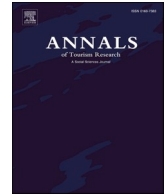




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Full Length Article

## Digital nomads' work-leisure management practices

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## ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic has rapidly advanced digital technology adoption, transforming the knowledge work market and mainstreaming digital nomadism. While digital nomads often enjoy autonomy in choosing when, where, and how they perform their work, they face unique challenges in managing the intersection of work and leisure. Yet, literature on the practices digital nomads use to manage the boundaries between work and leisure is limited. This study combines the sociomaterial lens within practice theory and border theory to explore digital nomads' work-leisure management practices, analyzing 224 digital diary entries and 32 semi-structured in-depth online interviews to identify 25 practices. This study offers insights into digitally mediated work-leisure practices of digital nomads, highlighting key aspects and implications for the tourism sector.

## Introduction

In 1997 Makimoto and Manners envisioned that digital technology would support the rise of a new nomadic age in which digital nomads, as individuals who perform work from anywhere in the world, would proliferate (Makimoto & Manners, 1997). Over twenty years later, technological innovations have expanded the potential and options available to individuals aspiring to become digital nomads (Aroles et al., 2020). The transition towards this new way of working, living, and playing has been exponentially accelerated by the global outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic (Hobsbawm, 2022), driving remote work opportunities and fuelling the digital nomadism phenomenon (Cook, 2023).

Digital nomads are knowledge workers (Rainoldi et al., 2024) who leverage digital technologies to perform remote work from various locations around the world (Hannonen, 2020). Unlike other remote workers, who typically stay in a fixed location, digital nomads pursue a lifestyle characterized by the integration of work with leisure activities with a deliberate focus on maximizing leisure experiences often connected to a high consumption of tourism services (Aroles et al., 2022; Reichenberger, 2018; Thompson, 2019). As they travel while working, digital nomads may face extreme flexibility and unpredictable or unusual work schedules—often influenced by time zone differences—resulting in blurred work-leisure boundaries (Cook, 2023), presenting unique challenges (Chevtava et al., 2024; Rainoldi et al., 2024). As a result, digital nomads develop practices for managing the balance between their professional and personal lives (Cook, 2020; Orel, 2019), sometimes because of the conditions of precarity in which they live (Green, 2023). These distinctive traits position digital nomads as a key demographic shaping emerging trends in hybrid work-leisure lifestyles and tourism

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practices.

The literature on digital nomadism has explored various practices, strategies, or boundaries across different forms of employment (Aroles et al., 2020) to homemaking (Bergan et al., 2021), discipline (Cook, 2020), mobility (Green, 2020), communication and information (Nikolaeva & Kotliar, 2019; Périssé et al., 2021), and identity construction (Prester et al., 2019). However, it has yet to holistically describe how the blurring lines between work and leisure occur. Although several studies emphasize the importance of this issue (Cook, 2020) few have attempted to analyze it. Those that did focused mainly on coworking environments (Orel, 2019), community building (Thompson, 2019), and organizational control (Marx et al., 2023). There is a need to understand how digital nomads integrate and balance work and leisure (Cook, 2023), adopt a non-dichotomous view of these activities (Reichenberger, 2018), and highlight border management mechanisms (Bassyiouny & Wilkesmann, 2023).

The aim of this research is to identify the work-leisure management practices digital nomads use to balance work and leisure. It combines the sociomaterial lens within practice theory studies (Leonardi, 2013; Orlikowski & Scott, 2008) with the border theory perspective within work-life boundaries studies (Ashforth et al., 2000; Clark, 2000). Theoretically, the development of a practice-based framework showing how digital nomads blend the relationship between work and leisure is important for tourism studies. It enables an understanding of the evolving nature of travel and tourism experiences, thereby enriching the wider literature on lifestyle mobility and the relationship between work and tourism (Bassyiouny & Wilkesmann, 2023; Beatty & Torbert, 2003; Kannisto, 2016; Uriely, 2001). Practically, it is of importance for tourist destinations (Zhou et al., 2024) and the so-called workspitality sector (Floricić & Pavia, 2021), which aim to attract this new type of hybrid tourists (Bassyiouny & Wilkesmann, 2023).

## Theoretical background

### *Sociomaterial practices and digital nomadism*

The growing importance of digital nomadism has drawn attention to the practices that form the foundation of this hybrid lifestyle (Aroles et al., 2020; Bergan et al., 2021; Prester et al., 2019). Practices represent the social processes that encompass both social and material dimensions through which organized conduct achieves specific human goals. They are defined as chains of activities made of the doings and sayings that constitute and sustain these practices (Schatzki, 2019).

Within practice theory, the concept of sociomateriality has emerged as a lens for gaining insights into the production, reproduction, and transformation of practices that unfold in the process of technology enactment (Orlikowski & Scott, 2008). The social aspect of sociomateriality is represented by doings and sayings (Schatzki, 2019) that transpire through actions based on knowledge, competence, and meaning (Shove et al., 2012). Materiality refers to the artifacts that enable practices (Leonardi, 2013), ranging from simple tools to advanced technologies (Gherardi, 2019).

While recognizing that materiality is ingrained in human actions, the notion of sociomateriality draws attention to how relationships between material artifacts and human practitioners are not pre-established but rather emerge through practice (Gherardi, 2019; Symon & Whiting, 2019). This underscores the significance of digital technology in the practices of digital nomads, who extensively employ a range of digital tools such as mobile devices, applications, websites, and platforms, to conduct and organize their work and leisure life (Cook, 2020; Hannonen, 2020).

In digital nomadism, practices are formed by several activities supported by digital technologies, such as writing codes and articles, recording vlogs, and taking pictures (Birtchnell, 2019; Prester et al., 2019). For digital nomads—who can be considered travellers who combine work-related with tourist-oriented pursuits (Uriely, 2001)—the organization of work activities is often closely intertwined with the organization of leisure activities, sometimes taking place simultaneously, being inseparable from one another (Thompson, 2019; Woldoff & Litchfield, 2021), and forming a network of work-leisure practices. This shifts work from separated to integrated with leisure. Considering the management of life borders as a sociomaterial phenomenon (De Alwis et al., 2022), where daily boundaries are continuously shaped (Davies & Riach, 2018), offers a fresh perspective on the interplay between the figure of the digital nomad as a social actor and digital technology as a material actor, emphasizing how their dynamic interaction shapes border management practices.

