Anders Underthun, Hege Hellvik,
Julia Loge and David Jordhus-Lier

On-site workplace survey and internet-based questionnaire for hotel workers in Oslo and Akershus

- some methodological reflections

NIBR
Norwegian Institute for
Urban and Regional Research

Abstract:	This working paper presents field observations and methodological reflections from an on-site workplace survey and internet-based questionnaire for hotel workers in Oslo and Akershus. The paper discusses practical experiences from the two surveys and also aims to show how field observations from an on-site workplace survey may enrich the analysis of the quantitative data generated from the same survey.

Preface

This is the third working paper discussing the methods and experiences of the survey of hotel workers carried out as a part of the research project *Industrial relations under global stress: fragmentation and the potential for representation of workers in the Norwegian hospitality sector*, funded by the Research Council of Norway under the VAM programme.

The project explores the politics of work in a part of the Norwegian labour market which is characterised by high levels of labour migrants, low-wage and low-skilled jobs, relatively low unionisation levels and an increasing outsourcing of services. In many ways, the hotel sector provides a contrast to the "Norwegian model" of labour relations. The project will focus on the possibilities of representation of workers in the workplace and in industrial relations. The data collected through this survey is an important first stage in this process, followed by workplace case studies and interviews with key informants in the hotel sector.

Researching the role of trade unions in society is in line with the general focus on the politics of civil society in NIBR's Department of International Studies, although the team encompasses other parts of NIBR as well as other research institutions. While published as a NIBR Working Paper, this publication is co-authored by researchers at NIBR and research assistants affiliated with the project through the Department of Sociology and Human Geography at the University of Oslo.

Oslo, February 2011

Marit Haug
Research director

Table of Contents

Tables

Summary

On-site workplace survey and internet-based questionnaire for hotel workers in Oslo and Akershus:
- some methodological reflections
NIBR Working Paper 2011:106

As a part of the research project on the hotel sector in the Oslo and Akershus region, *Industrial relations under global stress: fragmentation and the potential for representation of workers in the Norwegian hospitality sector*, this working paper presents practical experiences, field observations and methodological reflections from an on-site workplace survey and internet-based questionnaire for hotel workers in Oslo and Akershus. After a section on the planning and preparation stage of the study, we present concrete experiences related to carrying out the on-site workplace survey, including aspects of access to hotels, approaching respondents, language, non-response and external influences. Next, we discuss the execution of the internet-based questionnaire. The final part concludes the working paper with a brief discussion on case study triangulation and research transparency. The working paper is meant to be a background note to the analysis of the survey data that was generated from the study in focus.

Sammendrag

Oppsøkende arbeidsplassundersøkelse og internettbasert spørreundersøkelse blant hotellarbeidere i Oslo-regionen:
- noen metodologiske betraktninger
NIBR-notat 2011:106

Som en del av forskningsprosjektet om hotellsektoren i Oslo og Akershus med tittelen *Industrial relations under global stress: fragmentation and the potential for representation of workers in the Norwegian hospitality sector* presenterer dette arbeidsnotatet praktiske erfaringer, feltobservasjoner og metodologiske refleksjoner fra en arbeidsplass-survey og etterfølgende internettbasert spørreundersøkelse for hotellarbeidere i Oslo og Akershus. Etter en del om planlegging og forberedelse, presenterer vi konkrete erfaringer relatert til arbeidsplass-surveyet. Her diskuteres adgang til hotellene, kontakt med respondenter, språk, non-response og mulig ekstern påvirkning. I den neste delen diskuterer vi gjennomføringen av den påfølgende internettbaserte spørreundersøkelsen. Vi konkluderer arbeidsnotatet med en kort diskusjon av casestudie-triangulering og gjennomsiktighet i forskningen. Dokumentet er ment å være et bakgrunnsnotat for analysen av survey data fra undersøkelsen vi beskriver.

1   Introduction

This working paper presents field observations from an on-site workplace survey and experiences from an internet-based questionnaire for hotel workers in Oslo and Akershus. In particular, we discuss practical challenges met throughout the survey data collection process. The paper is meant to complement other working papers related to the same research project[1], presenting the initial mapping of the hotel workplaces in the region (Jordhus-Lier et al. 2010) and the sampling procedures chosen to get a representative sample of workers (Aasland and Tyldum 2011), respectively. Moreover, the working paper can be read as a background note to the analysis of quantitative data from the survey in focus.

