

Enhancing workplace research through a radically reflexive video-tour: insights from a coworking space case study

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Abstract

Purpose – This study aims to explore the value of video-based ethnography, particularly the video-tour technique, in investigating and transforming contemporary workspaces, with a focus on coworking environments. Coworking spaces are dynamic, shared workplaces that serve diverse functions and are constantly evolving. Given their complexity, more participative and transformational research approaches are needed to understand their impact and engage key stakeholders in meaningful reflection. This paper advocates for the video-tour method as a tool to enhance both practitioners' and researchers' reflexive awareness, fostering a deeper understanding of coworking spaces and supporting their intentional transformation.

Design/methodology/approach – Drawing on a socio-material perspective, the paper presents a case study that employs a “radically reflexive” version of the video-tour technique. This approach is characterized by its performative, participatory and transformative nature.

Findings – The findings show that a radically reflexive video-tour enables a deep, participative and transformative analysis of coworking spaces, highlighting how they are shaped by the daily practices of their users.

Originality/value – This contribution is twofold: it illustrates the application of a radically reflexive approach in ethnographic research through the video-tour method and discusses the unique challenges and opportunities that this stance offers for studying coworking spaces.

Keywords Video-tour, Radical reflexivity, Space, Video-based ethnography, Coworking

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Space matters in our efforts of organizing work, both as a symbolic and aesthetic carrier of meaning (Yanow, 2010) and through its material affordances (Mengis *et al.*, 2018). At the same time, work modifies space through individual and collective practices of reinterpretation and reappropriation, in a constant entanglement of the spatial, affective and material dimensions of organizing (Beyes and Steyaert, 2012).

Coworking spaces represent an interesting example in this regard. Coworking is the practice of sharing a common workspace with other workers; this experience is today mostly shared by people in non-standard employment, such as freelancers, entrepreneurs and start-uppers. Over the years, coworking has grown steadily and gained even greater public attention

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due to COVID-19, developing a narrative that often presents it as a solution to the domestication and precarization of work, as well as the economic and social challenges faced by non-standard workers (Ivaldi *et al.*, 2021a).

Coworking spaces are therefore both the product of recent reconfigurations of work and places whose lived experience contributes to the development, reinforcement and spread of new and often alternative ways of working and organizing, both individually and collectively (Cnossen and Stephenson, 2022). These practices often escape the original design of the space and offer coworkers new opportunities for using and creating their “spacing,” as well as fostering their well-being, learning and collaboration according to their needs and the relational dynamics, networking and solidarity that arise within the community (Orel, 2019; Gandini and Cossu, 2021).

Due to their intricate dynamics and evolving nature, coworking spaces have been increasingly acknowledged as relevant to organizational and managerial/entrepreneurial theory and practice, yet still to be explored in depth (Howell, 2022). In particular, their open and co-produced nature and their effects on different types of targets and communities represent a promising and contemporary field of study. For example, while much research has contributed to describing the positive impacts of coworking spaces on increasing creativity and innovation in work (Kraus *et al.*, 2022), the development of professional and social networks (Bouncken *et al.*, 2024), entrepreneurship (Orel, 2019) and the well-being of coworkers (Kinsman *et al.*, 2024), negative or ambivalent impacts of this experience have also been discussed. These include the reproduction of social inequalities through the creation of elite, less inclusive communities (Sargent *et al.*, 2021; Fast, 2024), the commodification of the very experience of community building offered by these spaces (Bennis and Orel, 2024), the risk of stress and burnout for managers and conflict among coworkers (Crovara, 2023) and the legitimization of precarious working conditions shared by many members of coworking communities (Wright *et al.*, 2022).

Given this debate, we think it is crucial to examine the coworking phenomenon through a critical lens and to engage key stakeholders, such as founders and coworkers, in order to generate a more conscious understanding of these spaces and their effects and to trigger paths for transforming and recreating them accordingly.

In the paper, we propose to foster practitioners’ and researchers’ reflexive knowing and transformative action in coworking spaces, by focusing on the use of one specific method within the tradition of video-based ethnography – the video-tour. The video tour consists of a tour with the video camera around the organizational spaces, to collect personal gazes and looks, significant artifacts, cultural characteristics and specific processes or materiality that the filmmaker wants to put in evidence for analysis (Pink, 2001). More specifically, in the paper, we discuss a version of the video-tour technique that we have defined as *radically reflexive*, for its performative, participatory and transformative features. As highlighted in previous works (anonymized), *radical reflexivity* implies an emphasis on its constitutive rather than representational activity, a process of knowledge creation with a performative and transformative nature, built in relation with others (Meier and Carroll, 2023).

We argue that radical reflexivity applied to a video-tour-based ethnography can foster new and participative understandings of contemporary coworking spaces. Also, a radically reflexive video-tour-based-ethnography can create new possibilities for researchers and practitioners – as co-researchers – to gain a sense of authorship in the spaces, thus contributing to the emergence of new directions for change.

The paper is organized as follows. The first section introduces the debate around coworking spaces and their being an open experience and offers an initial examination of the main research methodologies used to study this phenomenon. The second section of the paper focuses on the video-tour as a specific technique within the realm of visual and ethnographic studies and illustrates how it can be used within a radically reflexive framework. The third section presents and discusses a case where a radically reflexive use of the video-tour has been proposed in coworking spaces. Our contribution will be twofold: we aim to highlight how a

radically reflexive approach can be applied in ethnographic research through the video-tour method. Additionally, we discuss the distinctive challenges and opportunities that a radically reflexive stance offers to the study of coworking spaces.

Coworking as spacing experiences: research approaches in search for innovation

Coworking is a working model that involves the sharing of a workspace by individuals who do not belong to the same company (Gandini and Cossu, 2021). Since the opening of the first modern coworking space in 2005, the coworking model has experienced significant growth and change. Surveys conducted by [Deskmag Global Coworking Survey \(2023\)](#) confirm that there are currently more than 20,000 coworking spaces worldwide, characterized by great heterogeneity (Orel and Bennis, 2021; Ivaldi *et al.*, 2021a). Recent literature has, in fact, focused on the great diversity of coworking and its evolutions and impacts at different levels: on coworkers' well-being and identity (Orel, 2019; Butcher, 2018), on communities and their solidarity practices (Ivaldi *et al.*, 2021a), on local areas, their vitality and welfare (Alatalo *et al.*, 2024).

