

Research Article

Postleisure: Disrupting the Disciplinary Fixity of Leisure Thinking

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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Constructionism
Being
Becoming
Empirical ontology
Postleisure
Ontology
Postdisciplinary

ABSTRACT

This paper is a postdisciplinary exploration of leisure and the conceptual corollaries of recreation and adventure. It seeks to broaden the ontological discourse in the field and demonstrate that alternative approaches to theorising about and studying leisure, recreation, and tourism are possible – if not necessary – amid concerns and critiques stemming from posthumanism, climate change, decoloniality, and the mobilities of hope and despair. It is argued that leisure as an object of inquiry has been largely possible due to the fragmentation of being, namely the creation of dichotomies that juxtapose different states of being. By dismantling the disciplinary confines of leisure, it is shown that leisure and recreation can be reconsidered vis-à-vis empirical ontology as deeper engagement with questions of being and becoming in lived contexts and in relation to other entities and things. The suggested pathway of thinking beyond leisure might be valued particularly by emerging conceptual and ethical pioneers keen to reexamine and reimagine how we are in and become with the world.

1. Introduction

This paper is a response to the ontologically themed call by the editors of this special issue to consider new ways of *being-with* (Sand, Varley, Taylor, & Farkic, 2025). It joins them in the effort to address questions such as: “How can we as academics and practitioners be ‘with’ the world and engage in more tentacular (connected, networked) thinking?”, and “How is a sense of wonder to be invigorated which takes us beyond our focus on the thingness of skiing, climbing, kayaking, or whatever to a practice of worlding?” (Adventure Tourism Research Association, 2023). The answers developed on the following pages are underpinned by three interrelated propositions. First, as this special issue is an invitation to delve deeper into ontology, in order to reach the needed depth of insight, it is necessary to consider being at a much more profound level. This implies engaging in philosophical rumination about the nature of human being, as well as the being of the more-than-human world. Second, to obtain new levels of understanding and to stimulate further critical engagement with ontological matters – as evident in the editors’ resolve to move beyond the discourse on skiing or kayaking – it is beneficial to consider alternative ways of thinking about disciplinary/interdisciplinary phenomena such as ‘leisure’, ‘recreation’, and ‘tourism’. Thus, it is useful to place the social constructs, typologies, and terminologies commonly accepted and readily used into a conceptual sandbox so that these can be reexamined, dismantled, and reimaged. The objectives are to unlock ontological, epistemological, and methodological possibilities and to inspire more relational actions and

comprehensions.

An approach that has recently advocated for this type of scholarly work – namely, fostering of creative, critical, and disobedient strategies and practices – is that of postdisciplinarity (Pernecky, 2020, 2024a). Its disruptive potential is exploited here to examine how we might think in terms of more-than-leisure, and to disclose an alternative pathway for inquiring into what is presented in this article as empirical ontology. The content is organised as follows: first, is a brief rationale for thinking critically and disruptively about leisure, which sets the scene for illuminating the concept of postleisure, discussed next. The main part of the paper is devoted to illustrating how the prevailing dichotomies can be challenged and disestablished and give rise to the pursuit of ontological research into being and becoming. The remaining sections discuss the implications for thinking beyond leisure and the methodological and epistemological ramifications of doing so.

2. Why think critically and disruptively about leisure?

Underpinning the criticalities in leisure and tourism scholarship is the drive to engage at a much deeper level with issues of inequality, injustice, and abuse of power. The mounting pressures stemming from decolonial scholarship and activism have challenged the unequal power relations and marginalisation of local practices, knowledge, and peoples linked to exploitation, dependencies on Western models, loss of autonomy, and economic inequality (Escobar, 2012), as well as stubborn settler colonial structures that are still present in leisure, tourism, and

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<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jort.2025.100901>

Received 30 October 2024; Received in revised form 2 May 2025; Accepted 28 May 2025

Available online 21 June 2025

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sport (Forsyth et al., 2023; Grimwood, 2021; Stinson, 2024). Post-humanist scholars (Braidotti, 2013, 2016; Haraway, 2015, 2016; Nayar, 2014) have gone further to argue that we ought not only to focus on human-to-human relations but also consider the more-than-human world from less dominant and anthropocentric points of view. Ultimately, it is also the fauna, flora, and ecosystems that are used, exploited, and eradicated as part of leisure.