### *Work-leisure border management and digital nomadism*

To examine and conceptualise the relationship between work and leisure, this study draws on border theory (Clark, 2000). The border lens views life as an interplay between distinct domains in which people assume different roles and perform various activities (Clark, 2000). Borders are seen as lines of demarcation, which are determined by the relationships that individuals form with each domain and their connected attributes (Clark, 2000). Establishing and maintaining borders has been described as fundamental for digital nomads. For instance, coworking spaces represent an environment where non-work-related distractions are reduced, and work discipline is promoted (Chevtaeva & Denizci-Guillet, 2021; Orel, 2019).

In the context of digital nomadism, borders function as an indicator of areas of human activity, with digital technology shaping their reach (Bodker, 2016; Cook, 2020). To illustrate, a digital nomad might designate specific hours of the day for work in a coworking space or a quiet café, while reserving evenings for local experiences. Thus, borders can be defined “as phenomena that are enacted in practice” (Leonardi et al., 2019, p. 668). Drawing borders helps individuals structure their everyday lives according to the circumstantial characteristics of the environment in which their activities unfold. Border theory categorises borders into *physical*, *temporal*, and *psychological* dimensions.

*Physical borders*, as traditionally defined, encompass all physical aspects of a place, including natural elements, infrastructure, and

artifacts (Clark, 2000). However, this broad concept does not fully capture the nuanced border management practices of digital nomads. For digital nomads, work is often multilocal (Voll et al., 2022) and integrated into leisure-oriented spaces—such as coffee shops, hotel rooms, guest houses, holiday rentals, and recreational vehicles (Floricić & Pavia, 2021; Gretzel & Hardy, 2019; Prester et al., 2019)—blurring the distinction between work and leisure. While these spaces are traditionally associated with leisure, digital nomads break the physical barrier of leisure through the use of material artifacts such as digital technologies. For digital nomads, being physically present in a place does not necessarily mean being engaged in it as digital technologies enable them to transition between work and leisure regardless of their location.

To address this complexity, the concept of physical borders is divided here into *spatial borders* and *material borders*. Spatial borders refer to the physical spaces where digital nomads live, including the infrastructure and environmental contexts. These spaces are inherently fluid, accommodating both work and leisure activities. Material borders, by contrast, focus on the artifacts—such as digital devices and tools, including automated and autonomous technologies—that actively shape and redefine the boundaries between work and leisure (Nash et al., 2018; Rainoldi et al., 2024). This distinction provides a clearer framework for understanding how digital nomads navigate their environments in which digital nomads' practices occur, and the elements involved in their accomplishment.

*Temporal borders* refer to when domain-relevant activities take place (Clark, 2000). For many digital nomads, work is flexible and extends beyond traditional business hours (Bassyouny & Wilkesmann, 2023), across time zones (Cook, 2020), and during holidays (Ferreira et al., 2019). However, this flexibility is not universal. Job roles and employer requirements often dictate adherence to more fixed schedules, including a 9-to-5 framework, making the experiences of digital nomads diverse and context-dependent. For example, as more permanent employees adopt nomadic work (Marx et al., 2023), some may have more fixed business hours, aligning their schedules more closely with those of other remote workers. Digital technology plays a crucial role in enabling digital nomads to engage in work whenever they wish. In this environment, service providers, such as hotels, have started to offer 24/7 access to coworking facilities (Hannonen et al., 2023).

*Psychological borders* are individually established rules and limits that define what behaviors, emotions, and cognitive patterns are suitable in one domain (Clark, 2000). Establishing distinct psychological boundaries is a major obstacle digital nomads face. While the ability to combine work and leisure represents one of the key motivations for adopting the digital nomad lifestyle (Woldoff & Litchfield, 2021), this duality often results in conflicting feelings and psychological needs (Reissner et al., 2021). In this light, this study prefers the term *human borders* to psychological borders to represent mental and emotional actions that govern digital nomads' actions.

Border theory further suggests that individuals, such as work colleagues, supervisors and significant others outside the work environment may play a role in negotiating and defining the scope of a domain and its borders. Influential domain members' views of domains, their borders, and their awareness about one's commitments across the diverse domains of life may impact the ease with which borders can be crossed (Clark, 2000). This research builds on the notion that social relationships—whether with co-workers, supervisors, clients, family, residents, other travellers, or the broader digital nomad community with whom they share living, working, and leisure spaces (Aroles et al., 2022; Bassyouny & Wilkesmann, 2023)—actively shape the flexibility and permeability of work and leisure boundaries. For example, relationships with co-workers, clients, and supervisors may enforce or relax professional obligations, while interactions with family and friends can reinforce leisure boundaries. As such, this research proposes that *social relationships* should constitute a border of their own.

In a digital environment, borders can be considered a resource that digital nomads can draw upon to deal with the complexity of their everyday lives and to provide structure and legitimacy to fields of human activity (Bødker, 2016). Building upon this foundation, in this study borders are conceptualised as structures that emerge as digital nomads interact recurrently with the properties of the technology at hand.

## Study methods

This study employed an abductive approach grounded in pragmatism—as a “*philosophy of practice*” (Simpson, 2018, p. 54)—and employed a qualitative multimethod strategy based on praxiography, incorporating digitally supported observant participation and interview techniques. Praxiography—as a form of practice-based ethnography—provides a framework for describing the web of activities that constitute a practice (Gherardi, 2019). It focuses on examining the modus operandi of human and material entities, highlighting how these actors are constitutively entangled within social practices (Schmidt 2017). Adopting a praxiographic multimethod approach aligns with the pragmatist paradigm, which advocates the use of multiple methods to gather diverse perspectives on complex phenomena (Mik-Meyer 2021), such as digital nomadism.

Digital nomads were identified via Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn by tracking hashtags such as #digitalnomad, #workingfromanywhere, and #laptoplifestyle. The use of these hashtags ensured the self-identification of the study participants with the research helped to select participants from areas unaffected by COVID-19 restrictions during data collection and screen their social media profiles to confirm their active involvement in digital nomadism. This identified 188 digital nomads, of which 32 completed the study (Appendix 1). Informed consent was obtained before involvement in the data collection phase. Data collection occurred between May and October 2021.

