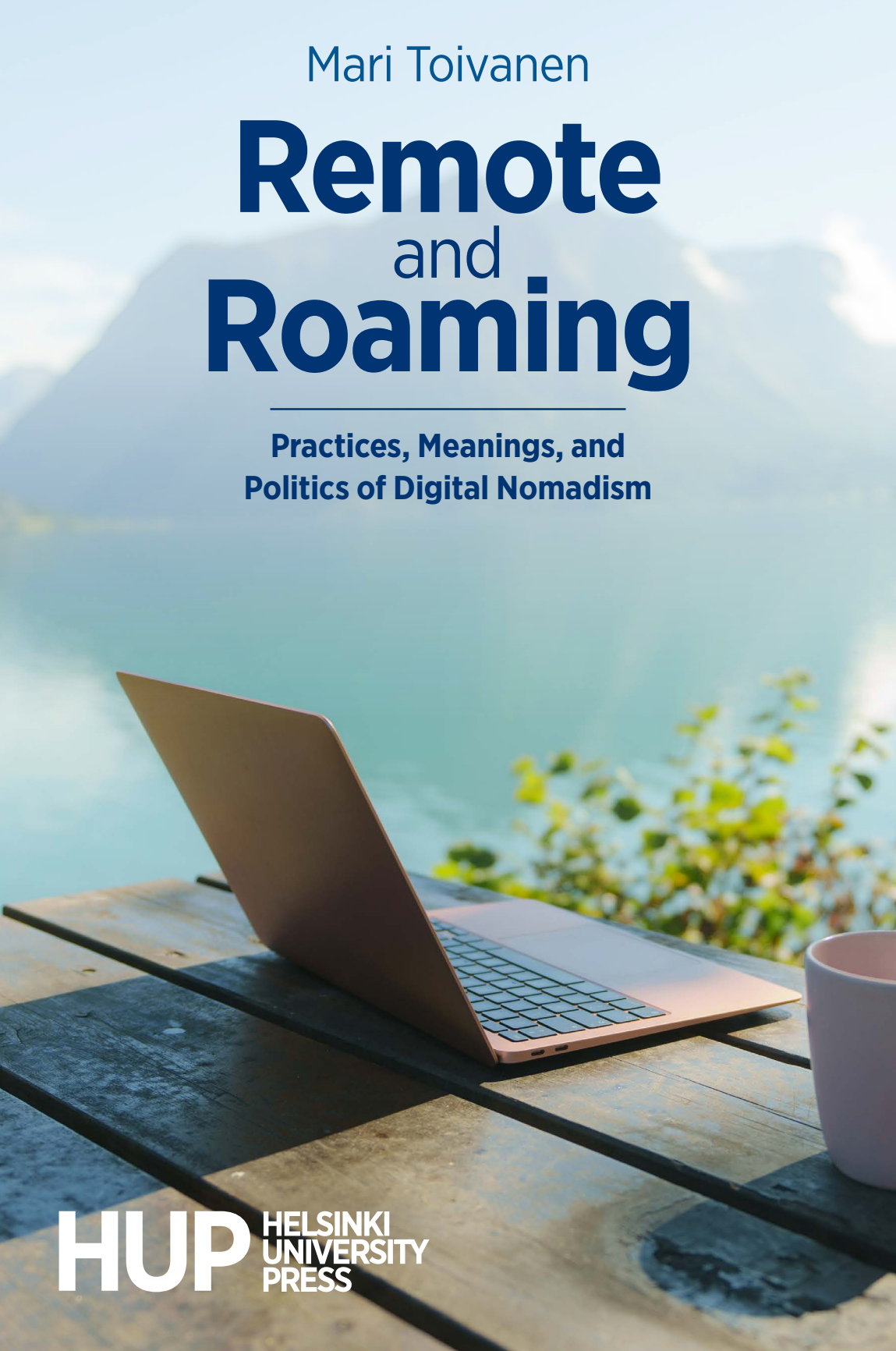
Mari Toivanen

Remote and Roaming

Practices, Meanings, and Politics of Digital Nomadism



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Contents

Figures and Tables

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Introduction: When Digital Nomadism Became Mainstream

From Buzzword to Mainstream Phenomenon

I believe it was sometime in summer 2017 when a friend of mine first talked of a co-working space she had visited in Thailand. Not really knowing what a co-working space was, I travelled to Koh Lanta island in November 2017 to work remotely. It was the first trip where I combined travel and work in such a manner, but it was not to be the last. On the island, I quickly noticed that there indeed was a popular co-working space that gathered dozens of individuals who spent their days working in an office-like environment, who all had different employers and/or were working as freelancers. This sparked my sociological curiosity: who were these people? How had they ended up here in the first place? During my six-week stay on the island, I encountered an increasing number of people at the co-working space—some returning for their second or third visit during the high season, while others had come after hearing about the island's digital nomad hub or through research on digital nomad social media sites to plan their next destination.

During the weeks I spent on the island, I talked with dozens of people who told me of their experiences, where they had travelled, why they had chosen to leave office-bound work behind and how they were looking for a like-minded community of travellers. The last of these needs was fulfilled by the numerous activities that the

co-working space organised each evening after working hours. I also quickly noticed that most people were like myself—relatively young, between 25 and 40 years old (I was 34 at the time), able to work remotely either freelance or by arrangement with their employer. They also, like me, held a powerful passport of a Global North country and enjoyed relatively privileged mobility rights. Some had been on the move for years; some had only just adopted a mobile lifestyle. I soon discovered that people were calling themselves 'digital nomads'; those who were less fond of that term, 'location-independent workers'. What was common to them all was the ability to work remotely and to travel simultaneously, often spending several months in one place before moving forward from Koh Lanta to Chiang Mai, in northern Thailand, to Bali in Indonesia or back to Europe for the summer season.

At the time, I did not yet know that I would be conducting research on digital nomadism in years to come. But I returned to the island in 2019 and completed my first interviews with digital nomads. The following year, I received funding for a five-year project on digital nomadism. Then, in 2020, the world was faced with a pandemic that halted most international travel, deepened existing inequalities and radically changed the look of mobilities and work. This also impeded my plans to conduct interviews with digital nomads. I finally started the data collection process at full speed in 2021, and I have conducted interviews with digital nomads and stakeholders (individuals offering services to digital nomads) in Thailand, the Canary Islands, Mallorca, Portugal and Mauritius. I have also participated in numerous digital nomad conferences and events, including in Bulgaria and Estonia (in addition to the countries listed above), followed the media debates surrounding the phenomenon and seen a growing number of academic publications tackling digital nomadism. Little did I know how digital nomadism would change from those moments spent on that Thai island in 2017 until I conducted the last interview in 2023. I doubt anybody did.

How Digital Nomadism Captured the Popular (and Academic) Imagination

In 2018, *Forbes* announced 'Digital nomadism goes mainstream'. The same year *The Economist* published a story titled 'Don't settle: the rise of digital nomads' and the *New York Times* an article with the headline 'When you are a "digital nomad", the world is your office'. Such stories are numerous, and the BBC, the *Guardian*, *Le Monde*, *Figaro*, Al Jazeera, the *Times of India* and many other major news outlets have all published lengthy news pieces on digital nomadism, reflecting also how the 'digital nomad lifestyle' tickles the popular imagination. Towards the end of the 2010s, it suddenly seemed that digital nomads were everywhere: they made the headlines and featured in countless media discussions that often celebrated the nomadic worker, who was now free from the shackles of office work, location-independent to choose any destination and to explore the globe, roaming from one tropical destination to another. In February 2025, there were over 12.8 million hits for the term 'digital nomad' in the Google search engine,[1] with Google Trends analysis showing a marked increase in searches for the term during the period of study.

Digital nomads have not only captured the popular imagination, but they have rapidly become of interest to states, municipalities and private sector actors that have understood the purchasing power this new consumer segment possesses (Toivanen 2023). Digital nomads started to feature as a category of mobile workers in governments' policy papers, and since 2019 we have witnessed a rapidly increasing number of digital nomad visa schemes.[2] In 2014, Estonia created an e-Residency programme that provides a transnational digital ID, allowing the user access to the digital

1 A year and a half earlier, in June 2023, the figure was nine million.

2 As of late 2024, 66 countries offered this travel authorisation visa to work and stay in their territories; see Kat Chen, '66 Countries With Digital Nomad Visas—and How to Apply to the Top Programs', *Condé Nast Traveler* (6 November 2024), https://www.cntraveler.com/gallery/countries-with-digital-nomad-visas (accessed 14 April 2025).

services offered by the Estonian state (banking, taxation, etc.), but it does not function as a residence permit.[3] Examples of services offered by the private sector include co-working and co-living spaces, tax consultation services, and community events and conferences, such as the popular Nomad Cruise or the Bansko Nomad Fest in Bulgaria (Toivanen 2023).

An ever-increasing number of services and events are now targeting the digital nomad consumer segment—often arranged by digital nomads themselves who have become 'lifestyle promoters' (see Bonneau et al. 2023). Such promoters sell the lifestyle through consultation, events and publications on how to become a digital nomad. One of the most notable and influential books in this regard has been *The 4-Hour Workweek: Escape 9–5, Live Anywhere, and Join the New Rich* (2007) by Tim Ferriss. The book presents the idea of escaping the mundanity of the standard working week, and discusses how to become financially independent by harnessing the benefits of geoarbitrage—that is, how to have greater purchasing power in Global South destinations by receiving a salary from a Global North country. These trends not only speak of the broader commodification and monetisation of digital nomadism (Aroles et al. 2020; Bonneau et al. 2023) but also of digital nomadism becoming more mainstream.

Despite this buzz that has surrounded digital nomadism since around 2014, it is not a new phenomenon as such. The term 'digital nomad' was coined by Makimoto and Manners as far back as 1997, in their book *Digital Nomad*. The authors predicted that new technologies would radically change the world of work, allowing workers to wander the globe. However, whereas early forms of digital nomadism in the 2000s were rather individualistic, it is suggested that it became recognised as a mainstream phenomenon around 2014–2015, following the emergence of dedicated online communities, series of events and co-working spaces (Schlagwein

3 As of 22 April 2025, Estonia had registered more than 124,300 e-Residents in its scheme; Republic of Estonia, 'e-Residency in Numbers', https://www.e-resident.gov.ee/dashboard/ (accessed 22 April 2025).

2018). The phenomenon has, unsurprisingly, been accompanied by the creation of virtual communities, digital nomad blogs, podcasts, social media pages, websites and so forth, where information on the digital nomad lifestyle, including on the popular hotspots across the world, is widely circulated. In 2022, 16.9 million people in the United States alone identified as digital nomads, a significant increase from 7.3 million in 2019, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic (MBO Partners 2022).[4] However, not all who identify themselves as digital nomads take to the road, but remain 'armchair nomads', usually working remotely from home. Nevertheless, this shows how the term has entered the public discourse and how the phenomenon has captured the popular imagination.

Lastly, the academic knowledge production on digital nomadism has boomed, with several academic theses and other scholarly publications seeing the light of day. Whereas global nomads and neo-nomads have been the object of research for some years already (D'Andrea 2006; Kannisto 2016), the current research on digital nomadism specifically has focused on defining the phenomenon; on the working and non-working (leisure) lives of nomads; co-spaces and digital nomad lifestyle; mobility practices; political economy of digital nomadism and questions of identity (for literature reviews, see Cohen and Stanik 2021; Gupta et al. 2024; Jaiswal et al. 2024). More recently, the relationship between digital nomadism and the state (Hermann and Paris 2020; Cook 2022; Mancinelli and Germann Molz 2024) as well as that between digital nomadism and the market economy (Thompson 2018; Wang et al. 2019; Aroles et al. 2020; Mancinelli 2020) have also drawn more interest, specifically including more critical perspectives on this form of lifestyle mobility. As with media, academic research on lifestyle mobilities has tended to idealise and celebrate

4 Since 2018, MBO Partners has published State of Independence research reports that have included statistical estimations on the number of people identifying as digital nomads in the US. Using survey-based methods to reflect wider population demographics, they estimate the number of digital nomads in the country to several millions.

the modern, urban citizen who is independent, cosmopolitan and moving effortlessly across national borders (Salazar 2018). However, a critical body of literature has also pointed towards the problematic characteristics of digital nomadism, including its environmental and social impact on local communities (Hannonen et al. 2023; Jiwasiddi et al. 2023; Chavarria 2024). Overall, the body of scholarly research on digital nomadism is still relatively young, although we can expect research-based knowledge on the topic to grow in the years to come.

Digital Nomad: Remote and Roaming

A digital nomad can broadly be defined as an individual who travels while working, and whose mobile lifestyle is enabled by such remote mode of work. But there is an increasing discussion what exactly constitutes a digital nomad. Does the emphasis lie more on the aspect of work or can, for instance, semi-retired mobile workers be defined as digital nomads? Can you be a digital nomad if you have a home base in some country? This debate has become a more accentuated in the post-COVID-19 context, particularly with the increase in the number of professional expatriates and mobile digital workers, or of mobile 'workationers', who might spend half of the year in one destination and the rest of the year in their country of citizenship (Bonneau and Enel 2018; Voll et al. 2023). In fact, we are witnessing a certain dissolution of the term 'digital nomad', which increasingly is also used to refer to remote workers more broadly, for instance in government policy papers. It is also an open question to what extent the phenomenon of digital nomadism becomes fragmented with individuals engaging in part-time mobilities or other configurations in their living arrangements that transcend the traditional sedentary/mobile dichotomy. The situation is rendered more complicated with the fact that the digital nomad is quickly becoming a policy category, namely in digital nomad visa programmes offered by states.

There has also been a vivid academic discussion on the definitional aspects of the digital nomad and the term has been the

subject of conceptual debates (Müller 2016; Reichenberger 2018; Hannonen 2020; Cook 2023). For instance, Hannonen (2020) discusses the different usages of the term 'digital nomad' in research literature and points out that the definition in the 'State of Independence in America' report (MBO Partners 2018, 2019) leans on the *possibility* of being mobile as a remote worker, whereas in other contexts, being mobile is rather the *condition* for someone to be classified as a digital nomad. More recently, Cook (2023) has offered an updated classification, which divides the digital nomad model into five types. These are freelance digital nomads; digital nomad business owners; salaried digital nomads; experimental digital nomads; and armchair digital nomads (those aspiring to become a digital nomad). This categorisation has been developed on the basis of employment status and level of mobility, as discussed in more detail later.

Another question is how the individuals who engage in what can be called digital nomadic mobilities define themselves. Based on my personal observations from the field, I have noticed how the connotations the term 'digital nomad' carries have changed since 2017 when I first visited the co-working space in Thailand. When I conducted my very first interviews with digital nomads in Thailand two years later, not all of them identified themselves as digital nomads, or they were quite critical towards the popular understanding of the term. My first interviewees made a distinction between digital nomads, who they considered to be merely 'travel bloggers in Bali', and 'location-independent workers', a category they more readily identified with, underlining that they were working in 'serious jobs'. Jumping to February 2022 when I conducted interviews on the Canary Islands, I soon noticed that many remote workers were referring to themselves as 'digital nomads', although they had a home base in their countries of citizenship and were only visiting the islands for a month or two. It is also an open question as to whether individuals who have opted for a mobile lifestyle while working prefer to identify themselves as digital nomads and will continue to do so in the future, particularly with the growing critical voices that the phenomenon

has started to draw. Indeed, one aspect affecting individuals' self-identification as digital nomads could well be the growing critical tone on the sustainability aspect of this mobile lifestyle and the debates that portray digital nomads as 'gentrifiers' of destinations where they stay.[5] In other words, the term 'digital nomad' has been in motion and is still likely to change in the years to come.

In this book, I draw from the understanding of 'digital nomad' offered by Hannonen (2020, 12): for her, the term refers 'to a rapidly emerging class of highly mobile professionals, whose work is location-independent. Thus, they work while traveling on (semi) permanent basis and vice versa, forming a new mobile lifestyle.' Leaning on this definition, I understand digital nomads as mobile professionals whose location-independent work enables them to pursue a mobile lifestyle marked by frequent transnational travel, indefinite stays in destinations abroad and no set intention to return to their countries of origin.

Where Is Digital Nomadism Going?

While it has been rewarding to study a phenomenon that is constantly and rapidly changing, it has also been challenging to keep track of all developments. In the future, we will be better placed to assess to what extent digital nomadism, as it plays out now in our reopened world, is qualitatively different from pre-pandemic (digital) nomadic mobilities. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been a strong tendency in policymaking, academia as well as in public debates to try to make sense of digital nomadism and of the factors that have contributed to its growth. These include the relative middle-class wealth accumulation in Western countries and the increase in mobility rights (for some) since the 1980s, as well as digitalisation, the emergence of platform

5 See, for example, Nicole Garcia Merida, 'Digital Nomads Are the New Gentrifiers', *Vice* (22 May 2023), https://www.vice.com/en/article/m7bgv8/digital-nomads-work-from-home-gentrification/ (accessed 14 April 2025).

economy, the COVID-19 pandemic and the revolution of remote work (Eurofound 2023a[6]). Other major trends shaping digital nomadism include the generational change in meanings attached to work and leisure. We have seen an example of this with the 'Great Resignation' in the US (De Smet et al. 2021). Such broader transformations in both the modes and the meanings attached to work and leisure are undoubtedly also shaping individuals' possibilities and decision-making processes in taking part in digital nomadic mobilities.

The 'State of Independence' report (MBO Partners 2022) identifies four factors that will likely contribute to the ongoing growth of digital nomadism. The first is the more relaxed remote work policies organisations have in respect of their employees; this is evidenced in the increasing number of traditional jobholders becoming nomadic (compared to the pre-pandemic situation). Secondly, countries and cities are attracting digital nomads, as seen in the digital nomad–specific programmes and visa schemes. Thirdly, a growing support industry is providing services such as global insurances schemes, temporary work and living spaces, and numerous events to digital nomads, thus facilitating the adoption of the mobile lifestyle (see also Toivanen 2023). Lastly, the continued development of remote work technology and methods, specifically due to the COVID-19 pandemic, will go on contributing towards digital nomadic mobilities in the future.

It goes without saying that the COVID-19 pandemic was a major factor in shaping the digital nomadism phenomenon. The upward trend in remote work is likely to continue because of the expansion of relevant technologies and the development of their quality (Eurofound 2023a). The number of remote work opportunities is also predicted to increase. Whether digital nomadism will develop as part of the remote work revolution, as a novel version of lifestyle mobilities (niche alternative lifestyle), or as a

6 European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (Eurofound) is a tripartite EU agency, founded in 1975, that produces research reports to support EU-level policymaking.

combination of both, remains to be seen (Dreher and Triandafyllidou 2023). Another unexplored terrain is the impact of growing (labour) precarity upon the younger generations in Global North countries and that is potentially pushing them to mobility as their cities of residence become too expensive and their professional lives more fragmented (see Thompson 2018). Yet another aspect that deserves more attention is how global inequalities in mobility regimes and steepening income disparities will shape future digital nomadic mobilities—and consequently also solidify the immobility of those who do not enjoy privileged mobility rights. One likely development is certain destinations becoming branded more strongly as digital nomad hubs;[7] evidence of such development already been seen (Toivanen 2023). Local policies to attract mobile workers and expatriates, without protecting the right of locals to affordable housing, are a major contributor to mass protests that have already taken place in Barcelona, the Canary Islands, Lisbon and Mexico City. The question remains, at what cost to local communities do such destinations become digital nomad hubs?

Digital Nomadism: A Form of Work-Related Lifestyle Mobility

Nomadic mobilities are not themselves new in the history of humankind. Travelling artists, nomadic tribes and indigenous communities, Travellers and other such groups are just few examples of individuals and communities for whom mobility has been a way of life (Cresswell 2006). Since the start of the 21st century, being 'on the move' has become a way of life for many (Urry 2002, 256; Canzler et al. 2008). What is qualitatively different in current

7 For digital nomad mobility trajectories, see https://blair.wang/nomads-map (accessed 14 April 2025). In May 2023, Ko Pha Ngan and Bangkok (Thailand), Mexico City (Mexico), Buenos Aires (Argentina) and Florianopolis (Brazil) were the top five destination according to the platform Nomads.com (formerly Nomad List, https://nomads.com/, accessed 14 April 2025).

lifestyle mobilities is that they are the direct result of past decades' global developments, namely digitalisation, economic accumulation and more general freedom of movement for (some) individuals (Benson and Osbaldiston 2016; Urmanbetova 2018). Digitalisation of work in particular has played a key role in the emergence of lifestyle mobilities, accelerated by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, as discussed later. The full impact of the pandemic cannot yet be fully assessed, but it is safe to say that the increasing modes of remote work, related technologies and practices have definitely contributed to the growth of digital nomadism since 2020 and will continue to do so for the remainder of the decade. In addition, whereas digital nomadism has long been considered a temporary and generational trend, such lifestyle mobilities are gradually becoming a more established and normalised way of life.

Moving from the more macro-level considerations of digital nomadism to more micro-level reflections, we can approach digital nomadism through the perspectives of work, travel and lifestyle. In terms of being a form of lifestyle mobility, digital nomadism has been considered to include counter-cultural elements and to represent an alternative to more sedentary lifestyles imposed by modern nation-states (Makimoto and Manners 1997). Research on neo-nomadic mobilities (as distinct from more traditional nomadic mobilities) evidences this counter-cultural element as well (D'Andrea 2006; Kannisto 2016; Korpela 2020). Digital nomadism has been considered to represent an escape from the 'rat race' and office-bound jobs, an alternative to more place-bound ways of constructing one's professional and social lives in one location (Cohen and Stanik 2021; Cook 2022), and a way to eschew the neoliberal capitalist market economy's consumption culture (Thompson 2018; Mancinelli 2020).[8] However, it remains

8 I refer here to Harvey's (2005, 2) definition of neoliberalism as: 'a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can be best advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong property rights, free market, and the free trade'.

an open question as to what extent such counter-cultural and alternative dimensions exist in terms of neo-nomadic mobilities such as digital nomadism. The relationship between digital nomadism and the nation-state, on the one hand, and with the capitalist market economy, on the other hand, is ambivalent, to say the least (Aroles et al. 2020), as will be discussed later.

At the Nexus of Work, Travel and Lifestyle

Work, travel and lifestyle constitute the three main dimensions in how digital nomadism has been approached, including by nomads themselves. In comparison to other types of lifestyle mobilities (such as the VanLife movement[9]), digital nomadism includes an important component of work (Hannonen 2020). Also, whereas the earlier studies on global nomads (Kannisto 2016) and neo-nomads (D'Andrea 2006) emphasised the lifestyle aspect of nomadic mobilities, the current digital nomadism literature also draws from labour studies and studies on work across diverse disciplines. For instance, Cook (2020, 357) conceptualises digital nomadism with two intersecting rating scales: high/low mobility and work/non-work. Based on his empirical work, he discusses how the self-identified nomads rated themselves according to these scales. He distinguishes digital nomadism from expatriate mobilities, touristic mobilities and from business travelling in terms of high work focus and high mobility.

Hannonen (2020) also distinguishes two contemporary approaches to digital nomadism: the work life perspective and the lifestyle angle. In the first, the emphasis in defining a digital nomad is on the remote and mobile work, situating the phenomenon in the context of changing conditions for work. In the second, the emphasis is on the lifestyle aspect, and on frequent international travel. As the name suggests, 'lifestyle mobilities' refers to mobilities related to one's lifestyle choice. Lifestyle mobilities

9 MBO Partners (2020, 6) define VanLifers as 'digital nomads who travel in vehicles that have been converted into roaming residences'.

are situated between temporary mobilities (such as tourism) and more permanent migration; they are distinct in terms of duration, frequency, seasonality and temporality (Cohen et al. 2015: 159; Bell and Ward 2000). Lifestyle migration, in contrast to lifestyle mobility, is based on one-off migration and with large seasonal variation, examples being retirees migrating from Finland to Spain and Westerners seasonally travelling to India (see Korpela 2010). In this way, these differ from more permanent migratory movements as well as sporadic and temporary touristic mobilities.

These three aspects—work, travel and lifestyle—allow better understanding of what constitutes the digital nomad lifestyle. Adopting a mobile lifestyle changes the mobile subjects' configuration of social and professional lives that are often thought of as highly sedentary. The digital nomadic lifestyle shapes social relationships and community formation (Cohen et al. 2015; Reichenberger 2018; Cook 2020; Green 2020), family life and intimate relationships (Thompson 2019b), work-related practices and meanings attached to work (Nash et al. 2018; Thompson 2018, 2019a; Aroles et al. 2020), and formation of identity and understanding of home (Birtchnell 2019; Green 2020; Willment 2020; de Loryn 2022a). Cohen et al. (2015, 158–159) develop the dimensions of lifestyle mobilities by adding a focus on belonging/home and temporality, suggesting that lifestyle mobilities may 'involve multiple "homes", "belongings" as well as sustained mobility throughout the life course'. Overall, mobile individuals make life arrangements, for instance, to maintain social relations as well as plan family life and leisure activities adapted to being 'on the move' (D'Andrea 2007; Mascheroni 2007; Reichenberger 2018).

In this book, digital nomadism is not defined as an isolated phenomenon or merely a personal endeavour, but rather as a form of lifestyle mobility deeply embedded in broader societal, economic and technological transformations. These include the digitalisation of work and economic restructuring, shifting values related to lifestyle and conceptions of 'the good life', and the structural forces that shape global mobility regimes and their hierarchies, as

well as the global inequalities in economic privilege that enable access to this way of life.

Digital Nomadism, Nation-States and the Capitalist Market Economy

Noyes (2004, 162) writes that 'sedentary states have always sought to control the nomadic flows of labour' in one way or another. The relationship between the nation-state and mobilities has historically been thorny, to say the least, with states monopolising the legitimate means of movement and the decision-making power of who gets to move and who does not with the invention of modern citizenship and the passport in the early 20th century (Torpey 2000). Therefore, it is not surprising that digital nomadism, representing an imaginary of complete freedom, has been said to pathologise the idea of the nation-state and citizenship (Cook 2020). It is most likely one of the reasons it has managed to capture the popular imagination. The journalist Danny Crichton has gone as far as to say that 'the nation-state has survived wars, plagues, and upheaval, but it won't survive digital nomads'.[10] Indeed, freedom has been the strongest and most common trope concerning the digital nomad lifestyle. This usually refers to freedom from office-bound work and more sedentary ways of life. More importantly, it evokes freedom from the state and its structural constraints to lead mobile lifestyles that celebrate location independence. This is also a part of the digital nomad imaginary and central narratives in digital nomads' accounts (Mancinelli 2018; Reichenberger 2018; Cook 2020, 2022; Thompson 2021).

At the same time, lifestyle *migration* has been shown to be related to a counter-cultural movement (Korpela 2020), paradoxically emerging within modernity itself and from the very modern

10 Danny Crichton, 'Digital Nomads Are Hiring and Firing Their Governments', *TechCrunch* (17 February 2018), https://techcrunch.com/2018/02/17/digital-nomads-are-hiring-and-firing-their-governments/ (accessed 14 April 2025).

dynamics of the nation-state, market and morality that they criticise (D'Andrea 2007). Regardless of accounts celebrating globalisation and the era of free movement, the most privileged mobile subjects are not free-floating agents moving independently of surrounding political, institutional and economic structures. For instance, Korpela (2020) shows how the prevailing nation-state system both enables and limits the actions of mobile subjects, for instance in the form of visas, work permits, citizenship rights, legal affairs, taxation, banking and so forth. In fact, digital nomads must 'negotiate tax systems, residency rules, and understand how states conceptualise and enforce worker protections, often managing these negotiations across multiple states' (Cook 2022, 307). Digital nomads are 'border artists' moving within and against the state (Mancinelli and Germann Molz 2024), mobile subjects who still need to comply with existing nation-state structures while simultaneously exemplifying a resistance to the nation-state's sedentary bias in how social and professional lives are structured.

Indeed, what is also qualitatively different about current lifestyle mobilities such as digital nomadism compared to other forms of human mobility is their relationship to the nation-state, including existing regimes of mobility (Glick Schiller and Salazar 2013). At the same time, nation-state systems and the mobility regimes are subjected to change, and they hold the potentiality to accommodate (and normalise) digital nomadic mobility as a way of life. One example of this comes from Estonia and its e-Residency programme. The programme is specifically designed for mobile individuals, and it specifically targets, as the world's first electronic citizenship, digital nomads. Another example is the digital nomad visa schemes that represent a significant change in the international regulations on mobility; this shows how governments are rethinking immigration systems in the era of remote work (Hooper and Benton 2022; Hari KC and Triandafyllidou 2025), often with a neoliberal ethos by adopting 'entrepreneurial and utility-maximizing policies' (Mancinelli and Germann Molz 2024, 189–190).

Digital nomadism has also been depicted to represent an alternative to capitalist and consumerist lifestyles. Wang and colleagues (2019, 1) argue that 'the broader socioeconomic context for digital nomadism is the market economy, to which it has an ambivalent relationship'—similarly to how digital nomadism has an ambivalent relationship with the nation-state. By this, they mean that digital nomadism both exemplifies resistance to market economics, yet at the same time is complicit by being the product of the market economy. They call this the 'resistance-compliance paradox'. The resistance, however, 'is muted by an inevitable outcome of compliance when such resistances are explored in further depth' (Wang et al. 2019, 1). Meanwhile, Mancinelli (2020, 419) notes that, rather than a complete challenge to the current system, 'digital nomadism is … an opportunistic adaptation to the conditions created by the impacts of neoliberal ideology of entrepreneurial freedom'. Similarly, Aroles and colleagues (2020, 125) argue that digital nomadism can be seen to embody 'an extreme form of capitalism'. The authors observe that, despite its ethos of providing an alternative lifestyle, digital nomadism is 'heavily reliant on the logic of capitalism and corporate culture for its own expansion' and that the relationship between digital nomadism and capitalism is a paradoxical one. Hence, the increasing commodification of digital nomadism (Toivanen 2023), both by private actors and states, operates with the logic of capitalist market economy. Digital nomadism is inevitably shaped by both its relationship to the nation-state as well as to the neoliberal and capitalist market economy.

Not All So Peachy and Unproblematic

We can note that the discussions on digital nomadism continue to be rather positively coloured. The main trope seems to be the celebration of location independence and freedom, increased quality of life and economic benefits for employers in allowing their employees to work from wherever and whenever. More critical opinions have surfaced, however, noting that digital nomadism

has deep ties with the global inequality in privilege to move and the disparity in income levels that digital nomads leverage in destinations with a lower cost of living than their home states. The connection between digital nomadism and privilege was noted by Jacques Attali as far back as 1991:

> the consumer-citizens of the world's privileged regions will become rich nomads. Able to participate in the liberal market culture of political and economic choice, they will roam the planet seeking ways to use their free time, shopping for information, sensations, and goods only they can afford, while yearning for human fellowship, and the certitudes of home and community that no longer exist because their functions have become obsolete. (Attali 1991, 11)

This foretelling observation relates to the question of privilege and inequalities that the neo-nomadic mobilities draw from and potentially (re)produce. Digital nomads largely hold passports of Global North countries and enjoy relatively free mobility rights, which may reinforce the existing inequalities concerning who is allowed to move and who is not. Mobility is always a political question. For instance, calling for *mobility justice*, Sheller (2018) shows how colonial legacies continue to shape the uneven privileges to move across national borders. Put bluntly, this means acknowledging that the mobility of some (often 'white Westerners') is at the expense of others: it is the labour of those who cannot be mobile that makes possible the effortless mobility of the other few. As Salazar (2018, 17) also notes, 'translocal mobility may have become the key difference- and otherness-producing machine of our age, involving significant inequalities of speed, risk, rights, and status'. This is visible in the practices of geoarbitrage that nomads (as well as many 'Western' expatriates and tourists) take advantage of. Geoarbitrage, as noted earlier, refers to the greater purchasing power that Global North citizens have due to earning salaries in euros, US dollars or British pounds compared to local populations in Global South countries with a lower cost of living (Holleran 2022).

The impact that digital nomadism can have on local communities and populations in destinations that receive these mobile workers is an increasingly hot topic of discussion. This debate touches upon the issue of rising rental prices and intense Airbnb presence in heavily gentrified neighbourhoods in places such as Lisbon and Mexico City,[11] phenomena which are consequently pushing locals out. Another major criticism levelled at digital nomadism is its environmental impact and nomads' carbon footprint, since most tend to prefer air travel.[12] However, nomads can potentially find themselves in a position of precarity and inequality vis-à-vis non-mobile workers, particularly in cases where their social protections have weakened as a result of their mobility. Thompson (2018, 9) discusses the relationship between digital nomadism and neoliberalism, observing that nomads in the US enter the 'neoliberal job market rapidly shedding benefits: health care, pensions, sick days, seniority and security'. Thus, in a sense, digital nomads with passports of industrialised Global North countries have many class privileges, but they find themselves in other ways in precarious situations (Thompson 2018). Anthropologist and travel writer Shaun Busuttil also observes that nomads can use mobility strategically to escape precarious situations in their countries of citizenship and take advantage of geoarbitrage. However, he notes that these mobility practices of escaping precarity can introduce different forms of risks to digital nomads'

11 Joshua Askew, '"People are Really Fired Up": Digital Nomads Blamed for Portugal's High Prices and Housing Crisis', *Euronews* (12 May 2023), https://www.euronews.com/travel/2023/05/12/proto-gentrifies-are-digital-nomads-ruining-portugal; Kate Linthicum, 'Californians and Other Americans are Flooding Mexico City. Some Locals Want Them to Go Home', *Los Angeles Times* (27 July 2022), https://www.latimes.com/world-nation/story/2022-07-27/americans-are-flooding-mexico-city-some-mexicans-want-them-to-go-home (both accessed 14 April 2025).

12 Joanna Gill, 'Forget Digital Nomads. Meet the Eco-conscious Digital "Slomads"', World Economic Forum (3 August 2022), https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2022/08/sustainability-digital-nomads-eco-conscious/ (accessed 14 April 2025).

mobile lifestyle.[13] More research-based knowledge from a critical perspective is needed on the aspects discussed above, specifically in the post-pandemic context. This book aims to fulfil such a gap in current research literature on digital nomadism.

About This Book

This is a book on digital nomadism as a rapidly evolving phenomenon, based on the lived experiences of a growing demographic of mobile workers in the post-COVID-19 pandemic context. The book simultaneously offers a micro-level perspective (*practices, meanings*) on the digital nomad lifestyle as narrated by digital nomads themselves, as well as offering a macro-level analysis (*politics*) on the structural aspects (citizenship/mobility regimes, state bureaucracies such as taxation and health care) shaping this form of lifestyle mobility.

The book draws from digital nomads' accounts of their mobile lifestyle, and tackles questions such as why they have chosen to become nomads; what their everyday nomadic lifestyle looks like; how they organise work and leisure-related practices; how they narrate their social relationships and family/community life; and how they arrange the bureaucratic and other practicalities that being on the move requires. More broadly, the book engages with the following questions: how do social and professional lives and the related aspects of work, family life, social relationships and community, often considered in sedentary terms, become constituted in the digital nomadic lifestyle? How is this mobile lifestyle accommodated, shaped and structured by macro-level factors?

This book embarks upon the task to better understand digital nomadism. As a precursor of growing remote work mobilities, the phenomenon speaks directly of the changing nature of work and

13 Shaun Busuttil, 'Mobility, Precarity and Risk: A Beckian Analysis of Digital Nomadism' (18 August 2021), https://www.shaunbusuttil.com/academic-writing/2021/8/18/digital-nomadism-mobility-and-risk (accessed 14 April 2025).

working lives in late capitalist societies and of the emerging lifestyle mobility patterns across different transnational geographies in the post-COVID-19 pandemic context. Exemplifying work-related lifestyle mobility more broadly, this book is also about the profound societal and global changes we are currently witnessing concerning work, (lifestyle) mobilities, digitalisation and their impact on social and professional lives. The book draws from a considerable ethnographic material (interviews with 70 digital nomads and stakeholders and observation data) collected before, during and after the pandemic across the world. In this sense, it provides new research knowledge on the rapidly growing form of lifestyle mobility that is digital nomadism and unique insights on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in shaping such mobilities.

The Focus

The book draws from and contributes to the growing literature on digital nomadism, and the research literature on (lifestyle) mobilities, work, digitalisation and their intersections in the post-pandemic context. The phenomenon does not neatly fit into migration studies nor studies on tourism or labour, and the adopted analytical approach is, therefore, cross-disciplinary, drawing from studies on (lifestyle) mobilities and migrations, tourism and leisure, nation-state, capitalism and work. I have specifically chosen to focus on three empirical axes to examine the digital nomad lifestyle: *practices*, *meanings* and *politics*. These three dimensions structure the chapters of the book as well as the main questions they tackle:

1. *What does the digital nomad lifestyle look like at the level of practices?*
   - What kind of im/mobilities and trajectories characterise digital nomads' experiences?
   - How do nomads arrange work-related and other practicalities?

- How are knowledge, goods and skills circulated in their (online) networks and how do digital nomad communities come about?

2. *What meanings are attached to the digital nomad lifestyle?*
   - What does work on the move look like and what specificities are ingrained in nomadic work modalities?
   - How does mobile work life affect life arrangements concerning relationships, children, social networks/community life and leisure?
   - How is mobility and location independence valued?
3. *How do the politics of digital nomadism come about?*
   - What is the relationship between digital nomadism and the state/capitalist market economy?
   - What contradictions, tensions, frictions, or accommodations and adaptations exist in this regard?
   - How do global, transnational, national and local processes shape digital nomadic mobilities?

In this book, I wish to argue that there is qualitatively something different to earlier lifestyle mobilities, specifically in the post-COVID-19 context. This is not only regarding the volume of individuals engaging in digital nomadic mobilities, but also concerning the lived experience of the digital nomad lifestyle in the post-pandemic context. This lived experience of leading a post-pandemic digital nomad lifestyle, as I will show in this book, is largely shaped by the relationship between digital nomadism and the nation-state, as well as by the forces of the capitalist market economy. Furthermore, examining digital nomads' lived experience raises the question of whether digital nomadism should be conceptualised and studied as a distinct phenomenon in its own right. This requires moving beyond the constraints of sedentary bias, which has often framed mobility in contrast to stability, while also avoiding the romanticisation of the digital nomadic lifestyle. Such an approach provides a more nuanced understanding of the life-worlds of this rapidly growing segment of mobile workers

who (are able to) seek a way of living and working that diverges significantly from that of their parents' generations.

The Fieldwork

This book draws from rich ethnographic material collected between November 2019 and May 2023. Altogether 70 semi-structured interviews were conducted with self-identified digital nomads and with stakeholders including individuals who offer services to digital nomads (co-working and co-living space owners, consultants, etc.). The collected data also includes observation conducted in co-working and co-living spaces, and at diverse digital nomad events and conferences. Specifically, observation was conducted at the Thriving Nomads Conference (2022), Bansko Nomad Fest (2022), Latitude59 Conference in Tallinn (2022), Running Remote Conference (Lisbon 2023, online participation) and other smaller events aimed at digital nomads, including skill-sharing sessions, community activities and informal get-togethers. The fieldwork has been conducted in Thailand (2019), Mallorca (2021), Bulgaria (2021), Estonia (2021), Gran Canaria (2022), Mauritius (2023) and Portugal (2023).

The digital nomads who took part in this study were reached through observed events, digital nomad Facebook and WhatsApp groups, and recommendations from other nomads. The interviews were conducted mostly in English (with a few exceptions in French and Finnish). The majority of interviewees were European Union (EU) nationals (France, Germany and the UK being the most prevalent countries, but the interviewees also included nationals of Sweden, Slovakia, Hungary, Italy, Spain, Serbia, Finland, the Netherlands and Belgium). Other nationals included citizens of Peru, Morocco, Belarus, Egypt, New Zealand and the US. Most interviewees were in their 30s and 40s, working in various IT-related professions (web developers, social media content creators, consultants and online marketers) but also in professions that had become more digitalised following the COVID-19 pandemic, including therapists, physical trainers, researchers, teachers and

translators among others (see the Appendix for details of the interviewees).

Structure

The book is divided into seven chapters. Following this introduction, Chapter 1 presents the background for digital nomadism from a broader perspective, leaning on previous research literature and available statistical data. It discusses the driving factors behind digital nomadism, including digitalisation, free movement (for some), the revolution of remote work, the COVID-19 pandemic and more.

Chapter 2 offers theoretical insights into this rapidly transforming phenomenon and presents a conceptual reflection on how to understand digital nomadism as qualitatively different from touristic mobilities and lifestyle migration.

Chapter 3 leaning on the collected material, analyses the practical dimension of life on the move. In other words, it enquires about the mobilities, trajectories, circuits of knowledge, skills and resources that characterise digital nomads' lived experiences of leading a mobile lifestyle. This chapter will also shed light on the social aspects of their physical mobilities as well as the circulation and accumulation of knowledge and skills, and offer insights on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic vis-à-vis work-related lifestyle mobilities.

Chapter 4 focuses specifically on how digital nomads narrate the meanings they attach to work, social relationships, family and community life. It also asks how mobility shapes these aspects and how the norms and values attached to 'desirable' professional and 'the good life' come across in nomads' accounts. The chapter offers a critical analysis of the contestations and negotiations that are included in the mobile lifestyle choice. The chapter also sheds light on the meanings that are given to community life and place.

Chapter 5 focuses on the structures, state institutions/bureaucracies, citizenship regimes and borders that shape digital nomads' lived experiences of leading a mobile lifestyle. It analyses the

macro-level politics of mobility that are often territorially bound, how digital nomads cross different physical and institutional borders (regimes of mobility) and their transnational agency when drawing from the various forms of capital they have at their disposal. This chapter also discusses the impact digital nomadism potentially has on local communities.

Finally, the Conclusion draws together the observations presented in the previous chapters and discusses the advantages, potentialities, frictions, ambiguities and precarities entailed in the digital nomadic lifestyle. The chapter begins by tackling the broader significance of the findings in terms of understanding the future of lifestyle-related mobilities, work that stretches across transnational geographies, and what the phenomenon tells of broader transformations taking place in post-pandemic societies. It ends with suggestions for future research in the study of (remote) work-related lifestyle mobilities such as digital nomadism.