Paradigmatically, the weight of these criticisms is significant, because, conventionally, leisure has been conceived in the womb of a humanist imagination. For the most part, leisure has been aligned with the humanist perspective that “assumes the human is autonomous, conscious, intentional, and exceptional in acts of change”, which is a sharp contrast to the posthumanist view according to which agency is “distributed through dynamic forces in which the human participates but does not completely intend or control” (Keeling & Lehman, 2018, para. 1). This implies radical ontological, epistemological, axiological, and methodological shifts, as methodological shifts, as exemplified in the special issue on posthumanism by Kumm et al. (2019), in which the editors state that “to look affirmatively upon our posthuman predicament is to actively invent new forms of subjectivity, new ways of existing, defining our species and its belonging within the material world” (p. 343).

These standpoints alone are sufficient to begin inquiring into how we might and ought to be together in this one world we share; however, there are also numerous other gargantuan problems we face, including climate change, political polarisation and geopolitical tensions, population growth, artificial intelligence, pandemics, economic inequality, and intensification of nationalism, to name a few. The evidence points to a world in trouble. For instance, consulting the *Global Peace Index 2024* (Institute for Economics and Peace, 2024), we learn that in the past 17 years the world has become less stable with substantial increases in political instability and conflicts. According to the 2024 *Global Trends* report (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2024), the number of forcibly displaced people is estimated to exceed 120 million people. By 2050, it is expected that more than one billion people will live in countries that will suffer mass population displacement, and that an estimated 3.5 billion people will suffer from food insecurity (Institute for Economics and Peace, 2020, p. 2).

It is against this backdrop of amplifying urgencies that it seems particularly pertinent to ask: How do we approach thinking about leisure and tourism amid the presence of human, environmental, and planetary turmoil? Is it through conventional binary frameworks, or should we adopt different lines of inquiry altogether? How are leisure and tourism academics, as well as students, to deal with such complexities and with deeper social ontological and existential questions? Are these ‘issues’ or ‘problems’ pertaining to leisure, or concerns that could be approached in a different fashion altogether? Is there value, for example, in pursuing ontology and seeking to understand what it means to be a human, while also considering the being of other entities and our relationships with them? Can we embrace innovative and disruptive approaches to meaningfully engage with human, more-than-human, and planetary wellbeing?

3. Postleisure and postdisciplinary openings

Leisure is a social construct. The constructed nature of phenomena such as leisure and tourism has been sufficiently covered in the literature (Pernecky, 2012, 2014, 2016, 2022; 2023b), with constructionism as a philosophical perspective (Searle, 1996) providing a coherent thesis of how social facts including tourism, leisure, but also hosts, guests, holidays, and so on come into existence. The difficulty of reconciling constructionism with other approaches, such as realism, has been heightened by the misconception that something that is socially constructed cannot have real consequences, effects, and ramifications. This is not the case, as we are affected by the constructs around us: we participate in them, and our existence is shaped by them (Pernecky,

2023b). The premise of this investigation is to consider the possibility of leisure not only as a broader societal social construct but also an object of inquiry that guides the activities of scholars, who, through academic customs, have been organised into disciplines and fields of studies.

The argument for multiple ways to understand leisure has been laid out recently in “The End of (Objective) Leisure” (Pernecky, 2022), where it is proposed that leisure-objectivism be replaced with leisure-pluralism, leading to the articulation of the concept of *postleisure*. Namely, it has been suggested that we ought to “focus not so much on studying the fixed entities conceptually preconceived as ‘leisure’ but *emergent phenomena* and their relational dynamics; this implies the acceptance of uncertainty [and conceptual flexibility] as part of post-leisure discourse” (p. 743, italics in original). A related argument has been made in “Kinmaking: Toward More-Than-Tourism (Studies)” (Pernecky, 2023a), in which the term ‘kinmaking’ is used to capture the critico-creative transition of the neighbouring field of tourism into more-than-tourism studies. Similarly to the ambitions of this paper, kinmaking encompasses the urgency of considering planetary matters – or being *with/in* this world – and the need for sympoietic approaches to tourism. Adopting sympoietic approaches, following Haraway (2018), is to focus on making- and becoming-with, prompting questions such as:

What are we willing to embrace, and what are we willing to sacrifice/exclude in the tourism worldmaking processes? How is tourism to be ‘done’, ‘undone’, and ‘redone’ so that the previous ‘coding’ of people, places, objects, and animals as ‘touristic’ can undergo a critical, relational scrutiny? Moreover, what opportunities exist in adopting alternative ways of conceiving of, being in, and becoming through tourism? (Pernecky, 2023a, p. 562)