Given the heterogeneity and evolution of the phenomenon, research on coworking has also taken on diverse forms and methodological orientations over time.

Having explored many contributions and recent literature on the topic, it appears to us that most studies on coworking have primarily focused on mapping the phenomenon and tracking its evolution in a descriptive manner, aiming to capture its diverse and multi-dimensional impacts (see, for example, the reviews by [Howell, 2022](#); [Orel and Mayerhoffer, 2021](#); [Kinsman *et al.*, 2024](#)).

Within this framework, both quantitative, multi-method and qualitative research approaches have been developed. Quantitative surveys, for instance, have been used to monitor the coworking phenomenon and understand its trends, socio-economic characteristics and relationships with the urban environment ([Deskmag Global Coworking Survey, 2023](#)). Other research has employed mixed methods (cf. [Orel *et al.*, 2024](#)), combining interpretive interviews or focus groups with quantitative methods to, for instance, examine the impact of coworking experiences on members' well-being, sense of community or psychological capital. In their review, [Orel and Mayerhoffer \(2021\)](#) emphasized the importance of qualitative approaches in the study of coworking spaces. In their review, for instance, the preferential use of mono- and multi-sited ethnography emerged, along with immersive observation—with the researcher either as an insider or outsider—semi-structured interviews, and the analysis of complementary materials, which appeared as the most common techniques (cf. for instance [Yacoub and Haeffliger, 2022](#)). Other cited studies have employed phenomenological and narrative methods (cf. for instance [David *et al.*, 2023](#)). These approaches, based on interviews, diaries and participant observation, have aimed to gather information from coworking space users to comprehend their perspectives on various outcomes, such as enhanced productivity or knowledge sharing. In several of these qualitative studies, the use of visual material has also been present (cf. for example [Bacvice and Spreitzel, 2022](#); [Spinuzzi *et al.*, 2019](#); [Kusimin, 2022](#)), with researchers mainly collecting photographic artifacts and using them to complement their analyses, or, more marginally, with video-based approaches addressing the material-discursive production of space as an ongoing “spacing” ([Beyes and Steyaert, 2012](#)).

In these studies, it has emerged that coworking, through its spatial features, cultivates a unique atmosphere of collaboration and inclusion, which both influences and is influenced by coworkers themselves (Butcher, 2018; Ivaldi *et al.*, 2021a; [Yacoub and Haeffliger, 2022](#)). In this sense, coworking spaces have been recognized in many contributions as “spacing” experiences and have been accounted for their authored, symbolic and affective nature ([Kusimin, 2022](#)).

The above-described studies also show that coworking experience is continuously evolving. The transformations of coworking appear to be linked not only to the diverse contexts and macro-social and economic conditions in which it has spread ([Orel and Bennis,](#)

2021; Gandini and Cossu, 2021) but also to how the space itself is utilized by the various worker communities inhabiting it. Coworking spaces thus take shape and come to life based on the socialization and professional growth needs of their coworkers—whether they are remote workers or solely self-employed individuals, who see coworking as an opportunity for learning and community life (Johansson *et al.*, 2024; Orel *et al.*, 2024); based on the processes of accelerated innovation, learning and failure that occur when its inhabitants are, for example, entrepreneurs and startup founders (Howell, 2022); or based on the type of exchanges that coworking communities build with local communities, such as in peripheral areas (Sánchez-Vergara *et al.*, 2024).

Finally, studies have highlighted that coworking spaces may also reveal a potential “dark side.” Wright *et al.* (2022), for instance, highlighted how coworking aesthetics create and reinforce gendered and class-based notions of entrepreneurship, reflecting an elite of white, male, middle-class workspaces. Coworking spaces’ rich symbolism and openness thus capture coworkers’ hearts and minds, but with contested outcomes in terms of their capacity to promote coworkers’ well-being, freedom, empowerment and collaboration (Zukin, 2020). One critique raised, for example, by Wright *et al.* (2022) is that the practice of coworking ultimately legitimizes the precarious working conditions shared by many community members (Wright *et al.*, 2022). Other studies have highlighted how the coworking experience, its location and the attractive features of these spaces can contribute to reproducing social inequalities—such as gender inequalities—through the creation of elite, exclusive communities (Sargent *et al.*, 2021; Fast, 2024). A further challenge of coworking that has been noted is the risk of commodifying the community, linked to an excessive emphasis on “buying and selling” the experience offered by the spaces, with detrimental effects on the quality of relationships among coworkers (Bennis and Orel, 2024).

Other studies have focused on the risks of conflict and role ambiguity experienced by coworkers, who may be driven by very different and conflicting motivations and relational approaches (Waters-Lynch and Duff, 2019). Some have finally explored the phenomenon of caring-related burnout experienced by coworking managers, who are constantly engaged in emotional and social labor tied to the maintenance of the space and its community (Crovara, 2023).

We can therefore conclude that research on coworking spaces stands out for its variety and richness. However, what seems to unite most of this literature is that, while it has thoroughly accounted for the dynamic and multifaceted nature of the coworking phenomenon, very few research contributions have aimed to foster their evolution or guide their transformation. Few studies, with some exceptions (see Ivaldi *et al.*, 2021b; Kusimin, 2022), have proposed, for instance, participative perspectives to foster coworking spaces’ positive and sustainable development (cfr. Ivaldi *et al.*, 2021a, as an exception).

However, we believe that research on coworking’s spatial features and on their impacts should move further along these directions and thus contribute to supporting a more co-generated understanding and conscious (and positive?) evolution of this phenomenon.

In this regard, we agree with scholars who emphasize the importance of research that aims not only to “represent” but, more importantly, to “author” new organizational spaces of possibility, involving researchers and practitioners in an emergent relationship capable of shaping reflexive and actionable knowledge for transformation (Cunliffe and Karunanayake, 2013; Marcus and Cushman, 1982).