CHAPTER 1

The New Normal? Transforming Work, Mobility and Lifestyle

> Digital nomads: People who embrace a location-independent, technology-enabled lifestyle have moved from eccentrics to mainstream in less than a decade.
>
> MBO Partners, 'State of Independence' report (2023)

It is undeniable that the development of digital nomadism has proceeded at an extraordinary pace since around 2014. Equally undeniable is the significance of COVID-19 to digital nomadism; the pandemic is often cited as the watershed moment for the phenomenon. The most immediate impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic were the strict international travel restrictions and the widely adopted transition to remote work. The long-term consequences for work-related lifestyle mobilities more broadly remain largely unstudied, although there are some studies on the pandemic's immediate impact on digital nomads. Although the scene was already set for the phenomenon to grow prior to the pandemic, there is undoubtedly a digital nomadism prior to the pandemic and a digital nomadism after it. The pandemic's long-term impacts on labour markets and modalities of work are already discernible.

So, how can we best understand digital nomadism and its driving forces today? What major factors shaped the phenomenon before and after the COVID-19 pandemic? What exactly has been the impact of the pandemic on this form of work-related lifestyle mobility?

Digital nomadism as it is known today has emerged as a result of specific societal, political and structural transformations that have taken place in the early part of the 21st century. Firstly, the most obvious ones relate to the digitalisation of work, creation of new technologies and the restructuring and transformations in/of labour markets, including the rise of platform and knowledge economies. Secondly, the relative freedom of movement (for some) and the wealth accumulation among the middle classes in Global North countries since the 1980s have also undoubtedly contributed to the phenomenon. Whereas these are the more obvious factors that can be seen as contributing towards the rise of digital nomadic mobilities, other more subtle changes that are more difficult to discern arguably also exist. Thirdly, these are the changing meanings attached to values concerning work and leisure, individualisation of lifestyle choices, and the increased (labour) precarity among younger generations. The COVID-19 pandemic plays into all three dimensions, although we will only be able to assess its full impact on digital nomadism in the future. Nevertheless, accounting for all these factors allows us to gain a comprehensive understanding of why digital nomadism has emerged as a phenomenon, how it has grown and what potential future directions we can expect to see.

This chapter focuses primarily on the *structural* or macro-level factors that shaped digital nomadism prior to the pandemic, and which continue to shape it in the post-pandemic world. It specifically examines the driving factors behind the phenomenon, including the revolution of remote work, (changing) regimes of mobility, digitalisation, transformations in the labour market such as the rise of the gig economy and knowledge work, and the change in values attached to work and leisure, to name but a few.

Shifting (Infra)structures: Economy and Work

Modern economies and labour markets went through major restructuring during the latter part of the 20th century. Without delving too deeply into the historical aspects of such

transformations, the restructuring of economies, changes in contemporary working lives, digitalisation and the creation of new industries and services form the contextual backbone to better understand work-related lifestyle mobilities such as digital nomadism. Such changes in work, economies and services have contributed to digital nomadism becoming a more mainstream phenomenon and will consequently shape it beyond the 2020s. The following sections will discuss three interlinked facets shaping digital nomadic mobilities: 1) labour market–related changes; 2) digitalisation and the rise of remote work; and 3) the rise of new industries and services that target the 'digital nomad' and that fuel the phenomenon.

Economic Restructuring: The Rise of Knowledge and Platform Economies

The profound transformations that have shaped the labour markets include the rise of platform and knowledge economies, the breaking-down of traditional and stable work paths, and the rise in labour precarity (Morgan and Nelligan 2018; EESC 2021; Wood and Lehdonvirta 2023). Morgan and Nelligan (2018) trace the major shift in occupational profiles from manufacturing industry and blue-collar jobs back to the deindustrialisation that began in the 1960s in the West and that has continued ever since. They observe a 'shift in the occupational profile towards employment based on services, knowledge, creativity and technology' (Morgan and Nelligan 2018, 1). Indeed, such economic restructuring has contributed to the decrease of the labour force in manufacturing industries, specifically in Global North countries; factories have been relocated to countries in the Global South with lower labour costs and more easily exploitable workforces. This restructuring of economies has been framed in terms of the 'knowledge economy'—that is, an economy driven by the production, distribution and usage of knowledge to generate economic value.

Much has been written on this 'new world of work' (see e.g. Beck 2014). Aroles et al. (2021, 1) characterise it as 'increasingly

fragmented, individualised, digitalised, entre/intrapreneurial, gig-orientated and compartmentalised for the sake of flexibility, speed and integration'. Meanwhile, Spreitzer and colleagues (2017, 473) identify three dimensions of flexibility that characterise the new world of work: 'a) flexibility in the employment relationship, b) flexibility in the scheduling of work, and c) flexibility in where work is accomplished'. However, as a result of such flexibility, work has become 'fissured' (Weil 2014), meaning that the direct employment relationship between worker and employer has been replaced by diverse practices that reduce employers' responsibilities in respect of their workers.

The fragmentation of work has been facilitated by the rise of the so-called 'gig' or 'platform economy' business models that have proliferated since the turn of the millennium. Digitalised platforms represent new modes of organising labour through freelancing and independent contracting, enabling workers in their freelancer capacity to bid for 'gigs' and opt to work below market rates. The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant effect on platform economy–based jobs. For instance, a study by Umar and colleagues (2021) shows that the pandemic had a notable, positive impact on new job openings in the gig economy. In the EU alone, there were more than 500 active platforms employing 28 million workers in different tasks in 2022, and with an estimated 43 million workers by 2025.[14] Similarly, in the United States, where it is also a growing phenomenon, in 2022 around an estimated 59 million people were classified as independent workers, representing 36 per cent of the US workforce (Dua et al. 2022).

As platform work has diversified in the context of growing platform economies, defining what actually constitutes platform work has become more challenging. That said, the following have been identified as aspects of platform work (Eurofound 2018):

14 European Council, 'EU Rules on Platform Work', https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/platform-work-eu/ (accessed 7 April 2025).

- Paid work is organised through an online platform.
- Three parties are involved: the online platform, the client and the worker.
- The aim is to carry out specific tasks or solve specific problems.
- The work is outsourced or contracted out.
- Jobs are broken down into tasks.
- Services are provided on demand.

Indeed, platform work can be quite diverse. For instance, De Stefano (2016) distinguishes 'crowdwork' and 'work-on-demand via apps'. The former refers to tasks that are completed through online platforms, whereas the latter refers to work activities executed through apps managed by firms, often in the transport, cleaning and food-delivery industries, including well-known brands such as Uber, Bolt, Wolt and Airbnb. These can also be considered as *remote* platform work and *local* platform work, the former including 'data entry, graphic design and writing gigs' (Wood and Lehdonvirta 2023, 999–1000)—that is, medium or highly qualified work also including consulting and teaching.

Digital nomads who work in a gig capacity fall into the first classification of remote platform work, as they often work remotely as independent contractors or freelancers selling their labour to diverse employers in online marketing, programming, social media content creation, consultancy, engineering, translation, online teaching, virtual assistance and so forth (see Mancinelli 2020). However, digital nomads are embedded in digital economies regardless of whether they work in a gig capacity. Srnicek (2016, 9) defines the digital economy as 'those businesses that increasingly rely upon information technology, data, and the Internet for their business models', and as a phenomenon that 'cuts across traditional sectors—including manufacturing, services, transportation, mining and telecommunications'. It is, he concludes, 'a pervasive infrastructure to contemporary economy'. As Srnicek suggests, capitalism has turned to data as a way to maintain economic growth, meaning that the platforms as a new business model are able to extract and control considerable

amounts of data. While not all digital nomads work in a gig capacity within the platform economy, we can say that the logic of digital economies shapes digital nomadism more broadly.

At times hailed as a win–win both for workers and business, the gig economy is, on the one hand, considered to provide freedom and flexibility for both (Thompson 2018). However, this has also meant the breaking-down of traditional and stable work paths and lack of social protections for workers as a trade-off for lower labour costs, thus leading to increased (labour) precarity (Morgan and Nelligan 2018; Thompson 2018; Kaine and Josserand 2019; Schor et al. 2020; Wood and Lehdonvirta 2023). For instance, Wood and Lehdonvirta (2023, 1000) note that platform work 'can be highly disembedded from regulative labour market institutions, such as labour laws, collective bargaining and welfare systems'. One major issue concerning platform-based jobs has been the question as to what extent platform workers can be considered as employed workers and to what extent they are self-employed workers—a distinction that is key to determining their employment relationship and the right to enjoy social protections and labour rights. De Stefano (2016) analyses the opportunities and risks of the platform economy from the perspective of labour protection and concludes, in a similar way to Wood and Lehdonvirta (2023), that digital platform work can entail one more layer of uncertainty and 'fissuring' of work (see Weil 2014). This has also been shown to be the case concerning digital nomads (Thompson 2018; Mancinelli 2019; Mancinelli and Germann Molz 2024).

The EU has taken measures to counter the risks of worsening working conditions: in late 2023, EU institutions agreed to draft and implement a Platform Workers Directive to regulate the gig economy and ensure social rights for platform workers.[15] It remains to be seen whether this will also affect those who are

15 Théo Bourgery-Gonse, 'EU Lawmakers Nail Down Rules for Platform Workers', *Euractiv* (13 December 2023), https://www.euractiv.com/section/gig-economy/news/eu-lawmakers-nail-down-rules-for-platform-workers/ (accessed 22 April 2025).

doing remote platform work, or mostly those who conduct local platform work.

Digitalisation and the Revolution of Remote Work

The rise of digital labour platforms is one example of how digitalisation has shaped the world of work. Digitalisation and technological developments, starting as far back as the 1970s, have significantly shaped professional lives in diverse ways (Makimoto and Manners 1997; Messenger and Gschwind 2016; Charles et al. 2022). The digitalisation of the labour market has meant the introduction of new technologies and digital software in existing jobs as well as the creation of new jobs that are fully digital (Charles et al. 2022). 'Digital jobs' in the 'digital economy'—in other words, jobs that use or are made possible by new technologies and that use digitalised data—exist across different sectors, and are not only limited to ICT (see Srnicek 2016). Such digital jobs can be divided into three categories:

> First, *ICT-intensive jobs* that are directly created through the ICT sector and intensively using ICT, such as software engineering or website development. Second, *ICT-dependent jobs* that cannot be performed without technology, such as online freelancing work, jobs on digital labour platforms (e.g., Uber, Upwork, etc.), or e-commerce platforms. Finally, *ICT-enhanced jobs* that use digital technologies yet could be performed without ICT, such as accounting, office management, or graphics design, as well as the integration of digital technologies in sectors such as retail, service delivery, hospitality, agriculture, etc. (Charles et al. 2022, 9, italics added)

Jobs that digital nomads do can be found in all these three categories, although it seems that the emphasis has long been on the first types. However, more recent research findings from the US context suggest that the proportion of digital nomads in 'traditional jobs'—that is, in ICT-enhanced jobs—has increased from

44 per cent in 2019 to 66 per cent in 2022 because of the pandemic, only to decrease to 56 per cent in 2024 (MBO Partners 2024).

The increased digitalisation of work has been noted as one of the major reasons for the increasing popularity of digital nomadism. As far back as 1997, Makimoto and Manners predicted in their book *Digital Nomad* how new technologies would change the world of work. The authors also posited, in a remarkably accurate manner, that: 'The industry's ideal product will be both more and less than a laptop computer. It will do more communicating and less computing. And it will be much smaller and lighter than today's laptops' (Makimoto and Manners 1997, 30). Indeed, *Digital Nomad* is often referenced, because, according to Messenger and Gschwind (2016, 201) it pinpoints 'the turn from "Old" to "New" ICTs'. This means specifically the development of new ICTs, including smartphones and tablet computers that, according to the authors, have 'revolutionised everyday work and life in the 21st Century' (Messenger and Gschwind 2016, 205). Thus, the digitalisation of work has not only meant the creation of new digital jobs, but it has had a direct impact on work modalities due to the portability of such technologies.

Indeed, the digitalisation of professions and work modalities has enabled work to take place outside of organisations, thus freeing (knowledge) work from spatial and temporal constraints (Aroles et al. 2020). New technologies have not only contributed towards the rise of digital platform economies and the creation of new jobs, as previously discussed, but digitalisation has had a significant impact on work *practices* and *activities*, not least in remote modes of work. Messenger and Gschwind (2016) observe that remote work and the development of new ICTs are intrinsically connected. They distinguish three generations of 'telework', starting from the 1970s. The first is the 'home office', and its main aim was to reduce commuting time by coupling of computers and telecommunication tools. This trend, referred to as 'working from home' started in the 1970s and increased considerably in the 2000s. Overlapping with the first generation of telework, the second generation is the 'mobile office', starting from the 1990s, when

the development of smaller and wireless devices allowed workers to work also outside of home. There was a growing realisation that work could take place 'here, there, anywhere, and anytime' (Kurland and Bailey 1999), thus telework became increasingly conceptualised as 'work from anywhere' (see Choudhury et al. 2021). For instance, Aroles et al. (2023, 1262) conceptualise digital nomads as 'a specific type of location-independent workers situated within the "Working From Anywhere" (WFA) phenomenon'. The third stage is the 'virtual office', which came about with the proliferation of the World Wide Web and the Internet in the 1990s, and specifically in the 2000s. The most significant difference with the previous generation of telework is that in the second generation, the information needed to be carried around and the information technology was kept separate from the communications technology. With the third generation of telework, which is still ongoing, the information is stored in the cloud and networks, and it can be accessed with a relatively light and small laptop. Messenger and Gschwind (2016, 200) conclude: 'Telework has evolved constantly over four decades from the crude initial desire to reduce commuting costs to the mobilisation of office work and finally to the virtualisation of a whole new mode of work.'

Freeing office work from the spatial constraints, digitalisation has had a wide-reaching impact on the world of work. Aroles and colleagues (2020, 116) observe: 'By enacting the idea that a growing share of work activities can take place outside the walls of the organisation, remote work paved the way for a wide range of new work modalities, including zero-hour contracts, crowdwork, agile modes of management, collaborative entrepreneurship and new forms of nomadism.' Furthermore, the remote work practices that are a defining feature of digital nomadism were already increasing prior to the pandemic restrictions that imposed the norm of working from home (Aroles et al. 2020; Hemsley et al. 2020). Indeed, the COVID-19 pandemic was the true game-changer in the advancement of tools and modes of remote work.

The COVID-19 Pandemic and Its Aftermath

The COVID-19 pandemic led to a large-scale change towards remote work, particularly after 20 March 2020, when the World Health Organization announced that COVID-19 would be considered a global pandemic. Andrejuk (2022, 1) observes that the pandemic has generated 'new patterns in labour market activities, including greater frequency, intensity and sectoral diversification of technology-mediated online work'. She refers to this as 'super-digitalisation'. Also, Lund and colleagues (2020) summarise that COVID-19 broke 'through cultural and technological barriers that

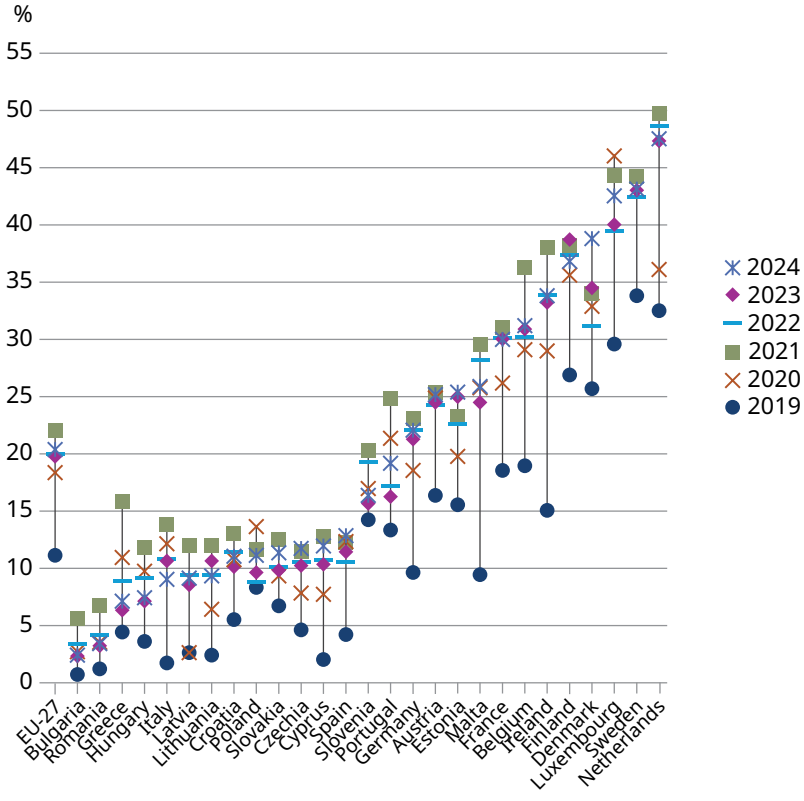

Figure 1: Shares of employees working from home at least some of the time, 2019–2024. Data source: Eurostat 2025.

prevented remote work in the past, setting in motion a structural shift in where work takes place, at least for some people'. Figure 1 shows how the number of individuals working from home in EU countries increased during the pandemic years (2019–2021), with considerable differences between different countries (Eurostat 2025, see also Eurofound 2023a). Prior to the pandemic, remote work tended to be more common in Northern European countries, compared to the Southern European countries. This north–south and east–west division can be explained by the 'spread of ICT, internet connectivity, the availability of IT skills, economic structure, gross domestic product, the work culture in the country and managerial practices' (Eurofound 2023a, 4; see also Eurofound and ILO 2017). This is important to stress since most digital nomads who are EU nationals tend to originate from countries such as the UK, Germany, France, the Nordic countries and so forth.

Similarly, in the US, the number of individuals working remotely grew rapidly during the course of the pandemic (Pew Research Center 2022a). Figure 2 shows that even when it became possible to work from the office, the work-from-home phenomenon persisted beyond the pandemic.

When looking at more global tendencies, the 'Working from Home Around the Globe' report (Aksoy et al. 2023), based on 39,021 responses to surveys conducted in 34 countries, shows that working arrangements in April–May 2023 had 66.5 per cent of full-time employees working fully on site, 25.6 per cent in hybrid manner and 7.9 per cent working fully from home. The pandemic meant that remote work changed, not merely in the number of individuals taking part in such modes of work, but also in terms of remote work practices. There has been growing research on the 'new normal of work' and how people have adapted to it (Newbold et al. 2021). The changes have involved both employers and employees finding new strategies to cope with the situation. Whereas the pandemic left some corporate offices empty, some

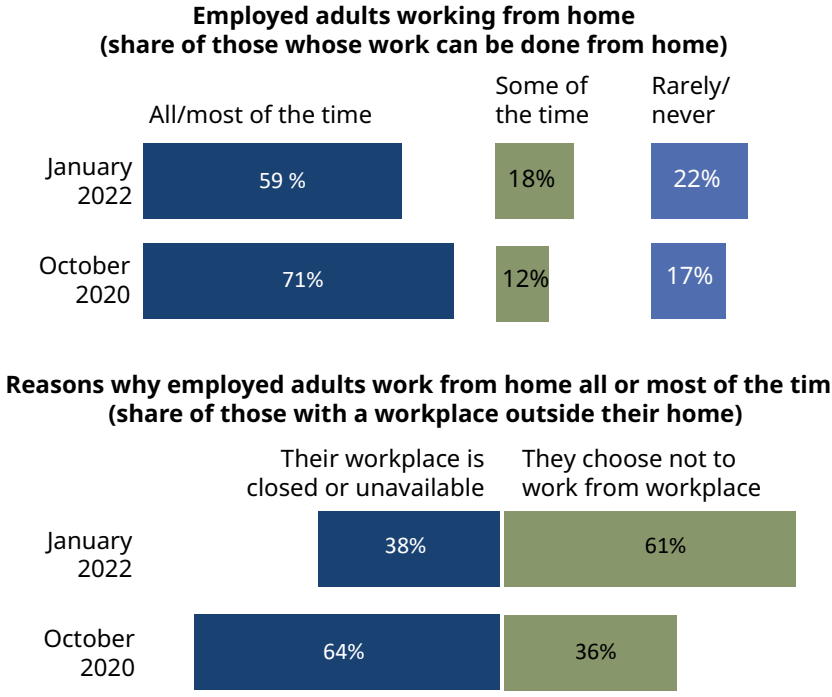

Figure 2: The share of employed US adults working from home in October 2020 and January 2022, and the reasons behind working from home.

Source: Modified from Pew Research Center 2022a, 4. Copyright Pew Research Center. All rights reserved.

companies opted to move their entire staff into remote mode.[16] Indeed, office occupancy rates remain well below pre-pandemic levels in major US cities.[17]

16 Bryan Lufkin, 'The Companies Doubling Down on Remote Work', BBC (24 July 2022), https://www.bbc.com/worklife/article/20220722-the-companies-doubling-down-on-remote-work (accessed 22 April 2025).

17 Kristin Broughton and Nina Trentmann, 'Companies Cutting Office Space Predict Long-Term Savings', *Wall Street Journal* (5 July 2021), https://www.wsj.com/articles/companies-cutting-office-space-predict-long-term-savings-11625493601 (accessed 22 April 2025).

The pandemic was a major factor in and a catalyst of the increase in remote work, enabled also by earlier developments in terms of digitalisation (Barrero et al. 2023). The post-pandemic context has stirred discussion on hybrid and remote modes of work. Not only have spatial working patterns changed, but temporal working patterns have diversified, with increasingly fewer individuals working traditional 'nine-to-five' hours (Brooks et al. 2022; Orel 2022; Wethal et al. 2022). New work arrangements are increasingly mediated by digital tools and platforms, impacting the structure of labour markets as well as 'how work activities are carried out and spatially organized' (Aroles et al. 2019, 285). The spatial aspect of work has also been discussed in the context of digital nomadism, concerning work practices and technologies that shape nomadic work (Nash et al. 2021; Toivanen 2025).

The experiences of COVID-era working that introduced the possibilities of working from home and, following that, working from anywhere to certain employees may well have been an impetus to take to the road. Hence, the post-pandemic context will most likely be characterised by an increase in remote work possibilities, even in sectors that have been traditionally 'location-dependent', thus contributing towards a diversity of work-related mobilities, including lifestyle migration, remote work mobilities and other types of mobilities of digital workers (Voll et al. 2023). Such mobilities will also be facilitated by the emerging regimes of mobility that specifically target mobile workers, as I will discuss next. Furthermore, the increased flexibility and autonomy of (knowledge) workers to choose their location of work as a consequence of the pandemic has led to the rise of new industries and services that focus specifically on fulfilling the new spatial and material requirements of new work practices.

Citizenship and Mobility Infrastructures

Without going into too much historical detail on the development of the relationship, citizenship from the perspective of mobility rights is a major enabler of digital nomadic mobilities, shaping

who can engage in such mobilities, how and for what duration. Overall, digital nomadic mobilities have been enabled by the gradual increase in mobility rights, mainly for citizens of Global North countries. While Global South citizens' mobility rights have progressively decreased with nationality-based visa restrictions (Mau 2010), Global North citizens have enjoyed greater freedoms in mobility, for instance with the introduction of visa waiver programmes since the 1950s and 1960s (Mau et al. 2015, 6), and later the creation of the Schengen area in 1995, which allows free movement for EU, European Economic Area (EEA) and Swiss citizens. Other citizenship-related privileges and inequalities, namely those related to health care and other welfare provisions, are also significant. Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic years witnessed the introduction of new mobility regimes that build on pre-existing citizenship-based mobility privileges. Digital nomad visa schemes are one such example. These developments are part of the growing industry of services targeted at digital nomads.

Privileged Citizenship and Pre-pandemic Mobility Rights

Contemporary citizenship status has been compared to feudal status in the medieval world: assigned at birth, hard to change and a determining factor of an individual's life chances (Carens 1992, 26). Shachar (2009), in her book *The Birth Right Lottery: Citizenship and Global Inequality*, also observes that birth right today in an affluent society—in other words, the acquisition of such privileged political membership—corresponds to the acquisition of private property in times past. Other scholars have also pointed out that the inequality in citizenship-based mobility rights represents 'a major stratifying force in the global social hierarchy' (Shamir 2005, 200) and that we are witnessing the emergence of 'a new system of stratification built on unequal access to mobility rights' (Mau et al. 2015, 1194). Citizenship status links directly to an individual's mobility rights. Sheller (2018, 18) suggests: 'Truly addressing the injustices of unequal mobilities requires that we develop a deeper understanding of how uneven mobility relates

not only to how we move around cities, but also gendered and racialized colonial histories and neocolonial presents.'

Transnational mobilities, a key phenomenon of modern times and even more so in the post-pandemic context, continue to be shaped by such colonial legacies and 'neocolonial presents'. Rights, capacities and resources are unequally distributed among citizens of different nationalities, this disparity being visible their mobility rights. The increased transnational mobilities can be viewed as part of the globalisation processes of the 20th century that led to a considerable increase in the cross-border crossings of goods, materials, capital, information and, notably, people (Castles 2002; De Haas et al. 2020).[18] However, the cross-border crossings of different people often operate with different rationale and policy implications, and individuals crossing international borders are varyingly subjected to diverse mobility regimes and nation-state-based border and control systems. Such regimes of mobility, meaning regulatory and surveillance systems of mobility, produce different hierarchies of 'citizenship' and 'non-citizenship', and produce 'forms of provisional and conditional inclusion to incorporate non-citizens into their polity' (De Noronha 2022, 428).

One such indicator to assess the inequality in mobility rights, depending on citizenship status, is the Henley Passport Index, which lists EU citizens as the most privileged citizens. For instance, in 2024, nationals of the G7 (Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the UK and the US) and the EU could enter around 85 per cent of the world's countries without a visa.[19] Liberal states also exercise a decision-making power on the freedom of movement

18 In the words of Giddens (1990, 64): 'Globalization can be defined as the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa.'

19 'Henley Global Mobility Report 2024 January', https://www.henleyglobal.com/publications/global-mobility-report/2024-january (accessed 22 April 2025). Henley & Partners publish regular Global Mobility reports that rank passports according to the destinations their holders can reach without a prior visa.

of non-citizens, often in form of visa waiver programmes. Citizens of Global North countries are the biggest beneficiaries of such programmes. Mau and colleagues (2015) studied the visa waiver policies of over 150 countries between 1969 and 2010. The authors show that, on average, visa-free mobility increased over the 40-year observation period. However, this development was unequally distributed: it has benefitted mostly citizens in North and South America, as well as in European countries, specifically former members of the Eastern bloc. The former colonial countries, Oceania and Asian countries have been largely excluded from this development, thus increasing the 'global mobility divide' over the 40 years of the Mau et al. (2015) observation period. This is relevant to digital nomadic mobilities, as most digital nomads are nationals of EU countries, the US and Canada, and therefore have a powerful passport guaranteeing them rather privileged mobility rights. This means that they can stay in another country without necessarily needing a visa or with an easily accessible visa waiver, thus indicating their globally privileged positionality vis-à-vis the current international regulations concerning mobility. Furthermore, digital nomads do not usually apply for a work-based visas, but instead stay in countries on touristic visas (Cook 2023, 313). The extension of their touristic visa, often granted for between one and three months, is made through 'border-hopping' or 'visa runs' (Mancinelli 2020, 430; Bruns and Lee 2023, 6, 25), allowing digital nomads to stay longer periods of time in one country by visiting a neighbouring country very briefly. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that for digital nomads who are EU nationals, the freedom of movement in the EU zone is a considerable advantage. For EEA nationals, this is further augmented with the health care coverage (through the European Health Insurance Card, EHIC) that they can access in other EEA countries.

New Regimes of Mobility: Digital Nomad Visas and E-Residency

The COVID-19 pandemic and its aftermath has witnessed the emergence of new regimes of mobility, in the form of digital nomad visa schemes since 2020. Traditionally, visa policies have been and continue to be a central instrument to control 'undesirable' mobilities. For instance, Mau and colleagues (2015, 1193) view 'visa waiver policies as the major strategy for fostering desired forms of mobility and controlling or hindering less desired ones. Citizens who enjoy visa-free travel to another country can be considered "trusted travellers" who encounter zero or low levels of control, whereas those who still require visas are tightly controlled.' The question as to who constitutes a desirable traveller, and who does not, is very much based not only on colonial legacies and racialised constructions of desirable mobilities but also on the neoliberal, capitalist logic of managing transnational mobilities according to labour market needs.

Hooper and Benton (2022) suggest in their report 'The Future of Remote Work: Digital Nomads and the Implications for Immigration Systems' that current immigration systems are poorly equipped to deal with remote work arrangements. They give the example of work visas that are often sponsored by employers. To remedy this and to account for the increasing number of professionals who prefer to work remotely outside their countries of citizenship after the outbreak of the pandemic, states have started to design digital nomad visa schemes. In November 2024, 66 countries were offering such visas.[20] As Bruns and Lee (2023) observe, before the introduction of these tailored visa schemes, digital nomads needed to work 'undercover' with a tourist visa or to opt out of immigration systems. Digital nomad visas have opened up 'a third route: legitimate, flexible mobility through

20 Kat Chen, '66 Countries with Digital Nomad Visas—and How to Apply to the Top Programs', *Condé Nast Traveler* (6 November 2024), https://www.cntraveler.com/gallery/countries-with-digital-nomad-visas (accessed 14 April 2025).

remote work' (Bruns and Lee 2023, 6). The following criteria are stipulated for a digital nomad visa to be granted: employment in a country other than where the visa is applied from, minimum yearly income,[21] proof of personal funds, and country of nationality (depending on the issuing country and the applicant's nationality, some programmes are open to all nationalities, while others accept applicants with pre-existing visa benefits with the issuing country). Some 75 per cent of visas offered by countries are open to all applicants (Bruns and Lee 2023, 30).

However, Bruns and Lee (2023, 7–8) also observe that digital nomad visas, despite their name, would better be characterised as 'remote work visas', and as a 'diverse array of remote worker and long-term residency programs', since they do not address some challenges that digital nomads encounter, namely related to 'varying stay durations, multiple entries, and access to local services'. In fact, digital nomad visas compete with the ease of tourist visas, which represent less bureaucratic hassle for digital nomads. Indeed, Hooper and Benton (2022) observe that there is no clear evidence as to whether digital nomads themselves actually use the digital nomad visa schemes. This is not to say that in future such digital nomad visa schemes, provided they are revised for the specific needs of digital nomads, would not attract a greater number of applications. For instance, Koskela and Beckers (2024) show how the schemes have evolved in a relatively short period of time, from ad hoc responses to the COVID-19 pandemic to more thought-through policies. The fact that governments are drafting policies aimed at the increasing number of mobile remote workers is also an indicator of changing state–citizen relations. A study by Sánchez-Vergara and colleagues (2023) on digital nomad visa schemes shows that governments wish to promote business environments and to foster a high-level entrepreneurial ecosystem. Similarly, Hari and Triandafyllidou (2025, 1) suggest that 'the promotion of tourism, attraction of foreign investments

21 According to Bruns and Lee's (2023) digital nomad visa survey, the median annual income required for the digital nomad visa is US$36,000.

and entrepreneurship, and talent acquisition through a migration policy model' motivates countries to offer digital nomad visa schemes as a novel migration regime.

Another such example is the e-Residency programme, launched by Estonia in 2014 and, since 2020, marketed specifically to digital nomads. The e-Residency differs considerably from the digital nomad visa, although the two are at times confused. Whereas the digital nomad visa represents a travel authorisation and the right to stay and work remotely in a foreign country, the e-Residency programme offers a transnational digital ID that enables the recipient to access the digital services offered by the Estonian state, including banking and taxation. The number of e-Residents has increased considerably since the scheme's launch. In April 2025, there were more than 124,300 e-Residents, and they had established over 35,100 companies. The majority of these companies have been set up by Ukrainian, German, Spanish, Finnish and Russian nationals, followed by Chinese, French and Turkish citizens.[22] It is hard to assess how many of these businesses were actually founded by digital nomads. Regardless, both the digital nomad visa scheme and the e-Residency programme show how digital nomads have come to be considered as mobile consumers, evidencing also how the states wish to capitalise upon this emerging consumer segment of mobile professionals (Toivanen 2023). It also shows how states produce different mobility hierarchies within the logic of neoliberal capitalism.

The Rise of Digital Nomad Infrastructure: Growing Industry of Services

Digital nomads rely on a diversity of infrastructures to enable their mobile lifestyle, the existing tourism infrastructure being one such example (Thompson 2018; Green 2020). Elements of the existing tourism infrastructure they use are relatively cheap

22 Republic of Estonia, 'e-Residency in Numbers', https://www.e-resident.gov.ee/dashboard/ (accessed 22 April 2025).

air travel, accommodation services (hotels, hostels, Airbnb, guest houses), travel insurance schemes and so forth. For instance, service providers offering accommodation, including Airbnb, have picked up on the growing number of remote workers (including digital nomads) and started to offer long-term stays for a cheaper price.[23] Airbnb's long-term stays (more than 28 days) are the company's fastest growing category by trip length, more than doubling in size between Q1 2019 and 2022.[24] The CEO of Airbnb puts the increase in long-term stays down to flexible working arrangements due to the pandemic.[25]

We have witnessed the emergence of new services and industries linked to work, community and accommodation in the context of digital nomadism. This includes services mainly offered by private actors (corporations, businesses). For instance, major hotel chains, like Radisson, have invited digital nomads to come and work in their lobbies, while several others have created communal spaces designed specifically for remote work.[26] Yet others are promoting themselves as 'co-working hotels', such as Cartel House Hotel, an entire skyscraper in Cape Town, South Africa,

23 In September 2022, Airbnb released the 'Airbnb Guide to Live and Work Anywhere' (https://news.airbnb.com/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/2022/09/Airbnb-Guide-to-Live-and-Work-Anywhere-15-September-2022-1.pdf, accessed 22 April 2025), aimed at governments and destinations, with pointers on how to 'leverage the rise of remote work for their communities—from improving visa processes and streamlining tax compliance, to encouraging remote workers to support local businesses and helping to immerse these workers and their families into the fabric of neighborhoods'.

24 'Airbnb First Quarter 2022 Financial Results', Airbnb (3 May 2022), https://news.airbnb.com/airbnb-first-quarter-2022-financial-results/ (accessed 22 April 2025).

25 Chelsea Ong, 'Airbnb Bookings for Longer-Term Stays Are Growing, Thanks to Flexi Work Arrangements, CEO Says', CNBC (17 February 2022), https://www.cnbc.com/2022/02/17/airbnb-ceo-brian-chesky-on-covid-impact-on-long-term-bookings-.html (accessed 22 April 2025).

26 Ianthe Butt, 'How Are Hotels Adapting for Digital Nomads?', *Roadbook* (30 October 2024), https://roadbook.com/opinion/how-hotels-are-adapting-remote-working-digital-nomads/ (accessed 22 April 2025).

that offers both living and working space for digital nomads.[27] The demand for and supply of co-living spaces catering specifically for the accommodation needs of digital nomads has become a multi-billion-dollar industry since 2014 (Bergan et al. 2021).

The number of co-working spaces has also rapidly increased during the early part of the 21st century, with more research focusing on the significance of these spaces to digital nomads' living arrangements (Lee et al. 2019; Spinuzzi et al. 2019; Von Zumbusch and Lalicic 2020; Atanasova and Eckhardt 2021; Chevtaeva and Denizci-Guillet 2021). In 2005 there were allegedly three co-working spaces in the world, but by 2022 there were an estimated 18,700–19,400 co-working spaces globally (ONEs Blog 2022; Statista 2023; Zippia 2023). Early in 2020, right before the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the co-working model was deemed to be the fastest growing workplace arrangement (Orel et al. 2024), with many crediting its popularity to the increase in remote modes of work. Both co-working and co-living spaces (at times offered together) are also examples of the new type of community-based space that have become more common (Lee et al. 2019; Chevtaeva 2021), particularly after the pandemic (Orel et al. 2024).

Other services, also often offered to nomads by nomads themselves, consist of various online apps, global nomad insurance schemes, tax consultation services and so forth. Tax consultancy is notably becoming a booming field, as taxation and medical insurance are two major issues digital nomads have identified as practical challenges (see Cook 2022). SafetyWing was the first company to offer global travel medical insurance, 'a global social safety net' as they marketed it, for mobile workers.[28] Similar medical insurance programmes have increased in number in the early 2020s.[29]

27 Way To Nomad, 'Cartel House Hotel' (last modified 29 March 2022), https://www.waytonomad.com/hotels/south-africa/cape-town/cartel-house-hotel/ (accessed 22 April 2025).

28 SafetyWing website, https://safetywing.com/ (accessed 22 April 2025).

29 Viktor Vincej, '10 Digital Nomad Insurance Plans for Health & Travel in 2025', *Traveling Lifestyle* (24 November 2023), https://www.travelinglifestyle.net/digital-nomad-insurance/ (accessed 22 April 2025).

Virtual services are also central in enabling mobile lifestyles. Dating apps meet the need of matching with like-minded nomads while on the move. Nomad Soulmates, which was launched at the Bansko Nomad Fest in June 2022, has more than 20,000 registered users.[30] Nomads frequently use Wise, Revolut or Starling to manage their money in different countries. Slack is a popular platform for online team workspaces and to exchange destination-specific information, while the website Nomads.com (formerly Nomad List) lists suitable destinations according to metrics such as fast Internet connection, (low) cost of living and desirable climate. Lastly, various retreats, cruises, organised stays, business training, life coaching and other such services have proliferated. Indeed, one major contributing factor in making digital nomadism better known is information provided by nomads themselves, 'lifestyle promoters' (Bonneau et al. 2023) who offer training, online courses or products that are targeted at other 'wannabe nomads' hoping to adopt the mobile lifestyle.

Public sector actors have also jumped on the bandwagon to market specific destinations and countries as digital nomad–friendly. Several national networks have emerged, including the National Network of Welcoming Villages in Spain that has some 30 member villages that provide co-working spaces, high-speed Internet and, in some cases, up to US$3,500 in moving expenses to digital nomads/remote workers to counter their shrinking local populations.[31] For instance, the Croatian city of Dubrovnik offered a digital nomad-in-residence programme in a collaboration between the city, ten selected digital nomads from across the globe and local stakeholders. This one-month programme aimed 'to create a strategic direction for the city' to make it attractive to

30 Denise Mai, '12 Digital Nomad Dating Apps—How to Date as a Digital Nomad?', *Digital Nomad Soul* (2 February 2025), https://www.digitalnomadsoul.com/digital-nomad-dating-apps/ (accessed 22 April 2025).

31 Red nacional de pueblos acegedores (in Spanish), https://pueblosacogedores.com/ (accessed 22 April 2025).

digital nomads and remote workers, especially to compensate for the loss in tourism due to the pandemic.[32]

These services have been increasingly tailored for and targeted at digital nomads, and we can refer to them as the digital nomad infrastructure, understood 'as constituted of services and infrastructures, both pre-existing and emerging, and offered by both public and private sector actors that digital nomads make use of to lead a mobile lifestyle' (Toivanen 2023, 74). The rise of the digital nomad infrastructure speaks of the increased commodification of digital nomadism (Aroles et al. 2020; Toivanen 2023). This commodification process is resulting in the creation of a strong digital nomad ecosystem in certain locations, thus also affecting nomads' mobility trajectories and increasing the number of individuals taking part in lifestyle mobilities. Therefore, the digital nomad infrastructure needs to be considered as a major structural factor shaping digital nomadic mobilities.

Aroles et al. (2020, 121) point out that the commodification of digital nomadism has not only 'involved the creation of new jobs, but also the emergence of a wide range of events, infrastructures and groups specifically dedicated to the digital nomad movement or community'. This commodification process is quite evident in the ambivalent relationship, characterised both by resistance and compliance, digital nomadism has with the neoliberal market economy (Mancinelli 2020; Wang et al. 2019). This ambivalent relationship is, unsurprisingly, constructed as one between service users and service providers, following the neoliberal logic of capitalism (Mancinelli 2020; Thompson 2018) and evidenced in the rapidly growing service infrastructure enabling a digital nomadic existence.

32 Saltwater, 'The Dubrovnik Digital Nomads-in-Residence Program Case Study Now Available', (last modified 28 October 2021), https://saltwaternomads.com/events/dubrovnik-digital-nomads-in-residence/ (accessed 22 April 2025).

Lifestyle Matters

It was reported in *Forbes* in July 2022 that the digital nomad lifestyle is on the rise. The magazine credited the COVID-19 pandemic for this growth but also listed reasons why an increasing number of individuals are adopting a digital nomad lifestyle. These include companies establishing 'work from anywhere' policies, foreign countries luring digital nomads with digital nomad visa schemes, an increasing number of families embracing the lifestyle, more products and services being offered to digital nomads (including co-living, co-working spaces, tour services, online jobs and information).[33] The commentary also touched upon the changing meanings and values attached to materiality, possessions and more broadly to lifestyle. However, what it does not mention are the changes that have taken place in values related to work and leisure, and meanings attached to mobility as a lifestyle, which are visible not only in digital nomadic mobilities but also in its neighbouring trend, the VanLife movement, and in remote work mobilities more broadly. It is evident that specific historical, structural and material conditions have enabled digital nomadic mobilities. Although harder to assess, less visible and more subtle changes have also taken place in values and meanings attached to leisure, lifestyle and quality of life. There is evidence to point that such shifts in values might also have a generational dimension.

