

# Sociological Analysis of the Quality of Life among Young People on the Island of Hvar: Challenges and Perspectives<sup>1</sup>

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**ABSTRACT** The aim of this study was to examine the quality of life of young people on the island of Hvar. The research was conducted in 2022 using semi-structured interviews with a sample of 30 participants. The analysis of the interviews revealed that most participants had completed secondary education, whereas those with higher education faced employment challenges in their fields due to a lack of job opportunities outside the tourism sector. The majority were employed in tourism, mainly on a seasonal basis, and were generally satisfied with their employment status. Leisure time patterns vary significantly between seasons: in winter, they have too much free time, whereas in summer, they have too little free time. They expressed dissatisfaction with available leisure activities, noting a lack of options for young people outside the tourist season. They viewed tourism positively because of its earning potential but also noted negative aspects such as rising living costs and the impact of party tourism. Although they appreciated the island's natural beauty and tranquility during the winter, they also missed social interaction. The main reasons for leaving the island were related to limited access to healthcare, shopping, and entertainment. Opinions about staying were divided: most participants expressed a desire to remain due to their attachment to their home, work, and family, whereas the most common reason for leaving was the shortage of employment opportunities beyond tourism.

*Key words:* quality of life, youth, island of Hvar, education, leisure time, employment, seasonal work, tourism.

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<sup>1</sup> This paper is the result of research conducted in 2022 as part of the thesis by Klara Šimunović at the Department of Sociology, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Split.

## 1. Introduction

Compared with their peers in Croatia's urban areas, young people living on islands face less favorable living conditions. During the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the islands experienced a pronounced trend of depopulation, particularly among young people, which can be attributed to various socioeconomic and political factors (Babić and Lajić, 2001; Nejašmić and Mišetić, 2006; Lajić and Mišetić, 2013; Nejašmić, 2013). The reasons for this phenomenon include the lagging island economy compared with mainland areas, economic crises, war losses, political turbulence, and the neglect of the island population's needs by state authorities (Lajić and Mišetić, 2013). The consequences of these factors are reflected in the increasing emigration of young people seeking better opportunities on the mainland, which poses a serious problem, as the reduction in the youth population leads to labor shortages, declining birth rates, and the "cultural demise" of island life, thereby slowing the revitalization of island communities. Therefore, the key question that arises in this context is as follows: why do young people leave the islands? This question forms the basis of this study, which aims to analyze the quality of life of young people on the island of Hvar, with a particular focus on educational opportunities, professional aspirations, leisure time, and the desire to stay on or leave the island.

### 1.1. Concept of Quality of Life

In the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, quality of life was primarily assessed on the basis of economic well-being at the national level. However, modern approaches have criticized this methodology, arguing that economic indicators alone are insufficient for a comprehensive assessment of quality of life. Recently, quality of life has been understood as a multidimensional and culturally defined concept, whose construct should be equally applicable to all individuals and contexts (Tonon, 2012).

While economic science emphasizes material well-being, economic growth, and standard of living as key indicators of quality of life (Mrvica Mađarac, 2017), sociological research covers broader dimensions, including social, cultural, and political factors that shape living conditions. According to Cummins (1997), quality of life encompasses both an objective component (measured by culturally relevant indicators of well-being) and a subjective component (individual satisfaction), both of which are necessary for a comprehensive assessment of quality of life (Kovčo Vukadin et al., 2016). Theoretical approaches such as those of Veenhoven (2000) and Phillips (2006) explore the difference between objective and subjective dimensions of quality of life. While physical health, economic status, and emotional well-being are key components of quality of life, there is ongoing debate about the importance of objective versus subjective indicators (Cummins, 2000).

In this context, research often integrates objective and subjective indicators of quality of life, enabling comparisons at the global or national level (Žanić, Miletić and Bendra, 2019). Objective indicators, such as health, social mobility, and education, are easier to quantify. In contrast, subjective indicators involve personal assessments of life satisfaction (Mulligan et al., 2004), and the subjective dimension of quality of life is based on personal perceptions of the success of various social roles (Ilišin et al., 2013). Subjective well-being has become a key indicator of quality of life, with numerous studies demonstrating its positive impact on mental and physical health (Argyle, 1999). Therefore, recent studies emphasize the importance of combining both types of indicators to obtain a more precise picture of quality of life (Slavuj, 2012). However, measuring subjective well-being remains challenging, raising methodological questions in this field. It is argued that the use of qualitative approaches in quality of life research allows for a better understanding of personal perceptions, experiences, and feelings, and is crucial for identifying new issues related to quality of life (Tonon, 2012).