Qualitative field observations represent crucial elements in case study-oriented data triangulation (Yin 2003), yet it is more rare to reflect upon observations from quantitative surveys. Sieber (1973) argues that these observations from an on-site, face-to-face survey data collection process enrich the analysis of quantitative data, while Ragin (1994) and Downward and Mearman (Downward and Mearman 2007) argue that qualitative and quantitative methods are not mutually exclusive when building (comparative) case study research. Another important discussion that is relevant to this paper is that field observations may be especially important when accompanying surveys of populations that are hard to access or when researchers run the risk of misrepresenting "invisible" groups (Horgen-Friberg and Tyldum 2007). This working paper addresses both these important aspects associated with on-site surveys. We also discuss the process of planning and carrying out an internet-based questionnaire. Here, we primarily want to demonstrate practical challenges, experiences with survey software and engaging incentives for achieving a higher response rate.

The remainder of this paper is structured in the following way: In part two, we describe the planning and preparation stage of the study, emphasizing the dialogue with hotels and hotel chains. Part three is about the concrete experiences related to carrying out the on-site workplace survey. Part four discusses the internet-based questionnaire, while part five concludes the working paper with a brief discussion on case study triangulation and research transparency.

---

[1] "Industrial relations under global stress: fragmentation and the potential for representation of workers in the Norwegian hospitality sector" (2009-2012), financed by the Research Council of Norway, 194332/S20.

2 The planning and preparation stage

Mapping hotel workers in Oslo and Akershus is not a straight forward endeavour. From brief conversations with managers and receptionists at different hotels, we found that the number of fulltime positions reported to official business registers far from matched the actual number of workers at a given time. This is due to many factors: first, the sector employs a great number of part-time workers; second, the increasing share of flexible "call-duty"- workers do not appear on official employee lists; third, there is a growing tendency of outsourcing labour tasks to external firms. Hired employees do not appear in hotel worker registers, although these workers have the hotel as a workplace.

2.1 Sampling strategy

As one of our initial concerns for respondent selection was misrepresentation of workers that were not listed as permanent workers at hotels, we decided to carry out a survey of workers based on insisting on interviewing everybody who had a particular hotel as their workplace in a randomly chosen time slot. In this way, we would not only include workers with a permanent contract at the hotel, but also those workers who were employed by external/subcontracted firms or standby workers with or without a contract.

An estimate of the actual number of workers in the Oslo and Akershus region, and their spatial and temporal distribution, was made based on conversations with hotel representatives as accounted for in Jordhus-Lier et al. (2010). A selection of 40 hotels and 80 time slots was considered adequate to meet our ambition of statistical generalisation (Aasland and Tyldum 2011). Within each interval of 2 hours, the design was to interview all workers present at the hotel during these two hours. If the drawn slot was from 08.00 to 10.00 this implied that we would include all workers that worked within this time frame, including those who came or left at 09.00.

2.2 The dialogue with the hotels and hotel chains

The challenges to this design were obvious. First of all, we needed to notify and reach an agreement with each hotel and each hotel chain that was drawn from the chosen list. The second challenge was related to time. Hotels are busy workplaces and the pressure on workers is high. Thus, we did not see carrying out a full survey at the workplace as an option, but at the same time we needed to map all workers at a particular shift. The solution was to carry out a very short survey with each worker, based on 5 core questions which will be discussed later. By participating in this initial

mapping survey, the workers were presented with the opportunity to fill in an internet-based questionnaire later.

We made agreements with hotel managers to conduct a short, on-site survey with workers within working hours. An alternative approach would have been to interview the workers elsewhere and outside working hours, but this would have limited our access to informants. Our first step after the selection of hotels and shifts were made was to contact the management of all the major hotel chains and inform them that we would contact each individual hotel in the draw. In this letter we explained the purpose of the survey, and we made the hotel chains aware of the anonymous character of the study. We also informed them that study had been approved by the Norwegian Social Science Data Services[2]. We asked for their consent and if it was possible to receive a letter of support and/or permission to use their contact details for future reference. We expected this could make the access to each individual hotel easier. Even though approaching the hotel chain management was time-consuming, we believe that it was vital to the survey that we managed to negotiate this consent and a certain level of support. A typical response from the hotel chain management was that they did not mind our research, but that it was down to each hotel manager whether they wanted to participate or not. While the different chain met our request with different degrees of hesitancy and enthusiasm, it is fair to say that the dialogue with chain management was a positive one. In addition to an easier dialogue with individual hotel managers, we have also been able to utilise the contact with hotel chain managements in other parts of the project on the hotel sector in Oslo and Akershus (see Jordhus-Lier et al. 2010 for an overview).