Leisure and Work

The values attached to work and leisure have changed since the year 2000. For instance, Fleetwood (2007) examines flexible working and situates it in the context of wider social and economic changes taking place, for instance in relation to neoliberalism. In this regard, he leans on David Harvey's understanding

33 Caroline Castrillon, 'Why the Digital Nomad Lifestyle Is on the Rise', *Forbes* (17 July 2022), https://www.forbes.com/sites/carolinecastrillon/2022/07/17/why-the-digital-nomad-lifestyle-is-on-the-rise/?sh=5cb8f93e4934 (accessed 22 April 2025).

of neoliberalism as 'a new class strategy whereby the iron fist of a renewed ruling class offensive is wrapped in the velvet glove of freedom, individualism and, above all, flexibility' (Fleetwood 2007, 388). Lewis (2003), interestingly, asks whether post-industrial work is the new leisure, in her article carrying the same name. Referencing freedom of choice, she shows how the context of such 'choices' and flexibility are often 'the value placed by society on work-based achievement which becomes a major source of self-esteem and identity' (Lewis 2003, 353). Work is, thus, more than just work: it is a form of leisure, self-expression and a source of purpose.

In a McKinsey survey, 82 per cent of US-based employee respondents were found to believe it is important that their companies have a *purpose* (Gast et al. 2020).[34] A later report published in 2021 shows that for 70 per cent of US-based employees, their personal sense of purpose is defined by work itself (Dhingra et al. 2021). The same report shows that nearly two thirds of US-based employees that were surveyed said that the COVID-19 pandemic had caused them to reflect on their purpose in life, while half were reconsidering the kind of work they were doing—because of the pandemic. The so-called 'Great Resignation' in 2021 that resulted in many people in the US leaving their jobs is quite telling of the changing values related to work. However, since the Great Resignation, the results of a survey by PwC (2024) show that the number of those 'very likely' or 'extremely likely' to change employer within the next year in fact increased from 19 per cent in 2022 to 28 per cent in 2024.[35] In the same survey, employees listed flexibility and fulfilling work as highly valued aspects.

Digital nomadism has been characterised as a lifestyle that combines work, leisure and travel (Hannonen 2020). Being a form

34 McKinsey & Company is an American consulting firm that produces data-driven reports and briefings on labour markets, technology and economic growth, among other themes.

35 PwC's 'Global Workforce Hopes and Fears Survey 2024' gathered responses from some 56,600 workers across 50 countries and regions.

of lifestyle mobility, one of the main motivations in adopting a digital nomadic lifestyle has been shown to be the search for meaning and 'the good life' (Benson and O'Reilly 2009; Mancinelli 2020). At the same time, the values attached to work are not automatically secondary to digital nomads' non-working lives or leisure time—research has also shown that work is highly valued by digital nomads (Thompson 2021; Prester et al. 2023; Toivanen 2025). Therefore, it is essential to discuss how the meanings attached to these aspects have changed more broadly in contemporary societies.

Orel (2019, 223) observes that the nomadic way of working might be more leisure-orientated than working in a location-dependent manner. This is reminiscent of Lewis's (2003, 343) observations that post-industrial work is becoming indistinguishable from leisure, 'as an activity of choice and source of enjoyment'. The flexibility and freedom of choice aspects are also mentioned by Reichenberger (2018) in her study on digital nomads' quest for holistic freedom in work and leisure. She observes that 'the traditional realms of work and leisure … are inextricably connected, as one provides the means for, is impacted by, and created upon the other and vice versa' (Reichenberger 2018, 377). Bonneau and Aroles (2021) have gone as far as to approach digital nomads as 'a new form of leisure class', due to the way digital nomads articulate the centrality of leisure to their lifestyle. Leisure considerations carry such weight that they even affect digital nomads' mobility practices and choice of location (Müller 2016), and potentially those of other types of work-related lifestyle movers. For instance, in relation to growing numbers of lifestyle migrants, Hayes (2014, 1963) notes that, 'just as labour markets have been increasingly de-territorialised and unbounded, so too are the social spaces of post-productive or leisure life, which may be increasingly oriented towards transnational lifestyle strategies aimed at maintaining or enhancing quality of life'.

Multilocal Living

Another aspect that deserves consideration is mobility, specifically as a lifestyle. More broadly, multilocal living and mobility have become more common (Wood et al. 2015; Di Marino 2022). There has been a growing interest in various forms of multilocal living, whether in the form of the VanLife movement, digital nomadism, second-home tourism, workationing, lifestyle migration or other mobilities. Multilocal living, understood as 'the practice of living in several habitual places at least once a year' (Duchêne-Lacroix 2014), ties in closely with the phenomenon of adopting multilocality as a lifestyle. This growing phenomenon is linked to several factors:

> The increase in multi-local everyday life arrangements is an indication of accelerated social change in late modernity, where new labour market demands, changing gender arrangements (and the attendant changes of household and family structures), the proliferation of lifestyles and ways of life, increases in living standards as well as the improvements in the infrastructure have all had a major impact on people's everyday lives, their social integration and on their mobility. (Wood et al. 2015, 365)

Digital nomadism, although represented as an extreme form of mobility, is inscribed into the broader changes taking place in terms of multilocal living. Whereas the phenomenon in itself is not new, it has often been difficult to monitor with traditional statistics. Multilocality also impacts the environment, and is often linked with geoarbitrage practices (strategically relocating oneself from a high-cost country to a lower-cost country). Multilocal living arrangements have grown in the post-pandemic context, unsurprisingly so. For many, it seems, the pandemic offered an opportunity to test a more mobile or nomadic lifestyle, once the restrictions were lifted, and when the possibility of remote work continued (Almeida et al. 2021). For instance, in the case of digital nomads, such groups interested in testing the digital nomad lifestyle were: '1) traditional home office employees; 2) independent

professionals who are [digital nomad] candidates; and 3) [digital nomad] candidates willing to invest in learning more about the lifestyle of a digital nomad' (Almeida et al. 2021, 1213). Orel (2023) discusses how digital nomads choose a multilocal lifestyle on the basis of their personal preferences, instead of professional circumstances. As the prior research literature on work-related lifestyle mobilities shows, lifestyle movers emphasise the importance of freedom and flexibility in their professional lives. They wish to be able to decide where to work, how and when, and enact various mobility practices to accomplish this. This speaks of the individualisation of lifestyles, shaped by the changes in work flexibility and the digital technologies that enable it.

Generational Dynamics

The rise of digital nomadism speaks of broader changes that have taken place concerning youth travel, its diversification and, specifically, the rise of nomadic travel behaviour (Richards 2015). Parag Khanna, in his book *Move: The Forces Uprooting Us* (2021), describes the forces that have been behind contemporary migrations and that continue to influence international mobilities. He lists shared values on mobility, pointing out the generational dimension that also needs to be accounted for when making sense of human mobilities during the 21st century:

> In fact, today's youth hold common views across geography far more than they do with older people *in their own countries*. We tend to think of nations as having a common mindset, but millennials and Gen-Z *share values on a global scale—especially the right to connectivity, mobility and sustainability*. For no previous generation could we so confidently pinpoint these or other common traits as we can for *billions* of young people today. The great divide in the world is therefore not East versus West or North versus South but *young versus old.* (Khanna 2021, 64, italics added)

Khanna references *values*, specifically. When looking at work-related lifestyle mobilities such as digital nomadism, the values

related to work and leisure, and—through such aspects—what sort of lifestyle one imagines and strives to have, are key elements to grasp. The results of the World Values Survey, a report published by King's College London, shows that the values attached to work have radically changed (Duffy et al. 2023). Concerning the statement 'Work should always come first, even if it means less spare time', the opinions of the pre-war and baby boomer generations in Britain remained relatively stable from 1999 until 2022. Notably, only 17 per cent of Gen X and 19 per cent of Gen Z respondents were likely to agree with this statement by 2022. In the case of millennials, this figure had dropped significantly, from 41 per cent in 2009 to 14 per cent in 2022. However, the report concludes that:

> The importance of work has declined significantly among Baby Boomers and those born pre-1945 as they age and leave the labour market, while younger generations that still make up the workforce are much more likely to view work as a key part of their life. (Duffy et al. 2023, 6)

This seems to indicate that whereas work is less valued as the top priority among the younger generations, it still has considerable importance in their lives. However, perhaps the main difference between generations lies in the *relationship* with work, with younger generations more likely to seek a sense of purpose and meaning from the work they conduct,[36] and to approach it as something that can be tailor-made to suit their lifestyle, rather than changing their lifestyle to suit their working lives (Deloitte 2024). For instance, a McKinsey report (Dhingra et al. 2021) shows that COVID-19 had caused two thirds of US-based employees to reflect on their purpose in life, with nearly half reconsidering what sort of work they do. The findings further show that among millennials, this figure was three times higher, with a considerable number stating that they were re-evaluating the sense of work

36 Bruce Horovitz, 'Employers Take Note: Young Workers Are Seeking Jobs with Higher Purpose', *Time* (13 May 2022), https://time.com/6176169/what-young-workers-want-in-jobs/ (accessed 22 April 2025).

for them. This invertedly also means that the values attached to leisure and non-working lives have shifted with the younger generations (Twenge et al. 2010), but that the importance attached to work as such has not shifted with the younger generations. They seem to hold stronger values for leisure and for work that offers extrinsic rewards (e.g. status, money), compared to intrinsic values (interesting, results-orientated job) (Twenge et al. 2010).

In another study on work values among younger generations in Europe, drawing from cross-national surveys in more than 30 countries, it was observed that generations are *not* significantly different concerning their work values:

> In summary, our assumption that younger generations are increasingly less work oriented, have less faith that they will achieve a career, and are less optimistic about getting a job and making ends meet on the basis of a salary turned out to be wrong. (Hajdu and Sik 2018, 647)

A report based on research by Georgetown University and Bank of America (2023) examined the attitudes and priorities of young adults, focusing on working-age members of Gen Z (24–26 years old) and younger millennials (27–35). The findings show that flexibility and work–life balance are priorities for these generations, whereas the study also shows that they are struggling financially and have little expectations concerning their retirement.

Speaking in broad tendencies, other likely factors and aspects that contribute to the generational dimension of lifestyle mobilities include the fact that younger generations in Global North countries are having less children and at a later age than their parents' generation. For instance, recent findings in the US (Figure 3) show that adults under 50 are increasingly deciding not to have children (Pew Research Center 2024). The report shows that the reasons for not having children include financial concerns, lifestyle advantages and worries over the future. The younger generations indeed have less stable working lives and career paths (Standing 2011, 112–115; Thompson 2024), as well as smaller home

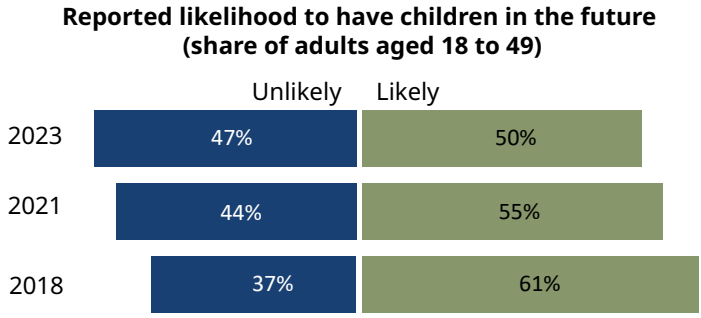

Figure 3: Likelihood of US adults under 50 to ever have children.
Note: The category 'unlikely' includes answers 'not too likely' and 'not at all likely'. The category 'likely' includes answers 'very likely' and 'somewhat likely'.
Source: Modified from Pew Research Center, 2024, 5. Copyright Pew Research Center. All rights reserved.

ownership rates (Goodman and Mayer 2018; Eurofound 2023b). In addition, they often have prior mobility experience (through Erasmus and other student exchange programmes, tourism or work-related travel, for instance) and they have acquired digital and language skills, and have generally lived in a more globalised and connected world. At the same time, they have experienced rising housing prices and inflation, and have potentially struggled to make ends meet in ever more expensive cities (Thompson 2024). These generation-specific factors, individually or together, can shape lifestyle-related choices and decisions.

*

In this chapter, I have reflected on some of the major forces shaping the rise in popularity of digital nomadism. However, a thorough history of digital nomadism in the pre-pandemic era still remains to be written. Schlagwein (2018) touches upon this topic in a research essay in which he states that to better understand the history of digital nomadism, 'we need to trace concurrent developments and interwoven historical trends in technology, business

and travel'. He refers, for instance, to new relevant IT tools and technologies, new business models and emerging travel and cultural trends. From the 2010s onwards, examples of such have been the development of cryptocurrencies, co-working spaces, online communities, new and cheaper modes of travel (Schlagwein 2018). In addition to such more easily discernible features, societal transformations related to the values attached to work, leisure and lifestyles more broadly also need to be accounted for in future contextualisations of digital nomadism. As Bonneau and Aroles (2021, 172) observe, 'Digital nomadism is not only a new technology-enabled form of work, it is also an economic activity and a sociocultural phenomenon in itself.' Therefore, it needs to be contextualised as such. Indeed, as digital nomadism becomes ever more institutionalised and professionalised (Aroles et al. 2020) in the years to come, structural factors related to economy and work, mobility infrastructures, as well as more subtle value-based changes that all arguably shape digital nomadic mobilities should be part of the analysis.

CHAPTER 2

How to Understand Digital Nomadism

This chapter offers a theoretical discussion on and a conceptual framing of digital nomadism. The dichotomy of stasis/sedentariness versus mobility/nomadic has characterised much of the research in social sciences and humanities concerning human mobilities (Merriman 2023). Digital nomadism falls somewhere between tourism/leisure and other types of work-related mobilities. Drawing from social scientific literature that problematises the two approaches of sedentary and nomadic metaphysics, two influential lenses through which to view mobility and place (Malkki 1992; Cresswell 2006; Merriman 2023), in this chapter I ask: how can we conceptualise digital nomadism and capture the digital nomadic life-worlds without repeating the dichotomous approach of stasis versus mobility, of sedentariness versus movement? How can we steer clear from the romanticising and fantasising imaginaries that associate nomadic movements with a free-floating existence, independent from the state, its control and other structures of power associated with the nation-state? Is it possible to find an analytical middle-ground where the digital nomad is neither taken as a romanticised, liberated figure and the hero of post-modernity, nor as evidencing some form of 'new migration', a policy-driven approach produced by methodologically nationalist approaches?

This chapter draws from critical literature on methodological nationalism (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2002), the mobilities paradigm (Sheller and Urry 2006), the paradigms of transnationalism (Vertovec 2009) and translocality (Greiner and Sakdapolrak 2013), as well as more recent approaches, including

entangled mobilities (Wyss and Dahinden 2022). I posit that one way to theorise digital nomadism in its own right is to focus on the agency/structure nexus in the context of lifestyle mobilities, and to approach digital nomads as neoliberal subjects that navigate within the grids of existing power structures with relative ease and who can capitalise on specific resources and privileges, while potentially also finding themselves in a precarious position in the long run. This chapter also draws from labour studies and the mobilities paradigm to offer conceptual tools to better understand nomadic work and its specificities, sociality in the context of mobility and mobility as lifestyle.

Beyond the Sedentary and Nomadic Metaphysics

> History is always written from a sedentary point of view and in the name of a unitary State apparatus, at least a possible one, even when the topic is nomads. (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 23)

Studies on migrations and mobilities have been shown to suffer from a sedentary bias, often manifested in nation-state–coloured approaches in conceptualisations of human mobilities (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2002; Thränhardt and Bommes 2010; Merriman 2023). Digital nomadism is a form of lifestyle mobility and is therefore often subject to theorisation that aims to make sense of human mobilities.

The understanding of nation-states as natural units of analysis, referred to as methodological nationalism, stems from the rise of nationalism, one of the most powerful ideologies of the past several centuries. In the late 19th century and throughout the 20th century, nationalism foresaw the establishment of national borders, the invention of the passport (Torpey 2000) and the sedimentation of nations as taken-for-granted political communities, albeit imagined ones (Anderson 1991). Methodological nationalism refers to this naturalisation process, to the idea that the world is structured according to clear-cut nation-states, with more or

less homogeneous national communities and identities existing within their borders. Indeed, the nation-state has been said to be the 'fundamental "blind spot" in the social science canon' (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2002, 303; see also Thränhardt and Bommes 2010).

In their article 'Methodological Nationalism and Beyond: Nation-State Building, Migration and the Social Sciences', Wimmer and Glick Schiller (2002, 301) question the taken-for-granted assumption that 'the nation/state/society is the natural social and political form of the modern world'. The authors argue that the conceptualisations of migration in the post-war period have been greatly affected by nationalist modes of thinking. One such example they provide is to think of migratory movements by dividing them into internal and international: while internal migration takes place within nation-states, 'cross-border migration, by contrast, appears as an anomaly, a problematic exception to the rule of people staying where they "belong", that is to "their" nation-state' (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2002, 311).

Although methodological nationalism has been discussed more thoroughly in relation to migration scholarship (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2002; Pries 2005; Thränhardt and Bommes 2010; Dahinden 2016), it is also of relevance concerning digital nomadic mobilities and digital nomadism's relationship with the modern nation-state system. Digital nomadism is often depicted as countering the sedentariness of the nation-state system and even as representing a countermovement with its emphasis on extreme freedom of mobility and way of life (Toivanen 2023). In such approaches, the methodologically nationalist thinking seems to embed itself in the background, as digital nomads are contrasted and defined against the sedentariness of the rest—that sedentary lifestyle considered more of a norm compared to mobility, which is and has long been construed as something exceptional. For instance, Glick Schiller and Salazar (2013, 185, italics in original) observe that, 'if we think historically about the human condition, it might seem that we should really have a *stasis* studies rather than migration or mobilities studies', as, historically, people have

actually been more mobile than sedentary. Also, Malkki (1992, 27) suggests that the 'commonsense assumptions linking people to place, nation to territory, are not simply territorializing, but deeply metaphysical'. Malkki's reflections concern forced displacement and refugees; she observes that confronting displacement makes highly visible how the sedentarist metaphysic is embedded in the 'national order of things' (Malkki 1992, 31). This also resonates in the case of digital nomadic mobilities that seem to counter the 'national order of things', albeit arguably with different sets of privilege, as discussed later.

Instead of approaching digital nomadism as an example of an extreme form of mobility (which often and falsely so depicts the image of digital nomads being constantly on the move), it might be more fruitful to look at how digital nomadic mobilities also include an important aspect of sedentariness in between the often relatively short moments of mobility. Digital nomadic mobilities do not follow established routes between certain countries (emigration and immigration countries, as conceptualised in migration scholarship), as is often assumed to be the case with migratory movements, although increasingly less so. Instead, an increasing number of studies highlight how digital nomads choose very specific, localised destinations—at times even within one country—no matter their starting point, to the extent that we can talk of digital nomad hubs that are created in particular cities and even neighbourhoods, or even around specific co-working communities and events such as conferences. These localities can share considerable similarities despite being in different states. The choice of a particular destination is often made on the basis of lower cost of living and warm weather, but also on the basis of an existing digital nomad infrastructure that enables working conditions (co-working spaces) and access to the digital nomad community (Toivanen 2023). Not limiting our approach to considering which states digital nomads travel between and stay in but instead paying attention to which more specific localities they travel between opens up a whole new way to think of digital nomadic mobilities. Furthermore, cross-border digital nomadic

mobilities are not only shaped by the nation-state system but also by different regimes of mobility, as will be discussed later. Overall, the relationship between digital nomadism and the nation-state is ambivalent, to say the least, and theorisation needs to account for this at times defying, at times complying association.

The sedentary bias could potentially creep into analyses of digital nomadism from theorisation of human mobilities. The mobilities paradigm can be considered an antidote to more sedentarist approaches. Mobility, as Cresswell (2006, 46) observes, 'seems to offer the potential of a radical break from a sedentarist metaphysics'. Hence, the other tendency seems to be to approach nomadism as the ideal form of mobility, a perfect anti-essentialist and anti-static take to counter the more static and sedentary epistemologies. Nomadism is often represented as the choice of mobility and as one that would lead to a more fulfilling way of life. This is not without its pitfalls. As Cohen and colleagues (2015, 160) suggest, 'to privilege any chosen way of life as "better", whether that be in lifestyle migration, or within forms of lifestyle mobility, is to potentially offer a romantic reading of it'.

Indeed, the links between nomadism and romanticism are discussed from a critical perspective in previous literature (Cresswell 2006; Hannam 2009; Merriman 2023). Such approaches are shaped by what has been called nomadic metaphysics, meaning that with mobility coming first, little attention is paid to the significance of place (Cresswell 2006). Philosophers have approached the nomad as a key figure to describe modern-day mobilities, albeit metaphorically (Deleuze and Guattari 1987; Braidotti 1994). The nomad as a figure has been shown to play a significant role in conceptualisations of mobility, to exemplify a modern-day obsession with mobility, often based on heroism, imaginaries of freedom and free-floating existence (Engebrigtsen 2017). The nomad thus represents a metaphorical figure free from state control and other structural constraints that might impede on more sedentary subjects' lives (Korpela 2020).

Moving Further from the 'National Order of Things'

Methodologically nationalist approaches have faced increasing criticism since the 1990s. There have been attempts to 'correct' and 'revise' such nation-state–coloured approaches by focusing on cross-border processes and formations. One such epistemic move has involved focusing on the *transnational* character of migratory phenomena. Transnationalism, in a broad sense, refers to social spaces, processes and formations that extend beyond the borders of the nation-state (Vertovec 2009); it has been defined as 'processes by which immigrants build social fields that link together their country of origin and their country of settlement' (Glick Schiller et al. 1992, 1). As an expanding notion of transnationalism, the concept of *translocal* surfaced mostly from the 2010s onward to describe and analyse phenomena 'involving mobility, migration, circulation and spatial interconnectedness not necessarily limited to national boundaries' (Greiner and Sakdapolrak 2013, 343). Most studies employing the translocal frame focus on different types of human mobilities; this framing has been employed to better understand social formations, multiple translocal affiliations and identities, and, overall, the tensions between mobility and locality.

One might ask again, how is this relevant to digital nomads? Can a transnational or translocal frame allow us to disentangle digital nomadic social formations on the move? Could digital nomad hubs and communities be approached as transnational/translocal agglomerations? The transnational theorisation posits that migrants are not simply operating within one nation-state, before they move to live in another state, but rather that migrants' social spaces, relations and lived experiences extend beyond national borders. This can be said to be true of digital nomads as well. Their social (and virtual) spaces extend well beyond the states in which they stay (not to mention the states in which they hold citizenship). This is also true of their lived experiences and socialities, as networks and relations grow with the mobility experience digital nomads accrue over time. Their lived experiences

also extend to several other localities, in which digital nomads could have spent several months at a time, and several years in total. Translocality can be of use to move beyond the dichotomous conception of country of departure and country of arrival, often used in transnational migration literature, and instead to grasp the notion of a digital nomadic existence that is arguably more multilocal than in the case of lifestyle migrants. It can also allow us to understand the interactions and connections between different localities, including different spatial scales, rather than confining our understanding to those limited to nation-states or cities.

Another epistemic move in terms of methodologically nationalist approaches has been the rise of the new mobilities paradigm. Sheller and Urry (2006, 208) observe: 'Social science has largely ignored or trivialised the importance of the systemic movements of people for work and family life, for leisure and pleasure, and for politics and protest.' In other words, the authors conclude that social science research has been 'a-mobile' and suggest that the new mobilities paradigm challenges *two* theoretical tendencies in social sciences. Firstly, it problematises how sedentarism that the authors identify in social science research treats stability, meaning and place as 'normal', and, in contrast, distance, change and placelessness as 'abnormal'. This also touches upon the previous discussion on methodological nationalism, as this type of sedentarism often rests on a form of territorial nationalism. Secondly, the new mobilities paradigm steers away from approaches that focus on post-national de-territorialisation processes, where mobilities become free and liberated from place and space, including national spaces. This stream of thought has been visible in theorisation on cosmopolitanism, for instance, that has flirted with the idea of de-territorialised and post-national condition and identities.

Both these observations on how the new mobilities paradigm challenges the two above-mentioned tendencies in social sciences, or as Ehrenfeld (2024, 5) puts it, the 'unjustified social-theoretical pathologization of the mobile', resonate in the context of digital nomadism. There is a risk of abnormalising digital nomadic

mobilities, as treating them as an expression of extreme mobility, contrary to sedentary lifestyles, without questioning or enquiring in more detail as to how mobility and sedentariness play out in digital nomadic mobilities. Digital nomadic mobilities can also easily be misunderstood and celebrated as being free from the spatial or nation-state–related constraints and structures, a tendency which will be discussed in the following sub-section. The new mobilities paradigm puts forth the idea that mobilities are always located and materialised (Sheller 2004). The materiality of places—for instance, the material conditions and infrastructures of digital nomad destinations—shapes digital nomadic mobilities (Toivanen 2023). Overall, Sheller and Urry (2006, 210) suggest that the new mobilities paradigm offers 'a set of questions, theories, and methodologies rather than a totalising or reductive description of the contemporary world'.

This is also the motivation behind the 'entangled mobilities' theoretical lens, offered by Wyss and Dahinden (2022). Referencing the new mobilities paradigm, the authors suggest that the full potential of the mobility lens has not yet been fully exploited in migration research. Instead, they propose three pragmatic entry points from which to study mobilities: mobilities in specific locations; mobilities in terms of intersections and co-dependencies of different mobile people; and mobilities within the biographical trajectories of people (Wyss and Dahinden 2022, 12). This theoretical prism, they suggest, allows scholars to move beyond nationality- and ethnicity-centred epistemologies and colonial aphasia, and to tackle the normative division that is common in studies on migration and mobilities, between the more positively connotated mobility and the more racialised and problematically viewed migration.[37] Lastly, Wyss and Dahinden (2022, 12) suggest

37 When discussing lifestyle *mobilities*, it is important to problematise the normative construction of mobilities as often referencing the privileged and non-racialised forms of movement. This is particularly in contrast to *migration*, which is often discussed in terms of control and regulation.

that the entangled mobilities approach is sensitive to multiple inequalities and mobilities regimes at play, referencing chiefly Glick Schiller and Salazar's theorisation (2013). Through the lens of entangled mobilities, the authors further argue that:

> we can identify the ways in which movements are embedded within (asymmetrical) social, political and economic relationships rather than only in relation to geographic (national) borders—while obviously not ignoring nation-states and territories, and their governance. (Wyss and Dahinden 2022, 5)

Such approaches as listed above suggest moving the empirical focus beyond the sedentary bias, which has often meant focusing on specific ethnic or citizenship groups, country contexts or on specific types of mobility (voluntary/involuntary, labour/family migration, etc.). I would argue that in the case of digital nomads, we can gain more analytical purchase in examining how different regimes of mobility and their hierarchies operate (for instance, one key distinction being between EU and non-EU citizens) and how digital nomad localities are often centred around specific co-working spaces in gentrified neighbourhoods, whose physical location can change, thus also changing digital nomads' mobility patterns. Examining digital nomads' employment status (freelancer, company-employed) and level of location independence might also represent more analytical utility than their citizenship or their belonging to a particular professional category.

I have specifically aimed to discuss these theorisations in the context of digital nomadism, all the while acknowledging that conceptualisations used to understand migratory movements cannot be automatically adopted to understand the form of lifestyle mobility that digital nomadism represents. The temptation to apply theories of human mobilities to digital nomadic mobilities exists, for understandable reasons, and therefore needs careful consideration. Regardless, I do argue in the later chapters that these theoretical frames can serve as a building block to analytically make sense of the specificities of digital nomadic mobilities,

namely on how they are materialised through specific global and transnational processes.

Not 'New' Migrants, Tourists nor Workationers

As Hannonen (2020) observes, the studies that provide theoretical considerations on digital nomadism tend to take either the work or the lifestyle perspective. On the one hand, within studies that focus on lifestyle aspects, digital nomadism is at times referenced as a new form of tourism. However, digital nomads' mobility patterns stretch across various geographies and involve differing durations of stays in a single destination. Also, work is a key component in enabling their mobile lifestyle. Digital nomadic mobilities resemble touristic mobilities in the sense that often they take place towards the same destinations; that both groups tend to use some of the same services (for accommodation, for instance, Airbnb apartments); and that both groups travel for lifestyle- or leisure-related reasons.

One the other hand, it could be tempting to discuss digital nomadism in the context of modern-day migratory movements, as 'new migrants', in the sense that digital nomads tend to stay for longer durations—up to a year—in one destination, sometimes learning the language of the country and becoming arguably more embedded in the local community compared to a tourist. In many respects, digital nomads are probably the closest to mobile remote workers, workationers, who spend one or two winter months working remotely in a warmer climate, before they return home, and whose numbers are quickly rising in the post-COVID-19 world (Voll et al. 2023). Yet, what distinguishes digital nomads is their perpetual mobility as a lifestyle choice. At the same time, they differ considerably from the more traditional category of labour migrants, which presupposes that individuals' mobility is motivated by labour-related reasons, either moving in search of work or moving for work (as is also the case with frequent international business travellers).

Cohen and colleagues (2015, 159) offer a comparison between lifestyle mobility and temporary or more permanent forms of migration. The four key dimensions that the authors point towards when making a distinction between more temporary forms of mobility, lifestyle mobility and permanent migration are duration, frequency, seasonality and temporality of mobilities. Cohen and colleagues (2015, 158) distinguish lifestyle mobility from temporary mobility as one that is 'sustained as an ongoing fluid process, carrying on as everyday practice over time'. On the other hand, compared to more permanent types of mobilities, the authors argue that with lifestyle mobilities, a return to a specific point of origin cannot be taken as an assumption (Cohen et al. 2015, 159). Instead, the assumption is that people engaging in lifestyle mobilities move on, instead of returning 'home'. Furthermore, digital nomads can also be situated conceptually somewhere between different types of lifestyle and work-related migrations and mobilities. For instance, Cook (2020, 357) conceptualises digital nomadism with two intersecting rating scales, high/low mobility and work/non-work, basing his conceptualisation on self-described digital nomads' own self-ratings (Figure 4).

Cook (2020) shows how the digital nomads who took part in his study rated themselves as highly mobile and work-focused. This puts digital nomads closest to frequent and occasional business travellers in terms of their work focus and mobility level (with the distinction of digital nomads' greater level of location independence). Whereas frequent and occasional business travellers move for work, digital nomads' livelihoods are not dependent upon nor conditioned by their mobility. What Cook's (2020) intersecting rating scales do not account for is the lifestyle dimension of digital nomadism. The distinction between digital nomads and other types of travelling remote workers (e.g. workationers) is a more challenging one to assess, specifically in the post-COVID-19 context. One key difference would be remote workers having a permanent home base, which is less likely in the case of digital nomads, as well as the mobility patterns, where remote workers tend to return to their country of citizenship between every

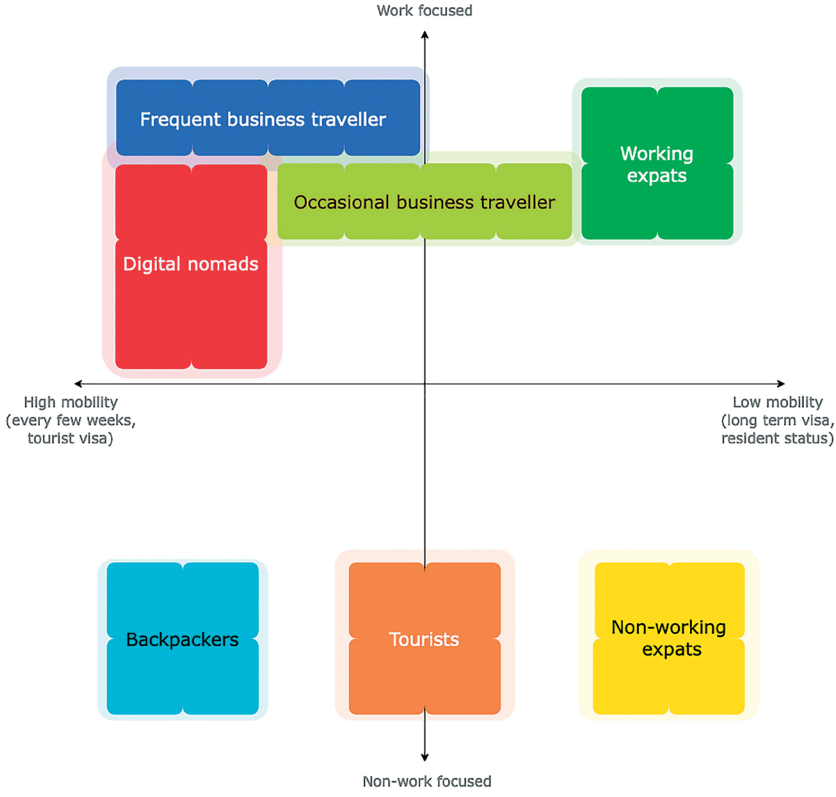

Figure 4: Two intersecting rating scales: high/low mobility and work/non-work (from Cook 2020, 357, diagram by Dave Cook and Tony Simonovsky). Published under CC BY 4.0 license.

period of mobility. It is also plausible that travelling remote workers are more often company-employed and with a more permanent employment status, whereas the majority of digital nomads still tend to be self-employed entrepreneurs and freelancers.

Cook (2023) has also offered an updated classification. He argues that the need for such a conceptualisation stems from, firstly, the observation that 'digital nomad' is a trending media label, often applied rather loosely, and secondly, the fact that digital nomadism often becomes enmeshed in discussions on remote work. To this effect, he distinguishes five types of digital nomads:

freelance digital nomads; digital nomad business owners; salaried digital nomads; experimental digital nomads; and armchair digital nomads (aspiring to become a digital nomad). This categorisation has been developed on the basis of nomads' employment status and their level of mobility, including six variables that are key digital nomad attributes:

> (1) frequency and autonomy of mobility; (2) homebase practices; (3) domestic vs. transnational travel; (4) legal legitimacy; (5) work–life integration vs. work–life balance and (6) co-working space usage. (Cook 2023, 259)

I briefly touched upon the definitions of 'digital nomad' in the Introduction to this volume, but let me return to it here. In my study, I have relied on the definitions by Olga Hannonen and Dave Cook. Hannonen (2020, 12) defines a digital nomad as referring 'to a rapidly emerging class of highly mobile professionals, whose work is location-independent. Thus, they work while traveling on (semi)permanent basis and vice versa, forming a new mobile lifestyle.' Meanwhile, according to Cook (2023, 259):

> Digital nomads use digital technologies to work remotely, they have the *ability* to work and travel simultaneously, have *autonomy* over frequency and *choice* of location, and visit at least three locations a year that are not their own or a friend's or family home. (Italics added)

Cook's definition mentions the ability, autonomy and choice—things that digital nomads have when deciding to work and travel simultaneously, an aspect of privilege that I find to be of key value in defining a digital nomad. Leaning on these conceptualisations, I define a digital nomad as a mobile professional with location-independent work who, as part of a lifestyle choice and with the ability to do so, frequently travels between different localities—sometimes crossing national borders but at others staying within one state—without necessarily intending to return to their country of origin.

Discussing the definitional aspects of the term 'digital nomad' not only has conceptual relevance in terms of distinguishing how digital nomads differ from travelling remote workers or other highly mobile professional groups (Voll et al. 2023), but it is also of relevance for analytical purposes to draw clear distinctions between different types of mobile workforces. The way digital nomads move—how often, where they go, the nature of their employment, the length of time they spend in one place and whether they plan to return to their home country—are all relevant factors in determining the global and more localised structures of power and hierarchy in which digital nomads are embedded and which they navigate, arguably with different privilege than cross-border migrants. All in all, to define a digital nomad and to understand the type, frequency and duration of the mobilities that digital nomads engage in allows us to grasp both the agentic dimension of their lifestyle, as well as its interplay with the structural factors that shape the digital nomadic existence. This will be a key issue in the future when more statistical data is collected on the phenomenon.

Therefore, digital nomads ought not to be lumped into the same basket with travelling remote workers, not least because of their perpetual travel style, the lack of a so-called 'home base' and the location independence they exhibit in comparison with often company-employed remote workers who are occasionally mobile. Hence, digital nomadism does not neatly fit into lifestyle migration or touristic mobility patterns either, due to its essential dimension of work. And lastly, although work being a central component of the digital nomad lifestyle, digital nomadism is not a form of circular or permanent labour migration, nor should it not be conceptualised in such terms.

The Nation-State, the Market and the Neoliberal Subject

> The digital nomad ethos is pro-capitalism, pro-entrepreneurship, and anti-state. (Thompson, 2024, 39)

Digital nomads do not exist outside the structures of nation-states. One concrete example of this is the system of citizenship, a system of privilege and of inequality, largely depending on where one happens to be born. Digital nomads, often holding privileged nationalities, can move relatively freely across borders, as well as stay in several countries without needing a visa or with easy access to one where necessary (Mancinelli 2020). However, it makes sense to pay attention to different regimes of mobility, instead of focusing solely on specific nation-states in between which the mobilities take place. Glick Schiller and Salazar (2013, 189) have suggested a regimes of mobility approach to 'call attention to the role both of individual states and of changing international regulatory and surveillance administrations that affect individual mobility' and to approach regimes as intersecting ones that normalise the movement of some privileged individuals while criminalising the movement of others. Interestingly, Glick Schiller and Salazar (2013, 189–190) introduce this approach to direct scholars' attention to the dynamic between sedentariness and movement, instead of approaching them in a dichotomous manner. Leaning on this approach in Chapter 5, I pay attention to individual states but also to the changing international regulatory and surveillance administrations (governance of mobility); bilateral agreements between countries; EU/non-EU-related mobility regimes; and immigration/citizenship policy—all of which shape digital nomadic mobilities.

In addition to privileged mobility rights, digital nomads, often citizens of Global North countries, also take advantage of other benefits of the states where they hold citizenship. For instance, as noted in Chapter 1, many digital nomads who are nationals of EEA countries leverage the EHIC to receive medical treatment

in another member state if needed. However, this only covers interventions that are usually provided by a statutory health care system in the visited (EEA) country, thus making travel insurance still a necessity. Other social and welfare benefits that digital nomads are entitled to are also used to mitigate the risks inherent in a mobile lifestyle. The privileges (or the lack thereof) related to one's citizenship status, beyond the mere mobility rights, is a significant enabling factor for digital nomadic mobilities and can also be a hindering factor for those with less privileged citizenship, as discussed in Chapter 5.

Aihwa Ong (2006, 501) talks about 'flexible citizenship'. By this, she refers to 'manoeuvres of mobile subjects who respond fluidly and opportunistically to dynamic borderless market conditions'. Mancinelli (2020, 419) also observes in the context of digital nomadism that instead of being a complete challenge to the system, it is rather 'an opportunistic adaptation to the conditions created by the impacts of neoliberal ideology of entrepreneurial freedom'. Mancinelli and Germann Molz (2024, 189) point out that digital nomads leverage 'state-imposed constraints into creative forms of "border artistry"', meaning that they opportunistically take advantage of systemic loopholes in existing regimes of mobility.[38] This they do in their efforts to navigate and take advantage of global economic and power structures, including maximising the benefits of a greater purchasing power and relocating their day-to-day expenses to low-cost destinations—the practice of geoarbitrage.

The relationship between digital nomadism and the nation-state is characterised by neoliberalisation, which has affected the citizen–state relationship, with states becoming a service provider and the citizens its clients (see Somers 2022). The neoliberalisation of the citizen–state relationship has been increasingly discussed in the context of digital nomadism (Cook 2022; Holleran

38 The concept of border artistry comes from Päivi Kannisto's book *Global Nomads and Extreme Mobilities* (2016), in which she focuses on long-term travellers and their relationship with the state.

2022; Mancinelli and Germann Molz 2024). Cook (2022, 319) observes that there is tension between entrepreneurial individualism and the state, and that, paradoxically, digital nomads engage more with the 'bureaucracies of both states and corporations' in their efforts to 'hack' them; thus, digital nomads still need to navigate (and comply with) diverse state bureaucracies and institutional practices, regardless of their seemingly free and mobile lifestyle. In fact, digital nomads attempt to 'opt out' or to 're-draw' the social contract—the trade-off relationship between an individual and the state—of not only the state where they hold citizenship but also the state in whose jurisdiction and under whose regulations they end up staying for longer periods of time. Cook (2022, 320) accurately concludes: 'Digital nomads are thus shaped by the very state bureaucratic processes they seek to resist.'

The relationship with the state can also alter in times of crisis. Holleran (2022) shows that during the COVID-19 pandemic some digital nomads fostered a greater appreciation of welfare state services, whereas others who viewed their position as 'independent purchasers of social services' resented their states calling them back during the pandemic. Mancinelli and Germann Molz (2024, 189–190) argue that if digital nomads can be understood as neoliberal subjects, then it should also be acknowledged that states 'adopt entrepreneurial and utility-maximizing policies, creating special visa programmes to attract a high-quality niche of consumers'. Similarly, Ong (2006, 501) observes that nation-states that are seeking 'wealth-bearing and talented foreigners adjust immigration laws to favor elite migrant subjects. Thus a new synergy between global capitalism and commercialized citizenship creates milieus where market-based norms articulate the norms of citizenship.' Indeed, digital nomadism has been said to challenge the very idea of the nation-state. Digital nomadic mobilities have made ever more visible the structural factors related to the nation-state, including taxation, health care, retirement schemes and welfare provisions that are largely organised within and provided by the (welfare) state.

Digital nomadism, as noted in the Introduction to this volume, also has a somewhat ambivalent relationship with the neoliberal market economy. Wang and colleagues (2019) argue that digital nomadism is both a product of the market economy and exemplifies resistance to it. The resistance, however, 'is muted by an inevitable outcome of compliance when such resistances are explored in further depth' (Wang et al. 2019, 1). They call this the 'resistance-compliance paradox' and suggest that it occurs in five specific trends in how digital nomads interact and participate in the market economy. The *first trend* is collaborative creative consumption, which exemplifies the ambivalent relationship between digital nomadism and the market economy in that digital nomads seek transcendentalism instead of consumerism (resistance), yet they still need to consume, especially physical objects (compliance). This means that digital nomads are still consumers, but their 'consumption is creative as it enables creativity in the work produced by digital nomads' (Wang et. al 2019, 6). The *second emerging trend* is self-driven and self-disciplined work. The ambivalent relationship is evidenced here in the way digital nomads seek flexibility and freedom instead of fixed work routines (resistance), yet they end up working long hours as labourer-entrepreneurs (compliance). The *third trend* is the reimagination of work materials. This trend stems from the fact that digital nomads no longer need physical resources and assets such as an office space to become new entrepreneurs (resistance), yet they still need physical workspaces where to actually undertake their work (compliance). The *fourth trend* is interjurisdictional prospecting, stemming from the possibility of evading the business cycle of booms and recessions and government regulation (resistance), yet still being influenced by monetary policies (compliance). Digital nomads are scouters who move between different jurisdictions with the aim of optimising their conditions (Wang et al. 2019, 7). The *fifth and final trend* is unregulated de facto citizenship. This relates to the trend of interjurisdictional prospecting and means evading local taxation via ambiguous legal status (resistance), yet still contributing

through economic consumerism and using the public infrastructure (compliance).