## **1.2. Quality of Life among Young People on the Croatian Islands**

Croatian islands, including Hvar, face serious challenges related to depopulation and an aging population. Hvar is unique because of its rich history and the high share of tourism in the economy, which has led to a division between different tourist destinations on the island (Matečić and Perinić Lewis, 2018). Although tourism offers certain economic opportunities for islands, demographic changes, such as a decrease in the number of young people, high mortality rates, and a lack of professional opportunities, encourage young people to migrate to larger urban areas (Babić and Lajić, 2004). Previous research has suggested that tourism can help slow the depopulation process (Nakićen and Čuka, 2016), but long-term changes require the development of educational and social content that would enable young people to stay on islands (Babić, Lajić and Podgorelec, 2004). Additionally, with the development of modern tourism and increased social awareness of the importance of environmental protection, the island region is becoming a prominent part of the national space again (Nejašmić, 2013).

Šimunović (1994) noted that islands are often considered special worlds, where life is shaped by specific factors related to the economy, culture, history, geopolitical aspects, and ecological systems. The scientific literature frequently highlights features such as isolation, a specific economic structure, high living costs, and a unique natural environment. These elements of island life are often the result of geographical determinism, but in modern times, technical solutions and better transport connectivity make island life easier. However, if the specificities of island life are excessively disrupted, there is a risk of losing the value of these characteristics.

When considering the quality of life of young people on islands, the qualitative approach is often overlooked, making such research relatively rare. For example, a study conducted on the island of Brač (Babić, 2019), revealed that life on the island offers young people advantages such as environmental quality, peace, and safety; however at the same time, they lack educational opportunities, professional development, work, and cultural content. While the island satisfies basic needs, there is a lack of amenities that improve quality of life, such as theaters, volunteer activities, or larger specialized shops. Despite this, young people on the island still indicate that they see their future exclusively there (Babić, 2019). The reasons for moving to the mainland still include better cultural and recreational life, a better future, difficulties traveling to school, neglect of island development, the possibility of further education, and better employment prospects on the mainland (Babić and Lajić, 2001).

## 2. Methodology

### 2.1. Objective and Research Questions

The main objective of this research is to examine the quality of life of young people on the island of Hvar. Accordingly, the following research questions were posed:

1. What are the educational perspectives of young people on the island of Hvar?
2. What are the professional aspirations of young people on the island of Hvar?
3. How do young people on the island of Hvar spend their leisure time?
4. Are young people satisfied with life on the island of Hvar?
5. Do young people intend to stay living on the island of Hvar?

### 2.2. Participants

The study involved 30 participants, consisting of 14 women and 16 men, aged between 18 and 34 years, all of whom reside on the island of Hvar. The participants were selected using a non-probability snowball sampling technique. Among the participants, half (15) had completed secondary education, whereas four had completed an undergraduate degree. Seven participants were enrolled in graduate studies at the time of the research, while four participants had already obtained graduate degrees.

With respect to employment status, the majority of participants were engaged in seasonal work. Specifically, nine participants worked seasonally while pursuing their studies, seven participants were employed year-round, and one participant was unemployed at the time of the study. In terms of industry sectors, the majority of participants were employed in the service industry: twelve in tourism and nine in hospital-ity. Additionally, five participants, in addition to their seasonal tourism employment, took on other winter jobs, including construction, ceramic crafting, and tailoring

services. One female participant was employed in retail, another in design, one male participant worked in the IT sector, and one was employed in the local government.

### **2.3. Research Procedure**

The research was conducted in 2022 using semi-structured interviews, which facilitated an exploratory qualitative investigation into the quality of life of young people on the island of Hvar. The qualitative approach was chosen to enable a deeper exploration of participants' perceptions of their quality of life, moving beyond the limitations of quantitative measures and allowing participants the autonomy to describe and highlight aspects of their lives that they deemed most relevant. This approach aimed to generate a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing the quality of life of young people on the island of Hvar. The interviews with the participants were conducted in person, by phone, and online via the Zoom application. Although all interviews were initially planned to take place face-to-face, logistical constraints necessitated that some be conducted via phone or online, as many participants were located off the island during the research period.

Prior to each interview, the participants were thoroughly briefed on the purpose, objectives, and methodology of the research. They were informed of their voluntary participation, their right to withdraw from the study at any time, and the opportunity to review the interview transcripts. The participants provided written informed consent, which included permission for audio recording and the use of collected data for subsequent analysis, with a guarantee of confidentiality. To ensure anonymity, each participant was assigned a code (e.g., P1, P2). The interviews were recorded using a mobile audio recording application, and the recordings were transcribed verbatim. The average length of each interview was 15 minutes, and data saturation was reached after 30 interviews.