However, questions of ‘undoing’ tourism and leisure do not sit comfortably with disciplinary frameworks. Most disciplinary contributions to leisure studies have had to conceptualise and ‘isolate’ leisure as a distinct phenomenon. For the most part, leisure as an object of inquiry has been possible due to the fragmentation of being and the creation of dichotomies that juxtapose different states of being. To study and measure leisure, it was necessary to specify what leisure was and what it was not. Thus, students of leisure learn from their introductory texts that the understanding of leisure as ‘free time’, or “time left over from work and paid employment” (Bramham & Wagg, 2014, p. 41) in the 1970s and 1980s remains ingrained and institutionalised within scholarly communities, although the focus has broadened to examine leisure as ‘residual time’ alongside leisure ‘activities’ and ‘experiences’. For the celebrated theorists of leisure, leisure has been closely interlinked with pleasure, freedom, free time, and self-expression, and presented as a “qualitatively different experience from the more serious concerns of work, politics, family, and religion” (Bramham & Wagg, 2014, p. 43). Postmodern and poststructuralist scholarship has made it much harder for academics to define leisure by introducing concepts such as complexity, fluidity, dual centrism, changing social identities, and global flows. Nevertheless, for the most part, these challenges have been framed as having “implications for leisure” (Bramham & Wagg, 2014, p. 48) – indicating a mindset that views these as problems for a community of scholars invested in the study of leisure and the continuity of ideas, courses, and programmes, rather than as opportunities to reinvent or rethink leisure, let alone engage in the heretical contemplations of abandoning the concept altogether.

The rise of postdisciplinarity as a critical, creative, and disruptive space for dismantling and thinking afresh about problems and conceptual schemas has legitimised such endeavours. One of the critiques stemming from postdisciplinarity is that disciplinary approaches, along with conceptual and methodological rigidity, inhibit inquiry (Coles et al., 2005; Hollinshead, 2010; Pernecky, 2020, 2024a). While pursuing conventional norms is a fitting objective in some circumstances – such as ensuring rigorous standards in medical research – it can unnecessarily restrict creative exploration in others, where postdisciplinary approaches can be valuable. The probing ontological questions of the

editors of this special issue (Sand, Varley, Taylor, & Farkic, 2025) are examples of the latter. In this regard, a postdisciplinary approach – as implied, for example, in the works of Caton and Hill (2020) and Pernecky (2020, 2024a) – would advocate for disrupting leisure-thinking (i.e., thinking in terms of established boundaries, concepts, methods, and disciplinary agreements) in favour of thinking beyond the constraints of existing classifications of leisure.

It is worth highlighting that the pull away from solely disciplinary research is also evident in other disciplines, including philosophy. For instance, Brister (2024) elucidates the relatively recent practice of ‘field philosophy’ as “an approach that integrates philosophy and ethics with practical, problem-solving interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary projects”, explaining that it was “born out of the recognition that the norms of academic philosophy hinder philosophers from engaging in collaborative, interdisciplinary research projects” (p. 218). The growing determination to adopt more cooperative, synergistic, and expansive vistas suggest that the intellectual momentum is ripe also for reconsidering ‘leisure’ as a concept and object of inquiry. By adopting a post-disciplinary lens, other alternatives can emerge as viable research foci.

4. Postleisure as a ‘return’ to being and becoming

Traditional approaches to leisure sciences have solicited various dichotomies to produce knowledge about leisure, primarily reflecting social behaviour, social structures, and cultural norms and values. Much of the conceptual repertoire has been built around agency and the kind of activities humans are obliged to do, versus the things humans would like to do. Such juxtaposition has made it possible to divide human life into actions, obligations, and mindsets (i.e., having to ‘work’), and contrast these with activities and interests people want to pursue, such as reading books, gardening, playing golf, climbing mountains, and travelling. These binary divisions have been reinforced by accentuating the concept of freedom, whereby leisure is when individuals spend their (free) time the way they like. However, these dualisms have been blurred and contested by postmodern analyses (Harvey, 1989; Ross, 2002; Sadowski, 2023; Zuboff, 2019), revealing that ‘work’ can be immensely fulfilling and become ‘play’, that one’s purpose and joy can be found in a ‘job’, that productive time and leisure activities coalesce in data-driven economies and digital capitalism, and that businesses have been effective at turning rigid expectations about work upside down (see also Bock, 2015; Fried & Hansson, 2018). Additionally, the rapid development and integration of artificial intelligence into various aspects of life is likely to further expose the limitations of dualistic frameworks.