Aroles and colleagues (2020, 125) also argue that digital nomadism can be seen to embody 'an extreme form of capitalism'. The authors observe that despite its ethos of providing an alternative lifestyle, digital nomadism is 'heavily reliant on the logic of capitalism and corporate culture for its own expansion' and that the relationship between digital nomadism and capitalism is a paradoxical one. Such is also the relationship between the evolution of capitalism and 'free and mobile labour'. Bastos and colleagues (2021, 158) conclude that the so-called freedom to move and sell one's labour is 'produced by the lack of freedom to withhold one's labour. Mobility is, then, a contradictory form of freedom, produced by the needs and effects of global capital, yet resistant to total control by capital or the state.' Labour mobilities, in their view, are therefore consistent with 'the neoliberal labour regimes and their need for flexible, docile and expendable labour'. Digital nomads can indeed represent such a flexible and expendable labour force, as their freedoms and location independence are matched with downward mobility in their financial status and less employment security (Thompson 2021). But what about digital nomads' agentic capacity in the context of such state and capitalist forces?

Mobilising Capital: On Privilege and Precarity

'Lifestyle migration' usually refers to more permanent and seasonal forms of lifestyle-related relocations, in contrast with lifestyle mobilities that are characterised by more fluidity and voluntary corporeal mobilities of continuous nature (Cohen et al. 2015). Although lifestyle mobilities such as digital nomadism differ from lifestyle migrations, the common interrelations of travel, mobility and lifestyle push us to dig deeper into the conceptual insights that can be drawn from the lifestyle migration literature (Amit 2020), namely concerning how agency–structure interaction shapes the *practices*, *meanings* and *politics* of digital nomadic lifestyles.

Korpela (2020) observes that in the case of alternative mobile lifestyles, less attention is paid to the structures within which the mobile individuals operate and more on their individual agency (see also Benson and Osbaldiston 2016). According to Korpela (2014, 42): 'One must not, however, forget that individuals act within existing structures. They are not flee-floating agents… although lifestyle migrants emphasise their individual agency, their actions are greatly influenced by external factors and structural conditions.' The structures that lifestyle migrants encounter include social norms, expectations, imaginaries and laws that they need to negotiate, although to a lesser degree than in the case of other migrants and perhaps differently also from lifestyle movers.

For instance, O'Reilly (2014) has discussed the importance of social imaginaries to lifestyle migrations and approached them as the individuals' capacity to imagine desired lifestyles and the possibilities to act on those imaginations. She distinguishes between 'external structures, internalised structures, practices, communities of practice, active agency and outcomes as a way of bringing more precision to our understanding of the role of the imagination and to both the social structural and the creative aspects of imagining' (O'Reilly 2014, 229). The processes of individualisation can significantly shape the individual's capacity to *imagine* the desired lifestyle, whereas the structural privileges provide the possibility to enact it. Yet this does not exclude the fact that nomads might put themselves in a precarious position in the long term, in terms of their pension accumulation and social protections (Thompson 2021).

Lifestyle migrants are often approached as social actors that have considerable agency in determining where, when and how to travel, and in decision-making processes to cross international borders with relative ease (Hayes 2014; Korpela 2020). In studies on lifestyle migration, through sub-types of lifestyle migration such as amenity migration, retirement migration, residential tourism and second-home mobilities, agency has been at the centre of discussion, often noted in terms of privileges that lifestyle migrants take advantage of, namely those concerning

their mobility rights and differing purchasing power (Benson and Osbaldiston 2016; Korpela 2020). For instance, Hayes (2014) has examined the strategies of geoarbitrage that North American lifestyle migrants opt for in Ecuador to maximise economic benefits for themselves through transnational mobility.

We can say that digital nomads exercise a similar kind of transnational agency in choosing their destinations, also on the basis of the resources they have at their disposal. However, unlike lifestyle migrants, digital nomads have less often been discussed in terms of capitals that they need to embark on a mobile lifestyle—and to be able to sustain it. The accumulation of economic capital in the country of citizenship through a Global North salary and its enhanced currency value in another country is a form of resource digital nomads draw from. The Bourdieusian understanding of capitals as resources is useful in this regard. To be able to exercise transnational agency, digital nomads draw from a set of resources that can be approached in the form of the four different capitals—economic, social, cultural, symbolic—that Bourdieu (1986) distinguishes. *Economic* capital refers to income, wealth and other financial assets, whereas *social* capital evokes resources based on group membership, networks and connections. *Cultural* capital can be embodied (i.e. literacy), objectified (material objects and cultural goods that can be monetised) and institutionalised (i.e. educational degrees). Finally, *symbolic* capital refers to resources that are available to an individual on the basis of their honour, prestige and recognition.

The Bourdieusian notion of capital has been also utilised in the context of migration and mobilities (Elliott and Urry 2010; Erel 2010; Ryan et al. 2015; Saksela-Bergholm et al. 2019). Such scholarship has theorised 'migrant capital' as a resource that is created during the migration process or as an outcome of it. Migrant capital consists of resources that are mobilisable, for instance through such social capital as transnational networks and connections, and that can be convertible to other forms of capital (Saksela-Bergholm et al. 2019, 164). Mobility in itself, it has been suggested, is more than a mere practice or a strategy (Kauffman et al. 2004;

Moret 2018, 2020). Mobility is a resource that can become, under certain circumstances, a form of capital that individuals possess and mobilise to gain advantages and to improve their situation. In that sense, mobility capital refers to past and present experiences of mobility and to also potential future ones. Kauffman and colleagues (2004) approach mobility capital (or 'motility', as they call it) through three interrelated factors: access to different types of mobility, specific skills that being mobile requires, and the appropriation of these two to strategically use and convert mobility into a form of capital. This topic is also touched upon by Elliott and Urry (2010, 10–11), who note that there is another form of power in the context of mobility—network capital, which the authors define as different from Bourdieusian understanding of cultural and economic capital:

> Whereas the latter were, for the most part, built up by individuals, network capital is largely subjectless, communications-driven and information-based. People with very high levels of network capital experience high levels of geographical mobility, have extensive institutional contacts, and are at home in, and move across, many diverse settings. What specially matters is information—its production, transmission, circulation and, above all, sharing.

Examining different forms of capital in the case of digital nomads, as is done in Chapter 5, we can gain insight into how privilege operates in the context of digital nomadic mobilities. It is also noteworthy that privilege is a relative term, and not synonymous with having absolute economic wealth. Instead, privilege for lifestyle migrants often means the possession of assets and resources (property, pensions), the facility to cross international borders relatively easily with a powerful passport, as well as the intersecting class and race privileges: lifestyle migrants are often 'white', 'Western' and middle or upper class (Benson and O'Reilly 2016, 24). These privileges can then be capitalised upon to realise the lifestyle choice to relocate, which then allows for further capitalisation of wealth and leading a comfortable life through practices of geoarbitrage. Furthermore, Benson and O'Reilly (2016,

21) interestingly observe that relative privilege can co-exist with precarity and vulnerability 'in ways that absolute understandings of wealth, privilege, and affluence might render invisible'.

We can also draw a parallel between lifestyle migrations and lifestyle mobilities, as digital nomads can also be characterised as rather privileged movers, such privilege being produced by the structures that surround them, similarly to lifestyle migrants (Cranston and Duplan 2023). In the literature concerning digital nomadism, agency is often discussed in the form of the centrality of self-realisation, individualisation processes and freedom (Mancinelli 2020; Cook 2020). The focus has strongly been on individuals having the freedom to choose an alternative lifestyle and them being able to do so free from the shackles of any state of other structures. Such debates draw from theorisation on individualisation, liquid modernity and 'new' individualism (Beck 1992; Bauman 2000; Elliott and Lemert 2009). For instance, Bauman's theory on liquid modernity has been applied to better understand digital nomadism (Mancinelli 2020; Ahuja et al. 2020; Thompson 2021; Xiao and Lutz 2024), and understandably so. For instance, Thompson (2021) suggests that the liquid modernity theory helps to make sense of neoliberalism, the gig economy and workers' rights, and to approach digital nomads as individuals capable of navigating the global neoliberal labour markets, including their attendant precarity, uncertainty and risks.

However, the individualisation processes mean that the individual carries the responsibility to succeed and assume the risks previously taken care of by the shared social structure (Mancinelli 2020; Bauman 2002, xv; Beck 1992, 2014). Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002, 2) define individualisation to mean 'the disintegration of previously existing social forms—for example, the increasing fragility of such categories as class and social status, gender roles, family, neighbourhoods, etc.' The authors aptly ask, what new modes of life come into being when this happens? For the answer, they point towards the second aspect of individualisation in modern societies, where 'new demands, controls and constraints are being imposed on individuals. Through the job

market, the welfare state and institutions, people are tied into a network of regulations, conditions, provisos' (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002, 2). The responsibility falls on the individual, for instance, to make it or break it in working life; and in exchange for the assumed freedom to pursue the lifestyle one wishes, an individual must also bear the risks and consequences of precarity that the choice entails. In the case of digital nomads, this has been discussed in the form of a new set of responsibilities (Mancinelli 2020), self-disciplining practices (Cook 2020) and how the entrepreneurial ethos and employment precarity are internalised by digital nomads and visible in their narrations (Bartosik-Purgat 2018; Thompson 2021; Holleran 2022).[39]

At the same time, the increased precarity in societies that digital nomads leave behind would also need to be accounted for in analyses on digital nomadism. Examining how the notion of privilege relates to whiteness, Housel (2009, 134) has observed that it is 'not just about who you are, but is about *where* you are' (italics added). Racial privilege, she argues, is 'constructed in the micro-geographies of everyday life' (Housel 2009, 131). We can also say that, like the production of privilege (Cranston and Duplan 2023), the production of precarity is linked to a socio-spatial context and micro-geographies in which the individual is embedded and where everyday life takes place. In this sense, it is important not only to account for how digital nomads capitalise, convert and mobilise different resources to produce privilege in specific locations, but also how such privileges translate, travel and become transmuted across contexts, including how such privileges can co-exist with dimensions of precarity and risk. This allows us to move beyond the juxtaposition between privileged or precarious, and to account for how digital nomads' agency as well as the structures within which they move and make decisions shape both their privileges and precarious positionalities.

39 Shaun Busuttil also reflects on mobility, precarity and risk through a Beckian analysis of digital nomadism; see Busuttil, 'Mobility, Precarity and Risk'.

Nomadic Life: Work, Sociality and Nomadism as Lifestyle

The *work* component is at the heart of digital nomadism, as discussed earlier. Bonneau and Aroles (2021) observe that 'this work modality is distinctive, in that it is also a lifestyle … that encompasses shared patterns of everyday behaviour' (see also Cohen et al. 2015). Before we delve into the connections between work and lifestyle in the digital nomadic existence, let us discuss nomadic work practices and how potentially to conceptualise them. Digital nomads' work practices (Nash et al. 2021; Aroles et al. 2023), usage of co-working spaces (Lee et al. 2019; Orel 2019; Berbegal-Mirabent 2021; Chevtaeva and Denizci-Guillet 2021) and the nexus of remote working and mobilities more broadly (Cohen et al. 2015; Hermann and Paris 2020; Thompson 2021) have been in focus in previous research. However, theoretical considerations on the configurations of digital nomadic work, specifically, have been relatively scarce, with the exception of a few studies (Aroles et al. 2020; Nash et al. 2021; Aroles et al. 2023; Bonneau et al. 2023; Toivanen 2025).

One starting point can be to contrast nomadic work modalities with non-nomadic work modalities to see how they differ. Wang and colleagues (2020) observe that the norms we can currently detect in knowledge work are, regardless of the major differences between the two fields, largely modelled on factory work. The authors suggest that the hypermobility paradigm, as they call it, 'offers a promising, fundamentally different approach to organizing work, working with technology, delineating work/life boundaries, and provisioning the social safety net' (Wang et al. 2020, 1384). Another strand of literature that we can draw from is the theorisation of *nomadicity* (Rossitto and Eklundh 2007; Su and Mark 2008; Rossitto 2009; de Carvalho 2013). Prior studies seem to address nomadicity as 'accomplishing work in and across different locations with the help of computing technologies' (Ciolfi and de Carvalho 2014, 122). In the nomadicity literature mobile work has, on the one hand, been viewed as an obligation, as individuals being obliged to be mobile in order to accomplish their work

assignments. Another approach has been to focus on the *mobility of resources* (Ciolfi and de Carvalho 2014, 120) or *mobility of the workplace* (de Carvalho 2013, 3) that allow mobile workers to perform their work activities in different spaces and to do so by choice rather than by obligation. The significance of such spaces has also been discussed, with researchers showing that workers tend to appropriate and transform spaces by using specific materials before starting their actual work (Rossitto 2009). In this sense, as Ciolfi and de Carvalho (2014, 121) observe that 'the mobility of the workplace is understood as the result of the mobilisation of different work resources, e.g. laptops, mobile phones, printouts, and other assets that are used to set up temporary workplaces in assorted locations where work is achieved'.

Indeed, it makes sense to take a closer look at the temporal and spatial dimensions that shape nomadic and non-nomadic work (Toivanen 2025). Traditional, office-based knowledge workers are expected to show up to the office and to stay there a certain amount of time; they have a certain set of responsibilities to fulfil and the division between leisure time and working time often has clear temporal and spatial boundaries. Remote workers, previous research shows (Estagnasié 2023), structure time through different practices to (re)create temporalities for their work, often navigating between different temporalities, ritualising them in trying to create time for work (and for leisure). Research in the context of digital nomadism shows that the binary between work and leisure can become blurred (Cohen et al. 2015; Reichenberger 2018; Thompson 2018; Orel 2019) and that nomads struggle to maintain the balance between work and non-work, while resorting to self-disciplining practices (Reichenberger 2018; Orel 2019; Thompson 2019a; Cook 2020).

Aroles and colleagues (2023) also show how nomadic work requires meta-work (the work that makes work possible). The authors conclude that while meta-work is undertaken in most, if not all, professions, 'in the context of digital nomadism, there is an obvious attempt to hide it to produce an image of professionalism, smoothness and ease' (Aroles et al. 2023, 1272). Such efforts

toward meta-work and to appear professional (and not on holiday) characterise nomadic work modalities, arguably more than they have to in traditional office-based jobs, where productivity and performance are more tied to showing up physically to the office and being under the employer's supervising gaze (Toivanen 2025).

Conceptualising nomadic work modalities and their alleged location independence, it makes sense to pay attention to spatialities and how they operate in digital nomadic work practices, detached from stable and physical offices. For instance, Halford (2008, 927) argues: 'Enter any work organisation and we are, necessarily, engaged in complex spatialities: engaged with the meanings, materialities and bodily performances embedded in and produced by these organisations of space and spatialities of work.' The spatial configurations of knowledge work, more broadly, have transformed from the office-based, nine-to-five rhythm to being characterised as multilocational (Ojala and Pyöriä 2018), arguably even more so in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic (Eurofound 2023a). Daskalaki and colleagues (2016, 193) have also studied translocality in the context of work and characterise it as 'spatio-temporal, relational, and inter-corporeal experiences that emplace/displace the self through multi-dimensional, polycentric, ambivalent and contested practices'.

Concerning digital nomads, Nash and colleagues (2021) suggest that due to the prominent role of technology in nomadic work, the emphasis concerning 'space' has, indeed, been on virtual, digital spaces. Countering the representation of digital nomads as being entirely location-independent, independent of place, Nash and colleagues (2021) show how digital nomads depend on digital infrastructures, technologies and discovering spaces that are fit to work in. In their study on the relationship between workspaces and work practices, the authors show that the physical and material space plays a significant role in nomadic work modalities.I also focus on digital nomadic work practices elsewhere (Toivanen 2025) and discuss the spatialities and different dimensions (temporal performative, material) that shape nomadic work practices.

Switching attention to *sociality*, one major consideration is how to maintain, create and foster social relations while on the move. Social lives and sociality have often been thought of in rather sedentary terms. Sheller and Urry (2006), as noted earlier, suggest that the social sciences have failed to examine the spatialities of social life and have rather fallen victim to a sedentarist bias. Urry (2012) also suggests that new socialities and ways of relating to one another have emerged as a result of new digital technologies. Movement in itself is not important, he suggests, but rather how movement allows people to connect and reconnect over time. He associates the mobile life with connectedness and a form of network capital that is accrued as a result of one's mobility. This goes back to previous sections, where we discussed the different types of capital à la Bourdieu. The capacity to connect through real and potent social relationships is a form of network capital, which can be converted to other forms of capital, as discussed in Chapter 5. This capacity is enhanced by the development of new technologies and means of transportation. Digitalisation also has a transformative power when it comes to socialities. For instance, Fortunati and colleagues' (2023) study on highly mobile individuals (expatriates and internal migrants) and their mobile sociality shows that when the spatial distance is greater, close relationships with family members become stronger.

Sociality has also been studied in the context of neo-nomadism. For instance, Mascheroni (2007) has focused on the emergence of mobile and network sociality among global nomads. She shows the significance of virtual spaces in keeping in touch with family members and friends 'back home' as well as maintaining connections with fellow travellers on the road, arguing that 'network relationships are reshaped and mobilized through reconfigurations of co-presence, proximity and distance in relation to the use of new media' (Mascheroni 2007, 527). Her study also shows how global nomads sustain a mobile sociality with the travelling community.

Indeed, another aspect of sociality relates to (a sense of) *community*. Benedict Anderson (1991) has famously referred to nations as socially constructed communities, as 'imagined nations'. They

are 'imagined' in the sense that a nation's members do not know each other, unlike they know their family members, yet they still feel a sense of belonging to such a community. How the boundaries of such imagined communities are constructed, maintained and taken up by individuals when making sense of themselves is a question that can be applied to the context of digital nomadism. Through which processes does a digital nomad community come into being, when the community is based on fleeting encounters among individuals who are constantly on the move?

One approach to understanding how a digital nomad community becomes constituted is to focus specifically on the practices—that is, the events, activities and spaces that digital nomads engage with. This aligns with social constructionist approaches to community and how communities become constituted, not as clearly delineated entities with specific features, but rather as a result of specific stances, projects, claims and practices (see Brubaker 2006). This would mean that instead of taking a digital nomad community as a bounded and clearly demarcated group or as a unit of analysis, we can ask what elements can be considered as constitutive of a digital nomad community. Such aspects can be the continuous mobilities, the work aspect that is combined with the digital nomad lifestyle and how the boundaries of the community are constructed through referencing a mutual lifestyle. Along these lines, we can say that not all work-related mobile communities constitute digital nomad communities, but all digital nomad communities are work-related mobile communities that come about as a result of specific processes that consist of idioms, narratives, practices, stances and identity claims.

Both the practicalities as well as the socialities of the digital nomadic lifestyle are embedded in specific time and space dimensions that defy the mobile/sedentary way of thinking. Cohen and colleagues (2015, 156) suggest that the current theorisation on lifestyle migrations does not sufficiently capture the 'complexities of time and space found in more varied and multi-transitional manifestations of lifestyle mobility'. Similarly to nomadic work modalities, it makes sense to examine such practices that mobility as a

lifestyle entails and requires, and to consider them as situated in specific spatio-temporal dimensions shaping the life on the move.

So, why do some, who have the capacity, choose to adopt a lifestyle of digital nomadism, while others do not? The sociologist John Urry ponders why travel takes place, why it occurs regardless of the development of new communication technologies that could, in the form of virtual travel, replace the need for corporeal travel. Indeed, he suggests that 'being on the move' has become a way of life for many (Urry 2002, 256) and that corporeal mobility has become the core of lifestyle choices (see also Cohen et al. 2015, 155–156). Or as Elliott and Urry (2010, 10) observe: 'A life "on the move" is viewed as a fundamental indicator of achieving "the good life". Indeed, we might say that multiple mobilities have become drivers of symbolic power, bodily habituses and pleasure-seeking lifestyles.' Mobility can become an individualised lifestyle and prioritised over location-dependent work and other place-bound commitments.

At the core of digital nomadism often lies the *assumption* of mobility. However, according to Matos and Ardévol (2021), at the very core of digital nomadism there is the *potentiality* to move, instead of actually being on the move constantly. Mobility represents for digital nomads the possibility of self-improvement and the possibility of changing location *in the future*, therefore not only including an aspect of self-realisation but also an interesting temporal aspect. The authors conclude that digital nomads 'dwell in the movement', as they aim to sustain their mobile lifestyle in the future by engaging in various practices that a mobile lifestyle requires (planning, organising, securing employment, etc.). Whereas constant mobility is not an actual practice—at least not to the extent that the popular image of digital nomads presupposes (Matos and Ardévol 2021)—engaging with the potentiality to be mobile can be an actual practice. Engebrigtsen (2017, 45) also discusses how the metaphorical figure of the nomad can be developed to 'imagine the mentality of movement, a mobile habitus. The nomad in this sense does not necessarily move, because movement is her mode'.

Furthermore, such 'dwelling in the movement' can be a resource, as earlier discussed in terms of mobility capital (Kauffman et al. 2004). It can be a strategy, used to ward off precarity (Mancinelli and Germann Molz 2024) or it can itself lead to a precarious existence (Thompson 2018). Interestingly, Eckhardt and Atanasova suggest in a piece published in the *Harvard Business Review* that millennials and Gen Z struggle in trying to make ends meet, and that instead of such 'solid' aspirations as buying or renting a house, they turn towards flexibility and 'the ability to be agile, mobile, and untethered from things and places'.[40] The authors reference this as the 'liquid' way of life, leaning on the Baumanian notion of liquid modernity as a metaphor of constant mobility and change in contemporary societies. A similar approach is echoed by Benson and O'Reilly (2009, 616), who observe on lifestyle migration that:

> we consider the insights offered by sociological theorists who make explicit the link between consumption and lifestyle (e.g. Beck 1992; Bauman 2000; Giddens 1991). Common to these accounts is the notion that society has not entered post, late, second, or liquid modernity (depending on the author), characterized by the demise of traditional social structures and divisions of labour, and a greater degree of consumer choice. Lifestyle, within this contemporary consumer society, *is a life project for the individual, part of the reflexive project of the self* (Giddens 1991), in which we unremittingly, but never routinely, engage, in order to make sense of who were are and our place in the world. (Italics added)

Mobility as lifestyle can indeed become a 'project of the self', fostered through different consumption practices, for instance, and hence embedded in neoliberal capitalist structures. Mobility

40 Giana M. Eckhardt and Aleksandrina Atanasova, 'The New Reality of Digital Nomads', *Harvard Business Review* (5 February 2024), https://hbr.org/2024/02/the-new-reality-of-digital-nomads (accessed 5 May 2025).

can both be a resource and it can have a symbolic significance within the broader (wannabe) nomad community, a desirable characteristic towards the potentiality of which nomads-to-be strive. Digital nomadism as a lifestyle also borders the discussion on the relationship between (hyper)mobility and subjectivity formation. D'Andrea (2006, 95) theorises neo-nomadism to investigate the 'the cultural effects of hypermobility on self, identity and sociality'. In the context of a mobile lifestyle, subjectivities are constructed, and identity, belonging and home are shaped by practices, narratives and other meaning-making processes. However, the question remains as to whether digital nomadism represents a lifelong lifestyle choice for most nomads, and to what extent it can be characterised more as a transitional phase on the path towards a more sedentary lifestyle, as previous research on 'backpacking' has shown (Noy and Cohen 2005; Matthews 2014).

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To conclude, we can say that theorisation on digital nomadism is still in its infancy. The phenomenon has received more overall academic attention only since around 2014, and scholars have drawn from different conceptualisations to make sense of and to understand the specificities of lifestyle mobility that digital nomadism represents. The difficulty in conceptualising digital nomadism, in my view, stems partially from the fact that it has been approached within different fields of study, including the scholarly field of communication technologies, on the one hand, and the field of labour studies and studies related to tourism, on the other. At times, the attempts to examine digital nomadism have also drawn from mobilities studies and studies on migration.

In this chapter, I have aimed to move beyond the sedentary bias that has often characterised studies on mobilities and migration. At the same time, I have also attempted not to fall into the romanticising approaches to nomadism but instead to pay attention to macro-level structures as well as to practices, agency (resources and capital), and lastly to spatialities and temporalities that shape

the digital nomad life-worlds. These debates will be returned to in the following three chapters.

CHAPTER 3

Life on the Move

Globally speaking, most individuals never migrate nor adopt a mobile lifestyle during their lifetime. In fact, only an estimated 3.6 per cent of the world's population are international migrants, those whose migratory movements extend beyond national borders. The proportion of people on the move globally is somewhat bigger if we are to include internal migrants—that is, individuals who relocate within the boundaries of their states of citizenship (IOM 2024, 8). Although the COVID-19 pandemic has changed mobility patterns globally in a way that cannot yet be fully assessed, it is safe to say that the number of digital nomads and other types of lifestyle movers remains a fraction of all international and internal migrants. This was surely the case also before the pandemic. So, going back to the small Thai island I visited in 2017, where this whole research journey on digital nomads began and the findings of which I now present, one of the questions that immediately came to my mind when entering the co-working space that was buzzing with more than 30 people focusing on their laptop screens, was: how does one become a digital nomad and end up here, to the other side of the world?

This chapter focuses on the practical dimension of becoming a digital nomad. In contrast with the two following chapters, this one examines the physical and material aspects of leading a digital nomad lifestyle. It discusses the transitions to such a lifestyle from the perspective of work, mobility trajectories and the factors shaping them, what sort of planning the digital nomad lifestyle requires (particularly related to bureaucracy, working and living arrangements) and the significance of circuits of knowledge in leading a

mobile lifestyle. It also sets the scene for Chapter 4, where the key focus is on the meanings attached to the digital nomadic lifestyle.

The COVID-19 Pandemic and the 'New Normal'

The term 'the new normal' has been used in connection with the COVID-19 pandemic, pointing towards how the pandemic disrupted everyday lives and had a profound impact on societies.[41] The pandemic was a disruptive moment in terms of work, mobilities and lifestyle, all aspects central to digital nomadism. It changed the spatial configurations of (knowledge) work, spurring the adoption of new ways of working, including remote work practices and new technologies (Newbold et al. 2021; Orel 2022), and thus accelerating the third generation of 'telework' and the 'virtualisation of a whole new mode of work' that was already ongoing (Messenger and Gschwind 2016, 200). It also halted international travel in an unprecedented manner in recent history. States resorted to travel restrictions, tightened or closed borders which had been relatively easy to cross previously, for instance in the EU zone, and imposed conditions on mobility rights that required travellers to have taken the COVID-19 vaccine. The pandemic bore an impact on the meanings attached to lifestyle choices, as the boundaries between work and leisure became ever more blurred with a considerable number of individuals transitioning to remote working, however temporarily.

Having conducted data collection prior to the pandemic, as well as partially during and after the imposition of pandemic-related restrictions, I was able to observe how the digital nomadic lifestyle was shaped by COVID-19. In fact, it was during the pandemic years and right after that many professions became digitalised and

41 'The new normal' was a term originally coined for the 2008 economic crisis to refer to the 'dramatic economic, cultural and social transformations that caused precariousness and social unrest, impacting collective perceptions and individual lifestyles' (Corpuz 2021, 344).

workers decided to choose a digital nomadic lifestyle, confronted starkly with what such a 'new normal' meant in practice. For others, those who had been leading a digital nomadic existence prior to the pandemic, this meant that the phenomenon became more mainstream. As this chapter shows, there is a qualitative difference in digital nomadism before and after the COVID-19 pandemic.

Becoming a Nomad

How does one become a digital nomad? This is one of the most common questions that those interested in the phenomenon, including aspiring nomads, ask me when learning that I am conducting research on digital nomadism. Curiously, this was the case not only among acquaintances and friends but also among colleagues—for instance, at conferences where I talked on the topic. Sparking the fantasy of exploring the world outside of touristic travel, the digital nomad lifestyle tickles one's imagination: what would it feel like to leave a location-dependent job and to swap a sedentary lifestyle for a life on the move? What kind of job would enable this transition? What practicalities must I take into consideration? Do I dare to make this change in my life regardless of going against the 'norm' of what is considered to constitute 'the good life'? These are the questions that the research participants had asked themselves. When asking them how they had become digital nomads, the replies often revolved around work: either seeking out a location-independent job, negotiating the terms of their existing job in a way that would make remote work possible or creating a location-independent job through freelancing, for instance. Work, as shown in previous research (Cook 2020; Hannonen 2020), is a central aspect of the digital nomadic lifestyle: it enables people to lead and sustain a mobile lifestyle over time and often it temporally structures everyday life on the move. The dimension of work also sets it apart from previously studied lifestyle mobilities such as second-home living or even the VanLife movement. Work is thus a central aspect of *becoming* a digital nomad, not least in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Overall, transitioning to a digital nomad lifestyle more often takes place gradually than as a result of a quick decision. For instance, Joshua (Israel) who has his own marketing business describes how:

> I gradually moved into this lifestyle in 2015, when I was spending some 10 months in Israel and 2 months travelling. Then in 2018–2019, it was like 50/50, and now it is more like 20 per cent of my time in Israel and 80 per cent elsewhere.

Indeed, adopting a digital nomadic lifestyle often means transitioning to location-independent, digitalised work. The experiences of the digital nomads I interviewed, in terms of the transition to location-independent work, varied according to their form of employment. The nomads' job situations when transitioning to a digital nomad lifestyle can roughly be divided into three categories: 1) some already worked in location-independent jobs; 2) some jobs became location-independent as a result of the pandemic or other company-related structural changes; and 3) some had succeeded in negotiating permission to work remotely or, when this was not possible, had quit their previous jobs, sought location-independent jobs or even created jobs for themselves. Compared to company-employed nomads, freelancers were more present in the first and third categories. Employees in the second category faced changing workplace policies after pandemic restrictions were lifted. Some employers encouraged or mandated remote work, while others prohibited it entirely. In some cases, companies even adopted a fully remote policy, eliminating the option of working in an office. Aspiring digital nomads displayed a varying degree of agency in terms of their transition to location-independent work.

This gradual transitioning towards a nomadic life reflects the broader transformations that have taken place in the labour markets. Even prior to the pandemic, remote work was gradually becoming more common (Eurofound and ILO 2017). Such ongoing changes in the remote work policies that different companies had were pushed further with the introduction of pandemic

restrictions. As Anthony (New Zealand), a designer for a start-up company, explains:

> Well, I've been working remotely like every, probably two or three months a year for as long as I can remember. So it wasn't really a big deal, and the pandemic kind of kicked things off, because all of a sudden, your employer has to let you work remotely. And then all of a sudden, it doesn't matter if you're in London or America or France, or wherever. That was the reason I kind of moved to doing this permanently.

Another related trend, already visible prior to the pandemic, was how companies were downsizing their offices spaces, realising that instead of paying expensive rents, they could adopt a remote work policy.[42] This was the case for Megan (US), a journalist by profession, who became location-independent before the pandemic due to internal restructuring in her company that had led to them cutting down office space:

> I feel like a lot of people who do this sort of digital nomad thing have done it intentionally; they have sought out a career and skills to let them do that because this is how they wanted to live, and for me it was kind of an accident. When I first started to work, it was a traditional office job. I was living in New York, I commuted from my Brooklyn apartment to Times Square every day at the crack of dawn, you know, and I sat in the office for eight hours and then went home at the end of the day, and it was very traditional work style. And then, much to my surprise, like three months or so into me working there, they're like 'Okay great news, the whole news team can be remote', and part of that was a company decision where they wanted that office space for people more important to the company's mission or whatever.

42 Megan Leonhardt, 'Remote Work Saves Companies a Ton of Money per Worker: It Could Help Them Survive a Recession', *Fortune* (31 October 2022), https://fortune.com/2022/10/31/remote-work-saves-companies-money-recession-survival/ (accessed 7 May 2020).

I interviewed Megan in 2019, prior to the pandemic. Whereas her employer had already decided to close the offices and move entirely to a remote work policy before the pandemic, in most cases the interviewed digital nomads told me that pandemic-induced remote work policies had inspired companies to close office spaces. Hence, this development was already ongoing before the pandemic, but evidently it was accelerated by it as remote work policies and practices became more common. In cases where the possibility of remote work was not offered or was even denied by employers, the digital nomads resorted to other solutions. For instance, Virginie (France), a graphic designer working in an American multinational company, describes how prior to the pandemic she was carving out a job for herself that would enable a digital nomadic lifestyle. Virginie's story is rather common: meeting a nomad, learning about the lifestyle, realising the possibility of herself becoming a location-independent worker with the option to travel, and then taking concrete steps towards it, all the while planning how to continue generating a steady income:

> I went travelling for six weeks in Asia or South East Asia—that was my first time. And my last stop was here in Koh Lanta. And one day of discovering scuba diving, I met a digital nomad on the boat who asked me about my job and what I was doing, and he said, 'You know what? You could bring your laptop here.' And it was like, 'new opening'—everything was opening in my mind. Like, oh my God, I'm free to do anything I want anywhere in the world. And so then I went back to France and I was like, okay, now I need to make this work. How can I travel and work at the same time? So, obviously, keeping that job was very important because it was regular income. But then I thought, I need to become a freelancer, a graphic designer in France, because that way I can manage a portfolio of clients who will hopefully come back regularly to me and there will be a steady work that I could bring with me all around the world. I can't really say I have managed to do that so far, but I'm in the process.

Most interviewed nomads had some professional experience in office-based jobs, though not all. The COVID-19 pandemic was a major game-changer in this regard. It is noteworthy that several nomads, who graduated during the pandemic, had moved directly into a nomadic lifestyle and remote work without having any experience in an office-based job. They considered the possibility of working remotely such an integral criterion of work that they were not willing to negotiate on that with future employers. More than half of the interviewed nomads had transitioned to the digital nomadic lifestyle enabled by their profession that had already been remote before the pandemic (this was often the case with those in the IT sector) or that became remote during the pandemic. The remainder, and arguably an ever-increasing number of nomads, had chosen a remote job that would fit their current lifestyle and found this to be a non-negotiable feature for their future employment as well, *regardless of whether they continued the nomadic lifestyle*. For instance, Maria (Portugal), a social media manager, speaks of how she started working remotely as a freelancer immediately after graduation:

> I definitely see more advantages than disadvantages in working like this. I think I was quite lucky that I started my work experience this way. Well, I've worked before but my real adult work experience is not in an office as most people do, or on a physical job where you need to be present, but I immediately started as a freelancer in the digital world. So, I don't even have that comparison. But I know I wouldn't like it because I was always a person who loves to travel and likes to be free a lot.

Indeed, there are an increasing number of professionals whose work experience post-graduation consists of (only) remote work, and for whom working remotely (without necessarily having the nomadic lifestyle) constitutes the 'new normal' and the new norm. This demographic requires future research, specifically concerning the aspects that relate to the constitution of professional community and employee–employer relations, and on

adaptive strategies in case they choose to transition to an office-based job later in life.

Overall, the pandemic restrictions related to remote work requirements have allowed many to transition towards a nomadic life, although not without negotiations with the clients or their employers. Some have even carved out jobs for themselves that subsequently enabled their mobile lifestyle. Broader structural changes, such as the increase in freelancing jobs due to the rise of the gig economy as well as company-specific policies on remote work are contributing factors, both attracting and pushing digital workers to adopt a nomadic lifestyle. Aroles and colleagues (2020) talk of the professionalisation of digital nomadism and how the phenomenon is becoming increasingly institutionalised. Building on this, I would also argue that we are likely to see a certain degree of 'standardisation' in transitions to digital nomadism in future. As digital nomadism becomes constructed as a viable career path (Aroles et al. 2020, 124), the transition towards such a career path is also likely to become professionalised. This raises interesting questions on the evolution of career paths, particularly among the younger generation that can more readily in the post-COVID-19 context enter location-independent work. We are likely to see a growing trend of individuals integrating mobile phases into their lives and careers, shifting between workations, digital nomadism and lifestyle migration. Flexibility in the employment relationship, in the scheduling of work and in where work is accomplished (Spreitzer et al. 2017, 473), along with the COVID-19 pandemic—which enabled many to experiment with and even sustain a digital nomadic lifestyle, either with employer approval or discreetly—are key factors shaping these emerging trends, warranting greater scholarly attention.

Mobility Trajectories

> At the beginning, we only thought of staying one month, two months, not more. We had, let's say, the golden rule of not spending more time in one specific location than one month. But after the past eight months, almost one year … We made a statistic, a very interesting statistic: we travelled almost 30,000 kilometres by plane and by transportation, 2,000 kilometres by foot in a six and half months or something like that. We've seen eight or nine countries and some 50-something cities. Those are the numbers for the past eight months.
>
> Stefan, architect, Romania

Digital nomads travel not necessarily as often as frequent business travellers, but most likely more often than tourists. They travel by land, air and sea, although travelling by plane is by far the most common mode of transportation.[43] Some prefer to change destinations every week or month, others tend to stay for between three and six months in one place. There is even a portmanteau referring to nomads who prefer slow travelling: slomads.[44] But when 'the world is your oyster', where do you travel to as a digital nomad? What mobility trajectories characterise a digital nomadic lifestyle? What factors affect the destination choices of digital nomads?

Quite soon after having started interviewing digital nomads and following discussions in get-togethers and other activities, I noticed that certain destinations cropped up in conversation more frequently than others. Nomads had travelled to diverse destinations, but Thailand, Vietnam, Indonesia, Colombia, Portugal, Bulgaria and Spain were countries most often mentioned. For instance, Angelina, who worked in an IT recruitment agency

43 The interviewees did include one person travelling by boat and one couple travelling in their van.

44 Nadia Dardón, 'What Is a Slomad, Slomad Lifestyle & How to Become a Digital One?', *Citizen Remote* (28 March 2023), https://citizenremote.com/blog/what-is-a-slomad/ (accessed 7 May 2025).

and was travelling with her partner, both Portuguese citizens. Their mobility trajectories over the previous four years included different destinations, but also differing temporal rhythms, the preferred one taking some time to find:

> Angelina: I would say the first two years, we were moving every two, three months, and after a while we were getting tired. We didn't think that this is the best thing for long term. So, we started to slow down a little bit and we found our sweet spot, which is around five, six months in each place.
>
> Mari (author): Okay, right. Are you now returning to the same places for five, six months or is it every time a different place you are going to?
>
> Angelina: We have been mostly in South East Asia. So Indonesia, in this case, Bali more specifically. We were also in Thailand, Vietnam, Malaysia, and then we did Europe, like Portugal, not only on the mainland but also the islands Madeira and Azores, Cape Verde in Africa as well. And hopefully this year, we go to Brazil and South America. The world is really big, there's a lot of places to check out. Sometimes we want to explore places that we don't know yet, but for the other side, we also want to go back to the ones that we really enjoy, for example Bali. We really want to go back to Bali, but at the same time, we're also keen to explore others, like Sri Lanka and Mexico.

Although the interviewed nomads' mobility trajectories were diverse, it is noteworthy that they tended to travel to *specific* places in certain countries.[45] For instance, as also evidenced by Angelina, Bali in Indonesia and also Koh Lanta, Chiang Mai, Ko Pha

45 For the mobility trajectories of digital nomads in general, see the map developed by Blair Wang at https://blair.wang/nomadsmap (accessed 14 April 2025). The data for the map is sourced from Nomads.com (formerly Nomad List) as reported by users between 1999 and 2019.

Ngan in Thailand, Bansko in Bulgaria,[46] Madeira and Lisbon in Portugal, the Canary Islands (Spain), Medellin in Colombia, to mention a few, were such destinations. The reason for this was the existence of a digital nomad community in the chosen destination or the knowledge that familiar nomad friends would be in the same locations. Lacárcel and colleagues (2024) examine the main aspects that shape digital nomads' destination choice. Drawing from user-generated content on social media, the authors conclude that the long-term search for quality of life and technological connectivity are the biggest drivers. The destinations need to fulfil certain criteria: warm weather, good flight connections, the existence of a digital nomad community, of a digital infrastructure—namely, reliable Internet connections—and, more specifically, of a digital nomad infrastructure (Toivanen 2023). This usually refers to the availability of co-working spaces and co-living possibilities: 'In some places in Asia, the infrastructure can be nice for backpacking but not for working like a digital nomad' (Beatrice, digital project manager, Germany). The time zone is also of importance to some nomads, with destinations that have a time difference of two hours in either direction preferred by digital nomads whose employers or clients were based in EU countries. Such destinations for the interviewed digital nomads included Morocco, Mauritius, South Africa and Egypt. For the US citizens, this meant travelling to Mexico, Costa Rica or to South American countries.

Nomads' overall mobility trajectories are shaped by leisure-related choices and reasons related to practicalities, but also family and bureaucracy-related motivations are common. In fact, the interviewed nomads often visited their countries of citizenship and their family members and friends, in addition to travelling around the globe, an aspect that usually receives less attention in research, although it counts towards their overall mobilities. The

46 Krista Hessey, 'Inside Digital Nomad Paradise: How a Bulgarian Town Became a Haven for Remote Workers', *Global News* (25 November 2023), https://globalnews.ca/news/10104237/digital-nomad-village-bansko-bulgaria/ (accessed 12 May 2025).

focus, instead, often seems to be on the destination countries and nomads' experiences there, whereas the nomadic life also encompasses the aspect of visiting parents and friends in the country of citizenship. Hence, nomads' mobility trajectories are an example of multilocal living, including occasional travelling and staying within one's country of citizenship. For instance, Virginie (France) visits 'home' where her parents still live more frequently now than during the first years of her nomadic experience. She refers to the flexibility of the nomadic lifestyle in the sense that she can visit 'home' at very short notice, whereas that did not use to be possible when she was an expatriate in the UK and working in a location-dependent job:

> The times that I visit home varies. So, the first two years, I really only went home for Christmas for a week or two. This past year I spent more time there because there was a family emergency. So I went home in the spring, which I normally wouldn't do and stayed for a month, six weeks just to get some family stuff taken care of. It really speaks to another real benefit of this sort of lifestyle and of work. I got a call about things going on at home and I was in Vietnam, and I was like, okay, I'll be on a plane at the end of the day.

