythm and pace.

In the last few decades, tourism is constantly growing and increasing. Today it is considered one of the fastest growing sectors in the world contributing 10% of world GDP, also it consists 1 in 10 jobs worldwide (UNTWO). Tourist arrivals increased over last 6 decades, starting from 25 million in 1950, to 1.235 billion in 2016. International global earnings from tourism increased from 2 billion in 1950 to 1,220 billion in 2016, expressed in US dollars. Tourism as an export industry is in rapid growth and now days is ranked 3<sup>rd</sup>, after chemical and fuel industry, thus overtaking ahead of automotive industry (UNTWO).

Considering that seasonality is driven by the amount of work and demand increasing and more employees are needed, employers benefit from atypical employment models. Two biggest benefits are cost saving and tax advantages (Mjere.hr). Until 2018, these permanent seasonal workers were paid 35-70% of their regular salary during the winter season when they did not physically report to work. However, in 2018, laws were changed, limiting these off season salaries. Currently, workers on this employment model cannot be paid more than the equivalent unemployment compensation that would be paid to registered unemployed workers. While many permanent seasonal workers and employers have expressed disappointment with this change (Mjere.hr) the law remains in effect.

#### *Consequences of seasonal employment*

Some studies have shown that "flexible" types of employment can lead to higher job satisfaction and life quality in hospitality as in other branches, but mainly for the highly educated and skilled individuals (Guest and Clinton, 2006). When flexible jobs are voluntary, job and life satisfaction can improve, for example for self-employed people in particular both

in tourism and other types of employment flexible work schedules or atypical employment can be attractive to women, it offers certain flexibility which help maintain balance between work and family (La Valle et al., 2002)., or if this type of employment is chosen as the side job, for an extra earnings.

However, research also shows that seasonal or atypical employees may suffer in various ways, whether it is physical health, mental health or social well being; also job security is not guaranteed (Dawson, 2014)

This is especially true if the seasonal employment is not voluntary, but it was the only choice, then this type of employment causes damage for workers physical and mental well-being (Dawson et al., 2014). Workers tend to have higher level of stress, anxiety, work – family conflicts and worse family relationships, which leads to psychological distress (Dawson, 2014).

While on the other side atypical employment does not have long lasting harmful health effect (Bardasi and Francesconi,2004), rather, seasonal and part time workers are identify themselves with lower physical and mental well being as lower job dissatisfaction (Bardasi and Francesconi, 2004).

Several studies show that job dissatisfaction is very high among seasonal and part time workers, mostly because of job security and poor or not equal working conditions (Dawson, 2014).

The relationship between atypical employment and well being is determined by the worker itself, voluntary and/or non-voluntary work, type of the contract and the economic ‘power’ of the country in the matter of the labor market (Bardasi and Francesconi, 2004). Usually worker was forced to choose seasonal employment because it was the only available option.

Bardasi and Francesconi' (2004) found that negative effects of temporary job only reflects on job dissatisfaction, while health variables are barely significant or insignificant. Bardasi and Francesconi (2004) measured consequences of atypical employment on four aspects of health, including: mental health, general health, job and life satisfaction. There is contrast between workers who are working seasonally and permanent, and their reports of individual well being. Workers who are working seasonally or part time are reporting more often psychological problems, lower job and life satisfaction (Bardasi and Francesconi, 2004). Connection in between poor health and atypical employment, was found in Clark et al. 2001, and Rodriguez, 2002, research but yet insignificant in case of British workers, while higher in case of German workers.

Taylor (2006) in the similar research recognized higher negative effects on psychological well being of workers who are working temporary or casually, on contrary to those who are holding fixed contracts. Workers were reporting to be more stressed and depressed, with questioning their own self worth.