Postleisure, as suggested here and elsewhere (Pernecky, 2022), captures a way of thinking about and understanding phenomena that transcends traditional boundaries. Fig. 1 depicts the process of disrupting the endemic dichotomies of leisure by moving from a polarised/fragmented view of leisure (a) into a distorted (b) and eventually fully defragmented space (c). It seeks to demonstrate that when we exert conceptual pressure on the manmade dichotomies, they give way to new shapes and, subsequently, the emergence of alternative spaces and new theoretical lenses. In the spatiality of postleisure, it is therefore possible to conceive of dissolving the established binaries so that ‘work’,

‘responsibilities’, and ‘obligations’ are amalgamated with ‘play’, relaxation’ and ‘freedom’ to form the overarching categories of being and becoming (Fig. 1c). The opportunities provided by such conceptual openings include the potential for new understandings and inquiries into human existence and the being of more-than-human entities. Whereas in Fig. 1a the inclusion and exclusion criteria for (leisure) research are fashioned through the fragmentation and polarisation of being and becoming, which are fundamental for defining leisure, in Fig. 1c, these criteria are eroded, altering the bounds of inquiry.

The ‘return’ to being/becoming is not intended here merely as a disciplinary return to the distinct branch of philosophy – ontology – but rather as an examination of being/becoming through the relational dynamics of everyday life. As a form of *empirical ontology*, it extends beyond the boundaries of traditional philosophical inquiry in that the labours of such examinations are not solely abstract-ontological but empirical in the sense that they are grounded in everyday phenomena and experience. It is not the task of philosophy proper to reveal what being must be; rather, it is through empirical investigations that we come closer to understanding being. A different way to put it is that empirical ontology is the only meaningful access we have to being: to understand existence is to study the diversity of experience. Empirical ontology, then, must also be the examination of what it means to exist in relation to other entities and things, considering various social, cultural, historical, psychological, spiritual, and spatial contexts. The spatial and contextual grammar of being and becoming provides ground for fertile explorations:

- **Being/becoming** ... female, gay, white, black, a climate refugee, terminally ill, old, disabled, alone, lost, insignificant, hopeful, Aboriginal, together, etc.;
- **Being/becoming a/an** ... teacher, lover, activist, mother, refugee, manager, tourist, solo parent, caregiver, volunteer, minority, researcher, etc.;
- **Being/becoming at** ... work, home, school, risk, ease, a loss, the end of one’s life, the end of one’s career, etc.;
- **Being/becoming in** ... nature, conflict, love, solidarity, pain, one’s body, financial hardship, a new country, the presence of injustice, etc.;
- **Being/becoming on** ... a new adventure, a personal journey, a spiritual path, a search for meaning, a borrowed time, etc.;
- **Being/becoming with** ... animals, trees, the ocean, family, a disease, pain, depression, climate change, racism, a pet, artificial intelligence, etc.;
- **Being/becoming without** ... a job, a loved one, a home, a homeland, a body part, discretionary income, support, a voice, community, freedom, species on the brink of extinction, etc.;
- **Being immersed in** ... reading, running, climbing, dancing, meditating, singing, new culture, etc.;
- **Etc.**

The examples provided above illustrate the richness and complexity of human existence, revealed through ontological grammar, highlighting how grammatical structure and language facilitate different understandings. They also reveal profound differences. For instance,

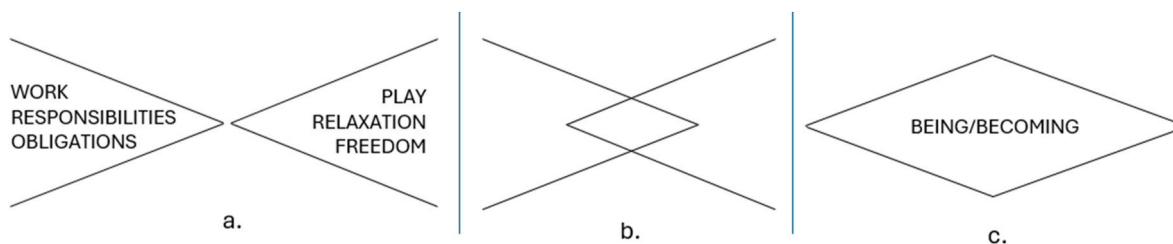


Fig. 1. Postleisure: disrupting the dichotomies of leisure.

being a climate refugee is not the same as *being without* a homeland. Whereas the former speaks of a socially constructed social fact, whereby having to live with this label determines – socially – the person's being in the world and with others, the latter is an inquiry into the subjective states of a person whose existence is affected by not having a homeland and facing a life *without*. Furthermore, the way that person might be/become with specific objects and entities, such as a palm tree or the ocean, may carry nuanced existential significance, which, in turn, informs the *being together* as a people and *becoming together* as a nation. By interrogating these subtle layers of being and becoming, it is possible to cultivate deeper ontological insights that may be dormant in an inquiry confined conceptually and methodologically to making a contribution to the fields of leisure or tourism studies (e.g., following the disciplinary intellectual and methodological customs and using a random sample to survey participants at a 'tourist destination').