This direction finally aligns well with the idea that coworking spaces are more than stable, neutral, physical containers (Mengis *et al.*, 2018) “waiting to be filled” but rather the product of interpretive and appropriative practices generated by coworking communities, which research can not only understand but also support in their transformative potential.

To achieve this goal, we argue that methods are needed that can explore the intricate dynamics of coworking while also giving voice to its members—the authors of these spaces—and guiding possible transformations.

Therefore, in the next section, we will propose a methodological approach to coworking spaces that could push ethnographic research toward a transformative perspective. Assuming that any transformative movement is possible only when participative and reflexive dynamics are enhanced, we present a specific application of video-based ethnography with strong potential in this direction: the *radically reflexive* video tour.

The video tour: challenges and potentials of a video-based ethnographic method

The video tour consists of a tour with the video camera around the organizational spaces, to collect personal gazes and looks, significant artifacts, cultural characteristics and specific processes or materiality that the filmmaker wants to put in evidence for analysis (Pink, 2001). Pink (2007) was the first to name “video tour” the technique of “walking with” the practitioners, following the practitioners’ eyes and gathering data about the places and the artefacts they perceive as most meaningful for their everyday work life, the typical situations, the routines and the interactions that create the texture of their contexts.

This method, within the realm of qualitative research, changes the usual data collection and interpretation process on the phenomena under investigation (Bispo and Gherardi, 2019). The video accompanying the researcher represents in fact an embodied practice-based research, where the effect is an intertwined activity made of choices, movements in the space, data production, interpretation, judgment and affect perception and performances (Gherardi, 2017). The capacity to walk in the space and capture or be captured by the cultural features of the space is a different way to *know from within* (Cunliffe, 2016).

The “home video tour method” built on Pink’s previous anthropological work on the “sensory home” (Pink, 2004) is informed by phenomenological theories of place and perception (Pink and Mackley, 2012). The “home” is considered a complex environment, enabling deeper insights into sensory and material contexts, interrelations and contingencies. In the attempt to capture this complexity, the researchers’ own in-situ experiences provide a form of live, empathetic understanding of the everyday practices situated in the spaces and contexts that are made evident. Presenting one’s home to the camera fosters enhanced reflection about otherwise tacit knowledge and actions.

In literature, video tour has been mainly adopted along this logic, providing a sensorial ethnographic opportunity to the participants involved in filming and in reviewing the produced video.

Alternative uses of video tour have been testified by researchers who proposed a shift in perspective, by placing the camera in the hands of the practitioners (Pontecorvo *et al.*, 2009). In making their filming, participants contribute to creating embedded and embodied knowledge and offer such material for analysis in the inquiry process with the researcher. This shift sustains a participative logic of research, which sees collaboration between researchers and participants in reflecting together on the data creation and data collection.

Filming with a camera represents a sensory experience where space appears in a sort of “material autobiographical archive” – a “memory” (Butler and Cunliffe, 2024, p. 1766) that situates workers in the time, space and physical representation of their experience. This approach empowers the practitioner to directly choose which data to collect, how to collect it and to shape the specific qualities of the recording based on their own subjectivity and selection criteria.

This approach shifts the power over data from the hands of the researcher to those of the research participant, placing both the responsibility and agency for data collection directly in their control. Video tour, therefore, represents a possibility for the organizational actors to be the principal owners of the process of data construction. Once the videos are created, the researchers, together with the participants, can analyze them by comparing the different representations generated and by reflexively sharing interpretations and insights on meaningful elements (Iedema and Carroll, 2011).

Other scholars (cfr. for instance [Mengis et al., 2018](#)), assuming a different research orientation, have focused their analysis on the performative capacity of the video tour method itself, following a socio-material approach. Being involved in representing through a camera means co-constructing the reality itself. The inseparability of “what is observed from the practice of observation” ([Orlikowski and Scott, 2014](#), p. 873) is particularly important in video tours, as in all video-based ethnography. The video tour is seen as much more than a mere “methodological tool” which captures things as they are. On the contrary, it should be seen as a “praxeology of seeing with a camera” where the nature of the phenomenon cannot be separated from the process of production, editing and ways of viewing and analyzing video images ([Mengis et al., 2018](#)).

With regard to space, the video tour breaks the geometric, static and closed understanding of organizational space and the idea of an inert and preexisting container of activities ([Mengis et al., 2018](#)). The alternative way of making sense of organizational space, brought forth by this dynamic and subjective tool, capture space as processually constituted and lived, appreciating the entanglement of its spatial, affective and material dimensions ([Beyes and Steyaert, 2012](#); [Clegg and Kornberger, 2006](#)).

By integrating these sensitivities into our research and adopting a participatory, performative perspective, we propose a new version of the video tour that pushes spatial exploration toward a more critical and transformative approach, which we call a *radically reflexive* perspective.

Pushing the video tour toward a radically reflexive approach

We understand reflexivity as the act of questioning assumptions in our own—and others’—beliefs and actions, exploring how these beliefs and actions are both shaped by and contribute to social and organizational identities and realities. Reflexivity is also a socially situated, political and collective process that requires acknowledging the context-bound nature of knowledge and practice ([Cunliffe, 2003, 2016](#); [Hibbert et al., 2014](#)). Ontologically, reflexivity is rooted in social constructionism, which assumes that the social world does not exist independently from us but is shaped by our interactions. These interactions, in turn, are influenced by our interpretations of social reality.

In this paper, we specifically advocate for the perspective of *radical reflexivity* as a practice that simultaneously fosters critical awareness and also new possibilities for action concerning the object of study for both researchers and participants (see our previous work—reference omitted for anonymity requirement).