Seasonal or atypical hospitality employment is also often connected to the risk of overwork, extended shifts, and lack of time off (Dawson, 2014). Overwork and lack of time off causes damage to the body, mind and work performance. Workers have higher chance of getting serious defects, such as heart attacks, heart problems and depression. Within all that, people who work more than 8 hours a day have problem completing assignments and mastering new skills, where the work performance suffers the most (Thu-Huong Ha, 2015).

*Dubrovnik, Dalmatia and full time seasonal "stalni sezonac"*

Dubrovnik as highly seasonal destination employs 7000 seasonal workers, around 3500 are "stalni-sezonci" while other half are "regular" seasonal workers. Dubrovnik is lacking "regular" seasonal workforce by 2000 due to increasing shift in the demand (Jutarnji List,

Farcic, 2017). During the July and August, Dubrovnik record more than 50% of tourist overnights (Croatian tourist agency).

In addition to regular seasonal workers who work for not more than four months during the calendar year. Some examples of seasonal workers include students who are working when they are not in school, and they get paid by the hour (MidwestHR, How Seasonal Employees Affect Your Business)

In recent years, hospitality employers in coastal Dalmatia have relied on a special form of seasonal employment called "stalni sezonac" or "full time seasonal worker". These employees work for at least 6 months with the same employer and they agree to work at least one more season with the same employer. It affects Croatian seasonal workforce and it is even implemented into the law. By signing 'redistribution of work hours' contract, employee is legally allowed to work for the few months in intensive pace, sometimes including more than 8 hour working time, split shifts, no days off, more than allowed night shifts during the season. During the winter, off season, employees do not report to work at all and receive 35-70% of the fixed monthly salary. According to 'stalni sezonac' status, certain security and stability is present for both employers and employees (Croatian Employment Service). This particular model allows employers to meet increased demand during peak season and allows them to break certain regulations that are normally required for workers' protection.

Workers benefit from this arrangement because they are getting paid from 35-70% of their paycheck when they don't work and they have a secured job for the next year with same employer (Peric, Slobodna Dalmacija, 2014). However they often work for months at a time with no days off, on extended shifts of even up to 12 hours a day. Employers also see benefits with these measurements, because they bonded their best workers for the next season and also they are paying less of taxes (Croatian Ministry of Labor)



In 2018, the government reduced ‘out of season paychecks’, thus causing the protest from both employers and employees. Paychecks were reduced to match unemployment benefit. Employees stated that this new regulation is forcing them to leave Croatia and work abroad, because they are losing all the ‘privileges’ of unemployed workforce, mainly ability to get employed. Workers state that it is unacceptable not to earn money during the three months out of season or receiving same amount of benefit as people who don’t work at all, and not be able to find another job because of the status of ‘stalni sezonac’. This means that ‘stalni sezonac’ cannot be legally employed in the winter or they will lose their paycheck. Employers have similar opinion; they are happy with already existing law regulations and state that tourism will suffer the most considering workforce and service by implementing new regulations (‘Ovo razuman čovjek ne može napraviti’, Net.hr, 2017).

There is high demand for seasonal workforce, which Croatia is lacking in present. Official number of lack in tourism workforce was 2700 in 2017, according to employment bureau and it will increase every year according to shift in the demand. The main reason for the lack of seasonal work force is going to work abroad and it is labeled as European problem, rather than just Croatian (Koretic, Slobodna Dalmacija, 2017).

## **METHOD**

### *Purpose*

The research investigated relationship between types of atypical employment in hospitality and self-reported physical and mental well-being as well as job satisfaction.

### *Participants*

The questionnaire was completed by 100 Dubrovnik hospitality workers (53 males and 47 females) between the ages of 19 and 62 during March, 2018. Most of the participants (70)

were employed in hotels. Participants included 38 seasonal workers (mostly college students), 32 permanent seasonal workers and 24 permanent employees with seasonal changes in work volume and 6 permanent employees with little to no seasonal changes in work volume.

