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Digital Nomads: Toward a Future Research Agenda

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Abstract

As pandemic lockdowns forced many traditional office workers to work from home, a subset of these workers left their countries of employment altogether to join a growing movement of location-independent transnational digital workers. These *digital nomads* have captured the imagination of mainstream and social media, which have promulgated images of laptop laden millennials from the Global North working within sight of a beach in Bali one month and from an Airbnb in a hip Buenos Aires neighborhood the next. Despite the media attention, academic scholarship on this topic is limited. What does exist appears primarily in the business and management literature, especially journals focused on information technology (IT) and tourism, as well as the sociological subfield of leisure studies. To date, scholars of migration have barely engaged with the topic, despite the subliterature on *lifestyle migration* (Benson & O'Reilly, 2009) providing a valuable theoretical antecedent to discussions of digital nomadism.

This paper offers a critical overview of what is known about digital nomadism so far and argues that migration scholars should seriously consider this topic in the years ahead. Theoretical frameworks and methodological approaches from migration scholarship could help to better understand what digital nomadism means for the future of work and the social contract between citizen and nation-state. There are also important implications for the *nomadlands*—the destinations where these remote workers temporarily reside. The recent appearance of over 30 digital nomad visas is one early sign of destination countries considering a policy response.

Table of Contents

Introduction

The notion of remote work has gained popularity during the Covid-19 pandemic as offices closed and their employees shifted to working from home during the lockdowns. The prolongation of this situation led many families to move to places other than their habitual residence, whether within the same country but outside urban centres, or in some cases abroad to reunite with family and loved ones (in the case of transnational families) or in search of a more pleasant lifestyle. The expansion of remote work to many service industries and to people who were paid employees rather than freelance professionals has given rise to a certain interest in *digital nomadism*, a vision that people could adopt a mobile lifestyle in search of leisure while working (so the adage goes) from a beach or from a cabin in the woods, and thus achieving a better work-life balance.

Digital nomadism has also attracted attention as the antidote to immigration visa bottlenecks. Anecdotal evidence suggests that talented engineers and managers in high demand in knowledge economies like Canada are opting to stay in their country of origin—close to friends and extended family and enjoying a more affordable cost of living—while employed remotely by companies in the destination country. Rumour has it that in some cases, transactions in cryptocurrencies facilitate this type of digital nomadism and offer ways to avoid taxation (Radocchia, 2019). At the same time, a range of digital nomad visas, which seek to attract these high-level nomad professionals, have been emerging in countries around the world (Hooper & Benton, 2022; OECD, 2022). Interestingly, a common feature of these visas is the requirement that the applicant can demonstrate remote employment and an expectation of income (indicatively $30,000 USD per year or more in many countries).

The aim of this paper is to demarcate the contours of the phenomenon of digital nomadism as we know it thus far, discuss its implications for the future of work and the future of migration, and develop an agenda for further research.

Who is a digital nomad?

Mainstream media and social media platforms shape an image of the digital nomad experience. This is captured in the following narrative description from Müller (2016):

> The term "digital nomad" describes people who no longer rely on work in a conventional office; instead, they can decide freely when and where to work. They can essentially work anywhere, as long as they have their laptop with them and access to a good internet connection. This means that their workplace might be in a shared office in Berlin, Germany for one month, and a month later they will be working on the same project in a café in Chiang Mai, Thailand. (p. 344)

This description, often represented by the image of a worker on their laptop on a beach somewhere (e.g., the cover of Hooper & Benson, 2022), dominates the journalistic space and digital nomad generated media (blogs, vlogs, social media). Yet, it does not fully cover the phenomenon of digital nomadism and is not backed by a clear operational definition.

As Aroles et al. (2020) argue, "there is a lack of clarity regarding what exactly constitutes digital nomadism. This ambiguity is in part connected to the variety of individuals who identify as digital nomads, ranging from freelancers to remote workers to independent entrepreneurs" (p. 126). Indeed, studies suggest that being a digital nomad may be best understood as a frame of mind rather than as a specific type of employment or travel experience (Aroles et al., 2020).

