

Trade unions and hotel industry: Current trends

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Abstract. The subject of this article is to research the role of trade unions in the hotel industry in this century. Looking at trade union density across the Horeca sector in the EU27 plus Norway, it can be seen that overall density is relatively low (less than 15%), irrespective of the diversity within the Horeca sector in each country. Accordingly, the main objective of this article is to investigate the future of the trade unions in the hotel industry considering social and economic changes of the last few decades. It starts from four hypotheses, which refer to the attitudes of employees and union members towards the role of unions in the hotel industry

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and their power. The results of field research have served as primary data. The survey has been carried out among hotel employees (N=452) along the Adriatic coast in the summer season before the COVID-19 crises. In order to evaluate, formulate and present the findings, the following scientific methods have been applied: analysis and synthesis together with descriptive and inferential statistics.. The main finding of this paper points to the conclusion that employees who achieve high productivity do not have faith in the power of unions in the hotel industry. In terms of demographic variables, union employees above the age of 50 believe the least in the power of unions. These employees mostly point out that they are not adequately rewarded, that their superiors do not help them, and do not respect their working hours. The findings obtained may be significant for trade unions and their representatives to support them to form a new strategy that is necessary for unions to reach their goals.

Keywords: unions, tourism, hotel industry, employees

JEL Classification: E24, L83

1. INTRODUCTION

Since the 1980s, the tourism and the hotel industry have revealed significant increase becoming ones of the largest world industries. At the same time, the number of union members has suffered significant decrease (absolute loss) along with the percentage of trade union employees (relative loss) influencing the power of the unions around the globe. In the hotel industry of the USA, only 8% of the employees belong to the union, while in most European Union member states, the trade union density accounts for about 15% in the hotel industry (UKEssays, 2018). At the same time, the number of precarious types of work is growing (Standing, 2011). Precarious work is a global phenomenon. Precarious work is associated with non-standard work contracts – fixed term, temporary and short term contract, part-time contract, agency work, freelance work, on-call employment (Delibasic et al., 2022), civil contracts. Precarious work has weakened the union as an organization since their membership continues to decline (Edralin, 2014, p. 24).

The hotel industry, in addition to agriculture (seasonal jobs), construction, and entertainment industries, as well as retail sectors, employ a lot of precarious workers (Pupavac et al., 2020). International tourism (Tung & Cuong, 2020; Kosikova et al., 2019; Pavlic et al., 2019) has an influence on structural changes of the employees' work, creates a lot of low-paid jobs, low-skilled precarious types of work and rises the number of foreign labour, even when there is high demand. Thus, the main questions of this article are: What is the influence of precarious work on the union as an organization?, What factors drive the hotel industry to precarious work practices?, What can be done by the unions to combat precarious work?, What are the employees' attitudes towards the role of trade unions in the hotel industry?, Is there a difference between the employees' attitudes towards the role of trade unions in the hotel industry bearing in mind demographic variables and labour productivity?, Do trade unions suit the hotel industry of the 21st century?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND CONCEPT OF RESEARCH

The traditional role of trade unions in contracting trade union rights involves fewer and fewer employees. Although Europe used to be the continent under union, nowadays, it is less and less so. This is a Croatian, European, but also a global trend. The decreasing number of union members is lower coverage

by collective agreements (Goerke et al., 2015). For example, 85% of employees in Germany during 1985 were covered by collective agreements, while in 2010 this percentage was only 61.05%. The number of employees covered by collective agreements is much higher in the public than in the private sector. According to the European Trade Union Institute (Fulton, 2015), the highest number of union members in 2012 was in the Scandinavian countries: in Finland 74% of the total number of employees, in Sweden 70% and in Denmark 67%. The lowest number of union members was in Estonia (10%), France (8%) and Lithuania (8%).

In the Republic of Croatia, 35% of employees are members of the union. The European average is 23%. Growing number of non-standard forms of work contract and change of the structure of employees are reasons for lower number of union members in Croatia. Factors that have led to the emergence of non-standard forms of work contract (Kalleberg & Vallas, 2018) are globalization, digital revolution, lower number of the union members and financialisation. Those factors will be present in the future as well. The pendulum of power between workers (security) and employers (flexibility) has shifted significantly to the side of employers, representing a "new normal" that allows employers to more flexibly align the required number of people with planned production (cf. Figure 1).