Observant participation was employed to capture a detailed account of digital nomads' practices in situ (Symon & Whiting, 2019). A digital diary—based on the *day reconstruction method* (Kahneman et al., 2004)—was designed to enable digital nomads to record insights about the activities that constitutes their daily border management practices. Combined with the *day reconstruction method*, digital diaries represent a novel and effective form of self-reported data collection. They allow participants to record rich data with ease and editorial control (Jarrahi et al., 2021) ensuring ecological validity (King & Brooks, 2017). Participants were asked to report their

work and leisure activities, the artifacts involved, and the temporal, spatial, and social contexts of these activities. In total, 224 digital diary entries were collected.

Following this phase, participants were invited to share their experiences through an in-depth online praxiographic interview, designed to complement and broaden the understanding of their border management practices. Unlike traditional interviews, which focus on abstract knowledge or opinions, praxiographic interviews investigate the practical actions, materials, and embodied processes that shape how practices are performed in real-world contexts. This type of interview enabled reaching participants without geographical limitations and gave participants a sense of comfort and normality. Participants were asked to discuss the activities reported in the digital diaries and explain how border management processes and transitions are managed. Interviews, conducted in English, averaged 90 min, totaling 44 h and 34 min.

The 224 digital diaries entries and 32 online interviews were first anonymized and then analyzed in a dialogic way (Pritchard, 2012) through template analysis (King & Brooks, 2017). Data analysis was conducted in NVivo 12 and a six-step process including 1) familiarisation with the data, 2) preliminary coding, 3) clustering, 4) producing the initial template, 5) developing and applying the template, and 6) final interpretation, was used. The analysis process included iterative rounds of analysis and revision through which the template was progressively refined by adding new themes, subthemes, and codes, to incorporate emerging insights, ultimately creating a comprehensive representation of the data.

An independent coder was engaged in the template’s development to ensure clarity, providing critical feedback invaluable for refining the four-level hierarchical structure of the template, enhancing the reliability and validity of the overall analysis. To interpret themes in greater depth a series of data queries, including, matrix coding and crosstab were run. This process of interpretation focussed on the details that constitute practices, enabling the identification of 25 digital nomads’ border management practices.

**Study results**

This section provides an overview and description of the digital nomads’ work-leisure management practices. These are clustered in the five structures that constitute the settings in which digital nomads design and manage work and leisure as represented in Fig. 1.

*Temporal practices*

Temporal practices represent the mechanisms that regulate when work and leisure activities occur, including their duration and rhythm. Digital nomads’ activities were found to be temporally distinguished in terms of *synchronicity* or *asynchronicity* with the conditions in situ. Synchronous configurations support clear borders while asynchronous ones encourage overlapping domains. Digital nomads’ management of temporal structure involves six practices: real-timing, sequencing, overlaying, time-setting, zipping, and time-zoning. Table 1 summarizes the six temporal practices, their core configurations, and examples to illustrate each practice.

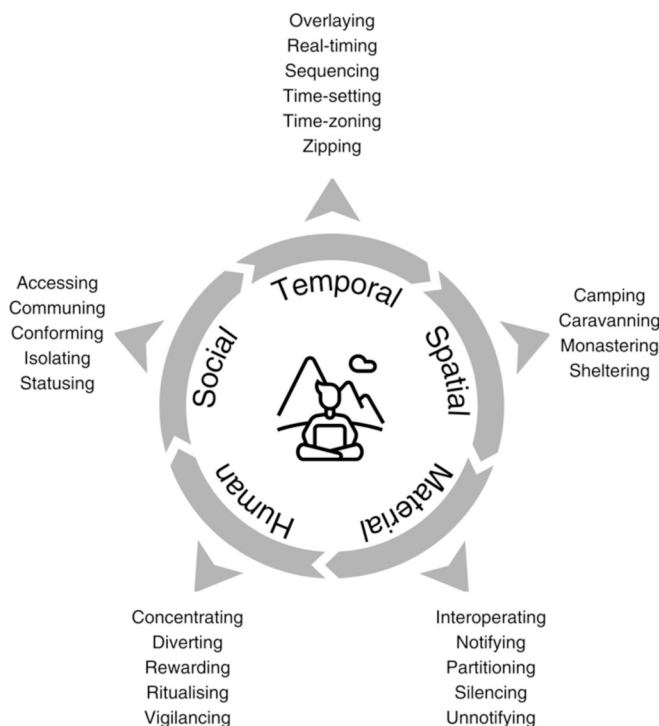


Fig. 1. Digital nomads’ work-leisure management practices.

**Table 1**  
Temporal practices.

Practice	Configuration	Illustrative examples
Overlaying	Asynchronous	"I usually listen to podcasts or other YouTube videos while working because I use two screens, and I can watch something on the laptop while working on the second screen". Elena, digital diary 1
Real-timing	Asynchronous	"In one hour, I could yo-yo between work and leisure activities up to 10 times, depending on what I'm doing". Catherine, interview
Sequencing	Synchronous	"It depends, I think, very much on the busyness of my year [...], I have certain high peak times and downtime for work". Elisabeth, interview
Time-setting	Synchronous	"Sometimes, like, in the laptop or I have this pomodoro, and it helps me to distinct pretty much [...] between work and leisure". Olga, interview
Time-zoning	Asynchronous	"A lot of my clients are going to be in Europe and North America, and I'm aware that I'm stuck out in a completely different time zone [...]. I see that as a good thing, because I'm not a morning person". Charles, interview
Zippping	Asynchronous	"I was running, then posting stories (for work), then running again". Maria, digital diary 7

*Real-timing* involves swift, spontaneous transitions between work and leisure, triggered by external cues resulting in an 'always-on' state. Real-timing shares similarities with *overlaying*, which refers to the simultaneous engagement in both work and leisure domains, featuring intentionally permeable borders and parallel actions in each domain. Digital nomads employ this practice when tasks in either domain require limited cognitive engagement, allowing them to actively focus on one task while passively attending to the other. For example, the consumption of leisure content during routine work. The resulting temporal overlap between work and leisure domains, which we propose to call *double-asynchronicity*, generates a new state of simultaneity by intentionally triggering domain interconnection without closing existing time frames.