In summarizing the limited academic literature on the topic, Hannonen (2020) proposes the following definition: "The term 'digital nomad' refers to a rapidly emerging class of highly mobile professionals, whose work is location independent. Thus, they work while traveling on a

(semi)permanent basis and vice versa, forming a new mobile lifestyle" (p. 12). This definition highlights some of the key attributes of digital nomadism, including location independence, mobility, and professional class. These characteristics are also evident in the scalar definition developed by Reichenberger (2018), which reflects differing degrees of intensity in digital nomad mobility (see Table 1).

Table 1. Scalar definition of digital nomad from Reichenberger (2018)

Level	Definition
0	Digital nomads are individuals who achieve location independence by conducting their work in an online environment,
1	Transferring this independence to mobility by not consistently working in one designated personal office space
2	But using the possibility to simultaneously work and travel
3	To the extent that no permanent residence exists.

Other scholars have attempted to define the digital nomad by developing schematics that differentiate it from other kinds of mobile lifestyles and remote work. Cook (2020) developed the diagram below (Figure 1) based on interviews with digital nomads, expats, and locals in Chiang Mai, Thailand. The organisation of these actors along axes of mobility and work focus show that digital nomads distinguish themselves from tourists and other kinds of leisure-prioritizing travelers, including backpackers. Digital nomads' mobility and work focus places them most similar to business travelers, but they are clearly distinguished from working expats. Cook (2020) makes additional notes from this distinction:

> First, digital nomads rejected the label 'tourist'. Second, Western ex-pats living in digital nomad hotspots differentiated themselves from digital nomads, whom they described as transient. Third, Thai locals were mostly unaware of the digital nomad term and simply used the term 'farang', which roughly translates as 'Westerner' or 'foreigner'. Finally, most digital nomads subjectively rated themselves as highly mobile and work focused. (p. 356)
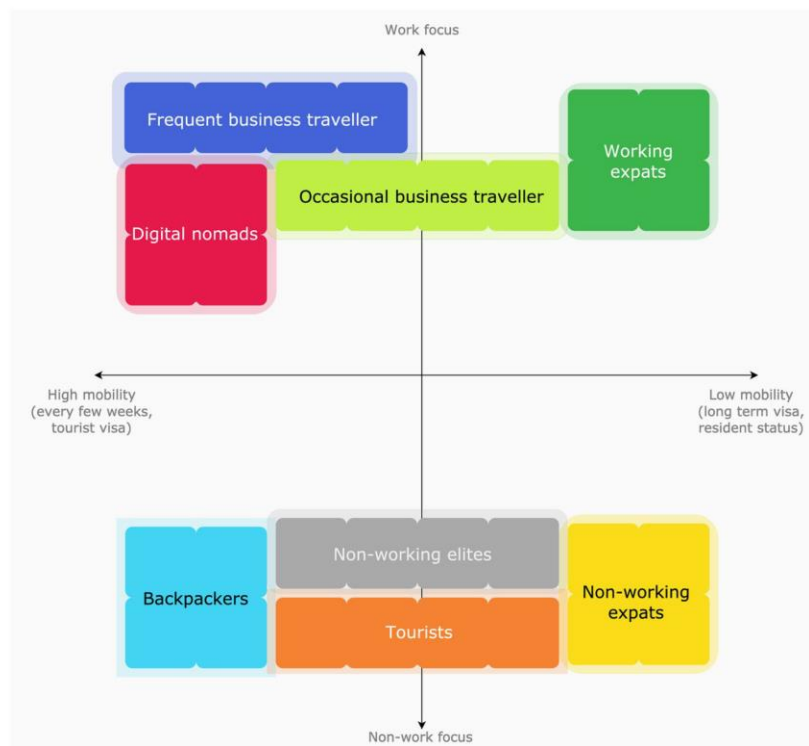
Figure 1. Mobility and Work in Digital Nomadism typologies (Cook 2020, p. 356)

The strong work focus and the technology-based work distinguish digital nomads from other kinds of lifestyle migrants including what Korpela (2020) refers to as "bohemian lifestyle migrants" (p. 3359). However, there is an overlap between digital nomads and lifestyle migrants including in the locales these groups frequent and their motivations for travel. As Hart (2015) notes, there is also often overlap in chosen leisure activities.