Building on [Meier and Carroll \(2023\)](#) work, in a previous study we ([Galuppo et al., 2023](#)) have defined radical reflexivity as a deconstructive, processual and relational practice characterized by: (1) an emphasis on the in-the-moment nature of reflexivity, which means that reflexivity is performed in the very interaction between researchers and participants on a given issue/topic rather than in prior or retrospective accounts of them; (2) the idea that reflexivity is a constitutive rather than a representational activity, a process of knowledge creation with a performative nature; (3) a process that is collective in nature, as reflexivity points to a transition from an individual level to multiple, collective and social levels, therefore paying attention to the others’ contributions; (4) a critical and deconstructive perspective, aimed at putting under perspective the ontological, epistemological, methodological and theoretical choices of the research ([Cunliffe, 2003, 2016](#)).

We reckon that by endowing reflexivity with a performing, constituting, collective and critical component, radical reflexivity can sustain transformative logics.

Re-interpreting the video-tour through a radically reflexive perspective means, for us, using it in a specific way. First, the video-tour must be used participatively, placing the camera in the hands of the research participants. Walking with the practitioner, in a way that they lead and the researchers follow, is a major shift in research: responsibility and agency for data collection and the entanglement between product – data collected – and process is here shared

by researchers and participants within a space of collaborative dialogue (Ripamonti *et al.*, 2016). In the moment of filming, the video-tour, as a *duet*, creates live knowledge that is already transforming the way to see the space and put one selves in relation to it. Further, since the video-tours are participatively collected, they can even more trigger processes of co-generation of new knowledge and change. In fact, since space can be inhabited by many actors participating in the environment, studying it implies the necessity to inquire about multiple parts, which are all co-constructors of the realities. Hence, there is the need to repeat the video tour for the many organizational members thus creating opportunities to bring together the travel and spatial experiences that each person has constructed.

Second, we propose that conducting the video-tour should be followed by video-feedback sessions (Iedema and Carroll, 2011). This process enhances the collective and transformative agency of both researchers and practitioners. By reviewing the videos of the space, a process of collective reification and enactment of the space happens. The discussion around space re-creates the space itself. As Cunliffe claims, it is about creating *organizational landscapes* (Cunliffe, 2003) in such a way that no voice goes unheard or overlooked. Radical reflexivity becomes in this sense a participative and collective act of generating and transforming the object of inquiry. The role of the researcher is in this case to accompany the process and stimulate, through interaction, engagement and sharing of experiences. This requires activating not only participation but also a movement of reflexivity on the research process (Cunliffe, 2003, 2016) and attention to the subsequent transformation of the object of inquiry.

In the following paragraphs, through a case study within a coworking space, we will present in detail some of these aspects and discuss their implications.

The study

Our work takes roots in a two-year ethnography conducted by one author of the paper and colleagues (anonymized) in several coworking spaces in northern Italy. These spaces, that had a mission of promoting solidarity-based projects in their local territories, were studied with the aim of analysing their “social” nature in comparison to other coworking models and exploring how the materiality of space impacted these distinctive elements.

The paper takes one specific phase of this study, directed to the participative and reflexive involvement of the founders and management board of one space, named *Sloworking*.

The space that hosted the research, Sloworking exhibited several unique characteristics. It was part of a social enterprise with a strong commitment to promoting work–life balance and was located within a public space with a specific mandate to carry out socially valuable activities, such as women empowerment initiatives. All coworkers were encouraged to engage voluntarily in such projects, thus reinforcing the solidarity vocation of the space. The core group of coworkers consisted of freelance women and parents, while after the pandemic there was an increase in the participation of men and employees, thus progressively changing the community profile.

During the first phase of the research, the founders and several participants developed some curiosities, particularly regarding the distinctive features that their coworking space could have compared to others in the area. From these interests emerged a second phase of research, which we refer to in this paper, aimed at: analyzing the lived experience of space by its members and the material-discursive production of space as an ongoing “spacing”; developing reflexivity around which aspects of the “spacing” experience were distinctive to Sloworking; initiating a path for potential transformation of the spaces to make their experience as consistent as possible with Sloworking’s value proposition.

In light of these objectives, in addition to the previously collected data through observations and interviews, we proposed to utilize the *video tour technique*. This method appeared to be flexible enough to address the aforementioned research questions, providing an opportunity not only to investigate but also to radically reflect on the lived experience of coworking and its influence on members’ work and lives. This phase of the research and the video tour proposal

therefore represented a shift in the research methodology itself. It transitioned from an exploratory approach to a participative and transformative ethnography (Iedema and Carroll, 2011; Ripamonti *et al.*, 2016).

The proposed method sparked curiosity, and the management board of Slowworking not only agreed to participate in the video tours but also extended an open call to the coworkers to join in. Of the 50 total number of coworkers, approximately 20 coworkers expressed their willingness to participate. From this pool, a group of 12 participants was selected to conduct the video tours. The selection criteria aimed for maximum variability in terms of gender, age, professional status and seniority within the Slowworking association. The intention was to encompass a diverse range of perspectives, experiences and uses of the space.

The mandate shared with the practitioners was: *“Please take the camera for a maximum 5 min, and make a tour with it in the coworking space, by highlighting what is meaningful for you and for your working experience. You are free to move and record as you wish: you can focus on spaces, artefacts, objects of your work, meaningful spaces of your work practice. Please comment verbally your specific decision in directing your video.”*

The video tours were conducted in two half-day sessions by two researchers. After the video tours, a brief conversation with the participants allowed for an initial debriefing.

Videos were recorded using the researchers’ phone and that consent for the use of the recorded clips was agreed upon with the researchers exclusively for internal research purposes (data ownership thus resides with the researchers). In cases where other individuals entered the camera’s field of view while being filmed by the research participant, they were asked to sign a consent form acknowledging and accepting their inclusion in a scene captured for research purposes. Furthermore, measures were taken to obscure the profile of any individual appearing in the video for all subsequent uses of the data [1].

The video tour materials were also shared, discussed and jointly interpreted in three video-feedback meetings with the participants. The purpose of the video tour and feedback session was clarified at the start of the research, ensuring that participants knew the recordings were meant for collective reflection and discussion on potential future changes. Awareness of a broader audience, and therefore the possibility to feel influenced in their choices of filming, was one part of the methodology we agreed with the research context, as it is typical of participatory research. Each participant therefore determined their level of sharing based on their sense of safety and control in the process.