This simultaneity differs from the microtasks typical of the *zippping* practice. Zippping involves quick actions in in-between moments to fill otherwise unproductive time gaps. This practice, often occurring in response to unexpected time frames, transforms downtime into a valuable resource. Similarly, *time-zoning* involves working and engaging in leisure activities in different time zones, allowing synchronization with the local reality while working asynchronously. Digital technology supports these practices by enabling instant information processing and the possibility to simultaneously create temporal anchoring in both the work and leisure domains.

Sequencing and time-setting practices suggest a temporal organization of work and leisure activities that recreate the conditions of a traditional office setup with a predetermined distribution of working and playing hours. *Sequencing* involves the alternation between dedicated time blocks for work and leisure activities, aiming to achieve focus and minimising intrusive overlaps. In sequencing, actions aim to maintain domain synchronicity, with technology supporting intentional and clearly demarcated temporal transitions. *Time-setting* refers to the conscious initiation of transitions between work and leisure at specific times. In this practice, digital nomads utilise applications like alarms, timers, and reminders to maintain synchronicity and consciously initiate transitions between work and leisure domains at a precise point in time.

### Spatial practices

Spaces are integral to the work-leisure management practices of digital nomads. In the spatial structure, spatial configurations involve organizing elements in the territory where activities occur, such as offices and coworking spaces, residential and hospitality structures, Airbnbs, hotels and cafés as well as places in nature, such as beaches, parks, and mountain trails. Digital nomads exhibit spatial practices that are either *territorial*, creating and protecting domain boundaries, or *nonterritorial*, dissolving boundaries to enable hybridized spaces, with digital technology playing a key role in supporting both approaches. Four spatial practices—camping, caravanning, monastering, and sheltering—were identified (Table 2).

The lifestyle of digital nomads has been associated with the working from anywhere metaphor (Bednorz, 2024; Hobsbawm, 2022), with camping and caravanning practices underlining this notion. These practices are used for setting up temporary offices in public or semi-public locations, such as cafés, restaurants, hotels, parks, beaches, camping places, and parking lots or means of transport such as cars, taxis, trains, and aeroplanes are often used as places of work. *Camping* involves the careful choice and customisation of spaces to create hybrid work-leisure areas. The leisurely ambience of these spaces provides a stimulating yet relaxing environment conducive to digital work. The choice of camping location is influenced by factors such as distance from home, amenities, and social atmosphere. Working in these leisurely environments, often outdoors, enhances emotional and mental well-being, boosting productivity, as reported by digital nomads.

*Caravanning* involves spontaneously selecting and organizing public and semi-public areas for work or leisure. Unlike camping, caravanning locations are chosen impulsively and used for rapid domain transitions, such as working while being on the move. This practice transforms in-between places, such as park benches, a seat on a car, a taxi, a train, or a parking lot, into spontaneous territories of action. The key to camping and caravanning is the use of mobile digital devices for connectivity. Facilities offering free Wi-Fi, like fast food restaurants and supermarkets, become vital for maintaining continuity in their activities. These practices demonstrate digital nomads' adaptability to overcome the constraints of their surroundings, which occasionally may not be ideal for work. This practice is a representation of the modern extreme mobilities mirrors flexible and adaptive nature of contemporary nomadic practices (Kannisto, 2016).

In monastering and sheltering, residential structures provide a safe ambience for work and function as private offices. In contrast to camping and caravanning where digital nomads use technology to transcend physical space, *monastering* involves immersing into the current spatial setting. This is achieved by managing the physical and digital attributes of technology to maintain a sense of

**Table 2**  
Spatial practices.

Practice	Configuration	Illustrative examples
Camping	Non-territorial	"I love that I have the freedom to work outside, to be location independent, to continue what [...] I'm working on, even if I am in a coffee shop or in a restaurant, so I just got the freedom". Jasmine, interview
Caravanning	Non-territorial	"I had to do some work so, then the train seemed like a good place because, um, they had the socket and they had a table, so it was a good place to get some things done". Adriana, interview
Monastering	Territorial	"Sometimes I want to go to [...] places or to do activities which can't involve a laptop or even cell phone, like we don't have Internet or something or it's a camping, or it's um deep inside mountains, and I love this stuff, type of activities". Olga, interview
Sheltering	Territorial	"I took a table where I could be alone so that I avoid distractions from fellow travellers. I opened my laptop and set my headphones on to emphasize even more that I'm not in a socialising mode". Adriana, digital diary 5

territoriality. For instance, work-related devices like smartphones and laptops are deliberately left behind during leisure time to prevent intrusions. Monastering also involves selecting locations with no connectivity, creating a temporary sanctuary for concentrated presence to prevent spontaneous domain transitions and overlaps. Unlike monastering, *sheltering* involves the creation of private micro-spaces within public areas. Devices like screens, headphones, and earphones are actively embraced to form a protective shield to control the proximity and influence of others supporting territorial actions.

### Human practices

Human practices regulate digital nomads' mental and emotional engagement or disengagement with work and leisure, determining their degree of blending. Work is often described using negative terms like overwhelming and stressed, but also positive ones such as accomplished and creative. Leisure, on the other hand, is represented by terms like relaxed and energised. Negative mental and emotional states from work can spill over into leisure. Human configurations distinguish between work and leisure by managing cognitive and affective actions, determining appropriate *engagement* or *disengagement* in each domain. Five practices emerge from the configuration of the human structure: concentrating, diverting, rewarding, ritualising, and vigilancing (Table 3).

The practices of concentrating and ritualising focus on obtaining undisturbed attention and provide a mental and emotional switch between work and leisure. *Concentrating* involves creating mental and emotional states for focused engagement in work or leisure. Digital nomads achieve this by setting dedicated time frames, choosing specific places, and engaging with supportive social contacts. This practice aims for deep focus, often facilitated by digital technologies like *mindfulness bells* or *pomodoro timers*. These tools help maintain concentration and avoid distractions, enhancing the quality of work or leisure activities.