Figure 1 illustrates the movement between flexibility and security on the labour market. Flexible markets led to demands for greater security in the 1930s. The end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century was marked by employers' demand for greater flexibility on the labour market (Standing, 2011). But the COVID-19 crisis will once again highlight the importance of work security and the protection of workers' rights.

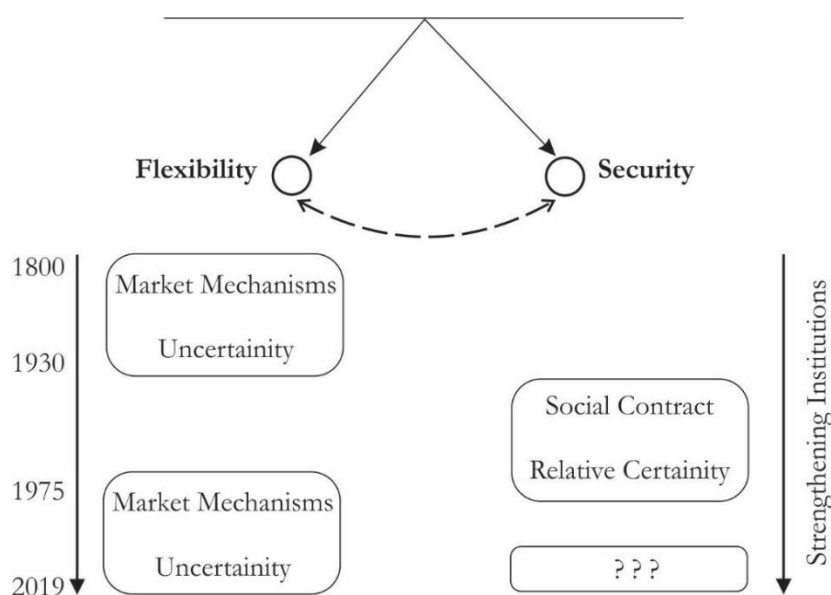


Figure 1. Pendulum of power on the labour market

Source: authors elaboration basing on (Kalleberg, 2009, p. 4)

This issue became especially significant for frontline workers, particularly, employed in hospitality sector (Kostynets et al., 2021; Remeikienė & Bagdonas, 2021). In resolving the question of whether more flexibility or more security is more appropriate for the functioning of the labour market, the Danish "flexicurity" solution has been imposed. This solution is perhaps an example of the best balance (Westergaard-Nielsen, 2008, p. 44) between flexibility (flexible hiring and firing rules for employers) and

security (social security system for workers). In times of the Covid-19 advanced forms of appropriate solutions are being used, particularly, digitally mediated collaborative work and communication (Bauters, 2021). Institutional support for trade unions is of particular importance in establishing a balance between flexibility and security (Draskovic, et al., 2020). Institutes of special importance are: organization and coverage of collective bargaining, representation at work, receiving unemployment benefits through trade unions (Brady, 2007; Checchi & Visser, 2005; Ebbinghaus & Visser, 1999; Rasmussen & Pontusson, 2017; Scruggs & Lange, 2002; Western, 1997). Important benefits guaranteed within collective agreements are possibilities of vocational training which led to lower staff turnover and higher economic growth consequently (Samoliuk et al., 2021) due to the increase of satisfaction with work that is important constituents of well-being social dimension (Aliyev, 2021; Fedor, 2021; Tvaronavičienė et al., 2021; Vovk & Vovk, 2017).

The causes of the growth of precarious work (Becic et al., 2019), especially in the countries of Southern Europe, should not be found in the exploitative desires of employers or modern technologies that take workers' jobs, but in outdated and rigid labour legislation. Also, there are more and more people who work in small businesses and service industries that traditionally don't have many union members. The causes of the growth of precarious work in the hotel industry can be found in:

- lower expenses or costs for salaries and benefits to increase profits,
- reduce the number of permanent workers,
- promote labour flexibility and
- weaken union or prevent unionization.

The main actions that can be taken by the unions to combat precarious work are (Edralin, 2014, p. 23):

- lobby for new laws or changes in current laws to promote security of the employees,
- recruit or organize precarious workers into unions,
- include contract workers in collective bargaining arrangements,
- negotiate for the same wages, working conditions, benefits and job stability for precarious workers and
- demand the employers reduce or eliminate the use of contract labour and other forms of precarious work. However, the question arises to what extent the actual and potential members of the union believe that this can be achieved through union work.