These particular groups of people were chosen because of their experience in tourism sector and for comparison between different types of employment in measured aspects. Informed consent was obtained from the participants. Underage workers (less than 18) were excluded from this research because of lack of working experience.

### *Instrument*

The first section of the questionnaire included 10 statements (both positive and negative) measuring job satisfaction, self reported job performance, and work intensity, with which participants were asked to agree or disagree on a 5-point Likert scale. Statements were adapted from the job satisfaction instrument developed by Taylor (2006) the section included statements about days off, shift, and schedule length, preference for seasonal over full time work, and use of time during off season.

The third section included 15 statements about wellbeing. Participants were asked to agree or disagree with each statement on a 5-point Likert scale, once regarding their wellbeing during the tourist season, and then again for their wellbeing during the off season or low season.

Based on the well-being instrument used by Sell and Nagpal (1992), there were 10 statements about physical wellbeing, (including sleep, diet, fitness, exercise, pain and illness), and 5 statements about mental and emotional wellbeing, (including mood, stress and relationships.)

The last section included 5 demographic items, including type of employment structure. The survey was translated into the native language of the participants (Croatian) and proofread by a professional. Minor wording changes were made after pilot testing and feedback.

### *Procedure*

Paper copies of the questionnaire were delivered to three hotel receptionists and distributed by them to their coworkers. Also, parts of the surveys were administered personally at the RIT Dubrovnik campus and Dubrovnik airport. 108 surveys were distributed, 8 were discarded due to incomplete information. Data was analyzed using an Excel spreadsheet. Mean values were calculated for each employment type. Negative statements were reverse coded.

## **RESULTS**

### *Physical and mental well-being*

Workers in every employment category reported better well being in all aspects out of season, compared to in season, although the negative effects of seasonal work were stronger on their physical well being than on their mental well being. Greatest damage caused by seasonal work was reported in sleep quality, tiredness, general physical condition and general physical problems. All workers reported sleeping less, feeling more tired and physically feeling worst in the season while working (Figure 1). Participants reported less effect of seasonal work on their habits of eating and exercise. Permanent seasonal workers reported greatest effect on their physical and mental well being, while the least effect was reported by permanent full time employees.

Considering mental well being, workers reported biggest differences in general life satisfaction', where again general life "satisfaction" was higher out of season, and being more nervous, also during the season. Family relationships were not strongly affected. These results do indicate that intensive pace and overwork do cause physical problem for workers, considering lack of sleep and report of worst general physical condition. Also results indicate higher job satisfaction among permanent rather than temporary employees.

### *Job Satisfaction and Performance*

All workers reported positive levels of overall job satisfaction however highest level of satisfaction was reported by permanent workers with little seasonal variation in workload.

(Figure 2)

Permanent employees are enjoying their jobs the most, feel the least stressed, least bored, most appreciated, and most likely to have regular days off. They also rated themselves highest on job performance.

On the other hand, permanent seasonal workers (*stalni sezonci*) reported feeling the most stressed, least appreciated, poorly treated and least likely to have regular days off. They also reported themselves to be least motivated to give their best performance.

Interestingly all four groups rated themselves positively on job performance (C and D highest) but also admitted to “slacking off” or doing minimum necessary at times (no significant difference between groups). The biggest differences between permanent and temporary employment were reported in feeling appreciated and overall working conditions. Also all participants expressed the wish for having permanent job, rather than seasonal.

According to the result most satisfied are permanent workers, followed by permanent workers with variation in workload. Most dissatisfied are regular seasonal workers followed by permanent seasonal workers.

Almost 40% of participants (n=39) reported that they do not have a regular and predictable day off during the week. However, nearly half of this group (n=18) nevertheless reported to be satisfied with overall working conditions. Most of this group reported using the winter period for personal relaxation. This category consists of seasonal workers and permanent seasonal workers, followed by insignificant number of permanent workers with changes in

workload. However, an almost equal number of participants with no days off reported being less satisfied with overall conditions (n=21). On contrary the group of least satisfied workers is based on 11 participants, with average age of 31 and with mostly seasonal workers. This category clearly stated that they are not satisfied with temporary seasonal job and prefer permanent employment model.