In the following paragraph, we will analyse a selection of the video tour material and the video-feedback settings. Our scope is not to illustrate the general results from our research but to provide insights regarding the radically reflexive work that the video tour facilitated.

Practice of video tours: authoring the space with participants

The video tours at Slowworking took place across three separate sessions during regular coworking days, involving coworkers who volunteered to participate. Each tour was conducted with the accompaniment of a researcher (two of whom are authors of this paper), who, after clarifying the instructions, joined the participant in their “journey,” prompting their narration, asking for clarifications and serving as a dialogical partner to enrich the talk with as much detail as possible.

The journeys through the space offered a unique and consistently varied experience. The starting and ending points, the flow of the tour through different areas, zoomed-in details and open overviews of certain spaces and the emotional atmosphere of the accounts varied significantly from one coworker to another. These elements, performed differently across tours, allowed diverse authorships to emerge, revealing different processes of “spacing.”

Some journeys began outside, in front of the coworking entrance, retracing the coworker’s typical day from entry to the desk they usually used, then to the kitchen where informal, convivial moments often took place at the start of the day and finally to the outdoor courtyard used during breaks. Other journeys were constructed with a journalistic approach, as if the

space were being described or even marketed to an external audience, focusing on its historical and institutional elements that underscore its value proposition.

For example, in the video tour of one participant (*Vittoria*, fictitious name), the tour began in the external courtyard, described as follows: “Here we are in the external courtyard of via Cavour 74/76. I am Vittoria, one of the founders of the association, and this is the space that has been hosting our association since 2018. (. . .)” In this excerpt, the presentation of Vittoria’s role, the collective “we” of the association being “hosted” by the space, and the characterization of the space as “public” effectively embodied the association’s philosophy. Then Vittoria entered the space and framed a noticeboard with some writings, “partnership needs care” and “there’s no partnership without a project,” describing them as follows: “The thing that resonates with me the most about this space is being the forge of the projects that I coordinate and that give me a strong sense of belonging to this reality. Because it is also written here, these writings were not made by us but by other designers, partnerships need shared projects and care, and this is a place that thrives not on assistance but on care.” In this excerpt, Vittoria’s professional identity and that of the space found synthesis in the values of shared project development, care and partnership, which are distinct values of the community.

Barbara, in contrast, began her video tour within the space, in the meeting room: “. . . it’s my favourite place, because we all work together around a table, not in silos as we would in a company.” She concluded by stepping outside and guiding us through “our morning ritual,” a coffee run to a local café on the corner of the street where the coworking space is located: “We all have our morning routine. I’ll take you along through our ritual: we arrive at Slowworking in the morning, leave our laptops, and then follow a short route to the nearby cafés -there are two close by- to have breakfast with coffee, pastries, and cappuccino . . . We’re committed to maintaining a lively relationship with the town and have developed many projects and partnerships with small businesses in this neighbourhood.” As she walked, the camera captured the historic paving stones of the town’s streets; she spoke softly, as if not to disturb the quiet around her. Together, we browsed the bookstore and greengrocer displays and greeted the local vendors alongside her. We experienced the rhythm of this route. In this tour, the boundaries of the coworking space expanded, revealing another characteristic element of the Slowworking experience: its social mission to open the community to the surrounding area, not merely sharing desk spaces, but exploring varied possibilities for interaction with the neighbourhood.

Other journeys followed a more introspective and intimate route, moving from one detail of the space to another, marking “geographies of property” (Pontecorvo *et al.*, 2009)—artifacts signifying individual or collective ownership—which activated memories and allowed for an affectively vivid narrative of the participant’s way of inhabiting the coworking space. For example, in Martino’s video tour, considerable time was spent describing a green area outside the coworking space, presented as “his garden”: “These are some plants we planted with Laura, and I’m very proud and happy about them this year . . . I’ll also show you the herb garden we lovingly tend to, and it’s doing quite well.” Across these tours, a constellation of communal artifacts—produced collectively and preserved within the space—emerged. This assemblage underscored how the coworking space has been transformed and enriched through multiple authorships: a place that is carefully tended to, while at the same time “caring for” its inhabitants, as it becomes a source of happiness and pride.

In the video tours, the space thus appears on stage in varied forms, all united by a sense of authorship and reciprocity with its inhabitants. Through their tours, Vittoria, Barbara and Martino each transformed the boundaries and spaces of the coworking environment, revealing facets of the coworking experience that reflected their active contributions and, in so doing, reified the coworking space as one built upon the contributions of its members. In turn, the space reflected, suggested and amplified aspects of the coworkers’ work and life experiences, positioning itself as a catalyst for acts of care, openness and conviviality—elements integral to the collective Slowworking experience with which individual participants identify.

As researchers, we were “guided” by the participants through this lively experience of spacing. In this dynamic, participants played the leading roles, while we were there to support, follow and facilitate. This experience required us to continuously reposition ourselves and even to improvise, facing surprises that were sometimes pleasant and sometimes disappointing. This aspect was particularly evident in one video tour, that of Patrizia, during which an unexpected event occurred. While Patrizia was showing us the exterior of the coworking space, explaining the storefront and the logo, an Egyptian woman entered the scene, asking for directions as she was looking for a nearby employment center. Patrizia kept the camera rolling, providing the information and adding, as she pointed to the coworking space, “This isn’t the employment center; this is a cultural center.” This interaction led to a lengthy digression, as the exchange between Patrizia and Fatima, the woman who soon shared her name, nationality and interest in Sloworking’s activities, prompted Patrizia to say, “This is also a space dedicated to culture and initiatives supporting women’s work.” After saying goodbye to Fatima, Patrizia remarked, “This encounter speaks to the openness of our space, a place created by women for women. We have many such encounters, and some of them leave an impact; you, too, are leaving a mark here.” She added, “I decided to record my encounter with Fatima because it’s representative of how we engage with the outside. And perhaps she approached us because she saw me with my phone in hand, filming . . . she wasn’t intimidated by it at all; if anything, it gave her permission to come closer. The tool changes the space’s context.”