We then sent a formal letter to all the 40 hotels from our drawn list. This was a similar inquiry to the one sent to hotel chain management, in terms of explaining the purpose of the study. In addition, we gave hotel managers an approximate time frame within which they could expect us to turn up at the hotel. As far as possible, we tried not to announce exact times for each hotel visit. This was to ensure that hotels were not fully prepared for our visit, and thereby aspire to keep conditions as natural as possible. Much as expected, we did not receive many replies straight away. The ones we did get were mostly managers with reservations or critical investigations about our objectives. Concerns were often related to occupying workers during their working hours given that of the hotel business was experienced difficult times. In some cases, it therefore took some explanation to assure hotel directors that the on-site survey would have very limited impact on their employees' work. We also received some positive replies to our inquiry. The majority of hotels, however, did not reply at all. We still decided to approach all the workplaces in our draw and concentrate our efforts on negotiating with the hotels from which we had received a negative or hesitant response.

---

[2] *Norsk samfunnsvitenskapelig datatjeneste* (NSD), see http://www.nsd.uib.no/nsd/.

3 Conducting the on-site workplace survey

A total of eleven interviewers participated in the hotel visits, including three researchers from NIBR and eight research assistants. The research assistants did the bulk of the survey data collection. Small laptop computers with designated survey software were used to carry out the study.

3.1 Arrival and access

The standard procedure when we arrived at the hotel was to contact the reception and announce our purpose of carrying out a survey. We then asked to speak to the manager and explained how we planned to conduct the survey. In this initial process we used a standard formulation that was prepared by the project team, in addition to presenting documents that demonstrated the correspondence with the hotel chain management and the letter that had been sent to the management of each selected hotel (see previous section).

Even though we had notified hotels that we would show up within a time period of three months (March-May 2010), we knew that we ran the risk of being rejected when we showed up in the reception without clear appointments. The majority of sampling was done within this time period, but we ended up having to visit a few hotels in June 2010 to fit the schedule of our research assistants.

The hotels may be divided into five categories based on access upon arrival. The first category of hotels represents the majority and agreed access straight away based on the routines described above. These hotels may be labelled *cooperative*. In general we had many positive experiences related to access throughout the survey process. Some of the hotel managers in this category were extremely helpful, for instance by sending the working staff one at a time to an agreed location within the hotel where the interviews could take place. This was particularly convenient for us at the large hotels. With some experience, one interviewer could handle thirty respondents within one hour with this kind of help.

The second category was the particularly large hotels, where we did not want to risk refusal due to the number of research assistants that would be needed to coordinate these particular hotels. Therefore, we decided to contact these *coordinated* hotels about the drawn time in which we would turn up. There is little reason to believe that the routines at the time of the survey were changed . In some cases, special arrangements were needed for hotel managers to agree to facilitate the on-site survey: in all of the large hotels we had to specify the exact time planned and in some cases we agreed on

a slightly different time slot (e.g. to avoid the morning queue at the reception counter).

The third group of hotels may be categorized as *hesitant*, and this group required a lot of extra work by the researchers and research assistants. 8 hotels represent this group, and experiences from them are interesting and important. For instance, the manager from one hotel contacted the research team after receiving the formal letter, telling us that they were not interested in being disturbed at their workplace. After speaking to the hotel managers, we agreed to contact the union representative at this particular hotel. With help from the union representative we managed to get hold of most of the people that had worked on the drawn shift, yet we also had a substantial number of non-responses due to absence for various reasons. During a different hotel visit, we had already started the survey when the manager interrupted us and told us to wait outside at the parking lot until the employees were done working for the day. After some discussion he agreed to let us finish what we had started. We decided to schedule an appointment before visiting this hotel a second time. Another group of hotels within this category refused entry at arrival, but were given the opportunity to contact the hotel manager and make a new appointment. In five of these hotels, the process ran smoothly after doing so, and we were allowed entry on the same weekday and during the same time slot. In one hotel, however, we were refused access a second time, even after an agreement had been made with the hotel manager. A third visit had to be scheduled and this time we finally got access. The survey was conducted, but because of the requested time and day differentiated from the drawn hours, some of the respondents were not at work that day. Thus, we had some non-response at this hotel.