There are also important contextual considerations. For example, *being* Aboriginal involves a set of social and cultural determinants that fundamentally shape the subject's existence. While both Aboriginal and non-Indigenous people are Australian, significant differences exist in how these identities are lived and experienced. For instance, a fourth-generation European Australian may identify simply as 'Australian,' whereas Aboriginal identity encompasses distinct relational and cultural dimensions. These differences have notable implications for how an Aboriginal person relates to the world and its entities. In other words, one person's *being a* may determine other ways of being, including: *being in* nature, *being with* the land, *being at* home, etc. To *be/become with* a mountain seen through the lens of tourism as a tourist site is vastly different from *being/becoming with* Uluru and Kata Tjuta, understood by the Anangu people to have been created by Ancestral Beings (see [Parks Australia, n.d.](#)). These existential sensibilities allow researchers to engage more profoundly in understanding and communicating what may be at stake for other persons, including the forces and conditions that mould being, leading to various ontological approaches noted in [Table 1](#), such as critical relational ontology ([Pernecky, 2024b](#)). They are also an answer to those seeking to engage in more tentacular thinking moving beyond the disciplinary thingness of skiing, climbing, and kayaking, problematised by the editors of this special issue. In this regard, [Fig. 1](#) shows how leisure can be 'dismantled' in the post-disciplinary sandbox to investigate the being and becoming of humans and the more-than-human world, potentially leading to novel conceptual schemas, insights, and calls to action.

[Table 1](#) details not only why ontological work is important but also the range and richness available in ontological research, depending on one's aims, focus, and philosophical alignment, such as classical ontology, process ontology, or empirical ontology. Regarding post-leisure, the articulation of empirical ontology in this paper underscores the fundamental role of lived experience, modes of being, interaction with the world, and engagement in generating meaningful ontological insights. Importantly, philosophy merges with empiricism in empirical ontology, which includes fieldwork and challenges the (disciplinary) distinction between philosophy and the empirical sciences. It dissolves these boundaries by asserting that existence can only be meaningfully comprehended through experience.

5. Becoming

The concept of becoming has permeated the fields of leisure and tourism studies sufficiently enough to be considered not merely a philosophical curiosity but a conceptual necessity. For example, [Hollinshead, 2021](#) has produced works to facilitate better understandings of Deleuzian philosophy, [Rose et al. \(2018\)](#) have drawn inspiration from Deleuze to develop an agenda for political leisure research, and [Stalker \(2019\)](#) posed the question "What is leisure without becoming?" and examined the capacities of a body in the context of leisure. However, it is useful to distinguish between the application of the concept of becoming to advance knowledge of leisure and empirical and process ontologies

Table 1
Expanded ontological vocabulary.

Ontology (classical)	The philosophical study of being, existence, and reality, typically concerned with identifying essential characteristics, fixed essences, and substances that define and differentiate entities.
Process Ontology	The study of reality grounded in the view that reality is dynamic and continually in a state of flux; emphasises processes over static substances.
Social Ontology	The study of social realities, including constructs such as 'leisure', 'tourism', or 'concierge', which are constituted through shared human practices. Their existence depends on our capacity to collectively create, recognize, communicate, and participate in them.
Applied Ontology (in tourism and leisure)	The application of ontological concepts and theories, particularly those related to existence, being, and becoming, to the study of tourism and leisure. This can range from phenomenological research in these fields to the use of ontological ideas, such as becoming, in leisure thinking.
Empirical Ontology	The study of being/becoming through lived experience and observable phenomena; prioritises direct engagement, interaction, and experiential inquiry to understand existence.
Critical Empirical Ontology	A critically focused empirical ontology that examines the power dynamics and external forces shaping being and becoming, including social, cultural, political, and historical contexts.
Relational Ontology	The study of reality through the lens of relationships; it emphasises the fundamental role of relations in constituting identities, entities, and social realities.
Critical Relational Ontology	A relational ontology with a critical orientation, concerned with the nature and dynamics of relations, particularly the relational matrices that sustain oppressive or unjust patterns of interaction and organisation (see Pernecky, 2024b).
Being	A fundamental concept in philosophy and the central concern of ontology. It designates what it means for something to exist and is approached, for example, in Heidegger's (1962) work through the notion of Dasein, which denotes the distinctive mode of human existence.
Becoming	A concept in ontology that emphasises processes, change, and transformation in contrast to static or essentialist notions of being. Deleuze and Guattari's (1988) work exemplifies this through concepts like <i>becoming-woman</i> , which challenge fixed identities and disrupt hierarchical categories in favour of relational fluidity.