Patrizia’s video tour created an unexpected experience of *transgressing* the established guidelines for using the tool. Patrizia took the initiative to include her encounter with Fatima in the video, which ended up being much longer than initially planned. She extended the boundaries of the video tour, as well as those of the coworking space itself, to incorporate Fatima. Suddenly, we were immersed in a performance of space that included and welcomed us, aligning with its value proposition as an “open place.” The video tour practice enabled the construction of space in its inclusive and collaborative form, prompting Patrizia and Fatima to engage with and open up to one another.

However, this transgression initially left us unsettled and questioning the quality and legitimacy of what was happening. It certainly made us keenly aware of the implications of being *guided* by participants: a process of discovery but also one of relinquishing control; of expanding the research scope but also renegotiating its responsibilities; of reflecting on the uses participants envision for the research itself and on its ethical, relational and institutional implications. Not only was the coworking space transformed through the video tour, but so too was the space of research, as its boundaries became elastic and open to question. How could these experiences be translated into transformative resources for the future?

Video feedback: from a duet to a collective choreography of space

In the practice of the video tour, the experience of spacing unfolds as a “duet”, a sensory experience of movements within the space where the participants take the lead, inviting us as researchers to explore alternative positions and to construct both the coworking and research spaces in continuously new ways. However, the dialogue and possible integration of the diverse experiences of space should not rest solely on the researcher but should also be actively engaged by the participants.

The primary moment of collective appropriation in the knowledge-building and spatial transformation process at Sloworking took place in our sessions of video feedback, conducted with the Sloworking participants and open to other interested coworkers. These sessions involved watching and collectively listening to the videos to grasp a sense of the whole, and discussing significant elements, as well as the overall affective and atmospheric structure of each tour. We paid special attention to emerging elements, such as each tour’s storyline, its opening and closing segments, the presence of actors, tools and work objects—whether visible or implied—that indicated varying roles, norms and community boundaries.

Our discussion prompts encompassed questions related both to the video content, such as: “Which space or spaces emerge from the video tours? Which objects, tools, and spatial features are most prominently focused on? Are some spaces/activities referenced more often than others? How do you feel different members of the community practice and even transform the space?”, and to the video-touring experience itself, for instance: “How are our power, voice, and relationships negotiated through our use of the video tour and within our coworking space? What roles are we enacting here? How does this mode of *organizing* the video tour experience reflect or challenge our coworking “way of organizing?”. These questions align with a phenomenological-interpretive research approach and the *elucidating function* of the researcher as proposed by [Butler and Cunliffe \(2024\)](#): “offering ways of elaborating lived and felt experience by elucidating something we know implicitly or have overlooked” (p. 1784). In this sense, the video feedback process served both to deepen interpretations and reflections on the content and practice of video production, as well as to generate insights for critical self-reflection and future action.

After watching the video tours, Slowworking participants lingered over several issues, foremost among them their differences: “we moved through the space with varying levels of familiarity,” one participant remarked. Each person “navigated and created” their “own” space, managing its boundaries with flexibility and in highly individualized ways: from Martino’s garden to Barbara’s exterior space, these tours revealed increasingly expansive boundaries for the coworking space . . . culminating in Patrizia’s opening act during her encounter with Fatima, which reified the coworking as a welcoming space, potentially open to a new member. The discussion on this point was lively: “If each person has created and constructed their ‘own’ coworking space, how do we coordinate?” “Where does our community begin and end? Which spaces are shared, expressing a collective identity?” “Which spaces are boundary zones? How do we care for them? Who has the legitimacy to open or close the space to others? What—or whom—are we perhaps overlooking?”. These questions, facilitated by us, were also addressed by reflecting on the experience of the video tours and how it was lived and practiced by community members. An interesting parallel emerged between the practice of the video tour and the relational, day-to-day experience within Slowworking. As one participant noted, “In the video tour you have the freedom to say what you want, to create your own path. At the same time, though, while making my video, I thought about what I expected the others would show. I tried to create alternative routes, to highlight something complementary.” This excerpt captured the participant’s attempt to construct a tour experience that reflects her own authorship, while also considering the authorship of the other coworkers. Another participant commented on this aspect: “there’s an asynchronous choral quality in the video tour, and it’s interesting to see it again”.

This “asynchronous choral quality” became a way to conduct the video tour, presenting one’s version of the space while keeping in mind the tours of other coworkers. It was also a way of living within the community in the shared space: each coworker proposed their own route, but in flexible interweaving with those of others, reinforcing over time common and distinctive elements of Slowworking’s collective identity, such as the values of caring, openness and inclusion and solidarity. This asynchronous aspect of being a community was also acknowledged as a distinctive trait of the coworking experience, lived in different rhythms and forms by each member, yet preserving the possibility of meeting and building relationships—even if with greater fluidity than in a more traditional organization.

In this choral context, power differences exist and were performed in the video tours: Patrizia took it upon herself to include her encounter with Fatima. Not all coworkers had, or assumed, the same authority to redefine, open or close space boundaries in their tours. Similarly, in the management of Slowworking, Patrizia had the recognized authority to include or exclude other coworkers from certain projects or shared activities—an authority acknowledged by others and not universally held. As researchers, we supported a critical re-evaluation of this issue, shifting from the video tour experience to coworking practices: “How is the work with the video tour changing your and our relationships and reciprocal role

expectations? How are you, as a collective, reconfiguring your roles? Are there any new ‘rules’ regarding role relationships and the use of power that we are experiencing here as co-researchers?” we asked. This topic sparked a rich exchange among the coworkers: “Power differences do emerge, managed in a non-hierarchical, but circular and shared manner,” one coworker emphasized, “... there are no bosses or reserved spaces for leadership; we highlighted spaces of conviviality; we emphasized that many of us, in various ways, take care of this ‘common home.’ We call each other ‘companions’ and ‘colleagues,’ which is unusual for a coworking space because we don’t work for the same organization ...” These reflections gained unanimous agreement: “Many common and shared aspects appear in the video tours, and each in their way narrates a personalized experience of the space, reflecting what occurs in the community: anyone who feels inclined can take on responsibility in projects and decisions.” A participant added, “this reflection is invaluable for our future: how can we continue to give everyone the opportunity to express themselves in this space and leave a mark? What does inclusion truly mean to us? To what extent does it reach?”.