A final group within the hesitant category insisted on scheduling the survey to another weekday and/or time slot. In one hotel we had drawn a shift on Wednesday, but from the hotel administration's point of view this was impossible. In their view, Wednesday was the busiest day in the week, every week, and for that reason we could not conduct the survey on that exact day. Through some negotiation we were promised to get lists over people who had worked on a given Wednesday and conduct the survey with them on the following Monday. We did so to be able to stick to our research design of 'time slot draws' as much as possible. For those hotel workers that did not work the Monday we turned up, we were allowed to come back the following Wednesday to get the rest of the respondents. We asked the respondents that we interviewed on the Monday when they got to work and when they left last Wednesday, and we also had to calculate days at work from the previous Wednesday.

There was a small *refusal* category of 2 hotels. Here, we were not allowed access despite repeated attempts of negotiation. A combination of factors seems to have led to these refusals. At one hotel we had already made the first visit after normal working hours, and therefore not met the managers yet. The second time we visited we talked to the hotel management and they told us to make an appointment and come back later. The leader of our project called the assistant hotel manager the same day to make the appointment, but it ended in a complete refusal. Since they obviously were not aware that we already had made an earlier visit and collected data, we informed the assistant about this in an effort to minimise the possible consequences for the hotel personnel we talked to the first time. The second hotel

that refused us entry was a small bed and breakfast hotel. We had to stand outside trying to explain the project over the calling system. The manager we spoke to ended up telling us that: "[…] okay, then I believe I have the right to say no […]", and hung up. We called her later and got an appointment, but when we turned up she was in such a hurry that she would not let our interviewer go through with the research. She asked us to send her the questions in paper form because then she could fill it out when she had the time. We sent the survey by post, but it was never returned.

Finally, there was an *irrelevant* category of three hotels. In this case the hotels did not match our criteria for sampling, for instance by not having any employees or being renovated at the time of sampling.

The following table shows the number of hotels based on the categories described above:

Table 3.1   *Hotel categories based on access*

Hotel Categories	Number
Cooperative	25
Coordinated	2
Hesitant	8
Refused	2
Irrelevant	3
Total	40

In terms of possible misrepresentation from our sample, the hesitant category might be the most problematic, and then in particular those hotels that managed to negotiate a different time of visit than what had been drawn. The typical situation was that when the hotel managers were allowed to pick an alternative day, they chose the least busy days. It also seems problematic having to postpone the visit by two weeks even though we were able to use the same weekday and time slot. For instance, one of our drawn hotels had a busy wedding schedule on Saturdays in late June whereas mid-July was a quiet period. Based on our qualitative case study research in progress we believe that these rescheduled times could lead to an underrepresentation of "numerically flexible workers" (cf. Kalleberg 2003), for instance from service companies, temporary work agencies and the hotels' own standby workers. Our case studies in progress clearly indicate that hotels make sure housekeeping and serving is kept at a minimum in quiet times.

Another important experience from trying to access the hotels suggests that small and independent hotels need a different approach than the larger chain hotels, not least because they are less used to research being conducted at their workplaces. When a researcher approaches a hotel after initial contact with and support from chain management, this makes a huge difference in the hotel director's response. Moreover, several of the guesthouses and smaller hotels only required one visit, either because there was no personnel at work at one of the two time slots, or because the same personnel was working in both slots. Worth noticing is also the fact that these smaller hotels did not follow the same working hours as the chain hotels.

We also had some challenges related to the sampling of "inconvenient" time slots. This particularly applied to the night intervals (00.00 to 06.00). Most hotels only have one night receptionist at work at night, and their usual shift is from 23.00 to 07.00. For these drawn hours we had to make some exceptions, and visited the hotel either at the start of the shift or at the end instead of the shift when we knew they were alone, for instance 02.00-04.00. We also decided to call some of these hotels when we knew the receptionist was alone at work. slot

3.2   Approaching the respondents

After we had achieved access to each of the hotels, we had to find out how many workers were present within the drawn time slot. Each category of hotels had to be approached differently in this respect. At some of the smaller bed-and-breakfast type hotels we only interviewed a handful, and it was very easy to find the workers that were present during the drawn slot. The biggest hotels were more difficult as the number of workers was high and the physical space in which to find them large. Additionally, it was difficult to find someone who actually knew exactly how many that were working at the time. Interestingly, we also found this kind of uncertainty at smaller hotels, where the staff explained that the different departments did not interact with other departments, and hence did not know anything about how many co-workers they had.

A practical issue was related to using small laptop computers. Although the computers were small and light, they were not ideal to run around with. Because of this we tried to establish points at the hotels for conducting the survey, preferably with a table.