Hannonen (2020) also compares digital nomads to other conceptual categories and identifies digital nomads as existing in a nebulous space between those focused on work-related mobility and those with lifestyle mobility as a primary motivation. This is captured in Figure 2.
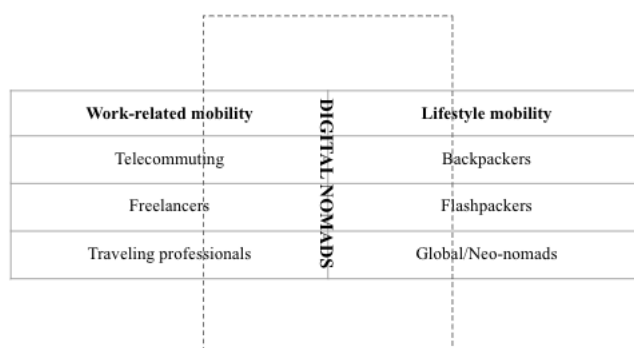

Figure 2. Interrelations of digital nomadism with related phenomena (Hannonen 2020, p. 340)

This analysis brings together the classifications offered by other scholars notably, including Reichenberger's (2018) three tier classification of digital nomads (see Table 1) and Toussaint's (2009) distinction among (1) continuous travelers living a simplified life to save money and funding

their lifestyle by asking for donations or sponsorships; (2) independent workers who choose a profession that allows them to travel, conducting work through various communication techniques; and (3) business travelers who travel around the world running their business and seeking living environments that serve their requirements for a good habitat (Hannonen, 2020). Figure 2 also draws on Richards (2015), who distinguishes among the backpacker, the flashpacker, and the global nomad. The main differentiation between digital nomads and backpackers is that the latter travel for touristic or lifestyle reasons without the need to work or work odd jobs to support their journey (Hannonen, 2020). Flashpackers are a subset of backpackers who carry with them their digital equipment (see Glossary for full definitions of the terms).

In trying to define and document digital nomadism, some scholars have turned their focus toward understanding the motivations of engaging in this work-lifestyle. Indeed, the uncertainty in defining digital nomadism is also reflected in the ambiguous or largely ungeneralizable motivations of this community. As documented in Figure 2 (above), Hannonen (2020) argues that digital nomads overlap with various kinds of lifestyle and work-related mobility phenomena. This extends to their motivations as well, with some digital nomads' primary motivations more closely tied to lifestyle, while for others, work is a primary motivation. As Aroles and colleagues (2020) state, "the motivations of digital nomads are particularly disparate, ranging from an attempt to explore one's inner self to a desperate escape from the corporate world" (p.121). In another take on digital nomad motivations, Putra and Agirachman (2016) suggest digital nomadism is primarily a touristic or leisure-focused lifestyle and that novelty is an important motivation for digital nomads.

Freedom is highlighted as a key motivation for digital nomads. Reichenberg (2018) focuses on the freedom motivations of participating in a digital nomad work-lifestyle. Based on online content analysis and semi-structured in-depth interviews with digital nomads themselves, the author suggests that digital nomad motivations can be understood as an enactment of three overlapping forms of freedom: professional, spatial, and personal (see Figure 3).
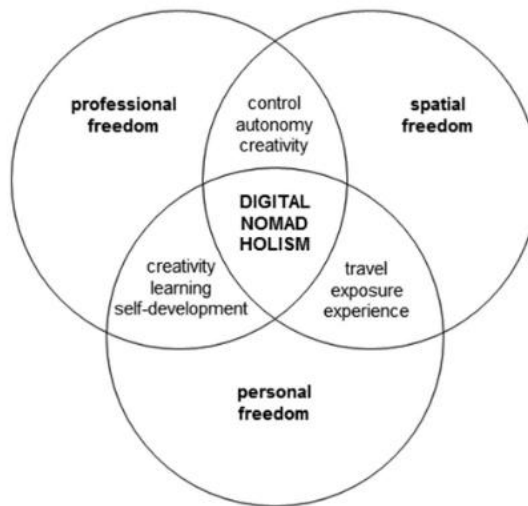
Figure 3. Three freedoms of digital nomadism (from Reichenberger 2018)