Instead, the diverting and vigilancing practices favour a high degree of blending and weak borders between work and leisure. *Diverting* involves deflecting mental and emotional focus, contrasting with the deep focus achieved in concentrating. Digital nomads using this practice experience two types of mental and emotional responses. Firstly, some remain cognitively and affectively attached to a domain beyond its boundaries, leading to a continuous focus spread. This attachment can result in an inability to detach, exemplified by digital nomads with a 24/7 work mindset (Mazmanian et al., 2013). Secondly, diverting can cause cognitive and affective shifts from one domain to another, often due to situational stimuli. These shifts, sometimes seen as distractions, are partially driven by digital technology, which creates unintended overlaps and transitions between work and leisure. Additionally, diverting encourages engagement in low-intensity activities that require minimal focus, contrasting with the deep engagement sought in concentrating.

*Vigilancing* is a practice where digital nomads maintain a state of psychological and emotional alertness, using digital technology to maintain a state of continuous connection and monitor their environment for potential triggers requiring border adjustments between work and leisure. It involves constant surveillance, keeping an eye on notifications and messages. This practice is common in precarious conditions demanding constant availability and responsiveness, influenced by demands from various social actors and personal traits like curiosity. These practices seem to be linked with what digital nomadism literature has described as favouring a 24/7 commitment to work and the fear of missing out (Cook, 2020). While more prevalent among self-employed digital nomads, these mental and emotional conditions also affect those digital nomads with contractual agreements.

**Table 3**  
Human practices.

Practice	Configuration	Illustrative examples
Concentrating	Engagement	"I think that it's (pomodoro timer) a, like, a piece for concentration [...]. It makes me more concentrated because I know I have it running. So, it helps me to concentrate and work". Olga, interview
Diverting	Disengagement	"I try to make the most of my free time, [...] but still you can never do it 100 % because parts of your brain will always be somewhere else and will always be thinking about jobs to come". Paolo, interview
Rewarding	Engagement	"If I'm working for 45 min straight, I need like 15 min for something else [...], I'm gonna enjoy, I'm gonna, like, reward myself for 15, 20 min with a swim or something like that or even coffee and then I'm going to continue working". Ante, interview
Ritualising	Engagement	"When working from the office [...], we have the commute [...]. That's a physical boundary that you've created to separate work, work and life. When working from everywhere you, you don't really have that, you have to create that for yourself [...] for me it's just, it is that simple act of closing the laptop, opening the laptop". Hailey, interview
Vigilancing	Disengagement	"Because there is no regulation, and no one sees when I'm really working and when I have to do something, and I don't have to be in my office for 8 h and can't just completely shut down my brain". Paul, interview

*Rewarding* focuses on mental and emotional gratification. It entails actions that generate pleasure and positivity, like taking a coffee break or going for a walk. In this practice, rewarding actions mark a shift from work to leisure, viewed as a mental and emotional respite for rejuvenation. Rewarding is about transitioning from work to leisure for psychological and emotional benefits post-work, with well-defined borders and disciplined management of transitions often supported by shared calendars or scheduling systems. Rewarding as a practice is linked to the sense of enjoyment, relaxation, and opportunities for learning that leisure activities provide. The rewarding practice shows that replenishing activities can take the form of micro-rewards for the accomplishment of work tasks and living in an environment that offers a variety of leisure activities can provide these positive effects.

The *ritualising* practice involves habitual actions that mark the start and end of mental and emotional engagement in a domain, exemplified by actions such as turning devices on or off and opening or closing applications. Digital nomads view these ritualised actions, like a 'shutdown routine', as significant transitions between work and leisure, imbuing them with mental and emotional value. Traditional transitions like commuting have been replaced by manipulating digital technology. This practice varies in duration, from hours to days or even an entire vacation, and is sometimes reinforced by organizational policies restricting technology use outside work hours or for non-work purposes during work hours. For digital nomads, these practices represent a way to compartmentalise work and leisure and achieve balance in their lives. They provide the structure and the detachment from work that traditional work models used to ensure through set breaks, weekends, and holidays (Cook, 2023). Thus, they represent a form of self-control that promotes what digital nomadism literature has labelled as self-discipline (Cook, 2020).

### Material practices

The material structure is crucial in the work-leisure management practices of digital nomads. Material structure refers to the plethora of artifacts such as digital devices, applications, and social media that digital nomads use to either blend or separate their work and leisure domains. This study identifies five practices for configuring this structure: interoperating, notifying, partitioning, silencing, and unnotifying (Table 4). These practices determine how digital nomads manage the boundaries between work and leisure, using their material environment. In this constitutive entanglement, the material structure is configured to form *concurrent* or *divergent* domain experiences to either merge or distinguish work and leisure.

By adopting interoperating and notifying practices, digital nomads favour the integration of professional and leisure life, which promotes weak, flexible borders and spontaneous transitions. *Interoperating* enables seamless domain transitions, as digital nomads synchronise their mobile devices to enable ubiquitous access to and communication of information concerning their professional and leisure lives. For example, a digital nomad can effortlessly switch from editing work documents to managing personal travel plans on synchronized devices. This multi-domain use of digital devices offers customization and adaptability according to the situational conditions, whilst also challenging the clear separation of work and leisure. Issues like portability influence this practice, as carrying separate devices for each domain is impractical. Using single accounts on communication tools and social media platforms for both work and leisure further blur the boundaries between these areas.

The *notifying* practice leverages digital technology for immediate interaction in work and leisure through notifications. It emphasises real-time information and communication, with digital nomads configuring devices and applications to alert them about messages and requests instantly, using on-screen banners, vibrations, and sounds. This practice allows for constant awareness and swift response to time-sensitive matters, aiding social connectivity. Notifying leads to an always-on behaviour (Mazmanian et al., 2013), where borders between work and leisure are perpetually susceptible to interruptions. Consequently, while it enhances adaptability to situational changes, it challenges the digital nomad's control over information flow and complicates the structured organization of work and leisure domains.