Having sorted out the issue above, the next step was to approach the respondents. This was fairly straight forward and only a few non-responses were noticed. We registered them and filled in the short survey. However, as we did two shifts at many of the hotels, several employees were registered twice. In this case we simply registered them as 'previously registered' respondents. However, we also experienced meeting a couple of people working in one hotel that had responded to our survey at another hotel. These workers were typically employed by the larger hotel chains or by a subcontractor and were moved around as the employer saw fit. These employees were also registered as 'previously registered' respondents, even though not in the same hotel. The case of the same personnel working in both time slots also became problematic when we visited with weeks between each visit. This made it harder for both the respondents and the interviewer to remember if they had participated in the survey at a previous shift. This was even more challenging when the interviewer who returned for the second visit replaced the research assistant that did the initial drawn shift. Thus, there is a slight chance that a few workers have been registered more than once.

3.3   Language issues

Almost all of the respondents spoke, or at least understood, either Norwegian or English. There were exceptions. Many hotels typically had a large group of workers with a common language, and in those instances where a respondent did not

understand the questions, another worker would translate. The reliability of translated responses may be questioned (Twinn 1997). For instance, one interviewer was uncertain about whether one of the respondents actually understood the questions, but later on that same respondent spontaneously took the position as translator for another respondent. At another hotel, the housekeeper acted as a translator for the cleaning staff. However, it did not seem as though the effect was very profound in this case, not least given the nature of the questions. Using translators comes with a certain amount of methodological challenges, and it became clear to us that we had to specify that it was important that the questions were translated very precisely, without adding or removing elements.

3.4 The questions

The questions of our initial short survey generated responses in addition to concrete answers that are worth mentioning in this working paper.

1. How old are you?

Most respondents found this question easy to understand and reply to. However, some respondents may have felt that we came on a bit strong when the first question was about their age, and a few replied vaguely. For instance, one respondent responded with: "[…] let´s say 50 years". In the survey we operate with broader age categories which should reduce some of this uncertainty.

2. In which country were you born?

Once again, the main impression is that the majority of respondents replied swiftly. Yet, some problems were encountered for a variety of reasons. For instance, we had one episode where a research assistant interviewed a non-western respondent at housekeeping. When the research assistant asked about country of origin, the respondent refused to answer the survey further, and asked the assistant to leave her alone. Another issue with this question was related to the validity of asking the respondent's country of birth. There were a few instances where this question did not fully cover the intent of mapping the number of immigrants. For instance, a research assistant met two women born in India that had spent their whole lives in either Norway or Sweden. The first had Norwegian parents who had just been working in India for a year. neither by name nor appearance could she be seen as anything other than Norwegian. The second woman was adopted to Sweden, had a Swedish name and Swedish mother tongue. These were registered as Indian.

3. How many days have you been working the past seven days?

For this question, the research assistants had to explain that this included the day of the survey as typical answers were "I normally work 3 or 4 days a week", or to just count the present 5-day week and not. Some interviewers even sketched a week plan on paper to explain what was meant by the question.

Some visits collided directly or indirectly with holidays (Easter and Whit). The question "how many days have you been working the last seven days" may therefore have generated answers that do not represent the day-to-day routine of that particular hotel. Those working fulltime and regular 5-day weeks could have responded less than five days and appear to be part-time employees, while those working weekends

and holidays could have had more work than during a normal week. The team tried to avoid these special weeks, but in one situation we had to visit on an exact day to have enough interviewers, and in another situation the hotel chose the date we could visit. However, the internet-based questionnaire will balance this possible misrepresentation as we have included questions on full-time/part-time employment.

4. What is your position/job at this hotel?

This question came with a pre-made set of possible answers that included typical hotel positions such as reception, room cleaning, kitchen staff or conference staff. More precisely, the question addressed what the respondent's *main* position was, as it is not unusual to fill a number of different roles at many hotels. Our list was not exhaustive as it did not cover all the specific categories that may be found in the larger hotel workplaces. Examples include administrative positions such as event booker, sales and booking manager, or restaurant related positions such as sous chef or beverage manager. In these and similar instances, the research assistants placed the workers in the most relevant category of "administration" or in the "others"-category.

5. Who is your employer?

A clear majority of respondents (85.6 per cent) answered that they were employed by the hotel or the hotel chain, while 12.8 per cent[3] replied that they were employed by a subcontractor or staffing agency. However, we found some irregularities in some of the answers involving housekeeping staff, and this might have led to a certain underrepresentation of subcontracted staff in the survey. When we asked who their employer was, they insisted on the hotel as their employer, but we later found out that subcontractors had all the contracts in one or two departments in the hotel. Possible explanations to this may be that workers still identify themselves as employees at the particular hotel, but it is more likely that the (wrong) response was due to not fully understanding the question. After a few similar situations, we ended up asking the housekeeping manager about the employer status before carrying out the full survey. We still asked the same question, but in certain situations we used the information from the housekeeping manager to control the answer. Some workers also responded by giving out a name, such as "Lene". In these cases we had to ask more questions to establish whether "Lene" represented the hotel, a staffing agency, a subcontractor or any of our other categories.