### **2.4. Data Analysis**

Thematic analysis was employed to analyze the data, following the steps outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006): familiarization with the data through active reading of the entire dataset prior to beginning the analysis of individual units; generating initial categories; exploring and reviewing themes; defining and naming themes; and producing a report where the data were categorized and connected to the research questions. During the familiarization phase, all 30 interviews were transcribed verbatim, and codes were assigned to each participant. The transcribed text was then compared with the audio recordings to verify the accuracy of the transcriptions. Once accuracy was confirmed, the text was read multiple times to ensure a thorough understanding of the participants' experiences. During the initial category construction phase, relevant

codes were identified across all the interviews. In the theme construction phase, these codes were reviewed and grouped into broader categories. During the exploration and review of themes, we examined the quotes corresponding to each theme to ensure their coherence and relevance. Finally, the themes and subthemes were named and defined, and the relationships between categories and subcategories were reviewed. In the final phase, a report was written, linking each category and subcategory to the most representative quotes to illustrate the findings.

The coding process involved both deductive and inductive approaches. The deductive approach focused on predefined categories, such as questions related to participants' educational perspectives, professional aspirations, leisure activities, and intentions to remain on or leave the island. The inductive approach facilitated the development of new categories based on participants' responses, particularly concerning their views on the impact of tourism on their lives on the island. This process led to the identification of additional codes not initially encompassed by the research framework. All the themes and subthemes were comprehensively described and supported by illustrative quotes, which were then woven into an analytical narrative to answer the research questions. The following section presents the analysis of the results, which are structured according to the research questions.

### 3. Results and Discussion

#### *3.1. Educational Perspectives and Professional Aspirations of the Participants*

Education is a crucial element of quality of life for young people, and it presents specific challenges on islands because educational institutions are limited compared with those in mainland. The number of secondary education institutions has decreased, and higher education institutions are often absent, which results in the need for young people to move to mainland if they wish to continue their education. According to the data, the majority of participants (26) are satisfied with the level of education they have completed, although nine participants are considering enrolling in a study program, and four plan to pursue further education through informal programs, such as adult education courses. These findings reveal an evident aspiration for lifelong learning and personal growth despite structural constraints.

Employment opportunities are strongly connected to tourism, which dominates the island's economy. Most participants (28) expressed satisfaction with their current jobs, as the majority are employed in tourism, which is the primary economic sector on the Croatian islands, including Hvar. In terms of career aspirations, 13 participants planned to continue working in the tourism sector on the island. However, those aiming to build a professional career on Hvar face certain challenges, such as limited opportunities in specialized industries:

*I definitely want to work in my field in the future; I think conducting research. It would be great if it were on the island, but I don't truly believe that will be possible. Actually, at first, I wouldn't even try to return to the island, but in the next ten years, I plan to come back. (P11)*

*I've been here for three years now, and after university, I thought it did not matter where I worked, but now I think it's actually much harder to do something serious in art in Hvar than in a larger city. Owing to the city's infrastructure, there is no permanent cultural activity or place where art can be actively performed. Well, I would, but I don't think it's realistic. The town is too small in winter. (P24)*

However, five participants expressed a desire to work on the mainland in the future due to wider professional opportunities.. Among them, three are currently pursuing higher education and intend to work in their respective fields:

*I plan to work in the field of my qualifications, that is, in the field I studied, but time will tell. I would do that on the mainland. However, you never know where life will take you. (P5)*

*Right now, I want to work in what I am studying, find a job in a company, and that's it. Honestly, I would rather be on the mainland. I simply believe that there is a wider range of job opportunities on the mainland than on Hvar. (P10)*

*Ah, in the future, I would like to work in the field I am studying, so I would like to continue in that direction, do that job. In addition, I think I would rather be on the mainland because... I think it's easier, there's better connectivity, more clients, and all the centers are linked to it, with furniture and everything, everything is closer on the mainland. (P29)*

These statements illustrate the structural dependence of Hvar's youth on tourism and on the mainland economy. Despite their strong emotional attachment to the island, limited opportunities in non-tourist sectors constrain young people's ability to pursue careers in their chosen professions. These findings are also consistent with those of Mikulandra and Rajhvajn Bulat (2022), who report that young people on the island of Prvić believe that they would have greater opportunities if they lived on the mainland. A comparable situation is recorded on the island of Zlarin, where a continuous outmigration of young, working-age residents to the mainland has been observed (Klempić Bogadi and Podgorelec, 2013). This corresponds with broader demographic patterns observed across Croatian islands, where limited educational and professional infrastructure contributes to youth outmigration (Babić and Lajić, 2001; Nejašmić and Mišetić, 2006; Lajić and Mišetić, 2013; Klempić Bogadi and Podgorelec, 2013). From a sociological perspective, this dynamic reflects the complex interplay between subjective life satisfaction and objective living conditions (Cummins, 1997; Veen-



hoven, 2000). Although participants reported general satisfaction with their education and employment, the lack of stability and opportunities for long-term professional growth reduced their perceived quality of life. As noted by Babić and Lajić (2004), the sustainable development of island communities depends on investment in diversified local employment and access to education, precisely the areas identified by participants as insufficient.