Considering least satisfied workers, there is 11% of workers who reported lowest in working conditions and '' no days off'' statement. According to most important indicators (sleep, tiredness, nervousness and general satisfaction) this category of workers scored very low. (Figure 3)

In the case of most satisfied workers, there were 46% of satisfied workers who reported highest in working conditions and regular days off statement. Most satisfied are permanent workers (22), followed by permanent seasonal workers (14) and seasonal workers (10). According to physical and mental indicators used in results, there is clear difference between the two groups. (Figure 4)

Job performance is not affected by the type of employment, except permanent employees with no changes in seasonal workload, where 83% (n=5) of them reported giving their best performance, 42% (n=16) of seasonal workers reported giving their best performance, 34% (n=11) of permanent seasonal workers and 37, 5% (n=9) of permanent employees with changes in seasonal workload reported giving their best performance. (Figure 5)

Figure 1: Physical and mental well being of all participants in and out of season, where red represents in season and blue out of season.

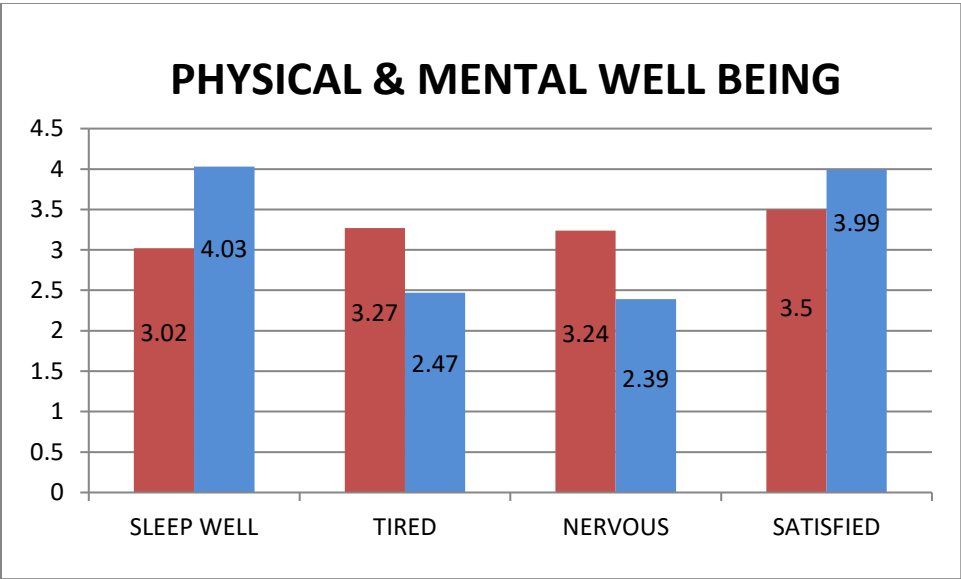


Figure 2: Satisfaction with overall working conditions by employment type.