6. When did you start work today? When do you think you will leave work today?

The first of these two questions does not contain much room for confusion. Still, some were more precise to the minute than others when telling us if they began at 08.50 or 09.00. It is not unconceivable that some omitted the 10 minutes of "getting

---

[3] One should treat this figure with caution, as it does not necessarily reflect the de facto outsourcing rate as of 2010. In the follow-up internet-based survey, where cleaning staff and externalised staff were significantly under-represented, 3.9 per cent of the respondents answered in a way that did not match their initial answer (either 'hotel' when they had replied 'external agency' in the on-site survey, or the other way around. This implies that the above percentage might be unreliable and, interestingly, that many employees are uncertain about their employer's status (see also the remaining paragraph under question 5).

ready" before the ordinary work hour, while others included them. The same can be said about "When do you think you will leave work today"?. The following conversation was not uncommon:

– My shift ends at four.

– Is that when you will leave?

– No.

– When will you leave then?

– Maybe a bit later.

In these instances we tried to make them estimate a time of departure based on their prior experience.

3.5 Non-response

The overall response rate was very satisfactory (see Aasland and Tyldum 2011), but there were several instances of non-response worth mentioning. These can be divided in two main categories, namely those who *refused to answer*, and those we *could not get hold of*.

Within the first category, the typical reason for non-response was that the respondents said they did not have the time to answer the questions. This could be because their work schedule was too tight, because they had to clock into work, or reach a train after work. At one of the large hotels, the interviewers were set up at the worker's entrance/exit. Even though we could control who came in and out, this was a vulnerable time in which to screen the workforce as they were either eager to show up at work, or to leave on their way home. Consequently, this led to a few non-responses.

Within the second category, reasons for non-response was either that we were not well enough informed about who were at work at the time of sampling, or we could simply not get hold of them for other reasons. At the largest hotels, no one seemed to know exactly how many people were at work and it was thus difficult to say how many we were looking for. We literally went around the corridors searching for employees when our estimates indicated a much higher number of workers. Thus, the large workplaces may have a slightly higher non-response rate than what we are aware of. At the medium-sized and smaller hotels, we believe that the receptionist's estimate was sound, but we had to be wary that they did not exclude the subcontracted workers. In other instances, we were informed about people that were at work or should be at work, yet we could not locate them.

Despite these categories of non-response it is important to note that we managed to get hold of some information about these workers in most instances, including their probable country of origin, age and position at the hotel. This information was included in the survey collection.

We also received feedback from non-respondents that helped explain why some refused to answer the survey. At one of the hotels, a worker told us that it could have made it easier for us if someone had put up a notice about the survey the same

morning and explained that it had been approved by the management. This remark is supported by our case studies in progress that indicate scepticism toward researchers at some of the workplaces, which again can be based on experience with various methods of surveillance by the hotel or subcontractor.

3.6   External influences

External factors also influenced the survey during the sampling period from March 2010 until July 2010. When Eyjafjallajökull erupted and spread volcanic ash in April 2010, it paralysed air traffic in Europe. It also disrupted the routines at the hotels in our sample. For receptionists and booking personnel, this meant more work with constant rebooking. However, for the housekeeping department there was less work since guests either did not leave or did not arrive. As a consequence we were told that some of the workers had been made temporarily redundant, often within hours. Under normal circumstances temporary lay-offs have to be notified with 14 days notice, but in the case of an unforeseen event, such as a volcano outburst, the notification deadline is reduced to two days (NAV 2010). As we continued our survey during the dark spell of the ash cloud, we could sense the uncertainty among the workers. Many were afraid of being laid off and at the same time they thought of their colleagues who had been given the message. For the survey, this entailed fewer respondents than expected, and that the willingness to cooperate seemed lower because the workers (receptionists in particular) were busier.

As we approached the end of the sampling period, the holiday season had started. Our general impression was that this meant a larger influx of guests and more employees at work. However, this may also be due to the fact that most of the sampling in this period was done on weekends. From our case studies in progress, the general impression is that there are fewer guests during the week and more guests on weekends during the holiday season. This picture, however, is the opposite in the hotels around the airport.