In contrast, the partitioning, silencing, and unnotifying practices support the creation of a clear distinction between work and leisure reducing spontaneous transitions. *Partitioning* delineates work and leisure domains through the selective use of digital technologies. Digital nomads employ specific devices, applications, and tools for either work or leisure, creating a material barrier to prevent unintended domain transitions and maintain focused attention. For example, using separate devices for work and leisure is common, especially among those digital nomads employed by organizations that monitor and restrict device usage for work purposes only. Beyond devices, partitioning extends to applications and tools, using different applications for similar services, creating separate accounts, or different folders within an account to distinguish between work and leisure. This practice contrasts with the integrated use in the interoperating practice. In reality, digital nomads might mix elements of both practices, such as using two synchronized devices while having distinct applications for work and leisure. The degree of separation in partitioning can range from exclusive domain use

**Table 4**  
Material practices.

Practice	Configuration	Illustrative examples
Interoperating	Divergent	"My cell phone and my MacBook are, are just two versions of the same thing". Oliver, interview
Notifying	Divergent	"I just want to be informed in case something breaks, or something is wrong, or whatever. I just want to be there if there's an emergency". Maria, interview
Partitioning	Concurrent	"My laptop is my work device. So, when I'm on it, it's, like, work mode, and then, when I want to disconnect, I go to another digital device". Catherine, interview
Silencing	Concurrent	"Especially when I'm like travelling, I just want to take a picture, you know, sometimes I put it (mobile phone) on airplane mode". Hailey, interview
Unnotifying	Concurrent	"I just turn off all notifications related to work, like, I did during my vacations". Olga, interview

of devices to simpler distinctions like using folders.

In the *silencing* practice, digital nomads use the features of technology to block external stimuli and prevent domain intrusions. This involves tactics like blocking websites, using airplane mode or turning off devices to eliminate distractions like calls and messages. Silencing is spontaneously enacted based on current needs. Its purpose is to create a material barrier at a specific moment to focus on the current domain, either work or leisure, without transitioning to another.

*Unnotifying* is used to limit notification impacts, contrasting the notifying practice. It involves deliberate adjustments to devices, apps, and tools to restrict unprompted stimuli, and setting notifications for specific times to prevent domain intrusions. Tactics include using airplane mode, activating focus options, or muting irrelevant notifications. This practice aims to create strong borders between work and leisure, minimising unwanted domain transitions.

### Social practices

Digital nomads manage relationships across work and leisure, interacting with various individuals like co-workers, supervisors, clients, co-travellers, family members, partners, and friends. Digital technology aids in controlling social presence, projecting identities, and indicating openness to social interactions. Digital nomads can be both senders and receivers of social stimuli, affecting their social engagement. The social structure encompasses practices of accessing, communing, conforming, isolating, and staturing, balancing immersion in current settings—*absorption*—and engagement across multiple spheres—*dispersion* (Table 5).

*Communing* resembles the way of organizing work and leisure often publicised in the digital nomadism literature, where coworking and coliving represent social settings that shape the social life of digital nomads (Bergan et al., 2021; Chevtaeva & Denizci-Guillet, 2021). The communing practice facilitates the development and maintenance of relationships. This practice involves actions that establish a sense of closeness with social contacts, encompassing working groups, leisure-oriented societies and the digital nomad community. Digital technology enables connecting, bonding, co-working, collaborating, sharing knowledge, and supporting within social groups. Communing primarily focuses on absorption into work or leisure communities, offering opportunities for domain transitions and enabling flexible border management to adjust social reach as needed. For example, a digital nomad might engage in a coworking space during the day to immerse in a professional community, and later join a local cultural group or social event, seamlessly transitioning between work and leisure while adjusting their social interactions based on their current focus.

However, digital nomads' social domain extends beyond social contacts in the physical space. Employers, co-workers, clients, family, and friends may enjoy constant accessibility to the practitioner, as explained by the accessing practice. *Accessing* involves ensuring social accessibility to diverse contacts across work and leisure domains. It relies on constant connectivity and unbounded availability, facilitated by digital technologies acting as social connectors. This practice is bidirectional, with digital nomads functioning as both senders and receivers of social stimuli, enabling unrestricted interactions regardless of time and place. This can lead to negative consequences, such as unplanned interactions perceived as intrusions, potentially disrupting nomads' activities. Overall, accessing creates weak, permeable borders in the social structure, leading to a dispersed social presence and periods of abstraction from the immediate context.

To communicate accessibility and determine its extent, digital nomads may also employ the staturing practice. *Staturing* is used by digital nomads to communicate their current social presence in work or leisure. They manipulate digital features on devices, applications, and tools to control social interactions, such as setting automatic status updates or replies to organize and convey the extent of their work and leisure borders. For instance, using an 'out of office' status or setting 'do not disturb' on messaging apps, helps digital nomads to communicate their accessibility. This practice can limit expectations of constant availability, with technology acting as a protector of social borders. However, features like online presence indicators in social media can also create social expectations.

Communing, accessing and staturing share some elements also with the conforming practice. *Conforming* involves adaptation to the norms and rules of work or leisure contacts. This practice shapes how digital nomads align their actions with the time, space, and material organization of their colleagues or leisure acquaintances. For example, a digital nomad might schedule work tasks around others' workdays. This practice impacts the use and choice of digital devices, applications, and tools to fit situational social environments. Conforming can lead to detaching from work-related technology in leisure settings or adopting tools common in social circles. It helps establish clear borders between work and leisure, mirroring the border structure of the social setting. However, communing and conforming stand in clear contrast with the isolating practice.

*Isolating* represents an overlooked type of social behaviour in digital nomadism. Isolation and loneliness are described as recurrent social issues that negatively affect digital nomads (Thompson, 2019). However, it remains unnoticed that digital nomads use isolation

**Table 5**  
Social practices.

Practice	Configuration	Illustrative examples
Accessing	Dispersion	"I always go somewhere where I have a connection, and they can always text me, email me or call me". Amina, interview
Communing	Absorption	"I want to meet more people from that community of the digital nomad, so that's why this week I tried something different, and I met those amazing people in this city". Maria, interview
Conforming	Dispersion	"When I have some work to do, I search for a place where I can work [...]. It could be at midday or in the afternoon or also at night and, yeah, because most of the time, [...] I'm travelling with other people". Paul, interview
Isolating	Absorption	"I put on 'do not disturb' or things like that when I, when I know that I really need to eliminate social distractions and intrusions". Hailey, interview
Staturing	Absorption	"I'm just very clear on my calendar with when I'm available". Donna, interview

to intensify their separation between work and leisure and to support other practices, for example, the concentrating practice. Digital nomads use this practice to limit accessibility to social contacts not relevant to their current domain. They may restrict availability to work contacts during work hours only to avoid constant availability (Mazmanian et al., 2013). Tactics like do-not-disturb modes or turning off the Internet, plays a crucial role in this practice. This allows digital nomads to create social barriers and control borders between work and leisure. However, for social contacts spanning both domains, the division is more flexible, allowing some overlap.