Professional freedoms involve control over the selection and structure of work (see also Schlagwein, 2018). This is especially relevant for digital nomads engaged in freelance or entrepreneurial activities. Spatial freedom primarily refers to location independence and personal freedom concerns the focus on self-development and a rebalancing of life priorities. These latter two examples of freedom suggest that in some ways, the motivations of digital nomads parallel those of other kinds of lifestyle migrants (Korpela, 2020). Some scholars question the reality of

the professional freedom highlighted by Reichenberger (2018). For example, Cook (2020) argues that digital nomads struggle with work-life balance and rely on a variety of external or self-imposed disciplining practices for productivity. Thompson (2021) argues that digital nomadism is akin to precarious gig work, and the motivation for engaging in this lifestyle is a way to gain some financial stability in more affordable locations (see *geoarbitrage* in [Glossary](#)). Ferriss (2007) argues for a mobile, location-independent lifestyle for both its intrinsic and financial benefits.

Other scholars have studied the motivations for digital nomads choosing specific locations to enact their lifestyle. Lhakard (2022) and Sukma Winarya Prabawa and Ratih Pertiwi (2020) present findings on digital nomad motivations for working in Chiang Mai, Thailand, and Bali, Indonesia, respectively. They find that beautiful or inspiring natural and cultural environments and support for living and working (including infrastructure and local digital nomad networks) are important motivations. In sum, the literature has engaged with the question of digital nomad motivations but much like the challenge of defining digital nomadism, has failed to come to a conclusive finding. Motivations related to lifestyle, including location independence, novelty, and work-life balance, are most evident in the literature, but these are not the only motivations. Future research could further explore the question of digital nomad motivations, especially in comparison to other kinds of lifestyle migrants and remote workers.

There is an unspoken assumption in works on digital nomadism that the person in question is young, white, highly educated and holds a strong passport that enables their seamless mobility. Thompson (2018) notes that her interviewees spoke English as their mother tongue, were not proficient in other languages, held university degrees, and came from affluent family backgrounds of highly educated parents. Despite anecdotal evidence of digital nomad participants from East Asia (primarily South Korea and Japan) and the Global South, most of these nomads are from the United States, Canada, Europe, or Australia. The most acknowledged demographic of digital nomads is their country of origin, often discussed using the terminology of *strong passport countries* (Cook, 2020; Thompson, 2018; Wang et al., 2018). The strength of a passport refers to the number of countries that one can visit without requiring a visa. Interestingly, many digital nomads reject national attachments and identify as "citizens of the world," albeit are highly dependent on their citizenship and passport to practice their lifestyle choices (Cook, 2020).

Future research needs to delve deeper into the intersectional dimensions of digital nomadism, discussing critically the role of citizenship and strong passports, the ways in which experiences of digital nomadism are gendered, ethnicized, and racialized, and how the archetype of the digital nomad relates to broader cultural transformation.

How many digital nomads are there?

The size of the global digital nomad community is impossible to scientifically assess given that digital nomads do not register anywhere; they do not generally inform their country of habitual residence or citizenship that they are leaving, and they do not register—like traditional migrants do—in the country of provisional or transient residence (Korpela, 2020). There is no clear indication that digital nomads actually use any of the digital nomad visas that exist (Hooper & Banton, 2022). And as discussed above, there is even disagreement as to who among the different types of transnational professionals and lifestyle migrants qualifies as a digital nomad.

The State of Independence in America report (2018; 2019) has included a separate category for digital nomads since 2018. The 2019 survey estimates that 4.1 million independent workers and 3.2 million traditional workers in the United States describe themselves as digital nomads (7.3 million total), while an additional 16.1 million aspire to become digital nomads someday. Albeit Hannonen (2020) draws attention to the fact that this report focuses on remote work more broadly, with the possibility but not the condition of transnational mobility. In this way, the State of Independence in America report is using a broad interpretation of the digital nomad

that resembles all levels of the scalar definition developed by Reichenberger (2018) (see Table 1). The pandemic was a significant impetus for increases in remote work. Hooper and Banton (2022) note that an estimated 7.9 percent of the global workforce worked from home prior to the pandemic. This percentage doubled (to 17.4 percent) during the second quarter of 2020 when the hardest lockdowns were put in place. In Canada, Johal (2023) reports that about 40 percent of employees worked from home in April 2020 compared to 4 percent in 2016. While the number has since declined (19 percent of Canadians reported working exclusively remotely in April 2022, with a further 5.8 percent in hybrid arrangements), there is a clear trend toward more remote work. And yet working remotely for all or part of the time does not equate to being a digital nomad.