### 3.2. Leisure Time of Young People on the Island of Hvar

Leisure time constitutes a crucial aspect of the quality of life for young people, particularly in small and seasonally dependent communities such as Hvar. The findings indicate that both the availability and organization of leisure activities among young islanders are closely shaped by the rhythm of the tourist season. During the summer, when tourism reaches its peak, participants reported a lack of free time due to demanding work schedules. Conversely, the winter months offer an abundance of free time but very limited opportunities for social and cultural engagement:

*In winter, I have almost the whole day free, but in summer, I don't trully have much time for myself. (P9)*

*In summer, I don't have any free time, but in winter, I have twenty-five hours a day. (P19)*

*Well, since I work seasonally, I'm mostly free in winter. (P23)*

Although participants engage in various activities during their free time, such as walking, sports, reading, and traveling, they all express dissatisfaction with the lack of cultural and recreational activities, particularly during the off-season months. They believe that the island offers very few cultural and entertainment options, especially outside the tourist season. To improve the situation, participants suggested expanding offerings, including cultural and recreational programs, sports centers, and cinemas, which could positively impact the lives of young people on the island:

*Because the content is not suitable for any age group, it is focused on younger children, such as sports, mostly football, but there is literally nothing else for someone of my age, eighteen and up, absolutely nothing except cafes. (P1)*

*Well, I think that's a problem that mainly suffers owing to the unprofitability of running businesses during the winter months, which is an issue that restaurateurs have been dealing with for years. Some kind of incentives or initiatives from higher authorities, preferably the state or the EU, for cultural and entertainment events and generally for activities and gatherings for young people would, I think, be very useful to people on the island, who are quite divided owing to the lack of such things. (P2)*



*We lack content. I would love to go see a movie or a performance or a ballet or anything, but for anything like that, we have to go to Split. (P12)*

*Well, honestly, not trully. Because winter on the island is desolate and miserable. You trully don't have that many options to spend your time; it feels like being trapped on this island, Hvar. In summer, there are at least one option. (P9)*

*I think in the summer, during the tourist season, there are plenty of choices. In addition, it's very different from the winter period when you can't even go for tea in the evening or for a drink because the cafes close at 9 pm. In the end, it boils down to either hang out at other people's houses or freeze somewhere outdoors. (P11)*

These findings are consistent with previous sociological studies that identify seasonality as a key determinant of subjective well-being in island communities (Babić, 2019). Young people on Hvar experience alternating phases of hyperactivity and inactivity, a rhythm directly linked to the tourist economy. While the summer season provides financial security and a vibrant social life, it simultaneously restricts leisure time and contributes to exhaustion. Conversely, the winter period offers rest but also fosters boredom and social withdrawal. As Cummins (1997) and Tonon (2012) emphasize, subjective well-being depends not only on the amount of available free time but also on access to meaningful social and cultural participation. On Hvar, the lack of cultural spaces and year-round programs undermines opportunities for young people to express creativity, connect socially, and cultivate a sense of belonging, all of which are essential components of a high quality of life. All of these findings align with the findings from the study on the island of Prvić (Mikulandra and Rajhvajn Bulat, 2022), which shows that young people particularly emphasize the lack of opportunities and spaces for leisure activities. Therefore, enhancing the quality of leisure time for young people on the island requires targeted investment in non-tourist community infrastructure, such as cinemas, cultural centers, and sports facilities. Such initiatives would not only diversify leisure opportunities but also strengthen social cohesion, thereby helping to mitigate the psychological effects of seasonal isolation.

### **3.3. Impact of Tourism on the Lives of Young People on the Island of Hvar**

Tourism has proven to be a key factor shaping the lives of young people on the island of Hvar, influencing various aspects of their quality of life. Owing to the importance of tourism and its role in the island's economic structure, participants' perceptions of tourism and its effects on their lives during the tourist season, as well as outside of it, were explored. While most participants perceive tourism as a positive phenomenon, they also highlight several negative aspects of its development. Among the negative views, concerns about mass tourism and its effects on the environment, social dynamics, and overall quality of life are prevalent:

*I think it's not good for the island. There is an enormous emphasis on tourism, although I understand that tourism originally started on Hvar as an escape from tragic living conditions. However, it has had unintended consequences, shaping a lifestyle with many flaws. (P2)*

*In the last few years, it has started to feel negative because mass tourism has arrived on Hvar. People come and go. There are just too many tourists. (P9)*

*I think we are heading in the wrong direction. Hvar has much more to offer than just nightlife. We have such beautiful cultural heritage, and it could be better balanced. I believe we're attracting tourists who are young and inconsiderate, walking around shirtless, constantly drunk, staying for one night, and making a mess in the shops. (P12)*