(see [Table 1](#)), whereby the concept of becoming can be deliberately used to 'free' the inquiry as depicted in [Fig. 1](#). Thus, we can study how we become in and through leisure and tourism, and we can also enlist the concept of becoming in a more foundational way – *a priori* to leisure and tourism.

[Deleuze and Guattari's \(1988\)](#) notion of *becoming* suggests that our existence is never in fixed states, and that humans and the stuff of this world are part of an indefinite flux. Whereas the examination of being (*being with, in, on, without*, etc.) allows for specific, embodied considerations of what it means to be by narrowing down on different accounts of being, the notion of becoming views these as instances on a continuum of possibilities. Deleuze and Guattari's antiessentialism is thus a sharp contrast to investigating the fixed essences that tourism and leisure researchers seek, for example, when engaging in descriptive phenomenology and distilling what given experiences must amount to. Incorporating the concept of becoming into one's research adds the caveat that any states of being are merely 'snapshots' of continuously evolving flows. Implicitly, it also creates further openings, because there is endless potential for existence to unfold: there are multiple ways to be/become, and therefore there are also multiple ways to know the world. And there, too, are multiple ways in which the entities of this world are valued, respected, and related to.

For instance, consider the different accents of being revealed through inquiring into *being with* or *being at* the ocean, and *becoming with* the ocean, such as in the local populations for whom the ocean is their home, say, in contrast to visitors for whom the ocean may be a novelty. Here, *becoming with* the ocean for a local population whose identity, wellbeing, and livelihood are inseparable from it is a different kind of relationality. The significance of such ontological probings lies in the elicitation of important social, cultural, and environmental intelligences with ramifications beyond the individual. Thus, *becoming with* the ocean extends to those tentacular understandings often lost in conceptually rigid views: that the ocean is also a source of food, a home to multiple species, an important conduit for thermohaline circulation, and a raft of other existential comprehensions. The departures from thinking in terms of tourism or leisure to considering the ways of being and becoming in the world – both human and more-than-human – are useful philosophical moorings, anchoring the needed paradigmatic changes. As argued by colleagues working in the space of posthumanist scholarship, “an ontology of becoming is perhaps the accelerant we need to dispatch fixed identities and subjectivities and invent new alternatives” (Kumm et al., 2019, p. 343). And as noted further by Jakobsen (2017), this means turning inward and examining the kind of beings that we could become, a reflexive process in which “the ecological self contradicts the egocentric self, which is self-centered, self-obsessed, attached to hedonistic pleasures and, as a consequence, alienated from itself and from nature and other beings” (p. 237).

The pursuit of empirical ontology and some of the variants listed in Table 1 may indeed be more effective in awakening collective agency and fostering critical reflection on the multiple and yet interconnected ways of being/becoming. In this regard, the ontological concept of becoming can be used as a democratic-inducing relationality because it lessens the grip of any single group/ideology/system of power. It presupposes ontological and epistemic pluralism as the inevitability of flows marked by differentiation (different cultures, spiritualities, ways of being and knowing, existential necessities, etc.). By interweaving these ontological approaches, it is possible to arrive at more perceptive analyses and understandings and levels of acumen that may be required to combat competing and conflicting dogmas.

6. Why consider ontological pluralism?

Ontological pluralism states that things may exist in more than one way. Regarding the ideas presented so far, ontological pluralism tells us that there is a plurality of ways of being/becoming, paving the way toward understanding the diversity of existence and differing – sometimes competing – conceptions of reality. Hence, a mountain can be at the same time a geological structure, a source of commodities, a tourist attraction, a site of worship, and a spiritual being (such as in the case of Mt Everest or Chomolungma for the Sherpa people who see it as the Goddess Mother of the World), and also be granted the status of legal personality – such as in the case of Mt Taranaki in New Zealand (Office of Treaty Settlements, 2017). In light of these perspectives, Arturo Escobar’s (2007, 2018) thesis of pluriversalism and alignment with ‘flat’ ontologies (contrasted with hierarchical ontologies) are potent examples of ontological pluralism, intended to ignite theoretical and political imagination in the Global South. In the context of tourism and leisure, the so-called ‘pluriversal challenge’ has been articulated as “the necessity to sincerely recognize and integrate diversity as part of the ontological, epistemological, and axiological reproductive systems that birth the realities in which we live and experience through tourism” (Pernecky, 2024c, p. 2).