Perhaps a good source for a realistic estimate of the scale of the digital nomad movement is the online community Digital Nomads Nation (2023), which claims to be assembling the first digital nation of workers. It currently includes over 155,000 members. Within the digital nomad community, there are ambitious estimates of the community's growth. At the DNX Global Digital Nomad Conference, Levels (2015) estimated that there would be one billion digital nomads by 2035. Following an approach reminiscent of Makimoto and Manners' (1997) seminal book on the topic, Levels (2015) draws on demographic data (e.g., increasing percentage of freelancers in the working population; declines in homeownership; declining marriage rate) and projections of technological advances (i.e., increased global internet speeds; faster and cheaper air travel) to produce this ambitious estimate. While we consider these projections overly ambitious, the demographic and technological changes that Levels identifies do suggest the digital nomad trend is likely to continue to grow. Various media and academic sources have found some validity in these claims, and the estimate of 1 billion digital nomads has been quoted in both mainstream media and academic sources (CNBC International, 2022; Wang et al., 2018). These numbers only provide a context within which we need to assess the incidence of digital nomadism. Future studies need to utilise a variety of entry points with a view to estimating the size, locations, and main socio-demographic features of the digital nomad population around the world.

Where are the digital *nomadlands*?

While asking where digital nomads live may seem a contradiction in terms—as nomads are by definition in transit—academic and media sources point to specific locations that are preferred *nomadlands*. While popular imagination of the digital nomad is someone working from a hammock on a beach, studies have shown that this is not fully accurate. Wang el al. (2018, p. 7) point out that the tendency toward "exotic" locations is often balanced with the need for work infrastructure like high-speed internet access. Digital nomads thus tend to gravitate toward peripheral urban centres in countries with an "exotic" or touristic appeal, and a lower cost of living than their own country of origin or employment.

The most referenced and studied locations include: Cambodia, Indonesia (especially Bali), Thailand (Bangkok and Chiang Mai), and Vietnam in Asia; Argentina (Buenos Aires), Colombia (Medellín), and Mexico (Mexico City) in Latin America; Germany (Berlin), Portugal, and Romania in Europe. Nomadlist.com (2023) is a frequently cited source of the most popular destinations for digital nomads. The website presents a user-generated "Nomad Score" that collates user assessments on cost of living, internet speed, safety/crime, and fun. At the moment of writing (April 2023), the top destinations include:

- Buenos Aires, Argentina
- Bangkok, Thailand
- Mexico City, Mexico
- Lisbon, Portugal
- Canggu, Bali, Indonesia

- Timisoara, Romania
- Gran Canaria, Canary Islands, Spain
- Penang, Malaysia
- Madeira, Portugal
- Medellín, Colombia

Interestingly only Argentina is included in the list of countries that offer digital nomad, workcation, or virtual working visas compiled by Hooper and Banton (2022). Although more recently, Portugal, Spain, and Malaysia have implemented digital nomad visas, and scholars studying Thailand and Indonesia have proposed specialized visas (Lhakard, 2022; Octavia, 2022). The concept of *geoarbitrage*, introduced by Tim Ferriss in his book *The 4-Hour Workweek* (2007), is the practice of scaling down living expenses by relocating (temporarily) to countries that are cheaper due to currency exchange rates and cost of living. Simply, it can be understood as a dollar having greater value in Mexico than in the United States. Mancinelli (2020) critiques Ferriss' promotion of this concept as an opportunistic use of systemic privileges of nationality for the benefit of leisure.

These observations open up a broader discussion about the local implications of digital nomadism for destination cities and localities. Opinions diverge. Haking (2018) suggests the presence of digital nomads in "innovation hubs" can lead to a beneficial spillover effect for the local population and economy. Lhakard (2022) studies the motivations of digital nomads' location selection with a concern for developing policy that maximises attractiveness. McElroy (2020) by contrast warns that the presence of digital nomads in Cluj, Romania, is leading to housing gentrification and the appropriation of Roma cultural identity. Investigating the impact of digital nomadism in the top preferred locations is an important issue with implications for local governments and the communities concerned. For example, the Mexico City government is encouraging digital nomads to stay through a recent partnership with AirBnb and UNESCO despite criticism from housing activists that these nomads are exacerbating housing shortages in the city (Fajardo et al., 2022; Reuters, 2022).