Tourism is extremely labour intensive. It is among the world's top creators of jobs. European Commission (2019) estimates, that the hotel industry in the European Union employs more than 13.3 million people. In the Republic of Croatia about 140,000 people. Of these, 35 to 40,000 are employees with a permanent contract. This is important to keep in mind because only about 10% of seasonal workers join a union. It is a large and mostly unorganized labour contingent. Trade union membership in the Republic of Croatia covers only 18% of employees in the hotel industry.

There are two representative unions in the tourism sector, namely (Croatian Employers' Association, 2016): a) Trade Union of Services and Tourism of Croatia and b) Trade Union of Istria, Kvarner and Dalmatia. The hotel industry creates a large number of low-paid, low-skilled, seasonal jobs that do not require any special abilities and skills (Lee, Hampton & Jeyacheya, 2015; Meliani & Gomes 2010). High rate of fluctuation (McGinley et al., 2017), work for tips and possibility for quick entry into the workforce for youth, women and migrant workers are just some of the factors that don't go in favor of unionization. The union membership in the European Horeca sector in most countries is below 15% (cf. Table 1).

Table 1

Trade union density across the Horeca sector in the EU27 plus Norway

HORECA sector trade union density rate	<1%	1%-5%	5%-15%	15%-30%	>30%
Group of countries	Lithuania Estonia Slovakia Czech Rep. Poland	France Latvia Germany Bulgaria UK	Spain Austria Netherlands Romania Hungary Portugal	Luxemburg Malta Greece Norway	Belgium Denmark Slovenia Cyprus Finland Sweden Italy
Compared to overall trade union density rates	Varies between 5% and 21%, except for the UK with 27% density rate	Varies between 5% and 21%, except for the UK with 27% density rate	Varies between 16% and 35%	Varies between 40% and 53%,	All above 54%, except Slovenia with 41%

Source: Gerogiannis et al., 2012.

The decreasing number of union members has been explained by proactive human resource management practices, ie the fact that in organizations where employees are only taken care exclusively by the union, worse indicators of human management are present. In hotel companies where there is a developed human resources department for employees' welfare, management takes care of the introduction and use of various practices that encourage employee motivation and satisfaction, knowing that motivated and satisfied employees are more productive and thus contribute to organizational success. In an organization in which human resource management is excellent, employees do not need to join a union in the fight to exercise their rights because human resource management "cares" for them better than unions can (Poloski Vokic, 2009, p. 238; Linhartova, 2021).

It is not a surprise that leading hoteliers point out that successful hotels invest in their people (Littlejohn, Watson, 2004). Hotel companies that want to avoid the trap of low productivity and low wages necessarily need to improve their human resource management policies. This can be done through the establishment of performance standards, measuring and controlling labour productivity, improving the functions of planning and obtaining human resources, investing in human resources training, improving the system of rewards and motivation of the employees.

We have to ask ourselves the question, what do workers in the hotel industry want, or what do they need? The answer to this question seems simple. These are primarily higher wages, more suitable working hours, better working conditions, job security, and safe working environment. J. Wilhelms (UKEssays, 2018) points out that workers in the hotel industry need a permanent campaign to transform low-wage work into decent jobs that give people the opportunity to make it into the middle class. Factors that affect labour productivity are (Avelini Holjevac & Vrtodusic Hrgovic, 2012): wages and benefits, motivation, education and training, working conditions, labour standards, planning and organization of work, morale and working culture. These are prerequisites for increasing labour productivity in the hotel industry. As it is very difficult for each individual worker and each special occupation to determine labour productivity in tourism, labour productivity is most often expressed in value indicators (millions of HRK per employee). According to the CBS (2017), the activity of providing accommodation and food preparation and serving, in addition to administrative and auxiliary service activities, belongs to the group of activities with the lowest labour productivity (HRK 131,300 in 2017).

Accordingly, a conceptual research model was defined (cf. Figure 2).