In these concluding remarks, the agency of spacing appeared to shift from an individual option to a collective one. The reflection between the practice of video tours and the experience of being and forming a community indeed opened up to a collective dimension and an agency directed toward the future, where the coworkers themselves shared the opportunity to monitor and potentially redesign the space to make it even more “suitable for all.” We, as researchers, were included in this circularity of power and agency. Our role was to provide “light” yet present guidance, stimulating analogical reflection between the practice of the video tour and the experience of inhabiting the space as a community, provoking thoughts that might challenge taken-for-granted assumptions for both the coworkers and ourselves. We also questioned how the experience of the video tour had prompted our role and knowledge and what implications this had for the knowledge produced and for the future. From this perspective, it is intriguing to consider a coworker’s reflection on the practice of the video tour in response to our research approach: “It is a tool that not only allows us to take stock of the situation and understand how the space is practiced and experienced in different ways; it is an inclusive tool that creates engagement, which could help us involve less engaged individuals and revive their projects concerning the space; it expresses our similarities and differences in an immediate way ... but it certainly requires a certain level of alliance and partnership between researchers and participants to function well!” These reflections, which open up discussions on the conditions of use and the possible limitations of the presented methodology, will be further explored in the following paragraph.

Discussion: co-producing and transforming coworking spaces through a radically reflexive video tour

The illustrated case highlights how a video tour-based ethnography could be integrated with a radically reflexive sensitivity in knowing and transforming the intricate lived experience of the coworking space. In this section, we discuss what it means to engage in a radically reflexive video tour, and which challenges have to be addressed by researchers and participants. We also discuss the opportunities and limits that a radically reflexive stance offers to the study of coworking.

As described in our theoretical framework, positioning within a radically reflexive approach means embracing a performative and intersubjective perspective on reality and knowledge that assumes that the subjects and the objects of reflection are tangentially connected and transformed by the reflexive process itself (Cunliffe, 2003). The radically reflexive performance of the video tours in fact developed itself as an *in-the-moment* and *constitutive* reflexivity (Meier and Carroll, 2023). Researchers and participants, as they moved through the space and accounted for it, enacted the coworking “landscape” in different ways (Cunliffe, 2003). In the case described, the coworkers enacted their “spacing” and expressed a collective identity, a sense of care and being cared for, thereby conveying a truly unique and

distinctive atmosphere within the Sloworking community. The tours also facilitated an exploration of how coworkers integrated and hybridized their work activities with other practices, such as leisure and conviviality, which are typical of coworking spaces (Bouncken *et al.*, 2023). At the same time, even within a shared ethos, the coworkers produced and performed the space in diverse ways, revealing—through spatial arrangements and appropriation practices—multifaceted uses of the space, power differences between founders and other members, and specific forms of coordination and organization of community life (Ivaldi *et al.*, 2021a). For example, in her video tour, Barbara emphasized the importance of extending the coworking space's boundary to the surrounding neighborhood, advocating for openness, rootedness and dialogue with the local community, aligning with the tradition of civic and rural coworking (Crovara, 2023). Patrizia enacted this inclusive vocation in a different way, welcoming Fatima into the space of her video tour and even inviting her to become part of the community in the future. Other coworkers, finally, shaped the space to be more personalized and tailored to their needs, emphasizing the importance of inhabiting and working in a place that reflected them and bore the marks of their presence.

The video tour made it possible to recognize how the space and its “warm and welcoming” atmosphere were as much the context as the outcome of coworkers’ activities, including those of more peripheral community members. It also brought to light differences and potential tensions among coworkers, as well as distinctive mechanisms of community building within the space (Spinuzzi, 2012).

Further, through the use of a radically reflexive video tour, the coworking space was not only *shown* but also *transformed*. This transformative dimension was amplified when the practice of the video tour shifted from a two-person process to a collective one during the video feedback session (Meier and Carroll, 2023). Radical reflexivity, therefore, emerges as *inherently collective*, where dialogue and interaction around the videos serve as constitutive drivers of change.

In the presented case, the transformative potential of the video tour particularly addressed the themes of boundaries and power within the coworking community.

Regarding the theme of boundaries, the spacing practices enacted by the coworkers conducting the video tours revealed boundaries of varying nature and scope within the coworking space. This raised the importance of addressing criteria for inclusion and exclusion in the community, along with the associated boundary work. For instance, the inclusivity of the space and its potential “elitism” (Fast, 2024) emerged as critical issues: Is this space designed to welcome only women? If so, what kind of women? To what extent should the Sloworking space alter its distinctive features—such as its outdoor spaces, logo, artifacts, mission and language—in response to these inclusions? Who decides the boundaries of the space and the community? These were central questions.

As for the theme of power within the community, the practices of appropriation enacted differently by various coworkers—thus marking their identification with specific parts of the space—partly reaffirmed the identity and sense of belonging produced and reproduced within Sloworking. Critical issues also emerged, echoing discussions in the literature on coworking spaces, such as differences in usage, motivations and interests brought by coworkers, as well as the potential tensions arising from these (Wright *et al.*, 2022). Notably, the emotional and social labor (Crovara, 2023) required to navigate different interpretations and ways of creating and inhabiting the space, and its impact on the community’s solidity and the design of the space, became points of discussion.

Finally, in line with the understanding of radical reflexivity as *critical reflexivity*, the practices of the video tour and the video feedback sessions became subjects of critical inquiry regarding their ontological, epistemological and theoretical underpinnings and implications (Meier and Carroll, 2023; Ripamonti *et al.*, 2016). Our interpretation of the video tour method suggests a specific ontological and epistemological stance. This perspective is grounded in an intersubjective paradigm of science (Cunliffe and Karunanayake, 2013), consistent with the tradition of multi-dialogue ethnography, which questions researcher authorship and affirms

the need to build trust-based relationships between researchers and informants (Marcus and Cushman, 1982). The challenge of being an ethnographer is here closely linked to the need to consider the very community in which the research is conducted, developing multi-dialogue approaches as consistent orientation. The more distributed the authorship in the ethnographic text, the more one can be confident that what is presented is authentic and relevant (Behar, 2022). However, this positioning must be negotiated and shared with participants, who need to become willing “epistemic partners” (Holmes and Marcus, 2005), bearing the associated responsibilities and relinquishing reliance on researchers as “experts.”