Location independence for the interviewed digital nomads also meant visiting family members more frequently and over greater distances than had they been in a location-dependent job, especially if it were located in a different city (although in the same country) to where their parents lived. Besides the seasonal variation that shaped such mobility patterns, also the bureaucratic (taxation and visa-related) reasons to occasionally return to one's country of citizenship or to change destinations often enough were common among the non-EU nationals interviewed for this study. Anthony, holder of a New Zealand passport, speaks of his reasons to choose destinations:

> This is basically the main reason why I choose certain countries, because I'm allowed to move there and not there. There are

> certain countries in Europe that have what's called a bilateral visa waiver agreement with New Zealand, which was signed before the EU reform. It overrides the normal 180-day agreement.

What specific geographies are targeted by digital nomadic mobilities also depends on the local economy and to what extent nomads are able to leverage greater purchasing power through geoarbitrage practices, as discussed in Chapter 5. Digital nomads' destination choice is often made as a combination of several factors, including economic, bureaucratic, infrastructural and environmental, as highlighted in previous research literature (Thompson 2018; Mancinelli 2020; Cook 2020; Lacárcel et al. 2024). However, the findings of this study point towards the need to account for family related reasons in the circular mobilities that nomads engage in, also including occasional travel within and towards one's country of citizenship. Location independence, rather than mobility framed merely as movement beyond one's country of citizenship, offers a more insightful lens for analysing how mobility practices and trajectories come about in the digital nomadic lifestyle. An overall tendency among the study participants in selecting their next destination was having future travel plans undecided and open to change. The reason for this was sometimes the wish to keep plans open, but due to events like the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine, the current global situation also played a role in decision-making processes, as shown with Angelina (Portugal):

> It really depends what is happening through the year, because it seems like every new year, there's a pandemic or a war, so we also play a little bit with what is going on in the world at the moment.

What Did the Pandemic Do to Digital Nomadism?

> I think a lot of people started this lifestyle with COVID, but actually, I think I had this in me, *j'avais ça en moi*, I had this in my head a little bit before.
>
> Claudine, marketing freelancer, France

The COVID-19 pandemic was a landmark event, the 'great disrupter' that halted global mobilities in an unprecedented manner (Adey et al. 2021). The world gradually returned to cross-border movements, and lifestyle-related mobilities have potentially grown to exceed pre-pandemic levels. One major reason for this is the change in remote work possibilities. But how exactly is pre-pandemic digital nomadism different from post-pandemic digital nomadism? Is it too early to assess this?

Digital nomads, often holders of passports from Global North countries, moved with relatively ease across the international borders before the COVID-19 pandemic. Research that has been published in the aftermath of the pandemic shows that the pandemic, unsurprisingly, disrupted and reduced the mobility of nomads in the form of lockdowns and border closures (Ehn et al. 2022; Holleran 2022; Williamson et al. 2022). Holleran and Notting (2023, 1341) show how digital nomads contested the globally introduced travel restrictions and engaged in some mobilities to 'maintain their identity and avoid border closures and lockdowns', while navigating feelings of mobility guilt and shame. In other words, they had the choice to relocate to their home countries, but also to stay put in more remote locations. Similarly, in this study, the interviewed nomads had opted to wait out the lockdowns imposed in their cities of origin in less populated destinations and, if possible, in places where pandemic-related restrictions were not as strict. Navigating between lockdowns and restrictions that different countries imposed at different times stemmed from the desire to live one's everyday life as 'normally' as possible. This

points towards nomads not only being privileged in terms of their mobility but also in terms of their chosen immobility.[47]

The digital nomads who participated in this study continued to move once it was again possible, and some even moved during periods of restriction. However, one significant impact of the pandemic was the change in travel destinations. During the pandemic years, the EU nationals opted for more familiar choices concerning their destinations, preferring locations in Southern Europe, whereas under normal circumstances they would have travelled to South East Asia or South America. Indeed, they preferred to stay closer to 'home', in destinations that had frequent flight connections to their country of citizenship, in the event they had to travel back in case of an emergency or a family member falling ill. Zofia, a freelance online marketer (Poland), speaks of how the pandemic changed her way of travelling altogether:

> Since the pandemic started, I decided I'm staying in Europe. Maybe I could travel, make a one-month trip, but I don't imagine myself now going for a half a year to South America as I planned before. The connections between me, my family and my friends has changed a lot during COVID, I got much closer to them. And now I feel like I need to stay in Europe because Europe is my place.

Similar kinds of observation were made in the US in 2023 after pandemic-related restrictions were lifted, where most self-identified digital nomads reported travelling exclusively within the US and more rarely outside the country. This phenomenon has been labelled 'tethered nomading' and it has surged with the back-to-office mandates that employers have been enforcing in the post-COVID-19 context (MBO Partners 2023). I was able to witness a similar trend among digital nomads who were EU nationals,

47 I discuss this in a blog post titled 'What Does the Right to Be Mobile Look Like after the COVID-19 Pandemic?', *Liikkeessä yli rajojen* (6 May 2021), https://liikkeessaylirajojen.fi/what-does-the-right-to-be-mobile-look-like-after-the-covid-19-pandemic/ (accessed 7 May 2025).

including Zofia above. She preferred to stay 'closer to home' due to family connections, but for many the reason to stay within reasonable flight distances was purely professional.

Hence, it is little wonder that the Spanish islands became particularly popular for EU nationals (both digital nomads and remote workers) during the winter of 2022. Indeed, according to the Government of the Canary Islands, they received 34,500 remote workers during the first half of 2022.[48] The islands do not have radical time difference with most EU countries and staying in the eurozone made taxation and insurance practicalities easier to manage for EU nationals. Many interviewed nomads ended up in the Canary Islands due to the travel restrictions in South East Asian countries, where many would have typically travelled for the winter season. The pre-existing airline connections between the Canary Islands and major European cities were a contributing factor. Staying closer to 'home' also permitted easier access to their home country's welfare services, if the need was to arise. Holleran (2022) shows how the pandemic fostered a greater appreciation among nomads towards welfare services, including high-quality medical care, unemployment benefits and access to vaccines.

The findings of this study show that the COVID-19 pandemic affected the digital nomadic lifestyle in at least two contrasting ways. One is the growth of industries specifically targeting the digital nomad, discussed in more detail in Chapter 5. The other is how the pandemic made long-term, more established digital nomads more careful in their travel destination choices. In addition, those nomads who did not have a home base prior to the pandemic were more inclined to acquire one. Leo, a business owner from Germany who had been a digital nomad for the previous 12 years, describes a change in his thinking due to the pandemic. He

48 Government of the Canary Islands, 'Turismo mejora las cifras de llegadas de teletrabajadores, unos visitantes que gastan tres veces más que la media' (in Spanish, 15 July 2022), https://www3.gobiernodecanarias.org/noticias/turismo-mejora-las-cifras-de-llegadas-de-teletrabajadores-unos-visitantes-que-gastan-tres-veces-mas-que-la-media/ (accessed 7 May 2025).

was travelling with his Ukrainian girlfriend when the pandemic hit.

> The homebase thing actually came in 2020, when COVID-19 started. The two of us got stuck in Oman for four and a half months. Even though it was overall a good time, and it was an active decision to stay there when the world shut down, because of the alternatives that would have been, there was this time frame where you could only travel back to your country of citizenship that would have meant early March for her to Ukraine, for me to Germany, where both of us didn't have anything that was attractive, so we decided to stay in Oman. We compared to what's going on in the rest of the world, it was definitely a good timing, a good decision to stay there. But also, this limitation in freedom of movement left some traces and I wanted to spend the following winter season inside Europe or inside the EU to be precise.

On the other hand, the pandemic in fact offered an opportunity for many to test the digital nomad lifestyle (see Almeida et al. 2021), to take the leap to a mobile lifestyle, as remote work (policies) became more common. Once the pandemic-related restrictions were lifted, the 'new normal' of remote work meant that many companies faced new circumstances in terms of whether to allow their workers to continue working remotely or not. This resulted in negotiations between employers and employees, but also the normalisation of remote work practices (Newbold et al. 2021). I interviewed Emilia, a social media marketer from Germany during the winter of 2022, when the change towards remote work policies and whether they would be of more permanent nature, was still an open question. Emilia depicts how the work model in the company she works for has changed as a result of the pandemic:

> Yes, we have a task force in the office. It's a group that works on the future concepts of work. And this is also about changing our office because we have reached the capacity of people who can work there. And now they are reassessing whether we need to

> expand the office space, which probably we don't need to do, because now the work model has changed.

However, in the interviews that were done after pandemic-related restrictions were lifted, the return to the office had often resulted in difficult negotiations over the possibility of working remotely. If the employer did not agree to remote work continuing after the pandemic, some interviewees had even resigned and changed jobs to ones where remote work was possible. Indeed, for some interviewees, this had been a deal-breaker after the removal of pandemic-related restrictions, the underlying motivations of which will be further discussed in Chapter 4. In a few cases, the lure of the nomadic lifestyle and location independence was so strong that the only option nomads had was to leave their job and seek work as a freelancer.

Nevertheless, remote work policies have prompted a new way of life for digital workers. Prior to the pandemic, those working as freelancers (often in the IT sector) were likely more represented among digital nomads. However, with the increased remote work possibilities that the pandemic brought about, more individuals with traditional employment contracts were able to take to the road (see MBO Partners 2022). This has also meant that the distinction between a digital nomad and a travelling remote worker (if such ever existed) has become somewhat diluted and blurred (see Cook 2023). According to my observations, this was very much the case in the Canary Islands in 2022, with travelling remote workers referring to themselves using the buzzword 'digital nomad', yet returning to their countries of citizenship after a few months' stay on the islands.

Practicalities of the Nomadic Lifestyle

Regardless of how digital nomadism is often portrayed as the embodiment of extreme mobilities and freedoms, digital nomads remain entangled in multiple state institutions (Cook 2022). Many of the practicalities that digital nomads encounter when leading a

mobile lifestyle are, indeed, linked to the fact that the nation-state system is a political unit designed on the basis of sedentary lifestyles, with several of the state structures linked to residency and citizenship status (including, but not limited to, taxation, health care provisions and mobility rights). This relationship between digital nomadism and the nation-state system will be examined in more detail in Chapter 5. However, I will also touch upon it in this sub-section, which focuses on the practical aspects of (pre-)planning, arranging work, living and leisure, and circuits of knowledge, skills and resources required to lead a digital nomadic lifestyle. What does the digital nomadic lifestyle require in terms of practicalities, planning and resources? How do digital nomads organise practicalities related to work and living? How do they find information on the lifestyle?

All the Planning It Takes

> I'm an anxious person. I like to get things prepared all the time, and so I plan budget—first, day by day, how much to spend on food, how much to spend in accommodation, transport, that kind of stuff. Safety—how can I keep my laptop and my gear safe? Then it's about community—is the community going to be warm? Or is everybody just very independent not talking to each other? Location—how far is the location of the co-working space from the place I'm going to live in?
>
> Virginie, graphic designer, France

Very few interviewed nomads had jumped into the digital nomadic lifestyle with little planning. Indeed, most had first searched for information from various websites focusing on the digital nomadic lifestyle, including lifestyle blogs, podcasts and digital nomad social media sites (see Thompson 2024; Lacárcel 2025), as was the case with Virginie. Besides looking for information on the lifestyle, they had, more specifically, searched for information on issues related to taxation and health care, private

insurance, permitted lengths of stay and whether they needed visas, on living arrangements and workspace options, and finally on the existence of a digital nomad community in their chosen destinations. The process of becoming a digital nomad entailed learning about the practicalities that the mobile lifestyle required. For instance, Noah (Israel), owner of an online marketing company, was travelling with his family, a wife and a one-year-old baby. His was one of two families I interviewed, and they had specifically chosen a destination where there was childcare available for their toddler, ending up opting for a specific destination in Thailand. The transition to the digital nomad lifestyle, especially as a family, had required one year of planning:

> At first, we created the list in Google Sheets and shared it, every time we talked about something we needed to do—for example, if we want to keep the phone number and so forth. The first thing was to choose the date and the second was to tell your friends. Then you are committed and you cannot regret, you cannot go back. So that's what we decided, I think one year before we left. And we talked all the time with our friends, to show that we have commitment for that. We started with the list, I think, six months before, and after we bought the tickets. We bought one-way tickets. The list included what to do with the apartment, how to deal with the insurance, the pensions, the bank and the visas, even the health care.

Several nomads described an intense period of planning before taking the leap to the mobile lifestyle. One of the major challenges was what to do with their existing home. Most either gave it up altogether, (sub-)let it or simply paid double the rent/living costs while travelling. The necessity of having a permanent address was often solved by using their parents' or friends' homes, thus showcasing how they navigated the legal grey zone that will be discussed later. Clara, a consultant for a sustainability company from Germany, had solved this in the following manner:

> I gave up my flat which I knew anyways that I had to move out, so it worked out quite well, so I don't have to pay double rent. In Berlin, the flat situation is not so nice. So, the rents are normally very high and it's difficult to find something so I didn't have to give up something great. But I also don't pay double. I'm registered at my dad's house, so I have the registered address in Germany still which my employer also wanted.

Clara's account references the high rental prices in Berlin, reflecting the trend of rising housing prices across several European capitals that nomads had left behind. To avoid paying double rent, especially with the lower cost of living in their chosen location, but also due to the more recent rise in rental prices, nomads are likely to find other solutions. Beyond housing, in terms of material possessions, many had rented a storage unit that awaited them if and when they wished to return. Most company-employed nomads were able to lead a nomadic lifestyle, provided that they remained in the EU. This was for the purposes of the insurance their employers provided them, showcasing how navigating between different jurisdictions varied if the nomad was an employee, a freelancer or an independent contractor. Freelancing nomads often resorted to private insurance to supplement the health care that they potentially already had access to—for instance, the statutory health care that nationals of EEA countries who were staying in the EU could benefit from with the EHIC. Tibor, a freelancer in marketing from Hungary, was opting for a health insurance package specifically targeted at digital nomads after being disappointed with the service offered by a more traditional insurance company:

> I think [health care is] a very important question because, for example, when we went to Malaga I had insurance—two or three types of insurance from Hungary, and I made an international one. For example, there was a time when we [needed] this service. It was from AXA and they just didn't answer the phone. And it was a really hard situation because my girlfriend had a very

> large pain. I just called the emergency number of the insurance company and they didn't answer; then finally, I called the hospital in Malaga, where they said that it's two hours for the ambulance … And finally it was okay, but I lost my trust in the AXA company. And one of my friends recommended me another insurance, which is especially for nomads, it's called SafetyWing, and I think I will try this out if I go back to Valencia because otherwise you have to pay a lot of money to everywhere.

Tibor leaned on the digital nomad infrastructure, discussed in more detail in the Chapter 4, which also encompasses global nomad insurance schemes. Such mobility-sensitive services can smoothen the transition to the digital nomadic lifestyle (Toivanen 2023). Another example of such was the e-Residency programme offered by Estonia, described in Chapter 1. This concerned particularly digital nomads who had their own company and who had to find a solution to taxation issues when establishing a legal entity on the move. Although very few of the interviewed digital nomads had opted to become e-Residents, reflecting observations presented in previous studies (Bruns and Lee 2023; Koskela and Beckers 2024), Leo, a business owner from Germany, ended up choosing to become one:

> I've done my research, I've done my work. Especially with discovering the Estonian e-Residency, this was the perfect toolkit for myself. So it worked very well with establishing the legal entity in Estonia, signing off from Germany, and then everything falls in place.

Indeed, one major reported issue was the taxation laws that bind digital nomads (Brown 2015), a concern that is discussed in previous literature. For instance, Mancinelli and Germann Molz (2024, 198) point out that 'another benefit of geoarbitrage is the possibility of manipulating one's exposure to tax obligations'. Indeed, keeping one's tax residency was a factor shaping many of the interviewed nomads' mobility trajectories, how long they decided to stay in one country and how they sought to avoid

becoming a tax resident in another country. Nomads who held US citizenship stood out in this respect, as the US, along with Eritrea, links taxation to citizenship. In other countries, the criterion of 183 days (six months) is commonly used to determine the place of residence (Tyutyuryukov and Guseva 2021). The nomads almost unanimously spoke of the 'grey zone' when referencing taxation, and chose not to let the local authorities know when they were outside their country of citizenship (see Brown 2015).

Cook (2022, 307) rightly observes how digital nomads end up in 'practical and unglamorous negotiations with state bureaucracies' and how they must 'negotiate tax systems, residency rules and understand how states conceptualise and enforce worker protections, often managing these negotiations across multiple states'. The EU regulations on jurisdiction and national laws are largely based on laws of physical countries that use default notions such as 'domicile' and 'habitual residence', problematic in the case of digital nomads (Brown 2015). This is exemplified by designer Anthony, who holds New Zealand citizenship but is a tax resident in the UK. In order to keep his tax residency in the UK, he needed to take care that his stays in other countries did not exceed 182 days:

> It's quite easy to just keep my tax residency in London … as long as I don't spend more than six months a year in any one country. So, in France, five months, Mallorca maximum six months, Vienna like two months, and as I don't become a tax resident elsewhere, it's difficult to lose your tax residency, because that's considered your centre of economic interests, that's your job. So I think I only need to spend a few weeks in the UK every year to keep my tax residency. As long as I don't go over 182 [days] in any other country, like in Spain, even if I'm going right up the limit, to 182 days.

Nomads often entered a country with a tourist visa and then extended their visas through border-hopping practices.[49] The visa regulations, in a manner of speaking, pushed them to become mobile. Nomads who resort to these kinds of tactics, can be seen as 'border artists', to borrow a term from Mancinelli and Germann Molz (2024), who observe that nomads navigate state-imposed constraints through creative forms of border artistry. Indeed, the interviewees in this study gave numerous examples of how they had become rather skilful in national legislation and particularly laws concerning international mobility. Navigating different visa regimes, keeping one's tax residency, staying in a preferred time zone, as well as finding suitable accommodation, working space and reliable Internet connections, all such practicalities contributed towards selecting specific destinations.

Arranging Working Conditions and Living

Digital nomadic work, which is multilocally and geographically flexible digitalised labour, is not totally free from surrounding structures and constraints, not in the way that the 'nomadic' qualifier would suggest. It is, instead, shaped by the availability of digital infrastructure (such as Internet connection), suitable working spaces, temporal constraints (such as time zone) and a variety of other factors (Thompson 2018; Mancinelli 2020; Nash et al. 2021). Indeed, reliable and fast Internet connection was the top priority mentioned by the interviewed digital nomads. As mentioned

49 Another option that digital nomads use in Thailand, specifically, is to book a flight ticket, which is required to obtain a visa extension, and then cancel it (and the accommodation) once the visa has been granted. The local authorities aim to ensure that travellers are not staying for an indefinite period of time, which is why they require proof of a return ticket; see Päivi Leino, 'Näin etätyöläiset salaavat sijaintinsa pomoilta ja huijaavat viranomaisia—Kaisu Koskela kertoo, miten" (This is how remote workers hide their location from their bosses and cheat the authorities—Kaisu Koskela explains how), *YLE* (11 November 2024), https://yle.fi/a/74-20113841 (accessed 7 May 2025).

by Marc, a cloud architect from France, this is the first thing he checks when moving into an Airbnb:

> Actually, a stable Internet connection is one of the few things we check when we search for apartments. Okay, so first thing is the place liveable, decent? And then if the Internet is quick. Those are the things we need. Because if you have things in the house you don't like, you can always somehow change. But if there are no providers of quick Internet and if you need to sign a contract, that makes things more complicated.

The existence of digital infrastructure in the chosen destination was non-negotiable, although there was variation among the interviewed nomads and their work-related requirements in terms of the speed of the Internet connection. Another main concern among the interviewed nomads was to find a suitable space and materials required to complete their work tasks, speaking of the material dimension of nomadic work (see Atanasova and Eckhardt 2021). This often meant travelling with peripherals such as computer screens, laptops, keyboards, routers, chargers, external memory storage devices, headsets and other equipment necessary to optimise working conditions. In some cases, the nomads had acquired materials if such were not available. As Kaisa, a freelance translator from Finland, says of her stay in Thailand:

> Yes, I came to this island before the co-working space opened, nine months before that, and I was here from October to the end of June. There was no co-working space here yet, instead I worked in an open bamboo kitchen. But I had a decent working spot there as well which I created myself. I had the same screen I still travel with and I purchased a desk that cost like €50. It was a good investment, and the flat had an office chair. There I worked and sweated under the fan—that's how I worked for months.

The interviewed digital nomads physically worked in multiple different settings: 1) co-working spaces, 2) their accommodation (often co-living or Airbnb-rented apartments); 3) in public spaces such as libraries, cafés and restaurants; and 4) at their company's

office for company-employed nomads when they needed to work on site.

Whereas Kaisa had acquired the necessary equipment and materials to be able to work, more often the study participants' work-related practicalities seemed to revolve around finding spaces where the essentials, such as a reliable Internet connection and a desk, were provided. While many liked working in quiet spaces, some preferred cafés due to the ambient background noise. The nomads needed to build a temporary home base and carve out a working space for themselves in the chosen destination (see Aroles et al. 2023; de Loryn 2022b), which points to the importance of considering the spatialities of nomadic work (Nash et al. 2021; Toivanen 2025). Managing temporalities was also part of the additional work they engaged in. Being in a suitable time zone, dividing time between 'home' and coffee shops/co-working spaces, deciding on working hours per day or per week, and making sure work and leisure became clearly demarcated were just some of the temporal practices digital nomads needed to navigate (see Estagnasié 2023; Toivanen 2025). These aspects involved self-discipline in addition to planning and organisation, as discussed later on.

The practices of nomadic work reveal interesting spatial and temporal dimensions, visible in the account of Michal, a project manager for an IT company from Slovakia. He had chosen to structure his working hours by dividing the time spent in two different localities:

> So, I stumbled out of here [a café in Las Palmas, Canary Islands], looked down the nearest coffee shop, opened up the laptop, and then looked at emails and things like that. In the past, I would work extensively at coffee shops. Since we've been here, I set up a proper office. The home Internet is cheap, you can get a desk and a comfortable chair, big screen. So, I work for a few hours in a coffee shop, an hour or two at home, then two or three hours at a coffee shop, and then home, so I just kind of move in between the two.

Having a suitable workspace also dictated living arrangements. Whereas some opted for co-living spaces, others preferred Airbnb apartments that had a 'dedicated working space', as marketed by Airbnb since the COVID-19 pandemic. Often, indeed, work took place in the same quarters where they lived. Cornelia, a freelance online marketer from the Netherlands, wanted to travel to Mallorca and was looking for a place to live in online groups:

> I was actually googling co-living, the concept of co-living. And then I found a co-living space in Palma. Okay, so that's why I'm here because I was checking the website and I really liked it and I applied for it. I had a conversation with the owner and he told me that there was no space left, and then he offered me this apartment. So, we live with five people in total here and we have a shared kitchen, shared bathroom, shared everything—actually, only your bedroom is yours. You have it for yourself, and we also have a desk in our room, which is amazing. And that's what we do. There are few things we need. I think it's the Internet, coffee and the desk, in that order. So, we share everything, like the washing machine, the kitchen, all the utilities.

Cornelia also contrasted the co-living space with a flat she had previously shared with tourists, emphasising that she preferred her new co-living arrangement as the other individuals staying there were inclined to work, instead of partying and staying up late. The practicalities related to work and living arrangements were a major topic at Bansko Nomad Fest, which I attended in the summer of 2022 in Bulgaria. Nomad Fest had some 500–600 visitors during the week. Leah Ziliak, a co-living consultant who spoke at the event, mentioned some of the most popular co-living spaces. These included Sun & Co. (Javea, Spain), SunDesk (Agadir, Morocco), Nine Coliving (Tenerife, Spain), Neighbourgood Cape Quarter Living (Cape Town, South Africa) and Coworking Bansko (Bulgaria). She stressed that co-living spaces differed from traditional hostels as they catered specifically digital nomads' needs, including the focus on work vs travelling, on productivity and well-being. The annual Bansko Nomad Fest is just

one example of the ways wannabe and new digital nomads receive information on the lifestyle and the practicalities it entails. Indeed, the importance of online spaces and on-the-spot communities in tapping into circuits of knowledge is undeniable.

Circuits of Knowledge: Tapping into the Community

Lacárcel and colleagues (2024) examine the main aspects that shape digital nomads' choice of destination, also discussing the role of social media (see also Lacárcel 2025). This was also visible in the present study, with nomads seeking information on particular destinations from digital nomad social media groups and websites. One frequently mentioned resource was Nomads.com, the website that lists 'the best places to live for nomads' based on factors such as the weather, Internet speed and cost of living. Tibor (Hungary) draws from several sources to find information on the destination, including his nomad friend circle that he has acquired after years of travelling:

> You can find information in the Facebook groups, and there's also a very good website called Nomads.com, and usually I just ask my nomad friends. I use them as a source of information. If they give me a good hint, then I google it to see if it's good or not.

Meanwhile, the account of Andrew, a computer programmer and holder of dual citizenship from South Africa and the UK, shows how nomads can also collaborate to find suitable accommodation and to minimise the cost of living in the chosen destination:

> We just met at digital nomads Gran Canaria accommodation group. So I was looking for an apartment and somebody's looking for an apartment. So I just wrote them like, 'Do you want to look together?' And that's how it snowballed into the third person, fourth person. First, it was the two of us—we found an apartment for four and then we found two other people.

Overall, the online platforms and groups proved to be a valuable source of information for the nomads who were just starting out, especially the Facebook groups specific to each destination. Usually, the interviewed nomads acquired more information through these destination-specific Facebook groups or the destination-based WhatsApp and Slack groups that had as members those nomads who were at that time physically present in the chosen destination (see Miguel et al. 2023). It seems that Slack groups have become more popular, since WhatsApp groups can only contain a limited number of members. That said, as the number of digital nomads has grown in specific destinations, this has led to more narrowly defined WhatsApp groups, such as ones focusing on accommodation listings, ones on social events or yet others on hiking and other sporting activities. Meanwhile, Slack groups are organised into different channels, which allows members to follow only the channels they are most interested in. Luciana, a travel agency worker from Peru, describes how nomads can 'tap into the community' in specific destinations:

> I met this Italian girl, and when she arrived it was so funny because she had already a lot of meetings with people, and I was like how, how are you doing all this if you just arrived, and then she said she was in Facebook. So Facebook, there are a lot of groups. It's like this one in Mallorca, you just type 'digital nomad in Mallorca' or the spot where you're going, and most of them have a group or a WhatsApp group or a Facebook group, and they add you and then you see how you go. That's what happened to me in Fuerte Ventura—that's how we did it.

It seems that the first step is usually to find Facebook, WhatsApp and Slack groups, and through these gain access to the community in chosen destination. This community is ever-changing as its members leave and new ones arrive, but it provides a platform for arriving nomads to tap into knowledge on the chosen destination and to access information on diverse practicalities concerning living, working and leisure time that are relevant for that specific destination. Such context-specific and updated information

can be accessed through specific channels, instead of finding it in a centralised form online, as shown by this account from Michal (Slovakia):

> When I was researching before coming here, I was trying to find a good digital nomad webpage, and I found a bunch of them—everybody's having their own digital nomad blog. But very little of them are good guys to follow. I heard a couple of podcasts like how to try to find the best aeroplane tickets and stuff like that. I don't know if there is a good, centralised resource for digital nomads that would have all of these tricks and hacks and everything.

As stated earlier, the process of becoming a digital nomad entails learning about the practicalities that life on the move requires. Once the nomads interviewed for this study had 'tapped into the community' and taken part in community events, information was increasingly received directly from other, often more experienced nomads who gave advice on, for instance, where to travel next. The digitalised circuits of knowledge in the form of virtual platforms such as social media groups were influential in gaining knowledge on the digital nomadic lifestyle, as also shown by previous research (Miguel et al. 2023; Lacárcel 2025). Megan (US) spoke of how she aims to get the 'lay of the land' before arriving to a destination. She described her Google Maps account as a 'mess of places', filled with tagged coffee shops, restaurants and other places of interest, including places where she can potentially work with reliable Wi-Fi. This way, before arriving, she already has a base of places, 'a network that can be vouched in some way'. In addition to such digitalised resources, word-of-mouth information proved a valuable way to 'tap into the community', also shaping the nomads' mobility trajectories and the overall experience of leading a nomadic lifestyle.

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Overall, the COVID-19 pandemic had a major impact on digital nomadism in several respects. Firstly, pandemic-related restrictions in terms of remote work requirements allowed many aspiring digital nomads to transition towards a nomadic life, to test it temporarily or make it a more permanent way of life. The number of graduates starting work in a remote manner (and diving straight into a digital nomad lifestyle) without having any experience in office-based jobs will most likely increase in the years to come. This links to the broader changes taking place in the meanings attached to work, for instance in form of the growing anti-office movement, with workers valuing their work–life balance and leisure time over financial success and career development, as discussed in Chapter 4.

Secondly, the pandemic shaped nomads' mobility patterns. Unsurprisingly, it halted their planned mobility, but its impact persisted even beyond the travel restrictions. It pushed some long-term nomads to acquire a home base, whereas it allowed wannabe nomads to test the lifestyle. Nomads also resorted to more careful planning, for instance choosing destinations 'closer to home'. The pandemic's impact on digital nomadism is likely to persist long into the future. We might even say that there has been a 'digitalnomadisation' of remote work discussions, meaning that remote work has become increasingly framed as enabling a digital nomadic lifestyle—particularly since the gradual removal of pandemic restrictions on travel and with remote work modalities having become a more common practice. The lifestyle, overall, has become more visible, more mainstream and—at least at the level of imaginaries—a viable lifestyle option for an increasing number of individuals who dream of escaping the 'nine-to-five' rat race to roam the world. But what about the digital nomads themselves? What meanings do they attach to the digital nomadic lifestyle?

CHAPTER 4

In Search of Meaning

The digital nomad lifestyle has been profiled increasingly regularly in newspaper articles, podcasts and blogs since the mid-2010s, and particularly after the COVID-19 pandemic. Popular books have also been written on how to become a digital nomad, following the increased commodification of digital nomadism and the rise of online coaching and consulting services that aim to sell and promote the lifestyle, often authored by digital nomads themselves (Bonneau et al. 2023, 67). We can say that there is abundant information online that often depicts the digital nomadic lifestyle in a rather positive light, and has tended to avoid tackling the more problematic aspects of it. However, this has been gradually changing in the post-pandemic years, with more diverse and balanced accounts of the digital nomadic lifestyle surfacing in the news media. For instance, in 2023 the *Guardian* published a story titled 'My Year as a Digital Nomad Looked Perfect Online. The Reality? Lost Luggage and No Days Off'.[50] The BBC published a story the same year, titled 'The Workers Quitting Digital Nomadism', depicting how the realities of a digital nomadic lifestyle had not met workers' expectations. The columnist concluded that 'an increasing number of workers who've tried the nomadic lifestyle report that behind the wanderlust-fuelled Instagram posts and

50 Francesca Specter, 'My Year as a Digital Nomad Looked Perfect Online. The Reality? Lost Luggage and No Days Off', *Guardian* (30 October 2023), https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2023/oct/30/digital-nomad-lost-luggage-no-days-off-laptop-on-the-beach (accessed 12 May 2025).

rosy travel blogs, the reality of this set-up is not always so glamorous.'[51]

Scholars have also drawn attention to the not-so-glamourous aspects of digital nomadic lifestyle (Miguel et al. 2023), including the need for additional meta-work (Aroles et al. 2023), for dealing with the bureaucracy that leading a mobile lifestyle necessitates (Mancinelli and Germann Molz 2024), the feelings of loneliness and lack of meaningful social relationships (Chevtaeva and Denizci-Guillet 2021; Thompson 2021) and the increased precarity that follows nomads on the move (Thompson 2018). So why the attraction of the digital nomad lifestyle?

As I conducted more and more interviews with digital nomads in destinations they had travelled to after pandemic-related restrictions were lifted, I gradually began to grasp the motivations behind their decisions to choose the mobile lifestyle. They described what their everyday lives on the move looked like, often contrasting their experiences with their previous more sedentary lives. I also started to see how their lifestyle choice had an impact on their work arrangements, social networks and relationships, how they talked about family and community life and how they valued location independence. In short, I started to understand how, despite the challenges listed above, digital nomads' reasons to choose a mobile lifestyle related to the notion of 'the good life' and what meanings they attached to it.

In Search of Meaningful (Work)life

Studies since the mid-2010s have shown that individuals attach great importance to gaining meaning and a sense of purpose from their work, more than they attach importance to their salary or working conditions (Bailey and Madden 2016; Gast et al. 2020; Dua et al. 2022). We have witnessed the 'Great Resignation' that

51 Ellen Nguyen, 'The Workers Quitting Digital Nomadism', BBC Worklife (20 June 2023), https://www.bbc.com/worklife/article/20230531-the-workers-quitting-digital-nomadism (accessed 12 May 2025).

took place in the US in 2021 when employees resigned in large numbers in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, often in search of more flexibility in their working hours (Pew Research Center 2022b). What kind of work–life balance individuals strive to have relates closely to the topic of leisure and to the notion of 'the good life'. For instance, a study by Bowers (2007, 30) shows how four groups belonging to different lifestyle movements aimed to replace the work/leisure dichotomy and instead to reframe their lifestyle as more meaningful and less dependent on 'traditional temporal schemata of obligation'.[52] Furthermore, he shows how through the construction of a 'new self-directed time and space-ordering' these groups engaged in collective resistance to redefine work as intrinsically meaningful, 'as something directly related to reclaiming their identity, and not just as an activity for financial reward in order to live and/or maintain a certain lifestyle' (Bowers 2007, 40–41). Hence, the meanings attached to work cannot be fully understood without also considering those associated with leisure and lifestyle.

What meanings do digital nomads attach to work? This subsection tackles how nomads narrate the work–life balance and what it means in the context of relative flexibility in terms of where, when and how to work. Performances of professionalism and self-disciplining practices are characteristic of nomadic work, begging further enquiry into the modalities that are specific to such work. Digital nomads attach great importance to location-independent work (although in many cases their work has temporal or geographical constraints), thus evidencing the growing anti-office movement in the making (see Toivanen 2025).

52 Bowers's research consisted of an ethnographic study, focusing on the voluntary residential (or 'intentional') communities of Bodhi Farm and Crystal Waters Eco-village in Australia and the Slow Food and Citta Slow movements in Italy.

A Typical Day at Work—Is There Such a Thing?

When asking the digital nomads who took part in this study about what their typical day at work looked like, the replies were as varied as were the respondents, depending on the line of work, whether they were company-employed or freelancers, and where they were physically located (time zone and working space). However, there were some similarities, namely in terms of how the nomads talked about work–life balance and the additional tasks nomadic work required. Maria, a social media manager, and business owner Leo describe below what their typical day at work looks like:

> So, usually I start around 9.30 because otherwise as freelancers, we don't have a specific schedule. With one, well, with my biggest client that really takes most of my week, we kind of have an agreed verbal arrangement that we'll kind of do a nine-to-five, although it's not a nine-to-five. So I start at 9.30 and, you know, start with emails, admin stuff, DMs, so a lot of engagement with followers, with clients, then I do client support as well. And then, of course, it depends on the projects we're working on, so I might need to do something more urgent specifically that day, but if not, I'll just move on to social media, so content creation, copywriting, video editing—well, that's quite a fun to create. If then I have worked for the second client, I'll do a lot of press releases, writing and blog writing. And if not, if I don't have anything to do that day for the second client … I usually come to yoga here to the beach. Exactly here we do a lot of yoga and sometimes in Confital hotel—it's lovely. And yeah, take a drink after with my boyfriend, go home, and that's more or less a typical day for me. The advantage in terms of work is that you don't need a schedule, and you can wake up and immediately start working, which is what I do. Because I'm a night owl, I'm not an early bird at all. So I just I wake up when I have to. I'll start right from bed to the table. The advantage of simply taking a shower at 11, you know, instead of rushing to the shower to get ready. I just love the advantage of

cooking my own meals at home while I work, saving money with that as well.

Maria, social media manager, Portugal

I would say in the long-term average, I work about maybe 30 hours a week. At the moment it is a bit more because it kind of comes in waves and I had decided to work more during the winter season here to put up my new business, and that means in the last couple of weeks my workdays were not so typical in the long-term sense. But usually, I think the most idealistic typical thing is a workday that I used to have in Thailand when through the time zone differences and being a night owl, I get up somewhere around 11am, go to my favourite bakery or a coffee shop and have a nice breakfast with a ton of fresh fruits and coffee and juices, and put up my computer to slowly start into the day, read some first emails, read my to-do list, and afterwards I move over to a co-working space and find out something that was not on my to-do list at all. And deep dive into something completely different. Find out how it's useful and how it brings my business forward, spend many hours on that. And then at the end of the day, I realise that I've done nothing off my to-do list, so either I put them for the next day, or I do an evening shift. And [recently], I think I actually went more towards having a Monday-to-Friday work week and then a weekend off. But I usually have a high flexibility in that, so if I like the place and if I want to explore, go hiking or do some touristic stuff for activities or whatever, I can usually easily carve a day or two out from the week, or even take an entire week off. Not so much these very days because with my new business, I established a client onboarding process that goes through video calls and consultation, so I have my calendar online and clients can book appointments. So that takes a little bit of flexibility from myself and it's only a temporary thing. That's usually not the way I enjoy working, so I do these compromises now on behalf of getting the business ready and starting from there.

Leo, business owner, Germany

Both Maria's and Leo's working days could be characterised as rather atypical, particularly if the point of comparison is location-dependent office work and its temporal configurations. However, both show a certain level of fragmentation in tasks to be completed, the day-to-day changes in the spatial and temporal configurations, the agreements with the employer that do not hold (in the case of Maria) and the flexibility that they both reference, which, however, seems to come at a price. Such atypicality seemed to be the 'new normal of work', based on the interviewed nomads' account.

One major feature that characterised the interviewed digital nomads' narrations of work was the blurring of the boundaries between work and leisure time. Such blurring between work and leisure in location-independent work is documented in previous research on digital nomads (Richards 2015; Reichenberger 2018; Thompson 2018; Orel 2019). Achieving a suitable work–life balance was one of the main motivations among the interviewed digital nomads when deciding to make the switch to a digital nomadic lifestyle. This did not mean that they considered work to be irrelevant—on the contrary, great importance was attached to work in their accounts. The question was more of what spatial and temporal configurations of work they were ready to adhere to. Finding location-independent work was seen as a way of ensuring location independence in terms of their leisure time and the moments between periods of work. Leo and Maria above both described having a certain level of flexibility to combine work and leisure throughout their day or week, without having a clear temporal separation between the two. For some nomads, such blurring between working hours and non-working hours was a desirable attribute, often narrated in terms of flexibility and freedom, but others needed clear separation between the two, especially if they were working in their accommodation. This could be done in several ways. For instance, Claudine (France), a freelancer in advertising, sought such a separation by working somewhere other than the co-living space:

> Yeah, I work inside my co-living, with my roommates. And I tried also to work in some co-working spaces because it's nice to be able to be a little bit further from where you sleep at night, to be able to have a physical space that is dedicated to work that is separate from the physical space that is dedicated for your private life. So sometimes I try to work somewhere else, but yes, most of the time I'm working from here.

This need to 'commute' to a co-working space or a café to work, and switching places during the day, provided a spatial distinction but was also used to structure the day into clear parts. Despite having the desired spatial freedom (Reichenberger 2018) to decide where and when to work, the interviewed digital nomads surprisingly followed the traditional modalities of office work fairly closely, with the exception that they did not work in an office with co-workers. In fact, as I discuss elsewhere, the nomads ended up 'mimicking' some features of traditional office jobs. One of the most common ways was to sign up to a co-working space or to find a café that had other working nomads as customers (see Toivanen 2025). In some cases, the nomads' living quarters had a working space, thus breaking down the boundary between work and non-working time even further. This was not always considered to be an issue for the study participants, reflecting previous research; for instance, Reichenberger (2018, 364) observes: 'Ideally, digital nomads perceive work not as an imposed obligation but regard it—much as their leisure activities—as intrinsically motivated and fulfilling.' Maija (Finland), a university researcher, explains how she understands the boundary between work and leisure:

> I was just reading this morning about work–life balance and work–life integration and I am definitely for work–life integration because I work on something that is my passion and centre of interest. Then the boundary becomes blur. Like when I'm going to bed in the evening, I browse through some Facebook groups [work-related task] so it is technically work but I would probably do the same even if I didn't have this job. And I have noticed that I haven't put any holidays on my calendar because I haven't needed

them yet. The idea is to have such a life that you don't need a vacation, so I'm not really strict about these boundaries.

As Reichenberger (2018, 377) observes in her study on digital nomads' work–life balance, the conceptualisation of work and leisure needs to move away from the dichotomy of employment time versus free time and 'to focus on experiential and perceptional approaches when deepening our understanding of what is what'. She concludes by saying that the realms of work and leisure are inextricably connected, and questions whether it makes sense to approach them as oppositional to one another, especially since professional and personal freedoms are mutually created.