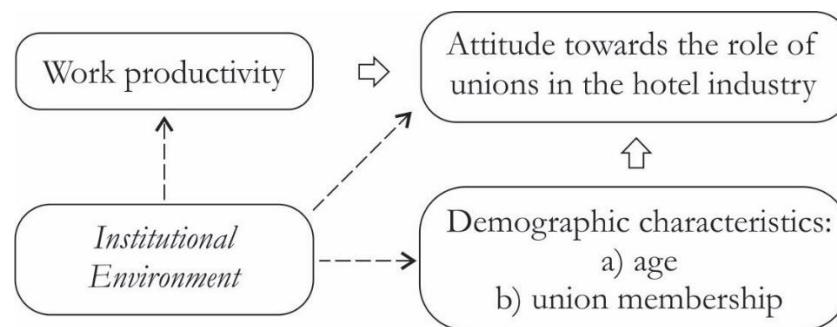


Figure 2. Conceptual model of research of employees' attitudes about the role of trade unions in the hotel industry

Source: own elaboration

A specter of uncertainty is circulating over the future of the union. The downsizing of the formal (public) sector has led to a sharp decline in union organization in many developing economies, creating an urgent need for unions to expand into the informal sector in order to gain a wider base of members. (Viser, 2019). There are four resources of power (Ioannou, 2020): economic-structural, associational-organisational, institutional and societal-communicative. Institutional resources are an important source of union power. There are five groups of activities through which unions exert pressure to achieve their goals: (1.) collective bargaining, (2.) complaints, (3.) tripartism, (4.) political activities, and (5.) industrial action. Employees' belief in the decline of trade union power is becoming more widespread due to global economic trends in which there is a more intense struggle of trade unions to preserve acquired rights than to obtain new ones (Poloski Vokic, Obadic, 2012). The future of unions in the hotel industry is becoming questionable.

The research of employees' attitudes towards the role of trade unions in the hotel industry of the Republic of Croatia, depending on age and trade union membership, is based on five statements (adapted from: Gutic et al., 2016): I generally do not believe in trade union power in the hotel industry (Power U). I have been appropriately rewarded for my work (Reward). My superiors are always available and ready to help (S_Help). The hotel company in which I work pursues an appropriate and fair human resources policy (Fer_HRMP). Supervisors respect my working hours and help me use them effectively (Respect_WT). Respondents were required to express their degree of agreement with the above statements on a Likert scale with a score from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

In this paper the valuation of employee productivity has been made based on four questions: a) With what grade will you mark your work success in the preceding period? b) What do you think with which mark will your guest grade your work success? c) What do you think with which mark would your colleagues grade your work success? d) With which mark would your supervisor grade your work success? The evaluation was performed on an ordinal scale with grades from 1 to 5. Accordingly, the surveyed employees in the hotel industry were, based on their answers, classified into three groups according to labour productivity.

The first group consists of employees who show *high productivity* - this stratum is made from the employees who assessed their work with the highest mark and thought that all the other participants (guests, work colleagues and supervisors) would assess their work success with the highest mark too.

The second group consists of employees who show *moderate productivity* - this stratum is made from the employees who assessed their work with a grade lower than five and thought that all the other participants (guests, work colleagues and supervisors) would assess their work success with the same mark.

The third group consists of employees who show *low productivity* - this stratum is made from the employees who assessed their work with a mark which differed from the mark they thought other participants (guests, work colleagues, supervisors) would give them.

In accordance with the statements with which the respondents were supposed to express the degrees of their agreement / disagreement, the research hypotheses were set:

- *Hypothesis 1:* The role of trade unions in the hotel industry is threatened by further marginalization.
- *Hypothesis 2:* Employees with different level of work productivity have a significantly different view of the role of unions in the hotel industry.
- *Hypothesis 3:* Employees of different age groups have a significantly different view of the role of trade unions in the hotel industry.
- *Hypothesis 4:* Union members, unlike other employees, have a more positive attitude towards the role of unions in the hotel industry.

2. SAMPLE AND METHODS

Field research was based on a survey questionnaire filled among employees in the hotel industry. Survey was conducted in the period from 15th May until 15th September 2018. The survey was anonymous, employees had no obligations whatsoever in filling in the survey. 523 questionnaires were collected out of which 452 questionnaires were correct. Sample (N = 452) was made up of 179 (39,61%) men and 273 (60,39%) women. 222 or 49,12% of them has worked in the place of their residence while 230 or 50,88% of them worked outside their place of residence. 361 or 79,87% of the employee had the part-time contract, while the full-time had every fifth employee or 91 or 20,13% of them. The largest number of survey participants was between 17 and 25 years old, that is, 185 of them or 40,93 %, followed by survey participants at the age from 26 to 35, 147 of them or 32,52%. Education structure of survey participants is given in Table 2.