As a consequence, this perspective demands careful reflection on how our identities as researchers and participants—and our relationships—evolve and are recreated in the research space (Cunliffe, 2003, 2016). When we realized that the practice of the video tour and video feedback sessions was altering or challenging the reality of the coworking space, our sense of agency and responsibility was significantly heightened. This required us to openly discuss and reconsider these new positions within the group, which had now evolved into a collective of co-researchers. For instance, discussing Patrizia’s “transgressions” within the video tour practice and their implications allowed us to reflect on her influence within the research space. Relinquishing control over the process was not simple for us. While necessary for a democratic and intersubjective research approach, the question remains to what extent power and control can circulate and which asymmetries must be preserved (Galuppo *et al.*, 2011). In this case, the synergy we experienced with the coworkers, along with the inclusive atmosphere of the space, enabled us to feel sufficiently aligned with our participants to trust them and allow ourselves to be guided. Similarities in our identities as women and in the values of openness and democracy promoted by the space aligned with our roles as researchers and citizens. This perception of similarity made it easier to entrust the video tour method to the coworkers and legitimize their desire to use it autonomously in the future—for community research and monitoring, reinforcing its ethos and even promoting the space.

However, we questioned what might have occurred if we had perceived greater dissonance between *us* and *them*. If we had not shared the research goals or the desire to transform the coworking space by actively involving coworkers, how would we have proceeded with the research? Would we have been able to use the video tour tool, and with what outcomes?

Additionally, aware of the potential risks and downsides of coworking practices, we questioned whether our relinquishing control over the research simultaneously empowered participants but perhaps also overexposed them to certain risks. For example, while the video tour legitimized the community’s democratic, caring and inclusive vocation, this vocation is not exempt from risks such as burnout among managers and conflicts among coworkers, which might have been reinforced in turn (Crovara, 2023). Finally, by entrusting the video tour method to the now-expert coworkers, we may have legitimized its use not only for ongoing research on the space but also for its more effective promotion and commercialization. In this regard, we reflected on whether we had inadvertently contributed to the commodification of the Sloworking community—an option distant from our values and purposes (Bennis and Orel, 2024).

These considerations open broader reflections on the mutual responsibilities, potentialities and limitations of a radically reflexive video tour. For such a methodology to succeed, we believe the research space must also become a forum for explicit discussion and renegotiation with participants regarding the theoretical, methodological and epistemological choices made—where agreements, objections, transgressions and resistances can all be welcomed (Cunliffe and Karunanayake, 2013). Furthermore, it is essential to discuss not only the conditions of entry into the research space but also the conditions of exit. Critical themes include maintaining the collective agency experienced during the study and identifying which future uses of the research practice are considered legitimate and appropriate. When roles and relationships are reconfigured within the framework of transformative co-research, it becomes vital to carefully share the value and future outcomes of the collective experience undertaken.

Conclusions

In this paper, we addressed the integration of video-based ethnography with a radically reflexive approach, emphasizing its constitutive and performative ontology and its focus on collective agency to explore and transform coworking spaces. Specifically, we presented a case of video-based ethnography in which a particular technique, the video tour, was employed from a radically reflexive perspective.

The radically reflexive video tour offers promising and innovative opportunities for studying coworking spaces, presenting a significant advancement over the approaches discussed earlier in this paper (Orel *et al.*, 2024). This method facilitates a nuanced understanding of space usage, inclusion and exclusion dynamics, power relations and processes of appropriation within the coworking environment. Moreover, performing the video tours and discussing the videos in collective settings allows for performing alliances, leadership structures, boundary-work practices and solidarity elements within the coworking communities, that can be reflexively addressed to inform a collaborative and more conscious design of such spaces.

Despite its potential, the radically reflexive video tour also introduces several unique challenges. First, it may not be universally applicable. However, we suggest that this approach is particularly effective in contexts, such as coworking spaces, where there is a demand for renewal or a need to better understand how lived experiences intersect with discursive and material features.

Second, the video tour often disrupts traditional researcher-participant dynamics. Establishing trust and securing participants' willingness to engage in a collective process of reorganization, while accepting the inevitable tensions and unexpected transgressions, requires careful negotiation across multiple interactions.

Third, researchers must be prepared to critically examine and, when necessary, reshape their assumptions and roles throughout the research process. These reflections should be made explicit when appropriate. While researchers are responsible for proposing methods and creating settings that foster radical reflexivity, they must also be willing to relinquish some control, creating space for participants' concerns and positions (Galuppo *et al.*, 2011). This necessitates an ongoing reflexive dialogue about the power dynamics within the research process and a readiness to address these dynamics as situations demand.

This study acknowledges several limitations that warrant consideration. First, our analysis focused solely on the video tour method. We recognize that the video tour may not always be feasible in video-based research, as it requires a positive and trusting relationship with participants, as well as a baseline level of camera proficiency. Expanding this framework by incorporating additional video techniques could enhance its applicability.

Second, the way we framed the video tour reflects only one of many possible approaches to video-based data collection. Specifically, our study did not explore other elements of video-based practices, such as filming techniques, camera positioning or decisions about when to begin or stop recording.

Finally, we did not address critical phases of video-based research, including video editing, integration of video tours with other methods or issues related to writing and representation. These aspects are significant and deserve closer examination in future studies.

By highlighting these opportunities, challenges and limitations, we aim to contribute to the development of video-based ethnographic practices that prioritize radical reflexivity and collective agency. This approach holds the potential to not only study coworking spaces but also transform them through collaborative and participatory processes.

Notes

1. The video data are available from the authors upon reasonable request, subject to the approval and discretion of the researchers. Permission for data use is negotiated in collaboration with the research participants to ensure ethical considerations are upheld.

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