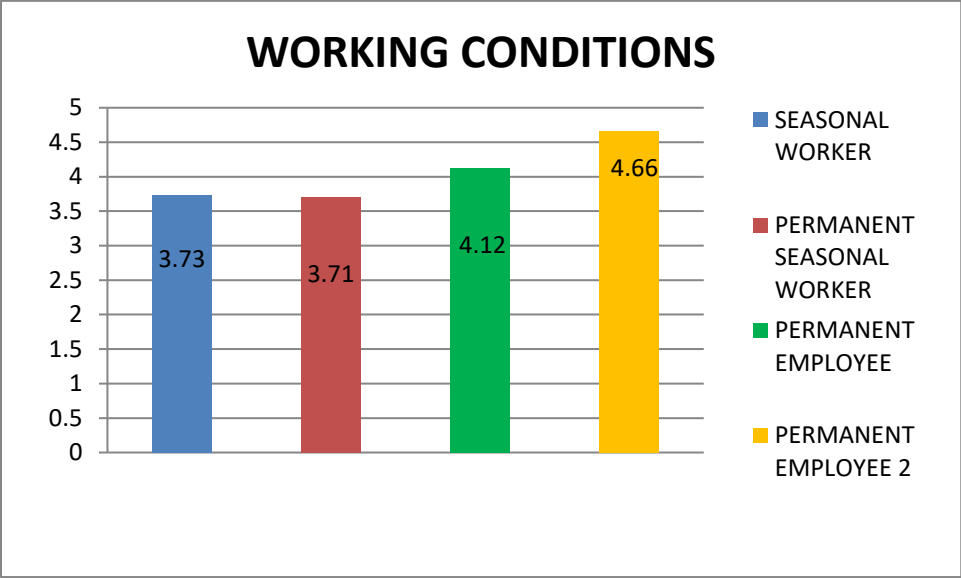


Figure 3: Least satisfied participants.

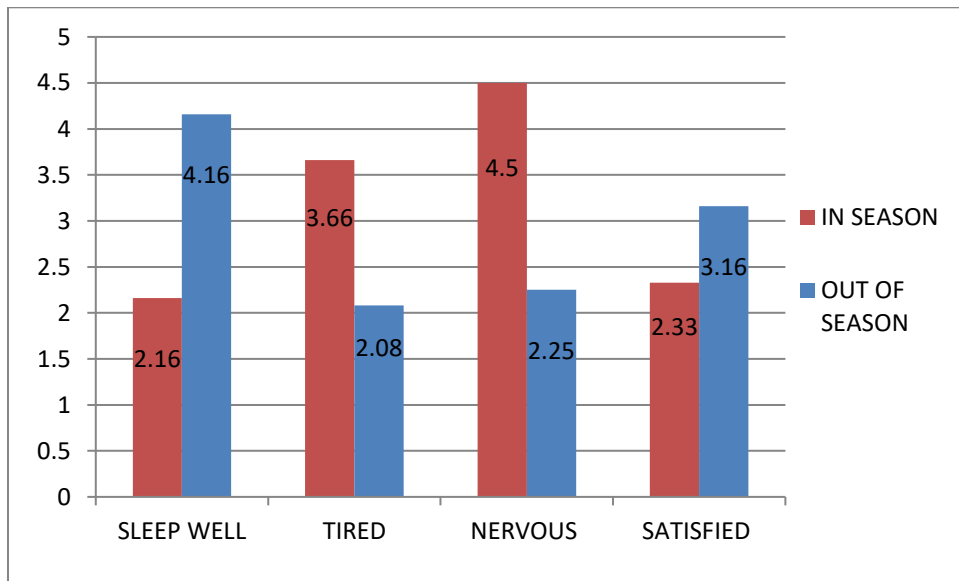


Figure 4: Most satisfied participants.