The championing of a multiplicity of understandings of, and being in, the world is important, particularly in the realm of decolonial discourse, whereby multiple worldviews and ways of being are posited to be equally valid without the need for domination of a single perspective. However, the idea of flattened ontology is also aligned with the post-humanist project of ethical and ecological imagination, according to

which humans are not ontologically privileged. Therefore, ontological pluralism functions as an effective philosophical lens for communities of thinkers and practitioners seeking to engage with ethical dilemmas arising from the Anthropocene, posthumanism, and the rights of both human and more-than-human entities, including the pursuit of multi-species justice. Such an approach encourages new lines of inquiry, alternative pedagogies, and deeper considerations of being.

7. Further epistemological and methodological implications

The process of dismantling existing dichotomies, as visualised in Fig. 1, reveals that it is possible to rethink our spatial and relational modes of being. Thus, one can *be with* a tree or a river or a mountain in a multitude of ways. This brings an additional politico-epistemological consideration important to note: adopting a single lens though which to see and study the world – i.e., vis-à-vis the conceptual lens of leisure – can result in rigidified representational thinking. This is less problematic within pluralistic approaches or flattened ontologies that resist epistemic hegemony, where such a lens is treated as one perspective among many rather than as a dominant or totalising frame. However, it becomes contentious when it fosters paradigmatic conflict, reinforces hierarchical ordering, or legitimises forms of domination.

To return to the constructionist and postdisciplinary framing of leisure as an object of inquiry, further important nuances can be discerned. When research is grounded in constructionist perspectives, its task is not to uncover universal truths, but to investigate socially constructed realities and constructs such as leisure – as they are instituted and maintained within particular contexts. Although such constructs are ontologically relative, they nonetheless support epistemologically objective claims in that once the relevant institutional facts are in place, knowledge about their structure, function, and effects can be obtained and objectively evaluated (see, Pernecky, 2022, 2023b). In this view, objectivity is grounded in shared understanding rather than in detached or neutral observation (note, however, that philosophers like Searle would not make the same claims regarding natural facts).

One implication of this framework is that any purportedly objective claims about leisure are contingent upon what Wittgenstein (1953), in *Philosophical Investigations*, terms *language games*: ways of speaking and framing reality that are governed by the rules and social practices of particular contexts (e.g., leisure = free time), and which are more or less useful depending on the social group and purpose. As Fig. 1 suggests, it is possible to disrupt the rules of one language game and participate in another. From a postdisciplinary stance, academics and researchers are creative agents imbued with the propensity to invent new rules. This is by no means regarded as a weakness but rather as a form of creative intelligence that gives researchers the necessary flexibility to frame and solve problems in novel, creative, critical, and contextually responsive ways.

Deleuzian philosophy – and the sketching of an empirical ontology pursued in this paper – enables a more fluid ontological and epistemological positioning. For Deleuze, concepts such as *leisure* are generative rather than final or epistemologically objective. Social constructs are understood as temporary territorialisations, and our knowledge of them is always partial and emergent. That is, through a Deleuzo-Guattarian imaginary (1988), leisure may be viewed as a social construct and a *territorialised phenomenon* – stratified and structured by historical, social, cultural, and intellectual forces. The task of academics – and indeed of anyone entangled in the flows of leisure – is not only to examine the ramifications of such territorialisation, but also to consider how we might engage in processes of deterritorialisation, both of ourselves and of the world. To this end, the scholarly pursuit of being and becoming through empirical ontology could well be an important part of moving into more critically hopeful futures.

8. Conclusion: towards postleisure futures

We have entered a relational milieu, as evidenced by special issues and publications that focus on our relationships with each other, with more-than-humans, and with our planet at large (Choe & Lugosi, 2022; Grimwood, Höckert, & Rantala, 2024; Grimwood et al., 2024; Grimwood & Höckert, 2023; Guia, 2021; Guia & Ayu Trisia, 2023; Huijbens, 2023; Rantala et al., 2023, 2024; Thomsen et al., 2023; Vlasov, 2025). The broader epistemological question that has been posed in these pivotal moments is whether our thinking about, and our study of, leisure is sufficient for dealing with the complexities and challenges ahead of us, and when the existence of not just humans but also more-than-humans and larger ecosystems is at stake. Do these challenges pertain to leisure, or do they invite different kinds of approaches? This paper has drawn on postdisciplinarity to disrupt leisure-thinking and to facilitate alternative avenues for research. It is intended as an invitation to examine our epistemological predispositions and, at least temporarily, to put aside the conceptual repertoire within the fields of leisure and tourism.