*I think it's negative because we're not working toward sustainable tourism; it's just more, more, more. This is not heading in a better direction, but rather a worse one. (P28)*

Further analysis focused on specific types of tourism present on the island, such as mass tourism, party tourism, and family tourism. The participants discussed the advantages and disadvantages of each type of tourism. Mass tourism is predominantly perceived negatively by participants because of its ecological and social impacts:

*Well, mass tourism is generally quite bad because it dehumanizes both people and tourists, and, most of all, it damages our coastline and, natural and cultural heritage because the sheer number of people devastates it. The most obvious example is overcrowded coves where people swim, and pollution from boats contaminates the water. (P2)*

*I think the advantage of mass tourism is that it provides people on the island with jobs and money to live off. (P16)*

*Hvar clearly has mass tourism, but it lasts only three months. This means that, during this period, people in tourism work outside the general labor laws; they are expected to work every day, all day, and it does not make sense to register employees properly. (P24)*

*Mass tourism, I think, is unsustainable in the long term, and I would definitely conclude that it has more negative aspects than positive ones. Coastal degradation, either by foreigners or by us, is due to constant construction and cementing. The positives are short-term, of course, the quick influx of a large amount of money, but that's only short-term. (P25)*

Party tourism also evokes mixed opinions among participants. While some highlight its economic benefits, many express concerns about its negative social consequences, such as tourists' unruly behavior and environmental damage:

*Recently, tourism in Hvar has shifted toward this Carpe Diem<sup>2</sup> mentality, with a focus on going out, drinking, drugs, and all that. (P5)*

*It's even too much, and we depend on it too much. For example, when the COVID-19 situation hit, we fell behind, there wasn't enough work, and people couldn't earn money due to the situation. There's just too much of this party tourism for such a small place. (P7)*

*For party tourism, I think it's fine in moderation, but if the only promotion of our beautiful city and island is that people can come and get drunk cheaply, that's not, in my opinion, fair to either the town or the people who live there year-round. (P11)*

*A major disadvantage is unorganized party tourism, which has consequences for the environment and ecology. (P19)*

*The most popular issue is party tourism on Hvar, which brings in large amounts of money in a short time, but destroys everything else. People get greedy, and after that, you have a very negative consequence that is now evident in the town of Hvar: there is a very small number of educated young people. (P26)*

On the other hand, family tourism has received positive feedback because of its sustainability and smaller negative environmental impacts. The participants emphasized that family tourism contributes to reducing seasonality and enables more balanced tourism development:

*Organized family tourism in the pre- and postseason is great. These people with children do not come during the peak season, precisely because of the party tourists. (P19)*

*It's much better to have quality tourism, such as family tourism, where people come back, like on the southern side of the island, where the same families return year after year. (P20)*

*Somehow, I feel that there's a greater need for family tourism, a quieter type of tourism. There's just too much party tourism, too much alcohol, and commotion. I think families and older people, especially those who would help develop winter tourism, should come. (P30)*

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<sup>2</sup> It refers to a lounge bar.

Several participants also referred to specialized forms of tourism that could benefit the island, such as ecotourism, sports tourism, and wellness tourism, which they perceived as long-term sustainable alternatives for island development:

*The downside of family tourism is that it is not very developed. For instance, we used to have medical tourism, but now it's no longer present. We're losing those sectors that used to exist, and now it's more focused on young tourists. (P1)*

*Elite tourism is slightly better in terms of destruction because fewer people come, and because of the nature of elite tourism, which emphasizes natural and cultural heritage, the interventions resulting from elite tourism are much more moderate and better for the town. However, the impact on residents is that, in elite tourism, significant money is made, and people are demotivated from further education and look for career paths other than tourism. (P2)*

*I think that cultural tourism should be improved and promoted, so more cultural sites should be opened for people to visit. (P16)*

*Another type of tourism, unfortunately, from my perspective, is the eastern side of the island, which is becoming more focused on agrotourism, wellness tourism, and adventure tourism. I think that, in the long term, this would be healthier and of better quality both for the guests and for us. (P25)*

*I think that Hvar would benefit most from family and sports tourism. They should build tennis courts and golf courses so that Hvar can also have an airport where wealthy people can come, play golf over the weekend, and so on. (P28)*

The dominance of tourism has created a paradox: while it ensures economic survival, it simultaneously threatens the island's social cohesion and ecological stability. These findings are consistent with previous research on Croatian islands, which highlights the ambivalence of tourism development as both an enabler of local prosperity and a source of dependency (Babić and Lajić, 2004). Hvar's young population is caught between economic pragmatism and cultural preservation. Their livelihoods depend heavily on tourism, yet many acknowledge that overreliance on this sector gradually erodes local identity and long-term sustainability. The prevalence of short-term, seasonal employment fosters insecurity, whereas the emphasis on mass and party tourism undermines the community's social capital, which is the very fabric of relationships, cooperation, and trust that sustain small island societies (Lajić and Mišetić, 2013).