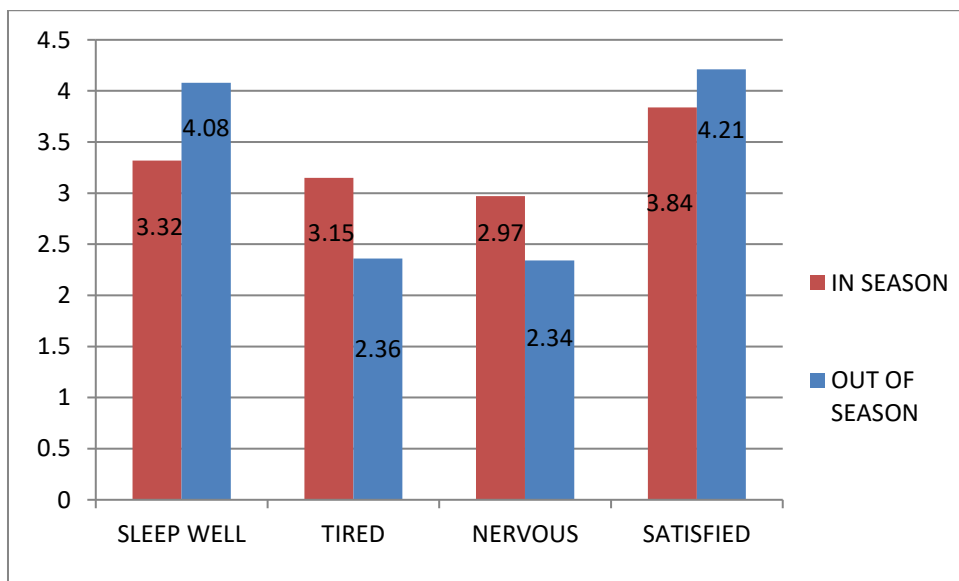


Figure 5: Job performance by employment.



## DISCUSSION

This research confirms previous studies (Dawson, 2014) that show negative effects of seasonal employment on hospitality workers' mental and physical wellbeing. According to this research paper, seasonal and permanent seasonal workers are suffering the most considering mental and physical well being, and also are least satisfied with working conditions. There is noticeable difference between seasonal and permanent seasonal workers compared with permanent contract employees, in all measured aspects. Atypical employment has impact on the individual well being, except when this particular employment model was chosen voluntary, and job satisfaction is higher in the case of permanent rather than temporary employment model. Also this research paper confirms that individual well being and job satisfaction in atypical employment models depends on voluntary nature of the work. If this particular model of employment is chosen voluntary, job satisfaction and physical and/or mental well being is increased.

For this reason Dubrovnik hotels and hospitality industry should provide employees with regular days off during the week and better working conditions in general. They should be



aware that happier employees are performing better. Also Dubrovnik should open summer kindergarten to support kids whose parents are working during the season. If this trend continues in the future, Croatia will lack the seasonal work force, especially after European Union opened foreign job markets, introducing better conditions for a seasonal worker is crucial for keeping the best and most capable workers in Croatia. Also Croatia risk losing young educated people who are going abroad for better opportunities, so called brain drain.

### *Limitations*

While the focus is on Dubrovnik seasonal workers, one very important variable needs to be taken in consideration. As stated before, Dubrovnik is single peak destination, where the mere peak is reached in the hot months of June and July, considering that seasonal workers are exposed to high temperatures, which combined with intense work pace, increases the chances of medical problems, especially those problems connected with heart diseases. Also the sample of permanent workers without seasonal change in the work volume is too small (n=6), thus not providing the most precise values.

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## APPENDIX

### ANKETA ZA TURISTIČKE DJELATNIKE

Molimo zaokružite broj koji odgovara stupnju vašeg objektivnog mišljenja u sljedećim tvrdnjama. Odgovorite na osnovi situacije vašeg trenutnog ili prethodnog radnog mjesta. (Ako ste tek započeli ili niste još započeli raditi novi posao, molim odgovorite prema vašim iskustvima sa zadnjem poslu.)

	Uopće se ne slažem	Ne slažem se	Niti te slažem, niti se ne slažem	Slažem se	Apsolutno se slažem
Uživam u svojom poslu.	1	2	3	4	5
Moj posao je dosadan.	1	2	3	4	5
Ponosan sam na svoj rad.	1	2	3	4	5
Atmosfera na poslu obilježena stresom	1	2	3	4	5
Na poslu osjećam se cijenjen i moj rad se priznaje	1	2	3	4	5
Dajem sve od sebe da pružim vrhunsku uslugu mojim gostima/klijentima	1	2	3	4	5
Zadovoljan sam sa radnim uvjetima općenito.	1	2	3	4	5
Na poslu radim samo kako mi je lakše.	1	2	3	4	5
Moji nadređeni me tretiraju korektno.	1	2	3	4	5
Ima previše posla, preopterećen sam.	1	2	3	4	5

Za svaku tvrdnju dolje napisanu, zaokružite odgovarajući broj na LIJEVOJ strani za period KADA RADITE (npr. sezoni). Za istu tvrdnju, na DESNOJ strani zaokružite odgovor za period KADA NE RADITE ili MANJE RADITE (zimi).