4   The questionnaire

In the following we describe experiences related to the planning and execution of the internet-based questionnaire that followed the on-site workplace survey. A more detailed account of the statistical methods, including probabilities and weights, of the hotel survey are described in Aasland and Tyldum (2011. Here, we will account for some design issues and discuss some of the problems encountered in administering the questionnaire.

4.1   Design

The questionnaire contained an extensive set of questions, covering basic personal and employment data, subjective opinions about workplace, social relations, management, trade unions and relatively sensitive questions about health and discrimination. The survey contained all in all 92 questions, and was estimated to take 15 minutes to fill in. The length of the survey is likely to explain why some respondents started the survey without completing it.

As all employees were sent the same set of questions, we had to design an intricate system of skips which allowed for customised responses to each question: e.g. respondents who were *not* members of a union were not asked to respond to questions about the union as such, but were asked to justify why they were not unionised; respondents who *did not know* whether they were union members would be exempt from both these sets of questions. As a result, some questions skipped to three different places further into the questionnaire. While the questionnaire software we used (Laguna Survey) had many of the qualities we were looking for, the research team had to collaborate with programme developers at Laguna Survey to develop the software to meet the requirements of this survey. Still, while we arrived at a desirable level of flexibility for the online survey, we did encounter some minor problems when the responses came back. In one case, we had to send an extra questionnaire to 105 respondents, including 4 questions which the said respondents had missed due to a skip error. The response rate on this extra survey was close to 75 per cent, ensuring that this represented only a small set-back in the data collection process.

4.2   Invitation

After filling in the short survey during the on-site survey visits, respondents were asked whether they would be willing to fill in the questionnaire. The overwhelming majority was positive towards doing so. The workers were offered two different formats, but the research team recommended the informants to choose the first option. The preferred format was that the informants gave their email address to the

research assistant[4], allowing the research team to email the respondents an invitation containing a link to an internet-based survey. The optional format was to receive a printed paper version on the spot, accompanied by a pre-paid, pre-addressed envelope. In other words, all respondents could answer the questionnaire in their chosen surroundings (also those without a computer at home). We offered the online and printed questionnaires in both English and Norwegian. This seemed to be fine with most of the respondents, and some of the English-speaking respondents even wanted a Norwegian survey because they could get help at home from their partner or a friend. A clear majority ended up filling in the Norwegian version.

To stimulate a high response rate, we decided to inform all the workers that participation in the survey would make them part of a lottery where two winners would receive a new, MacBook laptop. Within the 867 workers that completed the on-site survey, 87 per cent accepted the invitation to participate. It was clear to us that the incentive of participating in a lottery was crucial in keeping the interest of the respondents. However, the final response rate of the questionnaire reveals that only 42 per cent completed the questionnaire in the end, and there are some important biases in terms of who actually completed the survey.

4.3   Response

The internet-based questionnaires were sent out by email invitation on three separate occasions: 517 invitations on May 2010, 108 on 29 June 2010 and nine on 3 August 2010. While we initially aimed for only one invitation, the data collection took longer than expected due to the above-mentioned difficulties. Moreover, we wanted to send out the invitations while the informants' memory of the hotel visit was still 'fresh', and before the holiday season started.

During the first (main) phase of the data collection period, we had registered a number of respondents with an unspecified language preference for the questionnaire: some of these had not answered, a few of them had asked for a different language[5], a few others were registration errors. Consequently, we sent out 81 invitations in both languages. Each of the invitations contained a stated deadline (appr. 5 weeks after the invitation), and in this period at least three reminders were sent to the given email addresses. The following table indicates started and completed questionnaires for the different sets of invitations.

Table 4.1   *Started and completed questionnaires*

	Started	in %	Errors	in %	Completed	in %	Population	in %
5 May 2010								
Norwegian version	222	68,9 %	30	9,3 %	197	61,2 %	322	100 %
English version	23	67,6 %	4	11,7 %	20	58,8 %	34	100 %
Unspecified Nor	42	52,5 %	4		33	41,3 %		
Unspecified Eng	19	23,5 %	3	3,7 %	13	16 %	81	100 %
29 June 2010								
Norwegian version	71	74 %	4	4,2 %	67	69,8 %	96	100 %
English version	11	91,7 %	0	0 %	8	66,7 %	12	100 %
3 August 2010								
Norwegian version	3	50 %	4	66,7 %	3	50 %	6	100 %
English version	2	66,7 %	2	66,7 %	2	66,7 %	3	100 %
Sum	**393**	**70,9 %**	*51*	*9,2 %*	**343**	**61,9 %**	**554**	**100 %**

4.4   Paper print version

In addition to the internet-based responses, we received 32 questionnaires in Norwegian (31 of which could be classified as completed), and 2 in English (both completed). These were registered by research assistants as entries into a new Laguna Survey set. All the above survey data sets were then combined in an SPSS data base for analysis.