The proposal of postleisure as a 'return' to being and becoming involves recognising that, at a more fundamental level – before the coding of experiences as leisure, recreation, or adventure – we exist in relation to the entities around us, and that there are various ways to enact and conceptualise our being *in* and *with* this world. Whereas ontology, understood as a branch of philosophy concerned with the fundamental nature of being, is primarily an abstract/theoretical endeavour, empirical ontology has been presented in this paper as firmly rooted in the lived realities of both humans and more-than-humans. Empirical ontology thus engages with questions of being and becoming by examining existence-as-experience in this world. Anchored in the view that human being and identity are closely intertwined with our relationships to nature, other animals, and entities such as rivers, mountains, and forests, it offers opportunities to engage with ethical questions.

In this regard, pursuing empirical ontology may prompt critical reflections and critico-relational discernments that are necessary for tackling the roots of problematic relationalities and for architecting new relational matrices (Pernecky, 2024b). The overlapping critiques of anthropocentrism and posthumanism have challenged the view that human interests and needs are of prime importance and that humans possess intrinsic value, whereas “all other beings hold value only in their ability to serve humans, or in their instrumental value” (Goralnik & Nelson, 2012, p. 145). Nevertheless, the cardinal issue remains: mass-leisure amounts to humans engaging in activities for their own benefit. Thus, humans have been not only their own ends, but also the ends of leisure, with other entities, objects, animals, and systems serving as means to their ends. The suggested antithesis of postleisure to these deeply ingrained perspectives has sought to highlight the value, and perhaps also the necessity, of disrupting conventional thinking.

When we ask how we want to be with one another and with/toward other species, we open possibilities for thinking beyond leisure. The real-world implications of considering being and becoming more seriously vis-à-vis empirical ontology can prompt important inquiries, such as what states of being are facilitated concurrently, and what states of being we ought to envision and champion as we become, for example, *in* diversity, *amidst* a changing climate, *with* AI, but also *without* homelands, lost freedoms, endangered species, etc. These questions are arguably among the most pressing as we are carried further into this century by the flows of conflict, technological innovation, natural events, and the mobilities of hope and despair. The postdisciplinary exploration and the sketching of an empirical ontology offered in this paper provide a way of thinking beyond the conceptual confines of leisure and may be of value to the rising conceptual and ethical pioneers keen to examine and reimagine being and becoming.

Finally, although this paper has been primarily philosophical and theoretical in orientation, offering a framework for rethinking and de-thinking leisure, the next steps require engagement with concrete

concerns. A range of issues will inevitably arise for different scholars, shaped by their intellectual, ethical, political, or environmental commitments and priorities. The opportunity lies in probing questions such as: How can postleisure be implemented within systems still structured by dichotomies – where, for instance, some individuals must work two or three jobs to survive? In what ways might postleisure function as a political, existential, and ethical disruption – or deterritorialisation – of our prevailing modes of being and becoming? Equally pressing questions emerge in more-than-human contexts: How might we deterritorialise the world in light of ethico-relational entanglements with more-than-human others? Responding to these challenges requires communities of thinkers ready to interrogate the limits and possibilities outlined in this paper.

Management implications

The exploration of empirical ontology and the concept of postleisure presents significant management implications for outdoor recreation and nature-based tourism. Recognising the diverse ways of being and becoming—both human and more-than-human—provides a philosophical foundation for more inclusive and adaptive management practices. By embracing an ontology of becoming, managers can challenge fixed identities and dominant ideologies, fostering environments that encourage critical reflection and collective agency among stakeholders. This perspective promotes a democratic relationality that accommodates multiple worldviews, thereby allowing for diverse stakeholder engagement in decision-making processes. For example, recognising mountains not only as tourist attractions but also as spiritual beings, as seen with Mount Taranaki or Chomolungma, can reshape management approaches to reflect ecological and cultural values, supporting sustainable practices that respect local traditions and knowledge systems. Furthermore, the emphasis on pluralistic understandings necessitates the integration of varied epistemologies into management frameworks, enabling a more nuanced understanding of the ecological and social contexts in which outdoor recreation occurs. Ultimately, this critical engagement with empirical ontology offers a pathway toward more equitable and environmentally responsible management strategies that resonate with the complexities of contemporary tourism dynamics.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Data availability

No data was used for the research described in the article.

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