**KADA RADITE (u sezoni)**

**KADA NE RADITE ili MANJE RADITE**

Uopće se ne slažem	Ne slažem se	Niti se slažem, niti se ne slažem	Slažem se	Apsolutno se slažem		Uopće se ne slažem	Ne slažem se	Niti se slažem, niti se ne slažem	Slažem se	Apsolutno se slažem
1	2	3	4	5	Općenito, dobro spavam	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	Održavam relativno dobru fizičku kondiciju	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	Osjećam se umorno ili bez energije	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	Općenito zdravo jedem	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	Imam stabilne i dobre obiteljske odnose	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	Puno pušim	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	Dobro se osjećam fizički	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	Ne spavam dovoljno	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	Jedem puno fast food-a, grickalica, slatkiša itd.	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	osjećam se nervozno ili razdražujuće	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	Zadovoljan sam u globalu	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	Općenito sam dobrog raspoloženje	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	Nisam dovoljno fizički aktivan	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	Osjećam fizičke tegobe (npr. glavobolje, probavne smetnje, bol u leđima)	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	** (Ako ste u vezi) Imam problema ili svade sa suprugom ili partner(ic)om	1	2	3	4	5

**\*\* Ako niste u vezi, molim preskočite ovu izjavu.**

	Uopće se ne slažem	Ne slažem se	Niti se slažem, niti se ne slažem	Slažem se	Apsolutno se slažem
<b>Na ovom radnom mjestu, dobivam najmanje jedan slobodan dan u tjednu</b>	1	2	3	4	5
<b>Na ovom radnom mjestu, znam unaprijed raspored smjena u tjednu</b>	1	2	3	4	5
<b>Na ovom radnom mjestu, znam unaprijed do kada traje moja smjena</b>	1	2	3	4	5
Meni odgovara sezonski posao	1	2	3	4	5
Želio bih stalan posao, u kojemu ima manje razliku intenziteta rada ljeti/zimi	1	2	3	4	5
Zimski period koristim za odmor, druženje, zabavu, hobi, obitelj, ili putovanje	1	2	3	4	5
Zimski period koristim za drugu vrstu zarade	1	2	3	4	5
Zimski period koristim za školovanje	1	2	3	4	5

## OSTALI PODACI

Koja rečenica najbolje opisuje Vaše trenutno ili zadnje radno mjesto? (Zaokružite samo jedan odgovor):

- A. Radim i primam plaću samo nekoliko mjeseci u godini (sezonac).
- B. Radim prekovremeno u sezoni. Zimi ne radim uopće, ali primam plaću ili naknadu.
- C. Radim i primam plaću tijekom cijele godine, ali u sezoni radim pojačanim intenzitetom.
- D. Radim i primam plaću tijekom cijele godine. Zimi i ljeti radim relativno istim intenzitetom.
- E. OSTALO (molim, navedite): \_\_\_\_\_

2. Kako biste opisali razliku u intenzitetu vašeg rada u sezoni i izvan nje?

- A. velika razlika
- B. prilična razlika
- C. mala razlika
- D. bez razlike

3. Koliko imate godine? \_\_\_\_\_

4. Spol (zaokružite): M  Ž

5. Zaposlen(a) u:

- hotelu
- privatni smještaj
- restoran/caffe bar
- turistička agencija
- rent-a-car agencija
- turistički vodič
- zračna luka
- vozač