### 3.4. Life Satisfaction on the Island: Advantages and Disadvantages

The participants highlighted several advantages of life during the tourist season, including increased job opportunities, a greater number of social activities, and stronger connections with the mainland. However, the most significant benefit was the financial gain that tourism brings, along with increased interaction with foreign visitors and a wider range of available activities:

*The advantage is definitely earning money. Another advantage is the sea; we don't have to go on vacation. There are many more activities than in winter and many more places to go out and have fun. (P1)*

*The advantages, I think most of them are positive for me because something is happening in the town, you have the opportunity to meet people you might not normally meet, and the atmosphere is just different from that in winter. (P22)*

*During the season? Personally, it's an advantage because, in my job, the intensity drops a bit during the season—not by much, but let's say it eases a bit, and definitely, the climate is very important for the quality of life. In the summer, we have stable weather, so you can enjoy nature practically every day, at sea, or anywhere. (P26)*

Despite these advantages, participants identified several drawbacks associated with life on the island, including the lack of free time, the consequences of party tourism (such as unruly behavior and noise), and the rising cost of living (e.g., transportation, groceries). Other disadvantages mentioned included healthcare issues and the reduced intensity of work outside of the tourism sector, which for one participant, was actually a perceived advantage of living on the island during the tourist season:

*I'm very dissatisfied with the season because, apart from the season, no other professions exist here anymore. My business has declined, and my boredom has increased. (P12)*

*During the season, for example, I don't have time to, for instance, fix my teeth. However, in summer, I don't have time to fix my teeth, nor can I go to Split or get any check-ups. In winter, I could do that, for example. (P23)*

*And negatively, I would definitely mention that it's kind of ingrained in our heads that, since the guests are coming, we must work. We leave ourselves very little time to explore what we want to do in the summer, where we want to be in the summer. I think that if we don't get out of that focus, many of us, including me right now, remain seasonal workers and, in a way, servants in the situation we find ourselves in. (P25)*

The social consequences of party tourism were also identified as factors contributing to reduced satisfaction among residents:

*The disadvantages are, I don't know. There are too many drunk people, and I don't trully like going to town with my kids. Now they're older, so it's okay, but when they were younger, it wasn't comfortable. (P27)*

Life on the island outside of the tourist season also has advantages, such as peace, quiet, and the opportunity to enjoy nature. However, participants noted several drawbacks, including a lack of social life, limited activities for young people, and inadequate healthcare services, which can complicate daily life:

*In winter, there is no life on the island. There's nothing. Two cafés are open in the town, and there are no dogs on the street. (P5)*

*I miss social and community life, and I trully feel that when I do not have work, and I am not satisfied. As a young person on the island, I think that this island in winter is not even for retirees, let alone for young people. (P12)*

*It gets a bit of depression, everything is closed. In addition, when the weather is bad, the catamarans do not run, so you cannot even leave the island. (P15)*

Limited access to healthcare and underdeveloped infrastructure further contributes to residents' dissatisfaction:

*Because of everyday things that are much more difficult on the island. For example, in regard to doctors, dentists, or any kind of clothing or shoes. Anything we need, we have to go to Split. (P29)*

This ambivalence, reflected in satisfaction with the island's natural and social environment during certain periods, and dissatisfaction with its infrastructural and social shortcomings during others, illustrates the complex nature of subjective well-being in geographically isolated communities. As Argyle (1999) and Cummins (1997) emphasize, life satisfaction derives from both objective living conditions and subjective perceptions of balance and meaning. On Hvar, the cyclical nature of life, characterized by intense activity followed by long periods of inactivity, challenges the stability of subjective well-being. In summer, young people tend to be overworked yet socially engaged; in winter, they rest but feel isolated. This duality, as highlighted by Ilišin et al. (2013), shows that social participation and meaningful employment are among the key determinants of youth satisfaction.

### 3.5. Staying vs. Leaving the Island

This section examines how often participants leave the island, the reasons behind their departures, whether these movements are driven by necessity or leisure, the significance they attach to nature and the environment in their lives on the island, and, finally, their plans for staying or leaving in the future. This theme connects with the previous ones, providing a comprehensive conclusion on the broader issue of the demographic future of the Croatian islands.

First, the frequency of departures to the mainland was examined. The participants were asked how often they travel to the mainland—on a weekly, monthly, or yearly basis. The results revealed varying mobility patterns. Six participants spent more time on the mainland than on the island because of their studies. Seven participants travel to the mainland more than once a month, whereas five do so several times a year. Four participants travel once a month, and three participants travel once a year. One participant travels to the mainland multiple times a week, three participants stated that they do so frequently, and one participant rarely.