5   Concluding remarks

This working paper has described and discussed field observations from an on-site workplace survey and experiences related to the internet-based questionnaire that followed. The second part of the paper described the planning and preparation stage of the study, in particular explaining our on-going contact with the hotels and hotel chains in order to secure access to the workplaces. The third part was a description of our field observations, covering issues of access, research routines, respondent reactions, non-response and external influences. The fourth part described experiences with conducting an internet-based survey, in particular focussing on design, experiences with survey software, invitation and incentive method, and responses. We believe that our experiences are useful in complementing the interpretation and explanation of survey results, as well as functioning as an important pilot to the hotel case studies in progress. Moreover, we second Yin's (2003) argument that field observations may strengthen the overall validity of case studies when employed together with other qualitative methods such as interviews and document studies. The triangulation of qualitative and quantitative methods are, however, not that common in case study research. This is often due to a lack of resources, a narrow scope of the study, or because the questions that generate quantitative or qualitative data are very different (Gomm and Hammersley 2000). In this case, we argue that the combination of qualitative and quantitative data indeed is fruitful when resources allow it and research questions are overlapping (cf. Downward and Mearman 2007). As such, the overall case study on workers hotel sector in Oslo and Akershus that includes this quantitative survey, 4 hotel case studies, a case study of corporate strategy in the hotel sector and a case study on the local hotel trade union, all benefit from the field observations described in this paper.

We further believe that transparency in the data collection process strengthens the analysis of the survey data, in particular when considering the aspect of generalisation. As some of our samples in the survey ended up smaller than expected, statistical generalisation is sometimes difficult to achieve. This is not least the case with the category of subcontracted workers. Our other studies within the hotel sector case study suggest that this category is increasingly important in understanding the changing dynamics of the hotel sector in Oslo and Akershus. Nevertheless, this category remains small in our survey, and not possible to generalise on in relation to many of our variables. However, when combining the observations in this paper with the statistical information about this group (Aasland and Tyldum 2011), it becomes easier to explain why the number is smaller than expected. Moreover, the detailed description of the research process may be beneficial to a more analytic form of generalisation (Schofield 2000) through which the transparency of research makes it easier to generate theoretical understandings as well as translate the process of data collection to other research situations.

References

Aasland, A. and G. Tyldum (2011). A note on sampling procedures for the hotel project, NIBR Working Paper 2011:105, Oslo: 1-7.

Downward, P. and A. Mearman (2007). "Retroduction as mixed-methods triangulation in economic research: reorienting economics into social science." Cambridge Journal of Economics 31: 77-99.

Gomm, R. and M. Hammersley (2000). Introduction. *Case Study Method*. R. Gomm, M. Hammersley and P. Foster. London, Sage.

Horgen-Friberg, J. and G. Tyldum (2007). Polonia i Oslo: En studie av arbeids- og levekår blant polakker i hovedstadsområdet. , FAFO Report, 2007: 27.

Jordhus-Lier, D. C., A. C. Bergene, H. M. Knutsen and A. Underthun (2010). Hotel workplaces in Oslo and Akershus. NIBR Working Paper 2010:106. Oslo, Norwegian Institute for Urban and Regional Research: 1-30.

Kalleberg, A. L. (2003). "Flexible firms and labor market segmentations: effects of workplace restructuring on jobs and workers." Work and Occupations 30: 154-175.

NAV (2010). Vulkanutbrudd og permittering. http://www.nav.no/Arbeid/Arbeidss%C3%B8ker/Inntektssikring/236659.cms, retrieved 16 October 2010.

Ragin, C. C. (1994). *Constructing social research - the unity and diversity of method.* London, Pine Forge Press.

Schofield, J. W. (2000). Increasing generalizability of Qualitative Research. *Case Study Method.* R. Gomm, M. Hammersley and P. Foster. London, Sage.

Sieber, S. D. (1973). "The integration of fieldwork and survey methods." American Journal of Sociology 78(6): 1335-1459.

Twinn, S. (1997). "An exploratory study examining the influence of translation on the validity and reliability of qualitative data in nursing research." Journal of advanced nursing 26(2): 418-423.

Yin, R. K. (2003). Case study research: Design and methods. Third Edition. London, Sage.