## Conclusion

As COVID-19 has accelerated the opening of the era of mainstream remote work (Cook, 2023) and hybrid tourism (Bassiyouny & Wilkesmann, 2023) understanding the practices of digital nomads has become paramount for tourism research and tourism destinations and businesses. Earlier studies on digital nomadism have largely focused on the motivations for becoming a digital nomad (Schlagwein, 2018; Woldoff & Litchfield, 2021), the mobility aspects (Birtchnell, 2019; Cook, 2023; Green, 2020; Reichenberger, 2018), types of work digital nomads engage in (Hannonen, 2020), and the broader lifestyle choices of digital nomads (Chevtavaeva & Denizci-Guillet, 2021; Thompson, 2019). These studies often emphasize the freedom and flexibility that digital nomadism offers, allowing individuals to live and work in different locations, without a holistic examination of the specific practices that constitute their daily lives (Cook, 2020).

This research extends understandings of the digital nomad life to explore how they manage work and leisure. By examining the specific practices through which digital nomads balance these two domains, the study provides a nuanced consideration of how work-leisure borders are negotiated. It highlights the challenges unique to digital nomads in maintaining this balance, offering insights into the complexities of their everyday lives. While some practices identified in this study may also be present in other work environments, their enactment by digital nomads reflects the unique demands and affordances of their lifestyle. For instance, the practice of isolating in a traditional office context may involve a fixed space or schedule, whereas digital nomads dynamically create isolation across shifting geographies and through the selective use of digital technologies. Similarly, rewarding practices for digital nomads are often shaped by the integration of tourism pursuits into their daily routines. These distinctions highlight how digital nomadism amplifies and reconfigures everyday work-leisure practices through the interplay of mobility, flexibility, and digital technology.

## Theoretical implications

This study challenges conventional tourism theories by positioning digital nomadism as a hybrid phenomenon that transcends traditional categories of work and leisure travel. The findings underscore the need to reevaluate tourism theories to account for the increasingly fluid and interconnected nature of work and leisure. By exploring digital nomads' practices, this study highlights how work and leisure are no longer discrete domains but are dynamically integrated within sociomaterial contexts. This integration redefines the conceptual boundaries of tourism, calling for a theoretical framework that accommodates hybrid lifestyles and their implications for mobility, identity, and place attachment.

Building on this perspective, the study also contributes to border and practice theories by providing detailed empirical insights into the specific practices digital nomads use to manage their work and leisure. It identifies a spectrum of 25 unique work-leisure management practices that illustrate how digital nomads navigate their unique lifestyle. This level of detail helps to fill gaps in the literature regarding the day-to-day realities of digital nomads, making the research more applicable to practitioners and academic researchers alike. The findings extend the applicability of these theories to mobile contexts, offering new insights into the role of digital technologies in tourism behaviors.

This study advances border theory (Clark, 2000) by introducing the constructs of spatial, material, and social borders, alongside reframing psychological borders as human borders, to better understand the practices of digital nomads and the rise of hybrid lifestyles that are reshaping tourism. Spatial borders show how physical environments, like coffee shops and hotel rooms, are transformed into hybrid work-leisure hubs. Material borders emphasize technologies, such as laptops and smartphones, that enable seamless domain transitions, driving demand for tech-integrated tourism infrastructure. Social borders highlight relationships with coworkers, family, and the digital nomad community, shaping shared and communal tourism spaces. Human borders integrate emotional and cognitive processes, crucial for understanding how service providers support digital nomads' well-being. These constructs provide a framework for analyzing hybrid lifestyles and their impact on tourism, guiding the creation of flexible spaces, tech-enabled services, and community-oriented experiences that cater to the evolving needs of work travellers.

This study introduces the idea of specific polar configurations for each practice structure, such as synchronous versus asynchronous temporal configurations, providing a theoretical framework that critiques the overly broad dichotomy of work-life separation and integration, offering a more nuanced and in-depth analysis of how digital nomads navigate fluid and hybrid work-leisure boundaries. It also provides empirical evidence of how digital nomads manage the blurred boundaries between work and leisure in highly mobile settings. This challenges traditional views within border theory that often assume more static environments (De Alwis et al., 2022), thereby expanding the theory's applicability to tourism studies concerned with more fluid, mobile lifestyles. As such, the findings offer novel insights into how work and leisure are increasingly interlinked in ways that challenge traditional tourism paradigms (Bassiyouny & Wilkesmann, 2023; Beatty & Torbert, 2003; Kannisto, 2016; Uriely, 2001), highlighting new forms of blending between these domains.

The paper contributes to the sociomaterial lens by illustrating how the materiality of digital technologies influences digital nomads' ability to integrate work and leisure. It demonstrates that digital infrastructure together with the environment in which digital nomads are immersed, play critical roles in enabling or constraining the practices of digital nomads. This contribution resonates with Prester

et al. (2019) helping to deepen our understanding of how material conditions co-constitute social practices, particularly in the context of work-leisure integration. The findings show that configuring work-leisure practices is a constant process where boundaries are continuously reshaped in response to changing conditions.

This study also finds that some practices identified in this research may be overlapping and co-dependent. This is because distinct practices share elements—such as actions, materials, or meanings—that allow them to intersect or influence each other in their performance. Furthermore, overlapping practices create interdependencies, where co-performance influences the unfolding of each practice. For instance, the real-timing, notifying, vigilancing, and accessing practices may overlap as they are performed simultaneously, each shaping the other and the management of work and leisure in digital nomads' daily lives. This concept theoretically aligns with theories of practice, which view practices as interconnected (Schatzki, 2019).

Finally, digital nomads have often been defined broadly and somewhat loosely, without a rigorous definition or consideration of the fluidity of their lifestyle. Therefore, this research concludes that digital nomads should be understood as mobile digital workers with a lifestyle that combines work and leisure across variations of time and space as well as individual and social settings in relation to material resources.