The most common reasons for leaving the island include medical visits (to doctors and dentists), shopping, and recreation. Other reasons include studying, visiting friends or family, traveling, and having business or administrative needs. The participants' statements help us understand their motivations:

*Some of the reasons for this are medical reasons. Whether it is a dentist, doctor, or anything else because, unfortunately, on Hvar, that is, in the town of Hvar, we do not have these services. The closest is Jelsa, which is quite far away. For example, recently, we no longer have blood tests in Hvar, so the blood must be sent to Split, which is absurd. (P3)*

*I go to Split very often because, for example, I am in driving school, and there are no driving schools in Hvar. I also go to the hospital in Split because the doctors here are not as good. There aren't many of them, so people go to Split for medical care. I often go shopping in Split because there are no places to buy clothes in Hvar. (P8)*

*The main reason is that we do not have anything on the island. For all the more important things, we need to go to Split, such as shopping, doctors, and schooling. On the island, we only have one school with two programs, so if you want something more, you must go to Split or even further. (P9)*



All participants attach significant importance to nature and the environment, highlighting that life on the island allows them to be close to nature:

*It means a lot to me. I always say I could never live in Zagreb because I would feel suffocated there. That's a big plus, but it's not the most important factor when I think about whether I will stay on the island. (P3)*

*This is quite significant because today everything is focused on tourism, apartments, and the mass sale of land to foreigners to build apartments. However, what happens when tourism disappears? What will people live on here? (P4)*

*Because we are surrounded by nature, you feel better in it, and it calms your life, especially during the stressful summer months when you're working nonstop. Therefore, it definitely has great significance. (P14)*

*It's enormous. I think it's the greatest charm because we live together with nature, and it's the most beautiful thing we can offer tourists. The more you leave the island and spend time away from the island, the more you see the beauty of nature, which you might not notice in the same way if you are always on the island. (P22)*

*It's very important. I think, to some extent, we depend on nature on this island. On the one hand, we cannot leave if nature does not allow it, and on the other hand, all tourism revolves around the sun and sea. (P24)*

Finally, fifteen participants planned to stay on the island in the future, with the main reasons for their love for their hometown, family, and employment opportunities on the island being as follows:

*I don't know, I love this island, and I think I'll stay here. First, because my family is here, I'm simply connected to the island. I'd love to stay here, I don't plan to move anywhere, but as life goes, maybe something will happen. (P9)*

*Since I've started my business, it ties me to the island, and because of that, I wouldn't want to leave. However, if I did not have that, I would have left without hesitation, mostly because of social life. (P12)*

*I don't have plans to leave the island, at least not long-term. I've traveled a lot, and I can say I haven't found a place where I feel the way I feel in Hvar. Regarding future plans, yes, I would like to stay here, develop my hobbies, business plans, and, despite everything, be an active member of the community and contribute to the quality of life on the island. (P25)*

*In principle, it's very likely that I will stay on the island. I simply love life on the island. I'm not saying this without experience, as I spent nine years in a big city, studied, and worked there. Therefore, very likely, I will stay. Whether I will work here, considering new technologies, there is also a large possibility to work online. I plan to stay. (P26)*

Seven participants were undecided and mentioned that they would like to spend summer on the island and winter on the mainland:

*I will stay on Hvar forever. Until the end of my life. In the summer. Winter is difficult. Because winter is boring, summer is great. (P13)*

*However I'm currently combining leaving in winter and coming back in summer. Coming for business reasons and leaving in winter because the island is very boring and lacks activities, so I escape to the mainland to be among people. (P14)*

*I often think about leaving, but that's just during a difficult period because I'll have to return during the summer for work. Therefore, it is all about short-term stays, two, three, or four months at most, but I'll always come back in the summer. (P21)*

*Sometimes I think I would probably like to live in Split in winter, just for an easier life, but in summer, I would probably be on Hvar because of tourism, the sea, and everything. (P29)*

The reasons for leaving the island, planned by eight participants, most often include the lack of employment opportunities outside the tourism sector:

*Currently, as things stand, I'm leaving the island. Simply because there's no job in my field, and I think I'll have more opportunities on the mainland. (P1)*

*This is mostly due to professional aspirations, but also because of the winter life on Hvar, which is a very negative factor. If someone decides to live in Hvar, they must also deal with the winter on Hvar and the fact that the town is alive in the summer and dead in the winter. For someone who does not work in tourism, that is problematic. Why would anyone want to live in a town that is small, overcrowded with 30,000 people in the summer, and then dead in the winter? Tourism creates a negative atmosphere for those who want to live there year-round but do not work in tourism. (P2)*