Leisure time, as well as work, were both highly valued by the digital nomads interviewed for this study, evidenced in statements such as that by Maija above: 'the idea is to have such a life that you don't need a vacation'. The findings also resonate with Orel's (2019, 223) observations on how the nomadic way of working is more leisure-orientated than working from one location. Nomadic work is an example of post-industrial work that is on the way to becoming indistinguishable from leisure (see Lewis 2003). The narration of freedom and flexibility is a key aspect of this, also reflecting the broader neoliberal discourse of 'flexible working' and greater individual autonomy (Fleetwood 2007). However, the downside of this is the spatial and temporal micro-management that nomads need to do, as well as how the perceived flexibility also opens the door for employers to demand more.

Tasking Oneself: Performances of Professionalism and Self-disciplining

The maintenance of effective work arrangements when leading a nomadic lifestyle requires additional work that makes work possible.[53] Aroles and colleagues (2023) refer to this as meta-work, an

53 The observations presented in this and the following sub-section are discussed in more detail elsewhere (see Toivanen 2025).

understudied yet important part of nomadic work. The authors conceptualise meta-work as a form of invisible work which is not limited to a single workplace; indeed, with digital nomads such meta-work extends to multiple spaces, including also digitally mediated spaces (such as technological platforms, online spaces). The digital nomads interviewed for this study took part in a multitude of tasks that can be viewed as meta-work and that speak of the specificities of how nomadic work is configured.

One aspect of such meta-work is the need to mobilise different resources that enable digital nomads to perform their work activities in different spaces. This means utilising different material resources, such as laptops, mobile phones, printouts and other artefacts that allow assorting a location for a temporary work (see Ciolfi and de Carvalho 2014, 121). Aroles and colleagues (2023) also refer to the aspect of performativity and how digital nomads attempt to convey an image of professionalism through meta-work. Such performances of professionalism also came through in the interviews. For instance, Johan (Sweden), an IT consultant whom I interviewed in Thailand said, 'You can be like a consultant and then there's a sudden picture of you with umbrella drinks, and your client is like "We are paying you too much!"' Alex (Germany), a programmer who was a frequent traveller in South East Asia, spoke of the challenges in accommodating the rhythm of a mobile lifestyle with more traditional office hours, especially when located in a different time zone:

> Once I had a Skype call with potential new German customer and I was in Cambodia at that time and the only place [with Internet] was a bar, and it was noon in Germany and afternoon in Cambodia, and there was reggae music. So they were sitting there in the German office with neon lights, office atmosphere, and then somebody else is asking 'Where is the reggae music coming from?' because I didn't explain that I'm travelling. I said sorry, I didn't have the Internet, it is the only place here, I'm sorry for the music, and actually I managed [to get] the bar to switch it off, because there were not many customers … [The German office

> staff] were like 'Where are you?', and I didn't get the job eventually. So what I want to say it's difficult to get new customers when you're travelling because they might see you as *not being so reliable*. But with the existing customers where you have proven that you can collaborate well, then normally it's not a problem, I haven't encountered any problem. So, with respect to the time zone … [it's difficult] if they have a meeting late and I am up until 2am. But if it's required for some reason, then I'm there. Also, I tried to compensate being here, by being especially professional—like being punctual on the meetings and writing minutes and fulfilling my to-dos, *being like a proper German employee*. Because if I would be a little bit sloppy, being a digital nomad and being in Thailand, it suddenly creates an image, which is just not so positive. (Italics added)

Alex's account shows the need to appear professional and reliable, 'to be like a proper German employee', and to be constantly available regardless of the time zone. This speaks of the expectations and of more traditional and location-dependent work life norms that nomads cannot necessarily escape, regardless of being on the other side of the globe. Previous studies (Aroles et al. 2023) also highlight digital nomads' need for performing professionalism to gain their clients' and employer's trust, mentioned both by Alex and Michal, a project manager from Slovakia:

> I think one thing is not being permitted by your employers to do this, but I also found myself having meetings in a vest, because I've just been at the beach or the gym, and I realised that it's perhaps a bit unfair. It's an armature, to put on always the t-shirt. But I don't want to kind of rub it in and then go surfing.

Performances of professionalism are embodied even in the clothing nomads wear in their efforts to convey an image of a reliable worker who is constantly available. Newbold and colleagues (2021, 3) name the flexibility that technology offers for work the 'autonomy paradox'. By this, they refer to the paradox between remote workers being promised more autonomy over their own

work and simultaneously being required to be constantly available. The authors' observation can be extended further. In addition to the (at times self-internalised) requirement to be constantly available, the configurations of nomadic work require other, more difficult to discern tasks, as discussed above. I would suggest that in addition to the performances of professionalism and 'presence', on the other side of the coin, practices of secrecy also constituted a form of meta-work for the interviewed digital nomads. As the pandemic restrictions were lifted, many found themselves following 'don't ask, don't tell' type policies. Either their employers knew that they were working from a location outside of the country in which the employer/office was based and simply did not raise the issue, or the nomads took measures to cover their tracks and travelled in secrecy. Some referred to the vagueness of the situation right after the pandemic, whereas others used technology to disguise their true location:

> If the boss knows that you have lied, then the blame is on you if there's a problem. So it's not really serious, but you don't want to make the mistake and write a mail saying that you will work abroad. It shows that the company knows, and if there's a problem, then the blame is on them. There's a small game, sometimes the bosses know, but they pretend that they don't know. Because if they receive an official mail showing that they know … It's still vague. It's a question of liability. I have friends who have said that [they would] like to work abroad, and their bosses have said, 'We haven't talked, I didn't hear anything', like 'You can do it but I don't [want to] know about it'.
>
> Claudine, marketing freelancer, France

> I had to figure out how I can connect to Slovakia first, before I connect to my company VPN. So, when I connect to my company VPN, my company VPN sees that this connection is coming from the Slovak Republic. So the problem with that was that I don't have administrative privileges on my computer. I cannot install any software there. I had to solve it on the hardware level. I had to

> have some kind of device that would be in front of my computer that connects to Slovakia first, and I plug my computer into that device. I have some kind of router that connects and then either I plug a cable into the router, or I connect to the Wi-Fi that is created specifically by the router. We are still not there as a company, where they would say okay, even though I think technologically and work-wise it should be totally okay to work outside the country. But legally, the legal department hasn't solved this, so I'm solving it for myself.
>
> Michal, project manager, Slovakia

I conducted several interviews during 2022, when many companies had not yet drafted clear post-pandemic remote work policies. This had resulted in some interviewees not informing their employers that they were working from another country; instead, they pretended to be working remotely from the same country in which the company was based.[54] This led to different strategies to hide their geographic location: choosing a white wall as a background in meetings via video calling, trying not to look suspiciously tanned and even using routers that falsely situated their IP address somewhere other than their actual geographic location, as in the case of Michal above. In other words, digital nomads were, officially and virtually, seemingly present in the countries where their employers and jobs were located, but physically somewhere else. Others just simply never brought up the question of working in the office after the pandemic restrictions were lifted.

While for some of the interviewed digital nomads the performances of professionalism meant assuring their employer that tasks were being completed, even while they were in a tropical destination, for others who were travelling in secret it meant 'faking presence'. Whatever the case, this added to the meta-work that

54 A pandemic-era phenomenon, these have been called 'hush trips'; see Monica Pitrelli, 'These Workers Take "Hush Trips." Here's How They're Hiding Them from the Boss', CNBC (19 June 2023), https://www.cnbc.com/2023/06/20/hush-trips-heres-how-workers-are-hiding-them-from-their-employers.html (accessed 12 May 2025).

the nomads needed to do, strategically not disclosing their actual physical location or misleading the employer about it altogether. In addition, the meta-work included self-disciplining practices that nomads engaged in. Cook (2020) studies digital nomads' self-disciplining practices and shows how they place an additional burden on nomads as they need to manage their own work without or with very little supervision. He calls this the 'freedom trap'. This was visible in the account of Cornelia (Netherlands) who, working as a freelance online marketer, struggled to make a division between work and leisure. At the same time, she had internalised the traditional nine-to-five approach to work:

> I wish [I could make a clear separation between work and leisure]. I am in the process of that, because I'm working with some of my clients for like three years, and we are super close. And they text me on WhatsApp, sometimes even on the weekends, and now I feel like I need to set some boundaries to really let them know like 'Hey, I'm available between nine-to-five on weekdays', and after that I also need my spare time. I am not so good with that, actually. *I feel like I should work between nine and five at least.* So, for example, two weeks ago, we went to the beach on Wednesday afternoon. I felt super uncomfortable. I was like, oh my God, maybe I got a phone call. Maybe I forgot something … I was super stressed about things. So that's a really challenging thing for me. I still need to work on that. (Italics added)

One aspect that has received less attention and that Cornelia also refers to is the *emotive* work that nomadic work entails. Kesküla (2023) refers to the feelings of guilt her participants felt over needing to justify their lifestyle. Marija, a freelancer in digital marketing, describes the anxiety and stress related to location-independent work and how to manage it, countering the popular image that digital nomads are 'just sipping pina coladas in the beach'. Also, Michael, who works in online marketing, recognises the stress that sustaining oneself financially and being able to continue the lifestyle represented:

> You live, you work, you have to work. It's not like a vacation or holiday and that you are just sipping pina coladas in the beach. You still have to work, so it actually brings a lot of anxiety and it's stressful and complicated.
>
> Marija, freelancer in digital marketing, Serbia

> Then there's the financial aspect of it. I had some other recurring revenues that I would get every month, so I wasn't as mentally stressed for that aspect of it, but that is a mental stress factor, right, is trying to sustain yourself while abroad. I think that's like the main thing, is trying to self-sustain your lifestyle.
>
> Michael, employed in online marketing, the United States

Stress, anxiety, fear, exhaustion and pressure originated from meta-work tasks, including finding sources of income to sustain the mobile lifestyle, constantly soliciting clients, managing the balance between work and leisure, managing work in different time zones, appearing professional and reliable, not flaunting the pros of the lifestyle too openly, and generating trust with potential clients or employers. Digital nomads' mental health is rarely discussed in research literature, although previous studies point towards the unsettled and potentially disruptive dimension of a digital nomadic lifestyle that can lack routine and steady career paths, and can be characterised by the difficulty in established long-lasting, meaningful relationships, alongside feelings of isolation and loneliness (Thompson 2021).[55] For instance, Claudine (France) was stressed out during the first few months of her digital nomadic lifestyle, fearing that she would miss deadlines:

> So, I took the remote job. I went back to Paris, I was super stressed out because I didn't want to miss on anything, any deadline. Yeah,

55 Well-being among digital nomads is discussed in some studies (see e.g. Von Zumbusch and Lalicic 2020; Miguel et al. 2023) and in some non-academic texts (e.g. Timothee Grassin, 'Why Digital Nomad Life Can Be Hard on Your Mental Health', *Medium* (14 November 2018), https://medium.com/@timgrassin/why-digital-nomad-life-can-be-hard-on-your-mental-health-994af0ce32f3).

> any deliveries that I had to do for the team I was working for because I wanted them to trust me that I was still going to do a good job even if I wasn't in the office. So, the first three, four months it was very stressful. But it was good. It was good to be independent, to see that I could manage everything by myself.

Part of the stress came from appearing professional and gaining or maintaining the trust of employers. At the same time, trust was assumed to be mutual and an aspect of nomadic work that resulted in greater productivity, instead of supervision and control, features nomads associated with the old-fashioned manner of thinking about work. Kesküla (2023), interestingly, shows how nomads try to overcome the dominant work ethic that they have internalised, visible in the ways in which they talk about productivity. The nomads in her study valued autonomy over work, all the while trying to minimise their labour and trying not to feel guilty about it. Kesküla links this to discussions on post-work life to examine how alternative ways to think about work that move beyond the dominant focus on work ethic can be explored.[56] Similar echoes on the work ethic were also present among the nomads interviewed for this study. For instance, Minna (Finland), a freelancer in marketing, had quit a steady job to become a digital nomad. Her account reflected the dominant work ethic and how in exchange she wanted to have an employer that would trust her:

> Working hard is in my spine—it's not even a question of moral, I just work. Maybe because of that I also want an employer who trusts me. So now I'm applying for jobs and in job interviews, I make sure that we have the same understanding of remote work. And I hope that the trust is there, because let's say some worker, who is not motivated, does half of the things they need to do, then

56 For discussions on post-work, see Andy Beckett, 'Post-work: The Radical Idea of a World Without Jobs', *Guardian* (19 January 2018), https://www.theguardian.com/news/2018/jan/19/post-work-the-radical-idea-of-a-world-without-jobs (accessed 12 May 2025); see also Weeks (2011).

> it doesn't matter if they are in Finland or in Las Palmas. It doesn't make any difference. So why should it for me?

As I have argued elsewhere (Toivanen 2025), nomadic work modalities and configurations need to be approached in their own right, instead of considering them merely as the opposite of more classical and traditional modalities of office work. If nomadic work is analysed with epistemological approaches derived from studies on sedentary populations, this can easily introduce the sedentary bias back into the analysis. Nomadic work modalities have specific spatial, temporal, performative and material aspects. They also include aspects of meta-work and emotive work that deserve more attention in future studies.

Right to Be Remote—An Anti-office Movement in the Making

Digital nomads consider *location independence* an integral part of their work. When discussing (remote) work, the digital nomads interviewed for this study referred to aspirations of flexibility and freedom as values they attached to location independence (see also Reichenberger 2018; Mancinelli 2020; Cook 2020), which they considered were missing in more classical, nine-to-five office work. The meanings attached to work evidenced a strong anti-office sentiment (Toivanen 2025). This anti-office sentiment was rooted in experiences of what was considered a toxic office culture and, more broadly, toxic working lives, increasingly characterised by control, hierarchy, lack of trust and autonomy, and risk of stress and burn-out.

Location independence that enabled a mobile lifestyle was a non-negotiable aspect of the interviewed digital nomads' professional lives. Minna was working for a marketing company in Finland when the pandemic hit. The employees were ordered to work remotely, which suited Minna well. However, once the pandemic-related restrictions were lifted, her employer would not let her continue to work remotely, even though according to her it

would have been logistically feasible. Eventually she resigned and decided to become a freelancer, even though it meant smaller and less steady income.

> Minna: So now I'm becoming a freelancer, but I'm still hesitating if I'll find some hybrid form to be partially freelancer, partially employed by a company. But in any case, I will demand to be able to work remotely. I want that freedom. …
>
> Mari (author): So, was this location independence a criterion for you to become a freelancer?
>
> Minna: Absolutely yes. It was interesting because I realised that it weighs so much now in my decision-making that you cannot attract me anymore with salary. That this dream weighs more now.

Minna discussed at length the 'freedom' that she attached to her lifestyle and work, something that came up in most interviews and will be discussed in this sub-section. Her account also shows how she resorted to 'crafting' her own tailor-made jobs, a sort of a hybrid between freelancing and being partly employed by a company. Similarly, Mancinelli's (2020) study shows how digital nomads can often adopt an entrepreneurial ethos and work in multiple jobs to compensate for the loss of income that choosing remote work often entails.

The end of restrictions related to COVID-19 often meant either a full return to the office or arranging some kind of hybrid model. This was met with resistance by the interviewed digital nomads. The company-employed digital nomads could not understand why their employers insisted on limiting remote work, since the pandemic had shown remote work to be possible, if not even more profitable and more productive, for the company. A clear mismatch between the new nomads' aspirations to work remotely and company policy was visible. However, digital nomads who were freelancers, contractors and business owners needed to negotiate the possibility of remote work with their clients, and some clients

had doubts over the nomads likely productivity while working and travelling simultaneously.

Digital nomads working in freelancing jobs represented slightly more than half of the total interviewed nomads. For many, it was indeed a reason they had chosen to become freelancers in the first place, similarly to Minna above, as freelancing provided more flexibility in deciding where to work. For others, it was a gradual realisation that they could work in a location-independent manner, as previously discussed. Nevertheless, both for those who stumbled into the mobile lifestyle and those who deliberately chose a profession that allowed it, the question was about professional, spatial and personal freedom (see Reichenberger 2018, 371–373). Acquiring experience in location-independent work, often under COVID-19 restrictions, meant that there was no turning back even after the effects of the pandemic had softened. Luciana (Peru), who was working in a travel agency, noted that when she now searches for jobs, she no longer considers jobs that are not location-independent, for instance using the filter feature that LinkedIn added to its job search platform in 2018 to bring up only results containing the keyword 'remote'. This was also the case of Anna (Sweden), a writer and translator, who adamantly refused any work that required her to be physically at a specific location:

> I never accept any job that requires me to be somewhere else. I actually had an interview online, he had a contact who asked me if I was interested in working with UNICEF, which … would be amazing, and similar to what I'm doing, full-time basis, but they did require me staying at home. Sorry, I can't do that. I would rather not take the money. Because, to me, it's not so much the work. It's the freedom of movement. I don't ever want to be tied to one place and having to sit through winter. So it's not so much the job—it's about the place.

The strong opposition to working in an office setting and complying with the traditional configurations of work speaks of a broader change taking place concerning the values attached

to working lives. As Olivia (Poland), a software engineer, said: 'I always knew I don't want to work in an office, I never want to return.' In this sense, as discussed in Chapter 3, remote work has become the 'new normal' (Newbold et al. 2021), something also picked up by the interviewees, who tied their anti-office sentiment to a broader societal change concerning work. For instance, Ahmed (Egypt), an IT consulting business owner, referenced this as a generational change:

> I think that change [in work] is not only about remote, but I think it is also a generational change in today's world where, I don't know, at some point, it's also about the satisfaction you get of work, the boss you have, the type of stress levels you want to have … All of this kind of work–life balance, I think after a certain time, you're more willing to overcompensate that versus money. Because money, you just do lifestyle inflation, and you just end up spending more because you're getting miserable. So, it doesn't really work out. I've been through that as well, so I understand.

Ahmed's account raises an interesting question on the generational change, concerning work and work–life balance more broadly. What kind of work the interviewed digital nomads found meaningful to do and in which location to spend their leisure hours were considered more important compared to their salary level or personal career-building goals. Most interviewees discussed nomadic work in terms of general well-being and having less stressful working environments due to greater flexibility and freedom. Aspirations of flexibility and freedom meant having a better work–life balance, even at the expense of higher income, as previously discussed.

While mobility—and the rights associated with it—was often taken for granted, the pursuit of 'the good life' relied more on location independence than on mobility itself. Location independence not only facilitated various forms of mobility, including returning to nomads' country of citizenship, but also meant the option to choose immobility during the pandemic. In fact, location independence, as it was discussed by the digital nomads in

this study, was only a step away from being framed as a political right.

All Things Social

Empirical research on digital nomadism has shown that leading a digital nomadic lifestyle shapes how social and romantic relationships and a sense of community are formed and how mobile individuals make life arrangements—for instance, to maintain social ties, plan family life and leisure activities adapted to being 'on the move' (D'Andrea 2007; Mascheroni 2007; Reichenberger 2018; Thompson 2019b). However, little is yet known about how social connections (intimate, professional, extended) are created, maintained and sought by digital nomads, on the one hand, and how they are transformed and potentially severed in such nomadic living that stretches across multiple locations, on the other. What exactly happens to social and romantic relationships on the move? Can family life be accommodated within the nomadic lifestyle? What role does community play in digital nomads' lives?

Social Relationships: Close and Afar

Previous scholarship that has focused specifically on digital nomads' social relationships has shown that nomads can suffer from loneliness and have difficulty in creating meaningful relationships on the move (Reichenberger 2018; Nash et al. 2018; Thompson 2019a; von Zumbusch and Lalicic 2020; Miguel et al. 2023). The studies show that the constant travelling, ever-changing community and distance from family members and friends back home can all contribute to feelings of loneliness and lead digital nomads to aspire to forming more meaningful relations. Similarly, in this study, the difficulty of creating meaningful relationships was mentioned as one of the biggest challenges of the digital nomadism. At the same time, meeting new like-minded people, those who also liked to travel and work in a nomadic way—that is, who shared the same lifestyle—and the overall *diversification*

of social circles were considered one of the main pros of leading a nomadic lifestyle. Indeed, besides experiencing feelings of loneliness and isolation, on the one hand, and creating new worldwide social circles with individuals the nomads would not have necessarily come across otherwise, on the other, the changes in sociality brought about by the mobile lifestyle were more complex.

The interviewed nomads' mobile lifestyle had a transformative impact on their previously established relationships, which tended to be more sedentary in nature. Indeed, not only were the nomads *on the move*, also their social relationships were *on the move*. Patrick, an engineer from the US, speaks of how he was missing out on some experiences back home:

> There's one thing that makes me a little bit sad. And it's that I'm just having great experiences around the world, mostly by myself. I share them temporarily with others, but mostly by myself at the expense of losing those experiences at home. I don't go to those weddings, I don't meet those babies, I don't see them having success in their professional life or going out. And, you know, they don't even invite me to the weddings because they know I'm somewhere else. Sometimes I'm like, I have my close groups of friends and if I go back, everything is like I never left.

Patrick's account references the feeling that 'back home' has not changed: 'everything is like I never left'. What seems to happen is that in addition to the physical distance that characterised nomads' relationships with friends and family 'back home', they also felt a growing mental distance to the localities they had previously inhabited in a more permanent manner. This was reinforced by the reactions that their transition to a mobile lifestyle had prompted among their existing friends and family. Such reactions varied from a lack of understanding of their lifestyle choice to envy or disbelief that the nomads would actually work, instead being on holiday when travelling (see Thompson 2019a, 31). For instance, Virginie and Claudine speak of this 'disconnect' with friends back home, partially due to having different lifestyles:

> You can relate more with nomads; you can have deeper conversations. That's something that I cannot do with my friends because, first, they don't travel the way I do—they like their own comfort, and they don't really envisage this sort of life. I have only one friend who lived abroad for four years. So she's the only one I can talk about these things.
>
> Virginie, graphic designer, France

> This life brings me a lot of joy compared to the life I had before; sometimes I felt a little bit stuck. Another thing is a little bit more personal. So now I'm in my mid-30s, almost 40s, and I don't have the same life as other people my age, my other friends in Paris, because most of my friends, they are married or not, but they have children, more than one, and they have a completely different life. And when I am in Paris, I don't feel isolated, because I have a lot of friends, but I feel like not in the same stage of my life as them. And when I'm travelling, when I'm a digital nomad, when I'm abroad, I'm meeting many persons who have the same state of mind and we're not talking about children all day long. They have the same issues and the same challenges I have and this is really amazing to be able to hang around with people like you, and I don't have that in Paris anymore.
>
> Claudine, marketing freelancer, France

This disconnect was seen to be a result of having different lifestyles, which meant different values and understanding of what constituted 'the good life'. What was perceived as a sedentary notion of 'the good life' was having children, buying a home and having overall a steady life. The female nomads who took part in this study had experienced more questioning in terms of their lifestyle choice and when they would settle down, start families and 'grow up', pointing to a gendered dimension in such a notion of desirable lifestyle. This speaks of the broader (gendered) norms attached to sedentary lifestyles and of the normative expectations related to (a desirable) family life.

Furthermore, study participants reported that their relationship with parents 'back home' had changed in the sense that the digital nomads were a bit more in touch with them and made an effort in this regard, since they were no longer physically present in the same country. Whereas 15 or 20 years ago nomads might have experienced technological challenges in maintaining relatively cheap connections with family members, platforms like WhatsApp and Skype now enable low-cost regular contact. Although being in a particular time zone can of course affect the frequency of calls, the impact of improved communication tools in this regard is undeniable, and (digital) social connection can to some extent compensate for the lack of physical presence. Elina (Finland), who at the time of interviewing was studying remotely, attests to this:

> With my friends, we have a Snapchat group and somebody posts there every day. So it has the social side and I feel that I haven't been forgotten, but that I see what happens in their everyday lives in real time. Social media brings people closer, like it's a real-time interaction. For instance, my mother sends me a good morning message in the mornings and sends a song for the day, so it feels homely.

Just as little attention has been given to nomads visiting their families and home countries, the visits of digital nomads' family and close circles to them on the move have also been largely overlooked. Several interviewed nomads described how their friends and family members visited them in specific locations. This aspect has not been discussed in previous research literature: how digital nomads' mobilities potentially spur international mobilities in their close circles. This seemed to be the case specifically for European digital nomads from countries such as Germany, France, the UK, Poland and the Nordic nations who stayed in Southern Europe. It was relatively easy for their parents and friends from 'back home' to visit them, as frequent flight connections existed between their destination and that of their parents.

Whereas their (relationship to their) old social circles experienced a transformation, what did the new relationships that digital nomads created and fostered while on the move then look like? The interviewed digital nomads' social circles had widened with the mobile lifestyle. Several mentioned that they now had a more vibrant and active social life compared to when they had led more sedentary lives. Eric, a developer in computer sciences from France, explained how his social circles drastically changed: 'The adventures relate to the travel, like you discover things, you meet new people. I met as many people in less than one year of being a nomad than I met in seven years in Paris.' The spontaneity of agreeing to meet at short notice, meeting people in the same life situation and with a considerable amount of leisure time facilitated the fostering of social connections outside of working hours. Kaisa, a freelance translator from Finland considered that her social networks had radically changed as a result of her mobile lifestyle:

> Actually, one of my main motivations to come to this place is the fact that I know so many people here. We plan even to come here at the same time—like if you are there, I'll come too. I think that back home in Finland people don't understand that I have quite an extensive network elsewhere. It's not like I come here alone and stay alone and leave friends behind in Finland. Actually, I see more people here than in everyday life in Finland. There people work during the day and then it's cold and dark and nothing happens in the evenings. Here we eat together and it's easy planning with a WhatsApp group that you can have 20 people in the same place, with no pre-planning, like let's see [each other] in two weeks at 8pm. But this depends on the fact that people are single; maybe some are in couples, but they don't need to plan where to put the kids.

The significance of the digital nomad community that Kaisa references here too, is discussed in more detail in the following part. The lifestyle aspect that comes through in Kaisa's account (not having children, being mobile) also created a sense of 'being on

the same wavelength', without needing to explain why one is constantly moving. However, the difficulty in establishing *meaningful* and *long-term* relationships was one major challenge (Reichenberger 2018; Nash et al. 2018; Thompson 2019b). At times, the meetings with other nomads tended to be superficial and repetitive in discussions. Megan, a journalist from the US, calls this 'constant stream of nomads' with whom she ends up having the same conversation 'kind of a drag'. Karl, a programmer from Germany, expresses a similar sentiment: 'here the connections, it's a bit more superficial. You meet new people, and they are there only for a month or two, and then the topics can be a little bit repetitive. You know, where's the best pad thai? And your favourite beach? And so on.' However, with time, most of the interviewed nomads had been able to build their 'travel network', as Johan (Sweden) called it. This took time and effort and was a more stressful experience to more introverted nomads, as Johan describes:

> I think that's the main thing why people are not happy in the beginning, because they haven't like built their *travel network*. I mean, I'm pretty social, but I used to be like, quite shy and not very social. And I can see that's problematic if you travel, because you meet a lot of people and you need to be networking, and then you get better at it as you train. If you're like the typical kind of nerd that is introvert, I heard a lot of stories of them having a problem. (Italics added)

This 'travel network' will be further discussed in the sub-section 'Digital Nomad Community: Imagined and Ephemeral'. The social networks that digital nomads acquired were also at times professionally beneficial. For instance, I interviewed two nomads living in the same co-living space in Palma de Mallorca. One of them had recommended her co-living roommate for a job, which she consequently got, securing for herself a year of employment. However, to what extent digital nomads can capitalise upon their travel networks, for instance professionally, remains in general an understudied topic.

Furthermore, it is interesting to observe how a certain entrepreneurial logic and corporate lexicon creep into the ways digital nomads talk about social relationships and networks (perhaps reflecting a broader trend in how cost–benefit thinking has permeated socialities in contemporary societies). While social connections on the move are often seen primarily as a way to combat loneliness and isolation, some interviewed digital nomads also highlighted self-sufficiency, networking benefits and the profitability of building relationships while travelling. This resonates with Germann Molz's (2021, 82–92) observations on mobile worldschooling parents, how family life becomes the object of 'entrepreneurial logic' and where worldschooling is viewed as an investment.[57]

Romantic Relationships and Family Life

When it comes to the interviewed nomads' relationship status, I interviewed two families with small children and seven nomads who were in relationships at the time of interviewing, but a large majority were single. Although nomads met many other nomads who were also single when travelling to new destinations, it seemed challenging to find a partner on the road. Cook (2020) observes that travelling and planning is easier for those digital nomads who are in relationships. In the present study, it emerged that this depended on whether both nomads could work entirely location-independently. In cases where one partner held

57 Worldschooling is an alternative educational movement that combines schooling with travel. Worldschooling can involve formal classes and curricula, whereas others prefer learning on the road through experiences. The common feature is the belief that travel is an essential aspect of worldschooling; see Dave Seminara, 'Would You Teach Your Kids on the Road?', BBC Travel (24 February 2022), https://www.bbc.com/travel/article/20161108-would-you-teach-your-kids-on-the-road (accessed 12 May 2025). Leaning on the writer Eli Gerzon's definition, Germann Molz (2021, 8) views worldschooling not as a set of learning practices but as 'a shared philosophy that experiential learning is the best way to teach children about themselves and the world they live in'.

a location-dependent job and the other one did not, the aim was finding location-independent work for the other. In one case, a nomad couple, an architect and a business consultant, had built a business together, drawing from their previously location-dependent jobs to create a common professional domain that enabled their digital nomadic lifestyle.

The social experience of this lifestyle and the need to tap into the digital nomad community in search of social interactions was different for those travelling as couples. The couples who travelled together also worked together, often in Airbnb flats or co-living spaces. Juliana and Pawel (Poland), a programmer and a software engineer who were travelling together and working from their accommodation, described being 'in a bubble' and 'self-sufficient' in terms of their need for social interaction:

> Pawel: When you travel alone, you're in your own bubble, and we're together in this one bubble. So that's the difference.

> Juliana: Yeah, that's challenging sometimes because when you talk about this social circle that you make, you reach out to people more when you're alone, because you need this contact, and when we are together, we are self-sufficient. In the sense, you know what I mean, like, we don't have a huge need to talk to people and to make new connections.

Even though I did not ask directly about dating, it was a topic that frequently surfaced in the course of the interviews. Tinder seemed to be one of the most often employed apps to find suitable dates. As noted in Chapter 1, I also followed a talk at Bansko Nomad Fest in 2022, where a dating app, Nomad Soulmates, was introduced to participating nomads.[58] The app profiles itself

58 The application's website advertises the app by asking: 'Why Nomad Soulmates? Digital Nomad Dating or just finding someone who has location freedom is not so easy, is it? You may meet interesting people but making soulful connections and finding someone who lives a similar lifestyle has been a challenge? Then you are in the right place!' (https://nomadsoulmates.com/, accessed 12 May 2025).

as specifically designed for digital nomads and remote workers, and its website mentions 'lifestyle' as one match criterion that it can offer to its members. The app operates on the basis of geographical localisation, like Tinder, but also includes a travel plan map to see who will be travelling soon to one's chosen destination. Thompson (2019b) has also studied dating and the love lives of digital nomads and observed that the nomads she interviewed had romantic ideals of meeting their perfect match, meaning somebody who shared the same mobile lifestyle, while they worried about falling in love with somebody who was location-dependent. Anna (Sweden) describes the challenges in finding meaningful relationships while being on the move, including romantic relationships:

> It's very hard to find meaningful relationships. I've been single for most of my life. But I did realise when I started this that I wasn't really [doing myself any favours]. Like it wasn't getting any easier. But then I was like, I was stationary for all this time and I was still single, so what difference does it really make? But I guess it does make a difference in that you're always transient and so if you meet people who are not, they will see you as not worth investing in because they know you'll be gone, so they know this is never going to go anywhere because you always move, and if you meet other people who are moving then they might not move to where you are moving. … We have rearranged travel plans so that I could be in the same place with potential people that I wanted to explore things with, but that is, I guess, the main drawback in terms of not just romantic, but friend relationships as well.

Finding a partner that would not consider the digital nomad a 'flight risk' also worried some interviewees. Their nomadic lifestyle was not an advantage on the dating market, unless they came across potential partners sharing the same lifestyle. One major issue concerning dating and romantic relationships was the question of what would happen if one or both nomads wished to establish a family. Would family life be possible while still living a digital nomadic lifestyle?

As noted earlier, I interviewed two nomadic families. They both had small babies (between 6 and 15 months), and they had quite recently started the digital nomadic lifestyle. Overall, it was considered easier to be on the move with younger children who had not yet reached schooling age. Noah, an online marketer from Israel, and his wife had already planned to start a digital nomad lifestyle before having their child:

> Our baby is only one year old, but we decided to do this before he came into this world. But we said that we would wait until he will be one year old, also because of some medical check-ups and also because at the beginning you want to see his temper, his energy, if you say okay, is he going to be so that we can go with him.

Although still marginal in volume, throughout the data collection that stretched from 2017 until 2023, I got to witness a gradually growing number of families who took part in activities and events organised by the digital nomad communities. Germann Molz (2021) interestingly, as noted, discusses mobile parents who choose a worldschooling approach for their children. Similarly to the interviewed families (and single digital nomads) in the present study, she points out that the ethos of freedom was one of the most important values driving families to seek a worldschooling lifestyle, which they viewed as a strategy 'to hack the good life' (Germann Molz 2021, 70).

During my fieldwork, the number of digital nomad families I encountered remained small, for sure, but the question of how to plan and accommodate family life within the mobile lifestyle was a frequent topic in interviews and at the events in which I participated. For instance, at Bansko Nomad Fest 2022, I attended a session on nomadic parenting led by Ken Weary, who has been on the road with his family since 2013.[59] The session was divided in four sections: safety, education, socialisation while travelling

59 The family founded a website to chronicle and inform others about their travels as a family: https://www.sunglassesrequired.com/about (accessed 15 May 2025).

and long-term planning. It was observed that it might be safer to travel with children in certain places. Concerning education, which seems to be a major issue when children reach schooling age, three different options were discussed: international schools, world/home-schooling and a blended online approach. The possibility of opting for home-schooling depends on national legislation and whether compulsory education is imposed on the citizens of a particular country (Sweden and Germany were mentioned as examples).

The digital nomads had very heterogeneous replies when asked for their thoughts on (planned) family life. For some, it was clear that the mobile lifestyle and having a family did not mix, contrary to those families that Germann Molz (2021) had interviewed in her study on worldschooling parents. For instance, for Eric, a developer in computer sciences from France, it was clear that he would settle down once the discussion of family became relevant, a sentiment that seemed to be the case for those nomads who wished to have a family later on:

> For me the relationship kind of ends it [digital nomad lifestyle]. If you want to have babies … the way I see it … I want to do it in a place, I choose a place. So for me it's going to be the way out. But I don't know when that's gonna happen.

On the other hand, a relatively large number of the interviewed digital nomads did not consider having a family with children and leading a mobile lifestyle as oppositional to another. What was common to all replies concerning family life was that it was spoken of in terms of a lifestyle choice. Emilia, a social media marketer from Germany, considered her lifestyle choice non-negotiable, to the extent that 'the same mindset' concerning starting a family was a criterion for her future potential partner. She did not wish to 'sacrifice' her lifestyle to have a family, nor to have somebody as a partner who would require her to do so. Michal (Slovakia) did not think it would be impossible to have a family life while on the move, but he did not see settled family life as something he

was attracted to. When asked whether he considered combining a mobile lifestyle with family life would be possible, he replied:

> It would definitely be harder, but I think it would be possible and I would probably be driving it that way. Like when I imagined that traditional life in Slovakia, getting married, having kids, working for an employer and trying to just make ends meet, that life doesn't really excite me that much. And I was never thinking that way like most of my peers who are already married and have their kids, like I'm the outlier in my social group. But it's not the life that attracts me.

Patrick (US) considered having a family a lifestyle choice that was a contrast with a mobile lifestyle:

> I guess you choose the lifestyle because it aligns with your goals in life. If you want to have a partner and children right now, you probably shouldn't choose this lifestyle or maybe it just aligns with the lifestyle and you are willing to just make it work through all that.

The family and nomadic lifestyles often appeared to be in opposition to one another. However, the long-term nomads among the interviewees were more likely to believe that family life could be integrated into their digital nomad lifestyle. Minna (Finland) had been in a relationship with her partner for years. Their thoughts on whether it would be possible to combine the mobile lifestyle with family life had changed over time, signalling a potential shift in attitudes towards the premises of family life, a shift that could well be generational:

> I feel like that only thing that can stop this lifestyle is having kids. Then we might spend more time in Finland. But [I] have also discussed with my partner that we've been thinking that once we have kids, we'll calm down and stop travelling. And I said that no, it does not need to be so. Many young people think that you need to travel before the kids or that they exclude one another, but in the end, they are not [mutually exclusive]. Just take the kid with

> you. I thought like that five years ago—that first you travel, then calm down and settle—and then I realised that they don't exclude one another.

For Angelina (Portugal), who worked in an IT recruitment agency, it was clear that family life would be possible while on the move. She had been together with her partner for ten years and they were frequently questioned as to whether they wanted to have children and what would then happen to their lifestyle. In fact, I asked them if they would keep up digital nomadism:

> Our answer is yes, we will, but maybe like in a slow pace, so our goal and our idea when we start having a family is to spend six months in one place and six months in another place. Thank God, there's already a solution for everything, so there's already online schools, there's … different schools, I mean different system; so there's Green School in Bali—they actually opened one in South Africa as well. There's also other parents in the same situation as us, location-independent parents. We already met a lot of couples, parents, families travelling all together. So it's also very inspiring when we connect with them and hear their stories, because you think like, if they did, we can also do it. Now it will be hard in the beginning. It's not easy, that's for sure. I mean, if it was easy, everyone would be doing that, of course. But I mean, if you really enjoy this lifestyle, and this is something that makes you more than happy, and this is what you actually want to do, then you will find a solution and you will find a way to make it work. So for sure we'll keep this lifestyle with the kid around as well, and I think it's possible. We just need to find the solution and maybe connect with the right people as well that had gone through the same thing.

Later I heard that they had had a baby and had indeed continued to pursue the nomadic lifestyle.

Schooling, as mentioned earlier, seemed to be a major concern among the interviewed nomads who were considering having children. Mancinelli (2018) has examined the experiences of

location-independent families who define themselves as digital nomads. She observes in her study that the families often home-schooled their children. Home-schooling, as she notes, can involve reproducing the school structure at home, with a set curriculum and routines, or can take place in form of worldschooling, referring to more self-directed and immersive learning. As also visible in Mancinelli's study, worldschooling as an option for children's education while on the move seemed to attract more interest than international schools among the interviewed nomads and in observed events (see Germann Molz 2021). Word-of-mouth experiences from nomadic parents, as mentioned by Angelina, were also considered encouraging and evidence of digital nomad family life being possible.

Digital Nomad Community: Imagined and Ephemeral

What is a digital nomad community? It evades a specific definition, perhaps even more so than other communities or collectivities (Brubaker 2005). Its alleged members are constantly moving. They form a rather heterogeneous community in terms of their professional, nationality and language backgrounds, yet at the same time they share a great number of attributes (age, Global North citizenship, level of education, 'whiteness'). The digital nomad community has also been quickly changing since around 2014, not least due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the changes it brought about in working lives. One way to approach the digital nomad community is to focus on its manifestations—that is, events and activities in which digital nomads participate and through which the digital nomad community is both sustained and formed. The 2010s saw an increase in events (conferences, retreats, summits) specifically targeting digital nomads. Schlagwein (2018) observes that digital nomadism became a more mainstream phenomenon around 2014–2015, with the emergence of 'dedicated online communities' around a series of events and co-working spaces, when co-working spaces were founded and various events were organised targeting digital nomads specifically (conferences). For instance,

the first digital nomad conference (DNX[60]) was organised in Berlin in 2014, the first Nomad Cruise in 2015,[61] and Nomad Summit in Chiang Mai (Thailand) the same year. Conferences and summits targeting specifically digital nomads have become even more popular since pandemic-related restrictions were lifted. Popular events include the Bansko Nomad Fest in Bulgaria, organised for the first time in 2020, Nomad Island Fest the same year in Madeira, as well as numerous smaller events or side-events that include workshops targeting digital nomads.[62] Some of these events attract hundreds or even thousands of participants. As an example, Figure 5 features a screenshot from a nomads' website that lists digital nomad events scheduled between April and June 2025.

During the data collection phase in 2022, I took part in the Thriving Nomads Conference in March in Gran Canaria, as well as Bansko Nomad Fest in Bulgaria in June. The former had some 50 participants on site (more online), 13 speakers, eight workshops and two full days. Nomad Fest, meanwhile, attracted more than 500 participants, lasted for a full week and included a dozen workshops and organised events per day. These exemplify the events that digital nomads seek out in their search for a community (Thompson 2019a).

Indeed, events organised for digital nomads are often entry points to the digital nomad community. When arriving in a new destination, nomads seek out the weekly meetings that take place and usually receive information via WhatsApp or Slack groups. An important aspect of forming digital nomadic communities is

60 The digital nomad festival is advertised as 'The mega event for entrepreneurs, digital nomads & a holistic lifestyle' (https://www.dnxfestival.com/, accessed 12 May 2025).

61 Nomad Cruise is marketed as 'The only traveling conference for digital nomads, entrepreneurs, and global freedom lovers' (https://www.nomadcruise.com/, accessed 12 May 2025).

62 These include, for instance, the Latitude59 Conference in Tallinn and the annual Running Remote Conference (hosted from Lisbon).