Table 2

Education structure of survey participants

Level of education	Count	Cumulative - Count	Percent	Cumulative – Percent
Elementary school	21	21	4.64602	4.6460
Secondary school-3 years	136	157	30.08850	34.7345
Secondary school-4 years	220	377	48.67257	83.4071
Faculty	75	452	16.59292	100.0000

Source: authors, based on results obtained by surveying guests

In order to corroborate constructed scientific hypotheses, a larger number of scientific methods were used from which a polling method, analysis and synthesis method, descriptive statistics method, t-test, and analysis of variance (ANOVA) should be singled out.

3. RESULTS

Descriptive statistics in the form of arithmetic means, min and max value and standard deviations for respondents are computed for various items of the employees' attitude towards union in the hotel industry (Table 3).

Table 3

Descriptive statistics of employees' attitude towards union in the hotel industry (N=452)

	Valid N	Mean	Minimum	Maximum	Std. Dev.
Power_U	452	3.223451	1.000000	5.000000	1.169107
Reward	452	3.163717	1.000000	5.000000	1.204100
S_help	452	4.046460	1.000000	5.000000	1.082028
Fer_HRMP	452	3.340708	1.000000	5.000000	1.129656
Respect_WT	452	3.634956	1.000000	5.000000	1.140630

Source: own research

Based on the data from table 3, the highest average grade of all five listed statements has: My superiors are always available and ready to help ($M = 4.04$). It is also encouraging that this statement has the smallest deviation of empirical values from the arithmetic mean ($SD = 1.08$). The lowest average grade is achieved by the statement: I have been appropriately rewarded for my work.

This statement at the same time has the largest deviation of empirical values from the arithmetic mean ($SD = 1.20$), which suggests that there are large differences in wages between employees in the hotel industry. A large, unjustified gap between employees can lead to dissatisfaction and their counterproductive behavior.

Hypothesis 1: The role of trade unions in the hotel industry is threatened by further marginalization.

Viser (2019) suggests four daring but equally realistic future scenarios for trade unions: marginalization, dualization, replacement and revitalization. The average grade ($M = 3.22$) per statement, I generally do not believe in the power of unions in the hotel industry is not encouraging for further unionization of the hotel industry. In fact, it points to the conclusion of the possibility of further marginalization of trade unions in the hotel industry. There are no statistically significant differences in demographic variables and beliefs in union power. Equally, no statistically significant difference was found between labour productivity and belief in union power. These findings suggest acceptance of H1 hypothesis.

In order to verify the hypothesis, ANOVA-test and t-test was carried out which with 95% of reliability should confirm or reject the hypothesis.

Hypothesis 2: Employees with different level of work productivity have a significantly different view of the role of unions in the hotel industry.

To test H2, it was first necessary to classify the surveyed employees into three groups according to the level of work productivity (table 4).

Table 4

Work productivity in the Croatian hotel industry

Frequency table: Productivity				
	Count	Cumulative - Count	Percent	Cumulative – Percent
High productivity	77	77	17.03540	17.0354
Moderate productivity	152	229	33.62832	50.6637
Low productivity	223	452	49.33628	100.0000

Source: own research

Based on the data from the table 4 it seems that 17.03% of the employees can state that they are showing high work productivity, while 33.63% of them can state that they are showing moderate (normal) work productivity. For 49.34% of the employee can state that they are showing low work productivity (Pupavac, 2020).

ANOVA method was applied to testing the H1 hypothesis (cf. table 5).

Table 5

ANOVA work productivity of the employees and attitudes toward the role of union in the hotel industry

Productivity; LS Means Wilks lambda=,94297, F(10, 890)=2,6517, p=,00342 Effective hypothesis decomposition						
Productivity	Power_U - Mean	Reward - Mean	S_help - Mean	Fer_HRMP - Mean	Respect_WT - Mean	N
HP	3.428571	3.389610	4.129870	3.584416	3.935065	77
MP	3.078947	3.256579	4.250000	3.440789	3.763158	152
LP	3.251121	3.022422	3.878924	3.188341	3.443946	223

Source: own research

The analysis of variance revealed significant differences in the level of attitudes towards the role of trade unions depending on the level of work productivity of employees. Employees who show high work productivity least believe in the power of hotel industry trade unions ($M = 3.42$), are most satisfied with rewards (3.38), mostly point out that the hotel company pursues a fair human resources policy (3.58) and that superiors respect their working hours (3.93). Accordingly, employees with the highest productivity leave the least room for union action in the hotel industry. Employees with the lowest productivity open the most space for union action because they are least satisfied with rewards ($M = 3.02$), least think that superiors are available and ready to help, least convinced that the hotel company pursues a fair human resources policy and least emphasize that superiors respect their working hours. A high Wilks lambda value of 0.94 and a low p-value of 0.003 suggest acceptance of H2 hypothesis.