*If I were to pursue psychology, as I mentioned earlier, I probably wouldn't stay in Hvar because that's not a job for Hvar. I don't think I could succeed here. Therefore, I would probably leave Hvar for that reason. Otherwise, I would stay and work in tourism, which can actually be very good. (P8)*

This tension between emotional belonging and economic rationality is a recurring theme in island sociology. Studies by Nejašmić (2013) and Lajić and Mišetić (2013) highlight how structural disadvantages, including inadequate infrastructure, high living costs, and dependence on seasonal work, contribute to the ongoing depopulation of Croatian islands. At the same time, Mikulandra and Rajhvajn Bulat (2022) reported that young people from the island of Prvić recognize certain advantages of island life, but perceive it as a place facing more challenges and areas requiring improvement than available resources do. Hvar's youth are part of this broader pattern: they perceive the island as ideal for family life and leisure but not as a viable place for career development. The decision to stay or leave is both personal and structural. On the one hand, it involves emotional attachment, identity, and lifestyle choices, on the other hand, it is constrained by systemic limitations such as a lack of educational and professional opportunities. According to Argyle (1999) and Tonon (2012), subjective well-being depends on individuals' ability to align personal aspirations with their living conditions, which is something that many young islanders find difficult to achieve.

#### **4. Conclusion**

The study of the quality of life of young people on the island of Hvar reveals specific challenges associated with geographically isolated living, limited educational opportunities, and the dominance of tourism. Although the island offers a safe and aesthetically pleasing environment, structural dependence on seasonal employment and the lack of year-round opportunities constrain the social and professional development of young residents. To reduce emigration and retain young people on the island, it is crucial to invest in educational programs and create opportunities for professional development in sectors beyond tourism. Strengthening digital literacy, remote work possibilities, and lifelong learning initiatives could empower young people to remain economically active without leaving the island. Additionally, it is essential to diversify the tourism offered to mitigate the negative effects of mass tourism. The development of sustainable and community-oriented forms of tourism, such as ecological, family, cultural, and agro-tourism, could extend the tourist season, preserve social cohesion, and support local entrepreneurship. Expanding cultural, social, and recreational activities during the off-season would enhance the quality of life and reduce feelings of isolation among young islanders. Local authorities and public institutions should collaborate to establish youth centers, creative workshops, and sports facilities that operate throughout the year. From a public policy perspective, it is essential to promote the diversification of education and employment, improve infrastructure, and increase the inclusion of young people in decision-making processes. Particular importance should be given to the sustainable development of tourism, which must balance economic interests with environmental and social sustainability.

Future research could compare the educational and professional perspectives of young people on Hvar with those on other Adriatic islands to better understand regional differences in living conditions. It would also be valuable to examine the role of digital technologies and online education platforms in facilitating professional development and reducing the need for relocation to the mainland. Further studies should explore long-term demographic changes, the socioeconomic impact of youth migration, and strategies for attracting young families to the islands.

Finally, the findings highlight the need for an integrated, youth-oriented island policy that combines sustainable economic development with social well-being. By investing in education, cultural infrastructure, and inclusive community programs, public institutions can create conditions in which young people perceive island life not as a limitation, but as an opportunity for a fulfilling and stable future.

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## ***Sociološka analiza kvalitete života mladih na otoku Hvaru: Izazovi i perspektive***

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### **Sažetak**

Cilj rada je ispitati kvalitetu života mladih na otoku Hvaru. Istraživanje je provedeno 2022. godine korištenjem metode polustrukturiranog intervjua na uzorku od 30 sudionika. Analiza provedenih intervjua pokazala je da većina sudionika ima srednjoškolsko obrazovanje, dok se oni s višim obrazovanjem suočavaju s problemom zapošljavanja u struci zbog nedostatka radnih mjesta izvan turizma. Većina ih je zaposlena u turizmu, no pretežno sezonski i općenito su zadovoljni svojim profesionalnim statusom. Slobodno vrijeme sudionika varira ovisno o sezoni; zimi imaju previše slobodnog vremena, dok ljeti premalo. Nisu zadovoljni ponudom sadržaja za slobodno vrijeme, smatrajući da nedostaju aktivnosti za mlade izvan turističke sezone. Turizam smatraju pozitivnim zbog mogućnosti zarade, ali ističu i negativne aspekte poput poskupljenja života i posljedica party turizma. Iako zimi uživaju u prirodi i miru, nedostaju društveni sadržaji. Razlozi za odlazak na kopno općenito su vezani uz zdravstvene usluge, kupovinu i zabavu. Iako su podijeljeni u odluci o ostanku na otoku, većina njih želi ostati zbog ljubavi prema rodnom mjestu, posla i obitelji, dok najčešći razlog odlaska ostaje nedostatak posla izvan turizma.

*Ključne riječi:* kvaliteta života, mladi, otok Hvar, obrazovanje, slobodno vrijeme, posao, sezonski rad, turizam.