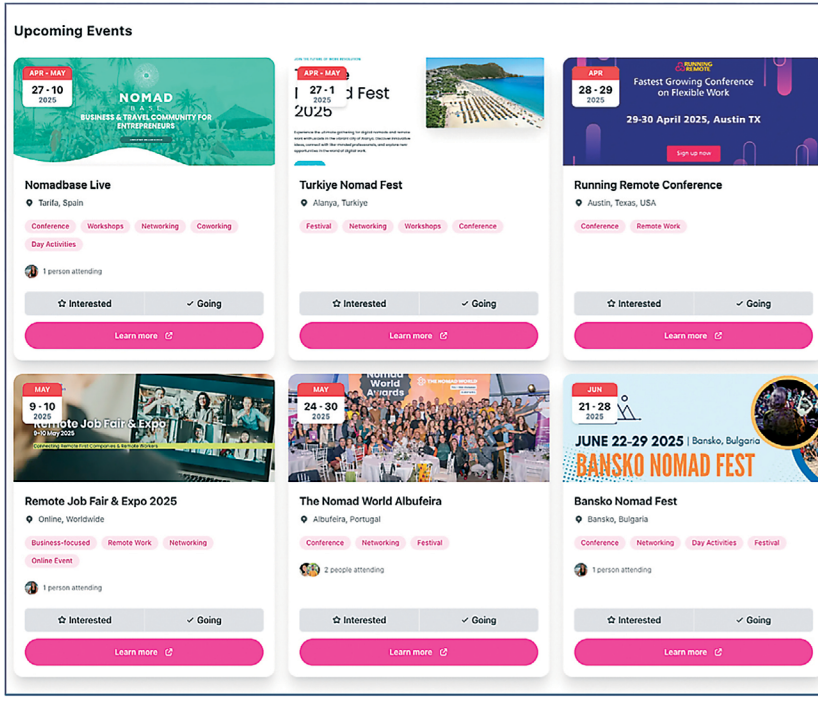

Figure 5: List of digital nomad events between April 2025 and June 2025. (Freaking Nomads, 'Events and Conferences for Digital Nomads', https://community.freakingnomads.com/events, accessed 12 May 2025.)

the use of virtually created socialities, in addition to socialities taking place in person in specific geographies.

As discussed earlier, most interviewed nomads referred to feelings of loneliness and lack of meaningful social interactions while being on the move. The social aspect is a key motivation to seek out a digital nomad community in the chosen destination. This often takes place through co-working spaces, depending on the destination. It is argued that digital nomads resolve the conflict between striving for spatial freedom and the need to foster social connections by 'purchasing community through co-working and co-living memberships, effectively turning community into

Figure 6: The welcome sign outside the city of Bansko, Bulgaria. (2022, picture taken by the author.)

something that can be bought … in other words, a commodity'.[63] We will return to discuss the commodification of digital nomadism in Chapter 5. Suffice to say here that accessing the community often necessitated an economic transaction—digital nomad communities were 'commodified communities' that offered curated experiences to members (see Thompson 2019a). For instance, Megan (US) shared her experience in Vietnam:

> I went to Vietnam, and ended up in Hoi An. There's a really great co-working space there. I traditionally steered clear of co-working spaces. I've used various ones around the world but up until Hoi An, all of them had kind of been very office-oriented, like you know, headphones on, staring at your computer, people aren't

63 Shaun Busuttil, 'The Costs of Digital Nomadism: Social Isolation, Loneliness and the Commodification of Community', (1 December 2022), https://www.shaunbusuttil.com/academic-writing/the-costs-of-digital-nomadism-social-connection-loneliness-amp-the-commodification-of-community (accessed 12 May 2025).

> really interacting, there's maybe a happy hour once a week, but there are not like major social events. And a lot of them were geared more toward like start-ups in the local communities, they feel more business-orientated than social-orientated and Hoi An was the first place I went to, where it was like a real community of people, doing social things, getting together for dinner, hanging out on the weekends, going for trips and stuff like that, and also sharing professional ideas like networking and skill-sharing and that sort of stuff. In a way that didn't feel real cheesy and corporate, so I really liked that. The only major co-working thing I've done is in Koh Lanta, Hoi An and the co-working in Bansko. And all three of those have the same vibe, like an intense social community and a lot of opportunities to meet other people.

The co-working spaces were a way to tap into the community, specifically in smaller destinations. This was also a marketing angle that the co-working spaces used and that was considered to provide a sustainable basis for long-term community-building. I also interviewed stakeholders including co-working space owners and individuals offering services to digital nomads. 'Community-building' was a key term referenced in smaller co-working spaces compared to the bigger chains (WeWork, Selina, etc.). In fact, I observed that the individuals who were offering such services to digital nomads were often more permanently settled expatriates or locals who had stayed extensively abroad. Nick, who had a co-working space in a South East Asian country and held UK citizenship, discusses how co-working spaces have boomed during recent years:

> You know, if you don't focus on the community, you don't really have anything that's sustainable. And a good example of this is now a lot of restaurants here, and hotels, are getting fast Internet and how they look to us to go into co-working space or something, and so naturally feel a bit threatened by it. But I think if you stick to your guns and focus on the community, I think it's more sustainable. Time will tell how we'll do, but ideologically it's about community and sustaining the community.

I conducted observation in the co-working space that Nick owned and witnessed how community activities were meticulously built each day: communal lunches, dinners, karaoke nights, pub quizzes, beach-cleaning operations, board game nights and so forth. The purpose of such activities is often to fight feelings of loneliness, balance work and leisure, and to seek a community experience otherwise missing in location-independent work and freelancing (see Orel 2019).

Garrett and colleagues (2017) observe about how members of co-working spaces co-construct a sense of community through their everyday interactions in that space. I observed the same in the co-working space Nick owned. When arriving in the morning, members casually chatted in the coffee room. Everybody took care to leave the space clean after having made drinks. Common lunches were agreed and observed, before returning to work. Most nomads I interviewed in this space planned and decided whether they would take part in the after-work activities the same day. This co-working space, also due to its size and location, differed from other co-working spaces where I conducted observation and worked myself. Co-working spaces are quite heterogeneous in their focus on after-work activities and crowds they attract, for instance, and ought not to be lumped together. The level of social interaction and community vibe also shift, depending on whether it is the high or low season in the chosen destination. Johan (Sweden) talked of different types of co-working spaces and choosing the one that suited him:

> I think what people [look for] in co-working spaces is usually the community, the right mixture of people. It's interesting since there have been other co-working spaces like in Bali and whatever. And if it's not your type of people, you are not going to enjoy yourself. So, I feel it's very dynamic, which kind of crowd the space is attracting. Because they can be very lifestyle-ish, like the co-working in Bali and in Ubud, it's super hipster, kind of upscale. If you feel like you have nothing in common with those people, you're not gonna enjoy your time at that co-working space.

What exactly was the meaning of the digital nomad community for the interviewed digital nomads? It represented a form of new sociality on the move, on top of the pre-existing socialities back home. Community was a community of lifestyle, also observed by Thompson (2019a, 33) in her study on digital nomads: 'lifestyle becomes a strong identifying aspect of self-perception, especially once they come together collectively as a larger group to reinforce their legitimacy, identity and community'. The sense of community based on sharing the same lifestyle was contrasted with a 'steady' lifestyle. Claudine (France) felt more at home in the digital nomad community than with her social circles 'back home'. Meanwhile, Angelina (Portugal) always chose to tap into the community in the destinations she was travelling to with her partner, thus travelling after a community, not destination per se:

> I was feeling sometimes a little bit lonely in Paris, because not being in the same wave as everybody else. But the community, the digital nomad community, brought me a community that I was missing in Paris. So this is super cool because you feel that you are part of something bigger and it feels amazing.
>
> Claudine, marketing freelancer, France

> So one of the main things that we do before going to a new place is to check actually if there's already a digital nomad community there, because if there is, probably we will go to that place because we really want to be in a place that already has a community there, and we can connect with other digital nomads and also join the activities. We also want a place that you know offers this, like activities, events as well and some connection with the locals, but mostly, we choose only places that we know there's a digital nomad community over there.
>
> Angelina, employee in an IT recruitment agency, Portugal

I also heard stories of travelling in communities, nomads travelling with other nomads they met on the road. However, it seemed more common to schedule to be physically present in certain destinations rather than to actually travel together (with

nomad cruises and such an exception to this). Having a community allowed nomads to make the whole lifestyle and travelling experience more memorable. Stefan, an architect from Romania, considered the digital nomad community 'incredibly important' for himself:

> When leaving your day-to-day life and you're used to having the community, you're kind of taking it for granted. You'll soon realise how important it is. But the nice thing about this is the fact that the nomads' communities are very open because they all experience more or less the same feelings and they know how it is, and they are friendly, very open and wanting to help the others. It's incredible—it makes your stay much more enjoyable. And you can, at the end of the day, make your whole experience not only work-related, but overall experience-wise, relationship-wise, socially and everything else memorable.

Having a digital nomad community to tap into was not only for social purposes but also had an experiential dimension, part of the lived experience of the digital nomadic lifestyle. The community, however, was different from the close communities back home, for instance in case of emergencies. The relationships were more fleeting, sporadic and ephemeral in nature. A few older nomads also mentioned feeling like outsiders in the digital nomad community that mostly consisted of younger nomads. For instance, Karl (Germany) felt he had needed to fight the age prejudice. Karl, in his 50s, was older than most other nomads I interviewed, and he referenced feeling left out occasionally in digital nomad social circles:

> I'm a bit older than most people. Sometimes I can feel a little bit excluded. But then I prove myself by being a bit wilder and then they integrate me. But in the end, it stays friendly, but superficial for the most part.

Not all interviewed nomads felt positively about the digital nomad community, although most found it important to foster social connections on the move. It was also a source of tiredness and social anxiety, and at times the community activities generated

feelings of FOMO (fear of missing out). Leo (Germany), who was travelling with his partner, wished to limit the interactions he had with the digital nomad community and instead to socialise with locals, to avoid 'living in a digital nomad bubble':

> First and foremost, I enjoy travelling for the local things, local culture, traditions, and I prefer to surround myself with locals. So here on Madeira, I try to limit my exposure to the nomad community to once a week, because I think there are many people who are out and about and with this nomad community all day every day. I'm a very social person, and I enjoy to come back to places, but I'd rather meet locals.

Where does this leave us with the notion of digital nomad community? How do we approach a community in the context of digital nomadism? How do we analytically approach social connections in multilocal nomadic lifescapes without falling into the sedentary bias, yet still account for the intricate ways digital nomads are embedded in different communities and networks, both old and new?

Amit and Rapport (2002, 4–5) reference a sense of collective fellowship that individuals, for instance through 'circumstances variously of work, leisure', can foster in order to establish a 'sense of contextual fellowship'; the authors observe that 'these forms of consociation are often partial, ephemeral, specific to and dependent on particular contexts and activities' and 'not marked with strong symbolic markers of categorical identity'.[64] This characterisation, instead of more classical understandings of 'community', fits the digital nomad community that can also be argued to constitute an 'imagined community', referencing the classical theorisation by Benedict Anderson (1991). Digital nomad communities can be understood as work-related mobile communities that come about as a result of specific processes that consist of

64 Although an important aspect to acknowledge, I have chosen not to include a discussion on identity, home and subjectivity in this book. Drawing from the same material, I discuss this in forthcoming publications.

idioms, narratives, practices, stances and identity claims (following Brubaker 2005). The imagined community of digital nomads is ephemeral in terms of its practices and activities that allow its members to opt in and opt out, and that can be specific to certain contexts. The lifestyle itself appears to be the common thread uniting the digital nomad community, eliminating the need to explain or justify one's choices among fellow nomads. However, when mobility defines the community, its members are constantly changing. Yet, it remains a community that digital nomads actively seek out, join and feel a sense of belonging to.

*

This chapter has focused specifically on how digital nomads narrate the meanings they attach to work, social relationships, family and community life. It also asked how their mobile lifestyle shaped these aspects and what norms and values they attached to 'good' professional and social life. Mobilities transform digital nomads' socialities in many respects. Whereas ties to family can become closer through more frequent, technologically mediated contact, there are simultaneously feelings of 'disconnect' with social circles 'back home'. The choice of mobility not only means adopting a life on the move but is also very specifically narrated as being a *lifestyle* choice, including the choice of not having children, not purchasing property and other decisions that are considered to be components of a steady and sedentary lifestyle. Romantic and intimate relationships as well as potential family life were aspects that would need to be adapted to the lifestyle choice of mobility. As shown in previous research, the fostering of meaningful and long-lasting social relationships becomes more challenging when leading a nomadic lifestyle, but the digital nomad community also provides a sense of belonging, the significance of which to digital nomads' socialities should not be underestimated.

CHAPTER 5

Politics of Digital Nomadism

> My way of travelling is so fast that I don't need to think about digital nomad visas. I just do the border hops, especially in Asia. That's ingrained in the local legislation that you can do those, so I don't feel like [I'm] doing anything illegal. But it's unfortunate that if you are a full-time employee and a 100 per cent digital nomad you are always breaking some laws—there is no way in today's world that this could be 100 per cent legal. Like even if I'm a tax resident in Finland, I should be there for half of the year but I really never am. But the Finnish state will never complain because I pay them taxes.
>
> Maija, researcher, Finland

Citizenship regimes, institutions and other structural and transnational dynamics shape digital nomads' experiences of leading a digital nomadic lifestyle. Digital nomads are often depicted as rather privileged movers, who exercise a great deal of agency in choosing their geographical location, style of living and professional setting. Indeed, the accounts provided by the digital nomads interviewed for this study evidence aspects of privilege and transnational agency, in how they 'surf around' different state institutions to harness the maximum benefits. At the same time, while valuing flexibility in terms of their working lives, digital nomads can find themselves battling increased global precarity, raising the question of at what cost choosing a mobile lifestyle comes.

In this chapter, I discuss topics such as social class, privilege and capital, geoarbitrage, strategic mobilities and precarious positionalities, all the while paying attention to the structures within which digital nomads are embedded. The focus in this chapter is on the broader transnational dynamics shaping digital nomadism and, in turn, digital nomadism's impact at the local level, an issue that has received relatively less academic attention so far. The local impact of the emergence of a transnational leisure class, to which digital nomads also belong, is explored, along with topics such as transnational gentrification, neoliberal capitalism and the growing anti-expatriate and tourism protest movements.

Making the Most of It

This sub-section focuses on digital nomads' transnational agency in capitalising on the diverse privileges they have access to. The aspect of privilege has been discussed in previous literature on digital nomads (see e.g. Mancinelli 2020; Thompson 2021; Atanasova et al. 2022) and more broadly in literature on lifestyle migration (Benson 2013, 2014; Hayes 2018). For instance, Benson (2014, 47) understands privilege as 'structural and systemic, negotiated through the practice of lifestyle migration', something that can change with a change of social setting (see also Benson 2013). Most studies have noted that digital nomads are privileged in terms of their mobility rights, often being holders of passports from Global North countries, and through geographical relocation, economically privileged also in terms of the purchasing power they can have in lower-income countries to which they travel.

Besides spatial, legal and economic capital, this section also discusses other types of capitals that have received less attention in previous literature, namely temporal and social. Indeed, digital nomads exercise agency in accumulating diverse capitals on the move. However, they can also find themselves in rather precarious positions. What has received less attention is how such privileges and precarities operate simultaneously in the context of

continuous mobilities. What does capital accumulation mean in the context of lifestyle mobilities that, unlike lifestyle migration, are continuous and take place in numerous social settings?

Surfing the State and the System

The relationship between digital nomadism and the nation-state system has been discussed in previous literature with scholars claiming it to be ambivalent and emancipatory (Wang et al. 2024), or simultaneously frictional and accommodative (Cook 2022; Mancinelli and Germann Molz 2024). Instead of seeing digital nomads as subjects who are free from the constraints of the nation-state, Cook (2022, 307) aptly notes that, 'paradoxically, to live an untethered, borderless life, digital nomads must negotiate tax systems, residency rules, and understand how states conceptualise and enforce worker protections, often managing these negotiations across multiple states'. The difficulty in aligning a mobile lifestyle with tax jurisdiction, largely based on national laws, is one example of this. For instance, Johan, an IT consultant from Sweden whom I met in Thailand, concluded that the Swedish state was okay with him being elsewhere, 'as long as you pay taxes. If you don't pay taxes, then they [the state] are gonna start caring.' The other side of the coin is that as well as staying in co-living and other (temporary) accommodation types while travelling, digital nomads also often do not have a permanent residence nor own a home in their countries of citizenship: they are thus exempt from residential tax in either state.

Digital nomads who stay in a particular country on a tourist visa (where such visas are required) cannot declare to be working there, for instance in entry documents—yet they work for clients or employers around the world nonetheless. They often find themselves in a bureaucratic 'grey zone', a term mentioned by several interviewees who described their strategies to navigate the state-based fiscal policies that they considered contradictory to their mobile lifestyle. Anthony, a designer for a start-up company

from New Zealand, contested the existing taxation system that is based on the nation-state:

> The biggest problem with the current system is that you are taxed based on your tax years. There's no concept of maybe being in one country six months and paying six months of tax and being in another country the other six months and paying six months there. You pay all your taxes in one country. That makes no logical sense anymore. Anyway, that has to change, but it won't probably change for decades. But once that changes … all countries will be completely open to it because they are getting the normal income as they would from any other citizen; there would be no reason to have any visa restrictions anymore.

Several interviewed nomads raised the fact that there is no uniform international tax law concerning digital nomads, and that taxation laws are still very much based on having 'tax residency' in one place, which is determined by the 183-day rule, as noted in Chapter 3.[65] One option to get around this was to avoid staying more than six months in any one country (in the EU), meaning that a viable strategy was, in fact, to be mobile. The interviewed nomads who were US nationals formed an exception in this regard, as the US has a citizenship-based tax system requiring all citizens, even digital nomads, to file a US federal tax return, no matter where they work or live.

Some digital nomads benefitted economically from the fact that they spend most of the year outside their country of citizenship. This was the case for Megan, a journalist from the US:

> It has factored into some of my decision-making about where to go. Just recently, last year I learned about this thing called the FEIE in the US. Because Americans have to pay tax, no matter where you are, you're going to pay income tax, except if you do this 'Foreign Earned Income Exclusion' … And so then if you're

65 This is a criterion in many countries to determine tax residency for citizens, referencing the number of days per year one needs to be physically present in the national territory.

> in the US for fewer than 30 or 35 days a year, you can file to get your federal income tax return. And for me, that's kind of a lot of money—it's up to a certain amount, like up to US$100,000 or something, of income. You can recoup that money at the end of the year because it's coming out of the top of my pay cheque. And so that actually made a big difference, because last year, just by chance, I was out of the US for 11 straight months. And that was enough money for me to sort the 'American problems'. I have a lot of student loan debt from undergrad and graduate school, and so getting all of that income tax back, I could pay off all of that, which has been very freeing ever since, because I don't have to worry about paying the student loan bills, and that being a part of my budget. And so that was a big deal and so I hope to keep doing that. *Obviously, it's worth the investment for me to stay out of the US*. (Italics added)

Megan's account shows the strategic dimension of not only planning specific mobility practices but combining them with specific durations of stay (or absence) in chosen destinations. It also speaks of the 'grey zone' in which digital nomads find themselves vis-à-vis state institutions that are designed for sedentary populations.

Digital nomad visa schemes have been presented as a way to tackle this 'grey zone' of ambivalent legal status, providing nomads a travel authorisation to work remotely. They are intended to help a digital nomad navigate between different jurisdictions, depending on status as an employee, a freelancer or an independent contractor. For instance, users of Estonia's e-Residency scheme have their tax residency remain where they were tax residents prior to becoming e-Residents, yet their companies are registered in Estonia for tax purposes. Digital nomad visas, which are usually granted for one year, aim to counter the rule of 183 days (or six months) after which a foreign citizen needs to pay income tax to the country where they live and work. However, as discussed in Chapter 1, such visa schemes are rarely used by nomads themselves, as they seem to be designed with a migration policy

rationale and to be more useful for long-term remote workers and highly skilled migrants (Bruns and Lee 2023; Koskela and Beckers 2024). Instead, digital nomads often resort to 'border runs' or 'border-hopping', as described by Karl, a programmer from Germany:

> You get all kinds of funny problems, so what I do now is just the tourist visa thing. I'm a happy tourist without a visa and then I get this visa exemption at the entrance at the airport for one month and I probably get another month and then I change the country. I don't like to do border runs so I do border runs with the purpose. I change the country and then work there, instead of just going to Kuala Lumpur and coming back [to Thailand]. Some people do that and that's like two days lost.

Border-hopping is one way to evade state-imposed visa restrictions on duration of stay. Indeed, Wang and colleagues (2019, 7) write that digital nomads are 'prospectors, who move between jurisdictions seeking to optimise their conditions', whereas Mancinelli and Germann Molz (2024), as noted, aptly call digital nomads 'border artists', showing how nomads creatively leverage state-imposed constraints in order to lead their chosen lifestyle. The authors further suggest that states themselves are also border artists and that 'mobility regimes emerge as the mutual interface between digital nomads' individual strategies to stay on the move and states' institutional strategies to codify and commodify their legal status' (Mancinelli and Germann Molz 2024, 189). Such forms of bureaucratic acrobatics were visible in the interviewed nomads' accounts, and they had resulted in the use of mobility strategies to circumvent the national legal regulations, particularly concerning the legality of where to work, for how long and on what terms.

Almost all interviewees worked remotely on tourist visas wherever they needed one, and did not make too much noise about it. Being a citizen of a Global North country, which allowed relatively effortless access to most nations around the world, highlighted the ease of planning mobility in advance with less exposure to

risk. In this sense, we can say that the nomads exercised a form of transnational agency that was based on their legal capital, citizenship in a Global North country (see Moret 2018). In the case of non-EU nationals, capitalising on citizenship was more challenging, specifically in the EU. Ahmed (Egypt), owner of an IT consulting firm, describes how the fact of holding an Egyptian passport meant more planning and less risk-taking than it would have meant for a digital nomad from the Global North:

> Obviously, an Egyptian passport doesn't have access to a lot of countries. I am still quite lucky because I have a permanent residence in Europe, generally, in Germany as well as in Europe. So that gives me flexibility of anywhere in Europe to do that. I also got myself a long-term visa in the US, so you can go to a few other countries, but definitely it is a factor. For example, in Thailand, I need a visa; that was part of the factors that I decided maybe not go now, because of all the restrictions, and I don't want to give them my passport for the visa and they perhaps take it and then I don't travel anywhere, and I need to travel within Europe. So that does bring its own set of challenges.

Ahmed further described how he observed different companies enacting remote work policies after the COVID-19 pandemic, with most of them limiting the opportunity for remote work to the EU, conveniently for EU nationals. He noted that this added yet another layer of inequality in terms of mobility rights, compounding the disadvantage of holding a less privileged passport:

> And I think that still brings a bit of an inequality, because when they say two weeks from any other country, this is a benefit just for the EU citizens. Never for the non-EU citizens. So, I feel that it's less that they spend time to check what's important for people and rather just have a policy that kind of works for a few people and creates more inequalities.

Citizenship status endows other privileges, besides mobility rights. For instance, as noted in earlier chapters, nationals of EEA countries often employ the EHIC to receive medical treatment

in another member country, if necessary, thus adding another benefit of staying within the EU. This was the case for Cornelia, a freelance marketer from the Netherlands:

> Well, I don't need a visa to be here in Spain. I just pay taxes in the Netherlands. So, my company is in the Netherlands because I was supposed to be here only for one month. So to be honest, I didn't really dive into audit regulations and everything. So my health care is available in the whole Europe. So I think that's covered. The weird thing is the government of the Netherlands, they don't know that I'm here. But it does not influence me being a legal citizen there. Because I still pay taxes and everything. I just don't have an apartment anymore there, but I'm still in the registers like me living there.

Another trend that I witnessed during data collection, and that relates to the relationship digital nomads have with the state, was the increasing demand from digital nomad families to provide schooling for their children in a way that would be compatible with their mobile lifestyles, as I learned for instance during Ken Weary's session on nomadic parenting at Bansko Nomad Fest in 2022. Currently, digital nomadic families with children of schooling age, seem to choose international schools, world/home-schooling options and a blended online approach (see also Germann Molz 2021). As states are often the providers of education (and in welfare societies, of childcare), the schooling needs of perpetually mobile children will most likely be met by other means—that is, through private services—in the future. This raises an interesting question on where digital nomad families' mobile lifestyle fits in with states' (often compulsory) education laws that require children of a certain age to attend school.

Digital nomads are also likely to navigate around different state institutions and regulatory systems in the future, with some nomads having more privilege and more transnational agency to do so than others. Digital nomads continue to surf the state institutions and the system, capitalising on their citizenship. A focus on the regimes of mobility, instead of on nation-states, allows us

to assess how digital nomads navigate between social fields of differential power. As Glick Schiller and Salazar (2013, 189) argue, employing the regimes of mobility approach 'calls attention to the role of both individual states and of changing international regulatory and surveillance administrations that affect individual mobility'. Simultaneously, their approach acknowledges that mobility regimes are not static, but rather constantly fluctuating, as we have seen, for example, with Brexit or with the digital nomad visa schemes.[66] Another issue that deserves more scholarly attention is how private companies' remote work policies intersect with state policies and whether they (perhaps unintentionally) produce more citizenship-related inequalities concerning mobility. The wide-ranging ramifications of privilege endowed by citizenship is more lengthily discussed in the following sub-section from the perspective of capital.

Capitalising on Mobility

Movement can be an asset. Indeed, mobility has been viewed as a resource that can be capitalised under certain circumstances. Kauffmann and colleagues (2004) explore the linkages between spatial and social mobility and suggest that for mobility to become a form of capital, social actors need to have *access* to different types of mobility; they need to have the specific *skills and competence* that being mobile requires; and they need to be able to *appropriate* these two to convert mobility into a form of capital, into a social advantage.[67] The authors approach these linkages between spatial and social mobility through the concept of *motility*, meaning 'the capacity of entities (e.g. goods, information or persons) to be mobile in social and geographic space, or as the

66 Koskela and Beckers (2024) predict a diversification of digital nomad visa schemes in the future.

67 Savage and colleagues (2005) also suggest that capital is not only relevant in terms of distinct relations of exploitation, but also in how it is accumulated and converted to other resources.

way in which entities access and appropriate the capacity for socio-spatial mobility according to their circumstances' (Kauffmann et al. 2004, 750).

In terms of diverse privileges that digital nomads can have, one of the most powerful (for some) is the capacity to cross international borders relatively easily. As previously discussed, digital nomads with a privileged citizenship in a Global North country, have *access* to great mobility rights, hence they have legal capital in their possession. This legal capital translates into spatial capital, as it allows nomads to have the privilege of flexibility and spatial independence to determine in which geographical location to work and to spend leisure time. Thus, digital nomads capitalise on their legal capital in diverse ways, for instance to escape the Northern European winters and relocate to a warmer climate for the winter months. This is the case for Tibor, a marketing freelancer from Hungary:

> In Hungary the best part of the year is around spring and the beginning of summer, because the summers became very hot nowadays in July and August. I don't like the very hot summer. And the autumn and winter are awful—I don't like that. So, I just found out that I can travel to a warmer place in the winter. After when I got nomads friends, one of my friends also inspired me by sharing that he went to Thailand for three months in the winter and he rented a big house with a swimming pool for the same price that I paid for my flat in Budapest, which is inside the city with the smoke and noise and everything.

Tibor references climate change, observing that summers in his home country have become so hot that it is no longer as enjoyable to stay there as it used to be. This might point towards a new trend in digital nomadic mobilities, where individuals from Southern and Eastern European countries avoid spending the summer in their home countries and instead relocate to destinations with more tolerable temperatures. As Matos and Ardévol (2021) observe, digital nomadism is not only focused on constant travel, but on the *potentiality* to move. This potentiality is an asset

that can then be capitalised according to one's aspirations as well as in anticipation of where it might be advantageous to move in future, whether it is for economic, climate or lifestyle reasons—or a combination of all factors.

Having legal capital enables a greater degree of location independence, including the capacity to visit one's country of citizenship occasionally but also to settle back there in cases where the digital nomadic experience has failed meet expectations. Furthermore, the interviewed nomads with less privileged citizenship had accumulated more legal capital whenever possible: some had acquired residence permits and long-terms visas in Global North countries, opening new possibilities for cross-border travel and stays. Andrew, a computer programmer, originally had South African citizenship:

> I have been UK citizen about five or six years. And prior to that, it was an expensive exercise. A South African passport is like having a North Korean passport—nobody has a very good visa reciprocity with South Africa. So that was an expensive and painful thing to do. It cost €100 every time to come into the Schengen area and you had to have a proof of hotel, so it became a problem. But with the UK passport for a while, it was no problem, and then with Brexit it became a problem again.

Thus, legal capital enables the accumulation of spatial capital, meaning having access to a diversity of places and networks that social actors have appropriated and from which they draw advantage, whenever needed (Moret 2018). Digital nomads 'master' different places through staying there, often repeatedly and at times for months in a row. This allows them to accumulate spatial capital that they can strategically draw from in the future. The existence of a digital nomad infrastructure can also be considered a resource that digital nomads can draw from, one that facilitates gaining access to several digital nomad hubs, as discussed in the latter part of this chapter.

Capitalising on mobility privilege also enables the accumulation of *economic* capital. Economic capital is needed to kick off

a digital nomad lifestyle. However, having privileged mobility rights through citizenship is an asset that can be converted into economic capital through strategic mobility practices. The practice of geoarbitrage—which, as noted in earlier chapters, means gaining Global North salaries and spending day-to-day expenses in a low-cost country—is one such example. The term was popularised by Tim Ferriss in his book *The 4-Hour Workweek: Escape 9–5, Live Anywhere, and Join the New Rich* (2007). Ferriss presents the idea of escaping the nine-to-five style of working and becoming financially independent, an idea that is viewed with much allure among digital nomads. The digital nomad lifestyle can be expensive, due to travel and accommodation costs. However, using mobility practices strategically and directing their travel to specific destinations allows digital nomads to leverage the global inequality in income levels and cost of living. In this manner, nomads can lead a lifestyle that is possibly out of reach to them in their home countries and cities that have become more expensive to live in.

Geoarbitrage practices have been explored in the context of lifestyle migration (Hayes 2014, 2018) as well as digital nomadism (Mancinelli 2020; Woldoff and Litchfield 2021; Hannonen 2024). Whereas lifestyle migrants, such as retirement migrants, can potentially draw from previous assets and properties to realise their lifestyle choice to relocate, digital nomads are dependent on a steady stream of income to sustain their mobile lifestyle. Therefore, the continuity of the mobile lifestyle in the case of digital nomads is conditional upon their employment, level and security of income streams, and how they draw financial benefits from added purchasing power. The accumulation of economic capital takes place on the move for digital nomads, a significant difference in comparison to lifestyle migrants (Benson and O'Reilly 2009). The relationship between digital nomads' mobility practices and economic capital accumulation is arguably more volatile than it is for lifestyle migrants. Digital nomads' mobility practices are dependent on their livelihoods. However, in a sense, their livelihoods are also dependent on their mobility, and specifically

on their capacity to sustain continuous mobilities, which enables them to accumulate other types of capitals. Being dependent on a steady income stream to sustain mobility practices also means more risk and precarity than in the case of lifestyle migrants, who are more likely to relocate less and have steadier income streams.

Digital nomads capitalise on *time*, which can mean temporal independence to work whenever one wishes. Atanasova and colleagues (2022) introduce the concept of 'temporal privilege' in their study on digital nomads. By this term, the authors refer to how gaining an abundance of free time and having sovereignty over time has become a status symbol. They suggest that temporal status is a new form of distinction for digital nomads who lead a liquid lifestyle. Indeed, the nomads interviewed for the present study often referenced the freedom to decide how to use their time, how to divide the working day and how to have more time for leisure activities in the chosen location. Leo, a business owner from Germany, who described his typical day at work in Chapter 4, also spoke of how he was able to leverage time, if needed:

> I usually have a high flexibility in that so if I like the place and if I want to explore, go hiking or do some touristic stuff for activities or whatever, I can usually easily carve a day or two out from the week, or even take an entire week off.

Time as a resource is capitalised towards self-improvement, acquiring new experiences in the chosen destination, learning new professional skills and fostering (professional) networks and social connections. There was also a strong ethos of self-improvement in the interviewed digital nomads' accounts, reflecting observations by Giddens (1991) on how the self has become a reflexive project in the late modern societies.

Digital nomads can, to a varying degree, accumulate temporal capital as a result of their mobility and, in some cases, convert it into social capital. I encountered numerous stories of how digital nomads had found work through newly established connections with other nomads, tips they had received from them on available jobs and so forth. This form of social capital that the

nomads accumulated while on the move was in the form of an international skill set, including mastering foreign languages, gaining cross-cultural knowledge and communication skills. Knowledge is also accumulated on the move. Digital nomads acquire knowledge on where it may be advantageous to go and when, how to circumvent state-imposed constraints (e.g. visa restrictions) and how to draw the maximum benefits of their chosen lifestyle. Elliott and Urry (2010, 10–11), as noted in Chapter 2, assert that network capital is a form of power in the context of mobility, one that highly mobile individuals—with extensive contacts and networks where information is circulated, transmitted and shared—can have. Eric, a developer in computer sciences from France, describes the skills he has acquired, including becoming fluent in English, a language he spoke very little of before adopting the digital nomad lifestyle:

> That's something I found with the people I met until now. You meet new people, you travel, you discover new way of thinking, you speak English—that is not something I am used to do with my work.

Overall, capital theory and social class have not been thoroughly discussed in the context of digital nomadism. Benson and Osbaldiston (2016, 413) consider social class essential in shaping the experiences of lifestyle migrants and posit that class is not merely a structure that makes lifestyle migration possible, but one that is reproduced and reformulated in migrants' lives. The authors lean on the Bourdieusian understanding of social class as assets, resources and capitals and observe that it can change with changes of social setting. Digital nomads manage to (re)produce their middle-class position through mobility practices and portable skills, at times even improving it in a new social setting. Their mobility operates as a resource that they accumulate through experience, skills and acquired knowledge. Mobility capital is converted into different types of capitals: legal, spatial, economic, temporal and social. It is noteworthy that such capitals can potentially help digital nomads to weather future crises concerning

housing, precarity, climate change or even political instability and global pandemics.

Privileged, Yet Precarious

Whereas in the previous sub-section I discussed mobility as a form of capital, showing how it can be converted to other forms of capital, in this section I steer the focus to discuss how it can become a factor of social differentiation. Moret (2020), who has studied mobility capital and transnationalisation of resources among Somali migrants in Europe, argues that mobility is constituted of past accumulated experiences of mobility and the potential to be able to move again. She further discusses mobility as an element of social differentiation, 'an unequally distributed resource that can, under certain conditions, be mobilised and transformed into social and economic advantages' (Moret 2018, 3). Furthermore, Mancinelli (2020, 423) observes in her study on digital nomads that whereas individual freedom of choice can be attractive, in exchange it can become a burden: 'Social differentiation in late modernity can be liberating, but it demands in exchange a new type of social commitment to its risks and burdens.' The impact of precarity and what sort of trade-off the digital nomadic lifestyle requires remain open questions.

However, lifestyle movers, including digital nomads, can draw from and capitalise upon diverse privileges in various social settings. Citizenship status is one such privilege because, alongside mobility rights, as noted, it provides access to diverse social and welfare provisions that allow taking the 'risk' of transitioning to a digital nomad lifestyle and returning back to more sedentary lifestyle at will. Regardless, previous research shows how the digital nomad lifestyle also includes a dimension of precarity, related to the workings of the 'gig economy' (Thompson 2018; Mancinelli 2020; Hong 2021). A large majority of the interviewed nomads worked either as freelancers or independent contractors, with a minority employed directly by a company or owners of their own company. As well as struggling to maintain a steady income

stream, the nomads working as freelancers also had to face the risk of not having social protections similar to those who were company-employed. Thompson (2018, 9) shows in her study how nomads enter the neoliberal labour market leaving behind several benefits they have previously enjoyed, including health care, pensions and sick pay.

Navigating such risks relates to the 'grey zone' in which many digital nomads find themselves. In other words, the risks are generated by continuous mobilities, and at times digital nomads resort to private services as a way to mitigate such long-term risks that their mobile lifestyle entails. For instance, Anna, a writer and translator from Sweden, was concerned about the security she would have later in life:

> [As I] get old, so I want to have some sort of security. But a lot of people don't think about it. I guess that is one part of planning. I do plan to get old. So I try to make a plan for that. And I do save money to put in some kind of pension scheme—that was also difficult to figure out because as freelancers in Sweden, we are just cut loose from this whole pension thing, so you have to figure it out yourself, but there's not really any schemes for that, so you have to set up some kind of private scheme.

Based on the interviews as well as informal discussions I had at numerous events, the questions of retirement and pension plans only came up with nomads who were closer to 40 years old, and not in conversation with younger nomads. This issue is likely to receive more attention in the years to come, with older individuals increasingly taking to the road and with the 'greying' of existing digital nomads. In some cases, the interviewed nomads had been taken off their country of citizenship's social security if deemed to have stayed abroad too long (and regardless of the fact that they were paying taxes in their country of citizenship). For instance, in the case of Anna, the Swedish state reinterpreted her legal status when she stayed for too long in another country:

> So I applied for dual, not the citizenship, but the kind where you're registered to two different countries. And you're actually residing in both places. But because Sweden doesn't have the way of thinking of people living the way I do, I didn't fit into any of the boxes, and I just had somebody at the authority I was doing this with, who announced that [I] don't live in Sweden anymore, even though I did actually spend most of my time in a year there. But I did spend a lot of time in Sweden and they're like, 'No, you can't be part of Sweden anymore'. So they took me off all that social security stuff. And then when I tried to get back, they sent a fiscal letter to my mom, asking her to verify that I was a real person. I was like dumbfounded because I never experienced this squareness of bureaucracy before and how inflexible it is in what to me was a straightforward matter. So now I'm very wary of getting in contact with any authority because they just don't have the way of thinking to include people who don't fit this norm.

Anna's account shows the 'squareness of bureaucracy' as she puts it that does not accommodate mobile individuals such as herself, individuals who do not 'fit this norm'. Indeed, Webb (2024, 301–302) discusses how digital nomadism presents a challenge to nation-state-based social citizenship and suggests the need to unbundle digital nomads' rights and obligations 'so that they are no longer based mainly on one or another national jurisdiction winning out'. Instead of focusing on changing tax rules and regulations, he calls for a need to rethink the 'the entire modern framework of social citizenship'. This is a reoccurring theme in the research material. For instance, I came across Plumia at one of the digital nomad conferences I attended. Plumia is a non-profit think tank operating within and funded by SafetyWing, the insurance tech start-up that offers nomad insurance with a mission to create 'an Internet country', a revolutionary alternative to traditional nation-state systems.[68] Such 'Internet country' would

68 Plumia's website announces that they are 'Unlocking the future of global mobility' (https://plumia.org/, accessed 15 May 2025).

be borderless, and citizenship would work through a subscription system via which new citizens could opt for different services such as health care and pensions, and pay taxes to the municipality where they are located (Hill 2023).

Another dimension that can lead to a more precarious existence is the lack of social networks similar to 'back home'. In case of falling sick, becoming unemployed or struggling to find accommodation, such networks can prove to be invaluable. The lack of such networks in the chosen destination can be a daunting thing in case of need. Megan (US) describes how she was lucky to have acquired such a safety network in Portugal after having been there several times:

> The cons are also about, for everything I've said about making friendships and communities, you always question how deep are these friendships, how significant are these relationships in the longer term. And at this point I can see how some do shake out and others do not, like friends that I have the good fun time with for two months, some of them I've never spoken to again, and others I've seen half the world, and who are like my emergency contacts sometimes, that kind of thing. I thought about that this summer when I was in Lisbon and, it wasn't anything huge, but I had to go to the hospital in the middle of the night, and I knew who I could ask, who would come with me, and would sit with me while I waited there and like helped me through the process or whatever. And I just had a moment where I was like, two years ago doing this, I wouldn't have had that—I would have been on my own network to figure it all out myself and I wouldn't have had that social support.

It is important to note that when talking of privilege and precarity in the case of digital nomads not all nomads have access to the same resources and capitals. In fact, there is a fair degree of heterogeneity concerning this. Studies on precarity (and privilege) might traditionally have focused on communities or otherwise more clearly delineated entities than the digital nomads represent. This study highlights the importance of recognising

the diversity among digital nomads rather than treating them as a single, homogeneous group. While their lifestyles may appear similar, digital nomads' positionality varies widely, depending on how much they can leverage their mobility. The precariousness of one's position is shaped by one's citizenship, professional and educational background, racialised positionality, age, social capital accrued over time and other factors. For instance, Linao and colleagues (2024) interestingly examine the interplay between 'race' and gender in the experiences of Asian female digital nomads, revealing the differential treatment that Asian women experience during their mobilities.

This is also a constantly changing game, as the markets' demand for specific professions are prone to fluctuate, even at a quick pace. Partially due to this reason, at any one time, some of the interviewed digital nomads who were company-employed had managed to negotiate good terms, found themselves considered valuable workers and had great negotiating power and an abundance of job offers, whereas others seemed to struggle. One such example of the fluctuating nature of supply and demand in the labour market is the rise of cryptocurrency-related jobs and potentially AI-related jobs in the future. For instance, Patrick (US) was a high-end earner in his profession as an engineer. He tells of the social differentiation related to economic capital taking place within digital nomad communities. He references 'those with normal jobs' struggling to make ends meet and needing to make concessions on living arrangements:

> This lifestyle is expensive. If you go to one place and you want accommodation for two weeks, it's not going to be as cheap as on the lease for one year. So I see all these digital nomads, they're all sharing apartments, two or three or four people, in order to pay as low rent as possible, because some of them don't make a lot of money. Some of them just have normal jobs and with normal jobs if you have this lifestyle, then all your money is gonna go to support that lifestyle and you are not gonna have any savings.

Bergan and colleagues (2021) have examined what Patrick also alludes to: the co-living apartments that offer short-term rentals with private rooms and shared facilities (kitchen, bathroom). The authors call out the emergence of 'new home cultures of precarity' and argue that, although often cheaper than Airbnb-type living arrangements, co-living represents a less affordable accommodation option. Co-living is, they further suggest, a largely commercialised response to the precarious labour conditions and a commodification of the growing mobile and precarious labour force.

