6 Anywhere workers and the sustainable development of tourist destinations

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Abstract

Working from anywhere, often associated with digital nomadism, is a growing trend that blurs the boundaries between work and leisure, with individuals choosing to work from tourist destinations. The phenomenon has caught the attention of academics, who mainly focus on the lifestyle aspects of digital nomadism. However, destination management organizations, as well as the tourism and hospitality industry, especially in Northern Europe, have been slow to recognize the phenomenon as relevant to tourism. The choice of place is an important factor in the system of anywhere work. Although defined as 'anywhere' workers, or digital 'nomads', their choice is largely based on the importance of being *somewhere*. In this choice, place matters as do the services that are offered there. Low living costs and good Wi-Fi connections are not everything. The chapter offers a literature review of the neglected, although very important, perspective of the tourism and hospitality industry response to the increasing numbers of anywhere workers, and how they can adapt to it to foster a more socially, economically and environmentally sustainable tourism. This type of visitors can be a low-volume, high-value segment, with longer stays, better integration into the host society, and more responsible consumer behaviour.

Keywords: Work From Anywhere (WFA), digital nomads, sustainable development, destination development, tourism and hospitality industry

Introduction

Working from anywhere (WFA) has been a growing trend that tentatively started in parallel with digitalisation, and was reinforced by the consequences of the pandemic (Hannonen, 2020; Tursunbayeva et al., 2022; Cook, 2023). The remarkable shift in the ways that people engage in work and leisure activities is currently reshaping the traditional boundaries of work, leisure, and tourism. We may need to understand the traditional terms 'work' and 'leisure' in new ways, and this demands new academic definitions. The phenomenon of travelling in order to combine work and leisure within an utterly mobile lifestyle has received many names, among them digital nomadism, anywhere work, bleisure (business+leisure), co-workation, work from anywhere, agile work, telework, mobile work, to name the most frequent (Bailey & Kurland, 2002; Choudhury et al., 2021; Lichy & McLeay, 2018; Reichenberger, 2018; Voll et al., 2023).The phenomenon of WFA combines several spheres of everyday life and society, including tourism, work,leisure, mobility, digitalisation, and globalisation. It touches upon various analytical aspects, such as lifestyles, identities, organisation of work, sustainability, and many others (Birtchnell, 2019; Hannonen, 2020; Nash et al., 2021; Pignatari, 2023; Reichenberger, 2018; Sánchez-Vergara, 2023; Thompson, 2019).

In the present chapter, we use the term 'anywhere workers' (cf. Voll et al., 2023) to define a broad group of people who are not bound to work from an office, but who use digital technologies to work remotely, while not necessarily embracing the lifestyle aspect of digital nomadism (Reichenberger, 2018). The concepts are related to lifestyle mobility, which emphasises place attractiveness on the one hand, and a work-leisure continuum on the other, all connected by human mobility (Cohen et al., 2015). Although called anywhere workers or similar titles, these people do not work and stay just anywhere. Instead, they choose their places to stay and work for several reasons. Although characterized as individuals who can work from anywhere, these individuals are far from being place-agnostic.

The concept of WFA has received scholars' attention for a while, though mainly focussing on lifestyle aspects of travellers. Another