H3: Employees of different age groups have a significantly different view of the role of trade unions in the hotel industry.

The results of testing the H3 hypothesis by the method of analysis of variance are given in Table 6.

Table 6

ANOVA age groups and attitudes towards the role of unions in the hotel industry

Age; LS Means (Justin_anketa_PhD) Wilks lambda=.93227, F(15, 1226,1)=2,1033, p=,00797 Effective hypothesis decomposition						
Age	Power_U - Mean	Reward - Mean	S_help - Mean	Fer_HRMP - Mean	Respect_WT - Mean	N
<25	3.140541	3.210811	4.054054	3.372973	3.562162	185
26-35	3.292517	3.142857	3.897959	3.258503	3.551020	147
36-50	3.177778	3.311111	4.344444	3.422222	3.955556	90
51+	3.533333	2.533333	3.833333	3.300000	3.533333	30

Source: own research

Based on the data from Table 6, it can be seen that employees between 36 and 50 achieve the best results in almost all dimensions. Employees over the age of 50 have the least faith in the power of unions in the hotel industry. This age group of employees largely opens up space for union activities because they point out that they are not adequately rewarded, that their superiors do not help them and that they do not respect their working hours. A high Wilks lambda value of 0.93 and a low p-value of 0.007 suggest acceptance of H3 hypothesis.

Hypothesis 4: Union members, unlike other employees, have a more positive attitude towards the role of unions in the hotel industry.

H4 was tested by t-test, and the results are given in table 7.

Table 7

T-test

T-tests; Grouping: Union membership (Group 1: No Group 2: Yes)					
	Mean - No	Mean - Yes	t-value	df	p
Power_U	3.208020	3.339623	-0.76961	450	0.441937
S_help	4.030075	4.169811	-0.88312	450	0.377644
Fer_HRMP	3.325815	3.452830	-0.76872	450	0.442462
Reward	3.177945	3.056604	0.68889	450	0.491250
Respect_WT	3.606516	3.849057	-1.45624	450	0.146023

Source: own research

Based on the data from table 7, it can be concluded that there are no statistically significant differences in the studied dimensions between employees who are members of the trade union and those who are not. We reject hypothesis 4.

CONCLUSION

The declining number of union members in absolute and relative numbers is a contemporary phenomenon. The reasons for this are to be found in the growing dominance of the service sector, numerous small enterprises, change of the structure of employees, an increasing number of non-standard forms of work contracts and proactive human resource management practices.

The results of the survey of employees' attitudes towards the role of trade unions in the hotel industry of the Republic of Croatia indicate the fact that the highest average rating of all five statements is achieved by the statement, My superiors are always available and ready to help (M = 4.04; SD = 1.08).

The obtained finding points to the conclusion that a partnership is developing between employees and superiors, which is the result of proactive human resource management practices. However, despite this, 49.34% of the employees can state that they are showing low work productivity. The reasons for this should be sought in the large number of seasonal workers who are very often insufficiently trained to work in the hotel industry.

The paper identifies statistically significant differences in the level of attitudes towards the role of trade unions in the hotel industry according to employees' productivity. Employees who achieve the highest productivity are the least likely to believe in the power of hotel industry trade unions. Employees who show low productivity open the most space for union action because they show the highest degree of dissatisfaction with the existing human resources policy, starting from remuneration, through the willingness of superiors to help them, to disrespect of their working hours.

The group of employees over the age of 50 opens the most space for trade union activities, and they mostly point out that they are not adequately rewarded, that their superiors do not help them and that they do not respect their working hours. It is a group of employees who at the same time have the least faith in the power of trade unions in the hotel industry.

The results of the research did not confirm the existence of a statistically significant difference in attitudes towards the role of trade unions in the hotel industry between union members and non-members. In future research, emphasis should be placed on researching the differences between employees with standard and non-standard forms of work contracts.

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