Digital nomadic life does not always meet the expectations that remote workers have prior to transitioning to a mobile lifestyle, at times even resulting in worsening physical and mental health and poorer jobs.[69] On the one hand, Salazar (2016) has noted that spatial mobility can come at the expense of downward occupational mobility. On the other hand, drawing from Ulrich Beck's model of risk, Shaun Busuttil writes that increased insecurity and uncertainty concerning employment has led digital nomads to use mobility as a hedge against the economic risks present in their working lives.[70] This relates to the increased precarity in the labour markets (the rise of the gig economy) and how the current markets are endowing the individual with responsibilities and risks. Building on this key observation, this study shows how increased precarity in the lives of individual digital nomads includes a significant temporal dimension that is directly connected to their mobility. Over time, some of the precarities can accumulate (e.g. those related to being cut off from social provisions the longer one is mobile—i.e. not physically present in the country of citizenship), while other precarities can be fought off (the creation of social support in the form of networks, acquired through mobility experience and time spent in specific destinations). How temporalities shape the formation of precarity in lifestyle mobilities deserves more theoretical attention.

69 Nguyen, 'The Workers Quitting Digital Nomadism'.
70 Busuttil, 'Mobility, Precarity and Risk'.

The impact of precarious labour conditions upon actual work practices and mobility practices (and mobility as lifestyle choice) also remains less studied. This shows the necessity for future research to consider nuances in how individual digital nomads' precarious positionalities develop and what sort of space they have to counter the effects of precarity. Over time and with the diversification of digital nomadic mobilities, we will most likely witness stratification within digital nomad communities that will leave some more capable to capitalise on mobility and others less so. At the same time, digital nomadic mobilities cannot be understood without focusing on the historical colonial and unequal power structures that make the lifestyle possible. Hong (2023, 530) aptly observes that 'digital nomadism and remote work—now termed as the frontier of our post-pandemic work arrangement—continues to embed this historicized differentiation of lives'. He argues that this sets apart three categories of people: elite professionals who can afford to work remotely, the nomad who can survive through geoarbitrage practices, and the many workers who 'perform cheap labour to support and care for this unequal global valuation of workers'.

Livin' la Vida Local?

As discussed in Chapter 2, the relationship between digital nomadism and the nation-state system can be rather ambivalent, as can the relationship between digital nomadism and the neoliberal market economy (Wang et al. 2019). One such example of how digital nomadism is 'heavily reliant on the logic of capitalism' (Aroles et al. 2020, 125), despite its narrative of offering an alternative way of living, is the commodification of the digital nomad lifestyle (see also Bonneau et al. 2023), evidenced in form of the emerging digital nomad infrastructure—that is, service structures that specifically target digital nomads and/or that digital nomads take advantage of, and that in the long run facilitate the transition to a mobile lifestyle. However, the expansion of the phenomenon, fuelled by the neoliberal capitalist system, is not without

its ramifications. In the post-pandemic years, there has been more and more discussion on the local impact of lifestyle mobilities such as digital nomadism, highlighting ever more the post-colonial context of modern-day mobilities in a world where the mobility of some is enabled by the immobility of others (Sheller 2018). Indeed, this last sub-section discusses how digital nomads belong to the emerging transnational leisure class, that by relocating to lower-cost countries they escape the austerity policies, gentrification processes and rising cost of living in their countries of citizenship, all the while themselves contributing towards transnational gentrification in their chosen destinations.

Digital Nomad Infrastructure

Overall, the 2010s witnessed a rapid increase in the provision of various services, infrastructures and events tailored for digital nomads, and this trend is likely to continue in the post-COVID-19 context. We can say that there is currently a booming and growing industry of mobility-sensitive services, provided by various companies and corporations, and increasingly also by public actors such as states and municipalities, particularly starting from the latter half of the 2010s. The interviewed stakeholders—that is, individuals who were offering services to digital nomads—had observed this rapid change. For instance, Carlos, a co-living apartment owner, tells how he first became familiar with the idea of co-working, which he then combined with renting bedrooms from a hotel and offering them to digital nomads in Spain. Eventually, he acquired a villa in which he offers co-living options (with working spaces) to digital nomads with a minimum of stay of one month. The proportion of nomads among the residents at his property rose from next to zero to 99 per cent in the winter of 2021 and then settled at around 70 per cent during the winter of 2022. This also generated a change in how he furnished his apartments:

> In August 2020, I had people come in asking me for a computer screen—that is the most strange question I have ever had from a

> guest. Of course I do not have a computer screen. Then another one asked me the same, another one the same. Okay, maybe I should buy this. And suddenly one friend called me and said, 'My girlfriend is working in an office and they are all now sent to work remotely and they need to close the office in two days. They need to sell everything what is inside—maybe it could be interesting for you for your apartments.' Wow let's have a look. And I went there with my van, and it was like a paradise there, a lot of office desks, lot of office chairs, computer screens they needed to sell in 24 hours, so they sold it very cheap for me. I bought like 15 of each, for 15 different apartments. Then I called the photographer, we took pictures with the new setups for the office and I published it in the listings. And it worked very fast, so I prepared my listings for digital nomads. I was giving information specifically for them. And I also applied a length of stay discount that I was not doing before. I work also on my pricing strategy to be more attractive for people that wanted to stay longer than seven days. So I did, for example, 3 per cent discount seven days, 5 per cent discount 14 days, 10 per cent discount up to three months, three months stays 50 per cent discount.

Carlos's account shows the rapid change that took place in the profile of guests he hosted. The COVID-19 pandemic shaped working and travelling patterns in an unexpected manner. In Carlos's case, he was able to acquire office equipment as a result of local remote work policies, exemplifying how rapid demand was met with rapid supply by local actors. More recently, his co-living accommodation started to offer social activities, community sessions, meditation, yoga and skill-sharing sessions, showcasing the emergence of mobility-sensitive services that also play into the leisure and sociality dimensions too. Methorst and colleagues (2025) discuss locational infrastructures, such as co-working spaces, and how they changed during the pandemic. The authors study co-working spaces as emerging infrastructures of repair that operated as spaces of care during the pandemic times. Marija, a digital

Figure 7: Ponta do Sol, the 'digital nomad village' in Madeira, and co-working space. (2024, picture taken by the author.)

marketing expert from Serbia, has observed this change in co-working spaces over the six years she has been a digital nomad:

> Co-working places offer activities now especially with this digital remote movement. Especially after COVID-19, it's like many more people embrace this lifestyle and live it that way. And even the local businesses try to kind of adjust their businesses to digital nomads. Even Airbnb is, if you see lots of places now started offering monthly rents, investing in comfortable chairs and desks and, you know, just in the life of remote workers, because it's a reality. It's a trend. It's like a new industry in a way. And so yeah, co-working spaces are opening like extremely fast pace. And all those communities try to organise; many countries are offering

> this digital nomad visa. Co-living place, that is the next thing. And trying to make money, especially trying to profit from that and trying to meet that need. So yeah, it's definitely a big thing.

Marija's account exemplifies the emergence of what I call the digital nomad infrastructure, which I define as constituted of services and infrastructures, both pre-existing and emerging, offered by both public and private sector actors that digital nomads make use of to lead a mobile lifestyle (Toivanen 2023). Such digital nomad infrastructure offers nomads a social infrastructure, access to a community through purchasable services such as membership of a co-working space or co-living apartment.

This rapid change in digital nomadism has not gone unnoticed by public sector actors. One example is the collaboration in Zadar, Croatia, between local entrepreneurs, businesses and the municipality to attract digital nomads (Chavarria 2024). Sequera (2025) also discusses how urban marketing strategies have shifted towards attracting the mobile workforce that digital nomads represent. He concludes that, 'today, digital nomads are the new creative class in the marketplace of cities' (Sequera 2025, 212). Another example of such a marketing strategy comes from Madeira, where the project Digital Nomads of Madeira, a collaboration between the regional government, Startup Madeira and a digital nomad, Gonçalo Hall, has resulted in Ponta do Sol becoming referenced as the 'digital nomad village'. The village opened in February 2021 and, according to Startup Madeira, more than 12,100 digital nomads from 142 countries have been in Madeira and Porto Santo since the beginning of the project (as of February 2025).[71]

The services that digital nomads take advantage of overall can be divided into two categories: 1) pre-existing services (from prior to the 2010s) linked to tourism infrastructure in certain destinations or in the form of state-provided services linked to citizenship; and 2) the more recently founded services specifically targeting

71 'Digital Nomads in Madeira Islands', https://digitalnomads.startupmadeira.eu/team/ (accessed 15 May 2025).

digital nomads, particularly from the 2010s onwards (Toivanen 2023, 76). Such services can be further divided into those offered by private actors, including corporations, various businesses and digital nomads themselves, and by public actors, such as states and municipalities (see Table 1). However, the private market caters for the mobility-sensitive needs of digital nomads in a way that states and existing mobility infrastructure cannot yet fulfil.

The pre-existing infrastructures that nomads take advantage of include virtual infrastructure, which is a major requirement for digital nomads and a requisite for them to be able to work. The increased popularity of short-term services that do not acquire a long-term commitment or lengthy subscriptions are also used by short-stay visitors and remote workers, including nomads in chosen destinations. Beatrice, a digital project manager from

Table 1: Services used by digital nomads, according to time and service provider

Actor	Public (states, municipalities)	Private (corporations, businesses)
Pre-existing services	• Mobility rights (visa waivers) • Welfare provisions (health care benefits)	• Tourism infrastructure for accommodation (hotels, hostels, Airbnb) • Airline connections with touristic destinations • Co-working spaces for remote workers
Created services (targeting nomads)	• e-Residency programmes • Digital nomad visa schemes • (In-residence) programmes by municipalities, cities and national networks that aim to attract remote workers	• Global insurance schemes • Taxation consultation • Digital nomad events • Business training and digital nomad literature/coaching • Co-working and co-living spaces • Online apps • Redesigning private spaces for remote work (hotel lobbies, cafés, etc.)

Source: Toivanen (2023, 76). Published under CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 license.

Germany, reflects on this aspect of digitalisation that has overall made gaining access to specific services, such as gyms, more flexible:

> The thing is that all of these things are digitalised and digitalisation makes more things more flexible in every aspect and everything that we do, whether it is a hobby or sport or whatever. For example, if I have a membership for a sports club, I can have that for three months, and then I stop it for three months, then I have it for three months again, and I can always track that somewhere online … and then pay online or pay not online. … Back then everything was more complicated because of this kind of logistics.

The digital nomad infrastructure and the existing infrastructures shape digital nomads' experiences of leading a mobile lifestyle in two major ways. While holding a strong passport and citizenship of a Global North country enables a mobile lifestyle, the purchasable services targeted specifically at nomads that often fill the gaps in state bureaucracies further facilitate leading such a lifestyle. The digital nomad infrastructure adds another layer of privilege by filling the gaps in state infrastructures (in the form of digital nomad visas, for instance). The digital nomad infrastructure shapes nomads' mobility trajectories and can be crucial in initiating nomads to nomadic lifestyle. Nomads take advantage particularly of services (co-working, co-living, conferences) for social and professional purposes, thus fulfilling a need to compensate for the sacrifices the mobile lifestyle potentially requires. We can say that the digital nomad infrastructure paradoxically allows the replication of certain aspects of a sedentary lifestyle while being mobile, by providing nomads with a social infrastructure. These aspects include fostering social and professional connections, creating mobility routines (choosing the same locations as other nomads), creating work routines (returning to the same co-working spaces) and having a sense of community feeling (however fleeting). The digital nomad infrastructure is an external condition in its own right that needs to be accounted for in future

studies that aim to better understand digital nomads' social and material realities and their experiences of leading a mobile lifestyle. The combined impact of the digital nomad infrastructure and the pre-existing service infrastructures also needs to be considered in future studies on privilege (and precarity) in the context of digital nomadism.

The emergence of the digital nomad infrastructure also speaks of the commodification of digital nomadism and the inseparable connections between digital nomadism and neoliberal capitalism, specifically in the post-COVID-19 context (see Methorst et al. 2025). The commodification is visible in nomads' personal accounts (Mancinelli 2020) and in the rise of 'lifestyle promoters', who 'turn their nomad experience into a profitable business (e.g. public speaking, online coaching, affiliate marketing, etc.)' (Bonneau et al. 2023, 67). It was also visible in the stakeholders' accounts. Julia, a teacher in Spanish, concluded that digital nomadism has become a product:

> And you probably agree with me, otherwise we wouldn't be doing this study. It has become a product. It's a product. So, you're selling the lifestyle, and it will be silly not to use it. I put hashtags in Spanish for digital nomads—it would be stupid not to do it. Because there's people who identify themselves as having this lifestyle or even think that it's their work and it has become a product.

The Emergence of Digital Nomad Hubs: The Local Impact

Since the latter part of the 2010s, we have witnessed the emergence of digital nomad hubs. Specific destinations have become quite popular among digital nomads, partially related to the emergence of the digital nomad infrastructure in such places. When I was collecting the first set of data in 2019, Ubud in Indonesia, Chiang Mai in Thailand and Medellin in Colombia were frequently referenced by nomads. More recently, destinations such as Bansko

in Bulgaria, Lisbon, Madeira and Porto in Portugal, the Canary Islands (Spain), Mexico City and several others have become digital nomadic hotspots. Another reason for this change is the word-of-mouth knowledge that circulates in social media groups for digital nomads. The often-mentioned Nomads.com (formerly Nomad List) website tracks the popularity of certain destinations according to criteria such as the cost of living, Internet speed, safety, nightlife and health care. Mike, a UK citizen who has a co-working space in South East Asia, remembers this change:

> I remember the first conference I went to. It was organised by the guys of Ubud [Indonesia] and they did a conference … I think in the beginning of 2015. And the first year I went to that it was a very new movement for co-working in this region. … Basically, when I opened, we were the first in the whole of the [region] of Thailand. And basically there was one space in Bangkok, another space in Chiang Mai and that was it. I mean, now [2019] there's hundreds of spaces.

The expansion of the remote work movement and within it of digital nomadism has indeed been rapid. Therefore, it is not surprising that more critical discussion on the local impact of digital nomadism in destinations that attract nomads have begun to surface. Indeed, lifestyle migrations and mobilities—that is, travelling remote workers, retirement migrants and expatriates—can have a significant impact in the local communities and contexts they travel to. However, the long-term impact of digital nomadism upon different localities remains an unexplored topic. Generally, digital nomadism has, for all its short history, been represented as a win–win situation for both the nomads and the localities where they travel. For instance, in a report by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD 2022) on whether OECD countries should develop digital nomad visa schemes, digital nomads are portrayed as a potential source of tax revenue for hosting countries. Digital nomads are perceived as investing in local economies through their consumption, without

taking jobs away from locals.[72] This positive economic impact has been discussed in previous research literature (Wang et al. 2019, 7; Hannonen 2020, 7). It has also been the driving argument in favour of digital nomad visa schemes, for instance, although it has been suggested that there is no empirical evidence on whether digital nomads' consumption patterns match the expectations of local policymakers (Chavarria 2024). Furthermore, Chavarria (2024) observes that digital nomads utilise public services and local infrastructure without making any direct tax contributions to the state in the jurisdiction of which they are staying.

The discussion on the local impact is also ongoing within the digital nomad community. I participated in the Thriving Nomads' Conference in the Canary Islands in March 2022, the themes of which were the impact digital nomads have ecologically, societally or even economically on the local communities where they reside. It included talks on nomads' networking skills and well-being, how to balance work and leisure time, how to become mindful and how to build a business strategy; these themes were often linked to specific services that could be offered to digital nomads (borderless retreats, e-Residency, nomad insurance and so forth). There were also keynotes speeches, workshops and mastermind sessions, which were framed in terms of the environmental impact, including talks titled 'Zerowaste nomad lifestyle' and 'Nomads giving back'.[73]

72 This view has gained a lot of popularity, with some considering how digital nomad visas (and digital nomads) can boost local economies; see Prithwiraj Choudhury, 'How "Digital Nomad" Visas Can Boost Local Economies', *Harvard Business Review* (27 May 2022), https://hbr.org/2022/05/how-digital-nomad-visas-can-boost-local-economies (accessed 15 May 2025).

73 Calls have increasingly started to emerge, encouraging nomads to travel more responsibly; see, for example, Katie Collins, 'Work All Over the World Without Ruining It: Ethics for Digital Nomads', *CNET* (1 June 2023), https://www.cnet.com/culture/features/work-all-over-the-world-without-ruining-it-ethics-for-digital-nomads/; Jenn Sutherland, 'Neocolonialism & the Dark Underbelly of the Digital Nomad

Considerations of their impact on their localities also surfaced in the interviews with digital nomads. Anna (Sweden) notes the sense of responsibility she felt for the places she had lived in, as well as for the places she was visiting:

> To me, paying taxes was important. I pay taxes when I had my digital nomadism business base in England, even when it was like next to nothing, and when I re-registered to be in Sweden, it was important for me to pay taxes as well, even though I don't necessarily live there all the time. I feel it's important to pay tax somewhere. That is the most logical place, and the easiest place. I know many digital nomads don't care about that. But again, it's the same question like with the environment—you are always somewhere, you are using resources somewhere, you're using infrastructure somewhere, so I just find it irresponsible to not care about that.

More often, however, the interviewed nomads discussed their contributions towards the local communities by paying for co-working spaces, accommodation, using local services and so forth—that is, in the form of economic consumerism. A minority also emphasised the importance of taking part in local initiatives (charity work, beach cleans, visiting local schools, etc.) and in engaging with the local community. Businesses around 'conscious nomadism' have started to emerge in various places.

Overall, the growing trend of digital nomadism can have a major impact on local communities' *cultural* and *social* fabric, especially in cases where nomads create their own 'bubbles' (Thompson 2018). Although the focus in previous literature has mostly been on the economic aspects of the impact of digital nomadism on local communities, the cultural and social dimensions have received much less attention. One of the few studies that discusses this from the perspective of local authorities and

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Movement', *Medium* (28 December 2016), https://medium.com/@jsutherland/neocolonialism-the-dark-underbelly-of-the-digital-nomad-movement-32e082306a3a (both accessed 15 May 2025).

stakeholders is that of Chavarria (2024; see also Hannonen et al. 2023; Jiwasiddi et al. 2023), who observes that:

> policymakers place lots of expectations on the potential for digital nomads to become community leaders through the sharing of knowledge and skills that could professionally and personally empower locals, mainly the youth. The reality nonetheless appears to be that, without the required platforms and incentives, digital nomad knowledge transfer is more wishful thinking than a reality. To summarise, this putative transfer of knowledge holds immense potential but is lacking the ingredients to become a success story. (Chavarria 2024, 47)

Digital nomadism has also been proposed as a potential cure for other societal ailments, such as rural depopulation. One example of a service targeting digital nomads drafted in collaboration with local municipalities is an Italian initiative to build a network for remote workers in the rural Mediterranean region. The founder of the network, Marco, describes these remote work hubs that offer co-living and co-working options, one of the aims of which is to reverse the effects of depopulation in rural areas of Italy:

> So, we are in the process of testing our vision. We started in early 2020. Like you said, we are building a network of remote workers around the Mediterranean, and we are starting in Sardinia, and at the moment in Sardinia … we saw that the process in order to build or repurpose certain buildings, it takes super long. So, we decided to start making agreements with the existing hotel owners, or residences or older apartment buildings that would normally be closed and or empty.

The local impact varies considerably depending on the digital nomad destination: whether it is an urban locality or a rural one, whether it has already experienced mass tourism or not, and on a variety of structural factors. For instance, Hannonen (2024) discusses a place-based perspective to unravel the structural factors shaping how different destinations are impacted by digital nomadism. Places, she argues, are connected to larger systems and

global processes, including 'social and economic shifts, safety and precarity both in the Global South and Global North' (Hannonen 2024, 9). Besides structural factors, social and linguistic factors also play a role. Thompson (2018), as noted, suggests that digital nomads tend to form 'bubbles', socially isolating themselves from local life. The present study shows that this is highly dependent on the locality (see also Miocevic 2025). For instance, the existence of a co-working space can mean a more tightly knit digital nomad community, thus decreasing interactions with locals. The interviewed digital nomads had highly location-dependent experiences regarding how easily they could integrate into the social life of their chosen destination. For instance, Anna (Sweden), who had been a nomad for seven years and spent most of that time in specific locations, describes her experience of local life:

> I noticed what a big difference it is between the local community and us as visitors—even if we stay here for a long time, it's still *farangs* [foreigners] versus Thai people, and you will never cross that line: you'll always be a *farang*. You are there, and working through that barrier can be really difficult, sometimes annoying. And then I went to Costa Rica and it was none of that—it was not like 'are you a foreigner?' You're sort of floating about a little bit. I don't know if that's because Westerners are seen to be far culturally or money-wise. It's just more inclusive in a way that doesn't necessarily mean friendlier. But just like you're more part of the society or fabric than here [Thailand]. Here you are always just a visitor, even if you have been here for years and years.

Local–nomad interactions definitely merit more scholarly attention, as the trend towards more interaction seems to be growing within the nomad community, as observed by Stefan, an architect from Romania. I interviewed Stefan on the Canary Islands where there were efforts to increase the interactions between digital nomads and locals, through NGOs and local initiatives.

> One interesting thing that I'm observing is the beginning of a trend of interacting not only between the nomads' communities,

> but also with the local life there, so this is a very, very nice thing to see. That these specific groups that … don't want to go for months and only work, work from beach and live the glamour life they thought they will be living, they are also very keen [on] adapting to the local life, in trying to interact with local people. This could be also very important regarding job opportunities, corporations, interaction between cultures and so forth—it could be a very nice trend and it's beginning to grow.

Integrating the economic interests of states and municipalities while mitigating the impact of lifestyle mobilities and tourism is not an easy task, and these (economic) interests are often at odds with each other. This is evidenced in the growing protest movements against expatriate and touristic mobilities in the likes of Barcelona, Lisbon and the Canary Islands, in destinations that particularly struggle to mitigate the impact of ever-growing mobilities on local communities. Such protest movements, which are also relevant to digital nomads, take place in the context of global processes, including housing crises, transnational gentrification and the overall increase in precarity, as will be discussed in the following sub-section.

The New Precariat Contributing to Gentrification?

In the post-COVID-19 context, the expansion of digital nomadism has been mirrored by an increase in media attention and public awareness of the phenomenon. Indeed, digital nomadism has come to be discussed increasingly in relation to the local ramifications such privileged lifestyle mobility and unequal geopolitical privileges can have. The political dimension of digital nomadism is evidenced in the protest movements that have, as noted, increased in specific locations, including Lisbon, Barcelona, the Canary Islands and Mexico City. In the collective imagination, as a 2024 article in *El Pais* observes, 'gringos' have become the cause of the soaring housing prices in Mexico City, inciting a wave of xenophobia against non-locals, even though the housing

crisis precedes the phenomenon of digital nomadism by several decades: 'Blaming the gringos for the problem absolves the real culprits'.[74] Such debates shed light on the vulnerabilities of localities, the disruptive nature mobilities can have at the local level (see Eimermann and Carson 2023) and how they are tied to postcolonial structures of power and inequality.[75] With the protest movements in Lisbon, Barcelona, Mexico City and wider Latin America, the central focus has been on the rising housing prices and the impact on the social and cultural fabric in these localities.[76] Cities including Barcelona, New York and Lisbon are now imposing restrictions on short-term rentals via platforms such as Airbnb, and more cities are likely to follow. This goes to show that digital nomadism is gradually becoming *politicised*.

74 Viri Ríos, '"Gringo Go Home": Mexico City's Housing Crisis Precedes Digital Nomads', *El Pais* (28 March 2024), https://english.elpais.com/economy-and-business/2024-03-28/gringo-go-home-mexico-citys-housing-crisis-preceds-digital-nomads.html#; see also Mekahlo Medina, 'Digital Nomads Receive a Not-So-Warm Welcome to Mexico City', NBC Los Angeles (25 September 2023), https://www.nbclosangeles.com/news/local/mexico-city-gentification-americans-rent-prices/3231544/ (both accessed 15 May 2025).

75 In fact, digital nomadism has been suggested to be a form of neo-colonialism or neo-imperialism. See: Verdict, "Digital nomads are not the citizens of the world", 19 July, 2023. Source: https://www.verdict.co.uk/digital-nomads-world-citizen-drawbacks/ (accessed 15 May 2025).

76 See, for example, Askew, '"People are Really Fired Up": Digital Nomads Blamed for Portugal's High Prices and Housing Crisis'; NBC News, 'Is the Rise of Remote U.S. Workers in Mexico City Pricing Out Residents?' (14 September 2022), https://www.nbcnews.com/news/latino/boon-threat-mexico-city-wrestles-influx-remote-us-workers-rcna47656; John McCabe and Georgetown University Latin America and the Caribbean Policy Association, 'Digital Nomad Movement Triggers Housing Concerns across Latin America', *Georgetown Public Policy Review* (25 January 2024), https://gppreview.com/2024/01/25/digital-nomad-movement-triggers-housing-concerns-across-latin-america%EF%BF%BC/; Miriam Partington, 'Digital Nomads in Spain "Bullied" as Anti-tourism Sentiment Swells—So What's the Solution?' *Sifted* (23 July 2024), https://sifted.eu/articles/spain-tourism-digital-nomad (all accessed 15 May 2025).

Digital nomads, as noted, are part of the emerging transnational leisure class, a new precariat (Standing 2011), if you will, made by global neoliberal capitalism, one that is 'a new in-formation unit of production introduced by changes in the nature of work as well as by corresponding changes in the urban social structures of social reproduction brought about by the transition to post-industrialism and the flexible regime of capital accumulation' (Sternberg, 2021, 3). However, digital nomads seek such conditions that can help them to counter, if not altogether remove, the effect of precarious living (Bergan et al. 2021), and insecurities related to employment (Thompson 2018) and social citizenship (Webb 2024). For instance, Mancinelli and Germann Molz (2024, 189) observe that 'digital nomads epitomize a kind of neoliberal subject who carves out individualistic exit strategies to cope with labor precarity, growing inequalities, and eroded welfare in affluent industrialised countries'. One such strategy is the practice of geoarbitrage. In fact, Hayes (2014, 1963) points out that geoarbitrage and the transnational lifestyle for lifestyle migrants may well be the 'neoliberal variant of the formerly place-based forms of citizenship of the Fordist welfare state regimes of the twentieth century', also resonating in the case of digital nomads.

Indeed, digital nomads can be approached as 'neoliberal subjects' (Mancinelli and Germann Molz 2024) who exercise transnational agency to improve their living conditions (see also Hayes 2014). Hayes (2014) argues in his study that geoarbitrage constitutes a new form of transnational agency, which is not only shaped by individual decision-making and choice but also by the social forces shaping living conditions in Global North countries; as noted in Chapter 1, he identifies these forces as financial precarity of retirees, declining employment and old age security in the US: 'Thus, just as labour markets have been increasingly de-territorialised and unbounded, so too are the social spaces of post-productive or leisure life, which may be increasingly oriented towards transnational lifestyle strategies aimed at maintaining or enhancing quality of life' (Hayes 2014, 1963). Transnational mobility can become a individualistic and neoliberal option to counter the

impact of decreasing social safety nets in welfare states and the decreasing job security in global labour markets when 'privileges gained at higher latitudes of the global division of labour can be cashed out at lower latitudes' (Hayes 2014, 1966). The practice of geoarbitrage enables digital nomads to have access to similar material reality as in their nation of citizenship (or even an augmented one). Nomads have, hence, access to similar and even better material realities that they would 'back home'. Due to transnational gentrification of certain locations, digital nomads can rely on finding a cafe latte, avocado toast, CrossFit and yoga services, comfortable living spaces and other aspects that are quite similar to their consumption patterns in their home countries.

Alexandri and Janoschka (2020) examine transnational gentrification in the context of leisure-orientated mobilities. They approach it by looking at how state power orchestrates the conditions for transnational gentrification and how transnational middle-class leisure-orientated mobilities are linked with labour precarities and flexibility. Approaching gentrification as 'an attribute of systemic violence exercised in financialised capitalism' (Alexandri and Janoschka 2020, 3202), the authors predict it will lead to new forms of social and spatial dispossession. Indeed, the wider impact of 21st-century transnational gentrification, understood as 'class-based neighbourhood change' brought about by a relatively affluent and mobile international capitalist class (Sigler and Wachsmuth 2020), is partially caused by lifestyle-driven mobilities and related forms of consumption (see Holleran 2022). Another side of the coin is the national and city-level strategies that aim to attract a hypermobile workforce, portraying digital nomads as desirable movers with purchasing power (Sequera 2025).

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How the conflicting aspects of the impact of lifestyle mobilities on local communities and states' and cities' desire to attract hypermobile workers can be reconciled remains an open question. In the context of digital nomadism, such conflicting interests are likely

to lead to further politicisation of the phenomenon.[77] Simultaneously, the rising cost of living in major cities, gentrification processes and austerity policies as well as the difficulty in securing a property or a steady job and the uncertainty of achieving a secure retirement pushes nomads onto the road (see Thompson 2024). Parag Khanna goes as far as to argue that digital nomadism can be considered a form of activism.[78] The act of migration (or mobility in this case) is always political, he reminds us; crossing voluntarily borders means voting with one's feet. Building on these observations, we should consider how digital nomadism is, on the one hand, evolving into a politicised issue, and, on the other hand, becoming a political act in itself.

77 For instance, Bozzi (2020, 2) suggests that Instagram could become 'the site of a critical re-imagination and re-politicization of the digital nomad as a utopian avatar of post-work'.

78 *Medium*, 'Digital Nomadism Is a New Form of Activism—Parag Khanna' (31 January 2022), https://medium.com/@PlumiaCountry/digital-nomadism-is-a-new-form-of-activism-parag-khanna-dcf65cf6846b (accessed 15 May 2025).

Conclusion

This book set out to explore the phenomenon of digital nomadism through the accounts of individuals who lead what can be termed a digital nomadic lifestyle. In the book, I have empirically focalised on *practices*, *meanings* and *politics* to gain a better understanding of this work-related lifestyle mobility, one that is rapidly growing in the post-COVID-19 context. Media representations often depict digital nomads as the lucky ones who have escaped the 'nine-to-five rat race'. Indeed, digital nomadism seems to offer a way to fantasise of the freedom to work remotely and roam the globe. It is a form of imaginary escapism—a kind of societal projection surface, if you will—as many who have the option to embrace a digital nomadic lifestyle ultimately choose not to do so.

I have argued that although digital nomadism shares similarities with other forms of privileged mobility, such as expatriate or touristic mobilities, there is something qualitatively different in the digital nomadic mobilities that are currently unfolding before our eyes. Digital nomadic mobilities rely on a diverse array of privileges linked to citizenship rights and the distribution of economic wealth globally. However, contrary to the popular image of digital nomads as individuals who have managed to break free from the shackles of the nation-state and other surrounding structures, digital nomads' experiences of leading a mobile lifestyle are greatly shaped by their embeddedness in neoliberal capitalist structures. For one, the commodification of the phenomenon has had specific consequences: the emergence of co-working and co-living spaces, as examples of the commodification processes

having an impact upon digital nomadism, have encouraged new behaviours, both in professional and social terms. Indeed, they have led to new work modalities, living practices and socialities. And this relationship is reciprocal: the digital nomadic lifestyle not only drives the growing demand for co-working and co-living spaces but is also shaped by them—particularly in its spatial, temporal and material configurations.

Both work and socialities seem to undergo a change with the adoption of a mobile lifestyle. In the context of digital nomadism, work is tied to new social spaces that generate new social life and socialities around them. The digital nomad community is a good example of this. The frequency, intensity and depth of old and new connections seem to undergo a transformation, at times leading to more extensive networks, yet ones that can be rather superficial in nature. The symbolic meaning of belonging to a digital nomad community cannot, nevertheless, be underestimated, as it provides a sense of belonging to a community that shares similar values of location independence and whose members identify with the choice of a non-sedentary lifestyle.

To better understand work, socialities and how digital nomadism is shaped by macro-level forces, I have sought to move away from the sedentary bias that has historically characterised conceptualisations of human mobility. At the same time, the accounts of digital nomads regarding their everyday lives do not support romanticised interpretations, the inclination in former studies on nomadism. Instead, I have suggested that digital nomads can be approached as neoliberal subjects that navigate within the grids of existing power structures with relative ease and who can capitalise on specific resources and privileges in their pursuit of spatial and temporal location independence, while potentially also finding themselves in precarious positions in the long run.

Hence, this book presents an argument to approach digital nomadism in its own right. At the same time, it also calls for researchers to pay attention to the heterogeneity among digital nomads. Evidently, they tend to share a great number of similar demographic and other attributes, including a strong passport,

racial and a number of other privileges, educational background and often the fact of belonging to the same age cohort. Based on this book's findings, however, what also seems to structure digital nomads' experiences and their access to spatial and temporal privileges, is their employment status. This calls for more nuanced analysis, for instance on how the experiences of company-employed and freelancing nomads differ from one another. Another significant aspect that has received relatively little attention is the gendered experiences of leading a digital nomadic lifestyle and how, for instance, the societal pressures related to family life and intimate relationships shape female digital nomads' experiences compared to their male counterparts. The gendered dimension of digital nomadism deserves more attention in future studies beyond the simple security aspect of where it is safe to travel.

While this book has aimed to offer a balanced understanding of digital nomads' positionality in the context of neoliberal capitalism and labour precarity, arguably also shaping why digital nomads have chosen to 'take to the road', their choice to adopt a digital nomadic lifestyle cannot be attributed to mere strategic and calculative motivations. It seems that it is first and foremost a lifestyle choice, a question of how to value work and leisure, and more importantly *where* and *how* to spend one's (leisure) time. In fact, *location independence*—more than mobility itself—as well as temporal independence are central values for digital nomads in their pursuit of what they consider 'the good life'. It is also a lifestyle choice that relates to expanding one's social life beyond the typical social circles, a decision about whether to have children and how to transform the lifestyle into a self-improvement project. Although this does not mean that the reality always matches the expectations digital nomads have when adopting this lifestyle, the reason to do so seems very much to be about the core question of what kind of life they desire to live (and have the capacity to live).

Finally, we have witnessed political backlash against expatriate, touristic and digital nomadic mobilities in various localities

in the 2020s, with digital nomads increasingly labelled as 'new gentrifiers'. However, what surfaces less frequently in discussions is how digital nomads could be viewed as political actors. Their decision to take up a mobile lifestyle is both a result of and a response to current societal and political realities; it is a product of as well as a strategy to escape rising living costs in major European and North American cities, and to adapt to the diminishing prospects of long-term employment, secure pensions and property ownership that were more accessible to their parents' generation.

Instead, digital nomads can vote with their feet, instrumentalising their mobility privileges and global inequalities in cost of living between Global North and Global South countries through geoarbitrage practices. To counter for the complexity, paradoxes and tensions that are ingrained in digital nomadism as a phenomenon, this books points towards causalities and chain effects that exist between transnational gentrification in both the localities of departure and those where digital nomads' travel is destined. While escaping the impact of gentrification in their cities of origin, digital nomads can potentially contribute towards it in other locations. Future studies should address how different sub-types of digital nomadism potentially contribute to localised forms of spatial injustice in specific geographies, including both in rural and urban settings where the localised ramifications can differ considerably. This is particularly important in light of the post-pandemic rise of diverse remote work mobilities—such as workationing, digital nomadism and remote work expatriate mobility—which demand that we rework our analytical frameworks, theoretical approaches and methodological designs beyond existing migration or tourism paradigms.

Appendix: Material and methodology

The book is based on empirical material collected between 2017 and 2023. The material analysed in this book consists of three qualitative datasets, collected using ethnographic methods. The main corpus of material consists of interviews while the secondary dataset is observation data:

1. The first dataset consists of 60 qualitative interviews conducted with digital nomads. The interviews were semi-structured and thematic (see the interview structure below). The interviews focused on different practices and meanings related to the digital nomad lifestyle. The interviewees' demographic characteristics were diverse, and they are further described below.
   - *Citizenship.* A large majority held passport from Global North countries (EU and North American citizens being the most prominent), but the interviewees also included citizens from Egypt, Peru, Serbia, Morocco, South Africa, Israel and New Zealand. The interviewees' digital nomad lifestyle was greatly enabled by their privileged mobility rights, linked to their citizenship status. Less privileged passport holders had acquired visas in the EU or US to ensure greater mobility rights.
   - *Demographics.* Most interviewees were aged between 28 and 37 years. The gender distribution between women and men was rather equal, women making up slightly more than half of the interviewees. As for occupations, programmer, IT consultant, freelancer in online/social media marketing or advertisement, project manager and business owner were

the most common professions, although the interviewees also worked as journalists, researchers and translators, as well as one lawyer and a therapist. Approximately two thirds were either company owners or freelancers, whereas the rest were employed by diverse companies and had more 'traditional' employment contracts. With the arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic, the number of company-employed digital nomads seemed to grow.

- *Destinations*. The interview data was collected in following locations: Koh Lanta (Thailand, 2017, 2019), Bansko (Bulgaria, 2021), Tallinn (Estonia, 2021), the Canary Islands (Spain, 2022), Mallorca (Spain, 2022), Lisbon (Portugal, 2023), Ponta do Sol (Madeira, Portugal, 2023) and Flic-en-Flac (Mauritius, 2023). These destinations were chosen because of the existence of digital nomad hubs/communities. However, these data collection sites are little contextualised in this book. The local/national context did not play a similar role or have the significance it does, for instance, for migrants who settle in a more permanent manner. In contrast, the digital nomad community and infrastructure, as shown by the present study, were significant contextual factors and ones that I have discussed in more detail.

2. The second dataset consists of qualitative interviews with stakeholders—co-working owners, co-living owners, consultants and other professionals—offering services to digital nomads. A total of ten stakeholders were interviewed and informal discussions were held with several others. The stakeholder data was collected in Tallinn (Estonia, 2021), the Canary Islands (Spain, 2022), Mallorca (Spain, 2021), Koh Lanta (Thailand, 2017, 2019) and Lisbon (Portugal, 2023). Some interviews were conducted online for practical reasons.
3. The third dataset consists of observation notes. I conducted observation at various digital nomad events, conferences and networking sessions, co-working spaces, social activities and so forth. The observation data was collected in Koh Lanta (Thailand, 2017, 2019), Tallinn (Estonia, 2021), Bansko (Bulgaria,

2021), Las Palmas (the Canary Islands, 2022), Palma (Mallorca, 2021) and Ponta do Sol (Madeira, Portugal, 2023). This allowed me to gain insights into the formation of community, socialities, the spatial configurations of work and the commodification of digital nomadism through targeted services.

The interview data was transcribed and processed using Atlas.ti, a qualitative analysis programme. The research participants were located through the snowballing method, and often found through digital nomad events, such as after-work social events and social media platforms. A large majority of the interviews were conducted in English. However, some data citations in Finnish and French were translated by the author. The overall material was analysed using thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006; Ruusuvuori et al. 2019). As for my researcher positionality, I was at times positioned as a digital nomad myself, having extensive mobility and an expatriate background. I also noticed that my positionality as a researcher became visible during the fieldwork, evoking positive and curious reactions by the participants, who were generally quite pleased that their lifestyle was being studied and receiving more attention.

Ethical Considerations

The main ethical issues related to drafting the interview guide and the research design, to conducting the fieldwork, preserving the collected datasets and to reporting on the findings. The semi-structured interview format was chosen because it provided the interviewees with the most space and freedom to answer the interview questions. I also specified at the beginning of every interview, which was recorded if the interviewee gave permission for it to be, that all identifiable features would be masked when referencing their accounts. In a similar manner, it was made clear that the interviewee did not need to answer questions that they did not wish to. Prior to every interview, the interviewees were asked to sign a consent form, and they were offered the chance

to have a copy of the signed form. All interviewees that are referenced in this book have been given a pseudonym and their identifiable features (age, profession, citizenship) are not referenced in such a manner that would reveal their identity. Particular attention has been paid to anonymity, confidentiality and data protection throughout the entire research process.

On Definitional Issues

As well as digital nomads themselves being on the move, so the definition of what constitutes a digital nomad is also constantly in flux, as discussed earlier. Self-identified digital nomads and individuals who had been leading a digital nomadic lifestyle for more than a year were selected for inclusion in this study. I have opted to use the term 'digital nomad' throughout the book, as it has become a standardised term in relevant research literature, where it has also been conceptualised in detail (see, e.g., Hannonen 2020; Cook 2023). Simultaneously, I acknowledge—although it lies beyond the scope of this book—that nomadism has deep historical roots and that traditional nomadism is fundamentally different from the technology-driven and work-related lifestyle mobility that is digital nomadism (see Urmanbetova 2018).

Interview Structure for Dataset 1

1. **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**
   - Age, gender, educational level, nationality/citizenship
   - What do you do for a profession?
   - What does your typical day at work look like?
   - Where do you physically work? In co-working spaces?
   - What arrangements have you had to make concerning work?

2. **PRACTICES**
   - How long have you been working 'on the move', leading a mobile lifestyle?
   - How did you start this lifestyle?
   - What trajectories have you had, say during two or five years?
   - How do you choose the destinations (insider info, networks, digital spaces)? Do you prefer some particular destinations/hubs/co-working spaces?
   - How do you plan your trips?
   - How do you plan practical issues, such as taxation, health care, visas, etc.?
   - What are the most important things that you travel with? Do you travel with some 'non-useful' things?
   - Do you have a lot of material possessions 'back home'? Has your attitude towards stuff changed since you started this mobile lifestyle?

3. **MEANINGS OF MOBILITY/IMMOBILITY**
   - Why do you like to work on the move? What good and bad sides do you see in it?
   - Do you consider this a permanent or a temporary lifestyle?
   - What do your family members/relatives/friends back home think about your lifestyle?
   - How does this lifestyle impact your social networks/relationships? Planning a family, children?
   - How do you understand 'home'? What does home mean to you?
   - Where do you feel you belong?
   - How does this lifestyle relate to your identity? How do you identify yourself? As a digital nomad?
   - Do you have any questions, additional information or something I haven't thought to ask?

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Index

Indexer's note: Interviewed persons are referred to in the index by pseudonym (profession; citizenship). Page numbers with 'f', 'n' and 't' refer to figures, footnotes and tables respectively.

C

D

E

F

G

H

I

J

K

L

M

N

O

P

Q

R

T

U

V

W

Z