### *Practical implications*

Tourism businesses can use these insights to create inclusive work/leisure settings that support relaxation, entertainment, and productivity. Managing digital nomads' temporal practices requires flexible environments that balance freedom and discipline (Cook, 2020). Destinations and businesses should offer spaces catering to both synchronous and asynchronous needs. For example, quiet zones for focused work and leisure-friendly areas allow digital nomads to transition smoothly between work and leisure. Time-management tools, such as workspace booking systems, and unrestricted access to private and shared working facilities can further support their temporal needs (Hannonen et al., 2023).

In addition to temporal needs, businesses must address the spatial practices of digital nomads. Research on digital nomadism often focuses narrowly on coworking spaces (Chevtaeva & Denizci-Guillet, 2021; Cook, 2023), overlooking their diverse usage of spaces for both work and leisure. Destinations should develop hybrid spaces, such as convertible outdoor areas and coworking spaces integrated with leisure amenities. Well-equipped spaces for work on the go, such as those enabling caravanning or camping, are also crucial. Membership packages providing access to networks of hybrid spaces—both public and private—enhance the nomadic experience. Planning should prioritize infrastructure (e.g., coworking, coliving), essential resources (e.g., electricity, high-speed internet), and destination branding as digital nomad hotspots (Woldoff & Litchfield, 2021). Businesses should also consider the dynamics of spaces shared by digital nomads and tourists.

Tourism destinations can attract digital nomads by addressing their psychological and emotional needs. Silent retreats or productivity-enhancing workshops support concentrating practices, while ritualising practices benefit from personalized scheduling tools or concierge services that help establish clear work-leisure boundaries. Rewarding practices can be catered to with curated leisure packages, including wellness activities for relaxation and cultural experiences for enjoyment. Businesses can also support vigilancing practices with workshops on burnout prevention, digital detox retreats, and professional services for managing work-related fatigue, enhancing satisfaction and well-being (Chevtaeva et al., 2024).

Material practices further highlight opportunities for tourism businesses. Destinations offering high-speed internet and flexible workspaces appeal to nomads balancing work and leisure through interoperating and notifying practices. Conversely, quiet zones, distraction-free environments, and accommodations designed for digital disconnection (e.g., rooms with limited access to technology) attract those prioritizing silencing and unnotifying practices. Customized services supporting these needs can drive increased visitation and longer stays, yielding economic benefits for destinations.

Lastly, social practices such as communing and isolating are essential for digital nomads to balance work and leisure. Flexible coworking areas fostering engagement (Chevtaeva & Denizci-Guillet, 2021), along with quiet zones for focused work and shared living accommodations, cater to these diverse needs. By offering spaces for both social interaction and solitude, destinations can provide a satisfying and productive experience. Recognizing these practices enhances a destination's appeal and supports its role as a hub for digital nomads (Florici & Pavia, 2021).

### *Limitations and future research*

Digital nomads were identified by using selected hashtags on selected social media which would not capture all. Using remote digital research methods for the data collection is also a limitation. Digital diaries and online interviews offered insights into otherwise inaccessible actions, but on-site data collection may have provided deeper immersion into the situatedness from which actions emerge as practices in a way that indirect observations do not allow.

Future research could expand this study's results, using its findings to propose a practice-based typology of digital nomads. Such typology could provide a foundation for future inquiry to assess the influence of these practices on tourism behaviors, destination choices, and the impact of digital nomads' local communities. Future research could explore how practices evolve over time and impact digital nomadism and tourism destinations and businesses. Future research could attempt to assess the impact of emerging technological developments, such as the metaverse and artificial intelligence, on the relationship between work and leisure and their practices. Future research could also explore leisure-at-work theories to investigate further the nuanced interplay between work and leisure for digital nomads, complementing the insights provided by border theory and offering a broader understanding of how these individuals navigate their work-leisure boundaries.

In conclusion, the findings of this work aspire to encourage reflections on the changing nature of both work and leisure, which scholars, organizations and the leisure and tourism community have long treated as two distinct and conflicting life domains. For digital nomads, work and leisure coexist within a system of interconnected activities rather than existing as polar opposites, thereby challenging the traditional work-leisure divide.

### CRedit authorship contribution statement

**Mattia Rainoldi:** Writing – original draft, Visualization, Project administration, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization, Writing - review & editing, visualization. **Adele Ladkin:** Validation, Supervision, Conceptualization, Writing – review & editing. **Dimitrios Buhalis:** Validation, Supervision, Conceptualization.

### Declaration of competing interest

None.

### Appendix A

#### Appendix 1

Participant information.

Name	Age	Gender	Nationality	Education	Occupational sector
Charles	38	Male	British	Master	Game development
Jasmine	39	Female	Filipino	Bachelor	Architecture
Paolo	31	Male	Italian	Master	Languages
Karolina	30	Female	Lithuanian	Bachelor	Marketing
Catherine	30	Female	American	Bachelor	Marketing
Deepak	25	Male	Indian	Master	Marketing
Leanne	31	Female	British	Bachelor	Marketing
Lazlo	25	Male	German	Master	Marketing
Honolulu	26	Female	American	Master	Coaching
Sofia	26	Female	Bulgarian	Master	Customer service
Elisabeth	32	Female	Austrian	Doctorate	Education
Hailey	40	Female	American	A-Level	Coaching
Frank	49	Male	German	Master	Entrepreneurship
Ante	25	Male	Croatian	Master	Digital marketer
Lotte	24	Female	Dutch	Master	Languages
José	38	Male	Venezuelan	Master	Software development
Lee	29	Male	Chinese	Bachelor	Entrepreneurship
Maria	28	Female	Bulgarian	Bachelor	Marketing
Donna	25	Female	American	Bachelor	Marketing
Amina	34	Female	Kazakh	Master	Consulting
Olga	28	Female	Russian	Master	Software development
Patrick	50	Male	Irish	Doctorate	Education
Paul	26	Male	Austrian	Master	Graphic design
Adriana	25	Female	Romanian	Master	Project management
Malaika	42	Female	American	Bachelor	Real estate
Elena	26	Female	Romanian	Master	Data science
Diva	28	Female	Indian	Bachelor	Product management
Ivan	31	Male	Russian	Master	Architecture
Luc	51	Female	French	Master	Languages
Yiannis	40	Male	Greek	Master	Marketing
Oliver	39	Male	American	Master	Software development
Nicholas	37	Male	Greek	Bachelor	Coaching

### Data availability

Data will be made available on request.

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