While existing studies mostly consist of ethnographic research on selected locations, there is a need for further critical work on the impact of digital nomads on those locations and on the local policies and politics that may surround such transnational phenomena.

What kind of work do digital nomads do?

Employment is a crucial feature that distinguishes digital nomads from other types of frequent travelers such as backpackers or "bohemian lifestyle migrants" (Korpela, 2020). Understanding discussions of digital nomad employment requires considering both their profession and modality of employment. Concerning professions, both academic and grey literature identify an association between digital nomadism and working in the information and communications technology (ICT) sector, financial services, scientific research, or other professional sectors that do not require a physical presence for the delivery of services (see also Hooper & Benton, 2022, p. 6). Aroles et al. (2020) highlight five modalities that capture the professional lives of digital nomads: remote employment, entrepreneurship, freelancing, travelling through work as an employee, and having more than one professional activity.

Iliescu (2021) employs the term *knowmad* to describe an emerging global meritocratic professional elite with a skill set that puts them in a position of power in relation to their employers. One of the ways that these knowmads use this power is in the negotiation of their work mobility. Iliescu (2021) draws on work from Moravec (2008, 2013a, 2013b), who defines the knowmad as a "nomadic knowledge worker – that is, a creative, imaginative, and innovative person who can work with almost anybody, anytime, and anywhere" (p. 99). Knowmads represent an emerging subset of knowledge workers (i.e., those employed in pharmaceutical and biotechnological

sciences; high hierarchical positions in organisations; strategic or market growth positions; and ICT professionals capable of independent decision-making) with particular competencies in ICT.

Several scholars have noted that digital nomads operate as members of the gig economy (Nash et al., 2018; Sutherland & Jarrahi, 2017; Thompson, 2018; Thompson, 2019; Wang et al., 2018). As part of the gig economy, digital nomads operate as freelancers or entrepreneurs who earn an income through completion of short-term or project-specific contracts. This employment modality also requires digital nomads to seek out and recruit clients as well as manage a personal brand (Wang et al., 2018). Some scholars articulate this position in the gig economy in stark contrast to the knowmads described above. Rather than understanding digital nomadism as an exercise of freedom and autonomy, Thompson (2018, 2019) suggests this movement is better understood as an adaptive response to downward mobility and employment precarity within neoliberal economies of the Global North.

With regard to digital nomads' entrepreneurship activities, Ferriss (2007) is a foundational text as it promotes a variety of approaches to start companies that generate a passive income and allow the entrepreneur to travel. One of the popular entrepreneurial approaches for digital nomads is *dropshipping*: "a fulfilment method where … the store purchases the item from a third-party supplier, and has it shipped directly to the customer. As a result, the seller doesn't have to handle the product directly" (Cook, 2020, p. 12). Amazon is a major platform and distribution channel for *dropshipping* companies.

Ferriss (2007) is also a proponent of virtual assistants, highly educated professionals from countries in the Global South (Ferriss identifies India and the Philippines as sources of virtual assistants) who are paid the prevailing wage in their own country to perform many of the tasks required to run the entrepreneur's operation. The employment of virtual assistants adds another layer to the globalised nature of digital nomad entrepreneur activities as well as their reliance on the neoliberal capitalist order that requires and perpetuates global inequalities. Another popular entrepreneurial activity among digital nomads is documenting and sharing the lifestyle through social media and online publications (Willment, 2020; CNBC International, 2022).

In the wake of the pandemic and the increase in remote full-time employment, the question of digital nomad employment modalities requires revisiting. Are digital nomads necessarily freelancers or independent professionals? Or should we also consider full-time paid employees who live in a different country from their employer as a digital nomad? The implications that the employment relationship has for taxation, welfare, access to health and pension benefits are manifold and remain under researched (Hooper & Benton, 2022). Such implications concern both the individual digital nomad who might find themself stuck in a situation of permanent precarity, as well as the systems of taxation, welfare, and health that might need to provide for flexible schemes to cover those individuals who live such mobile transnational lives.

A three-dimensional framework for analysing digital nomadism

We propose a three-dimensional framework for digital nomadism that incorporates a spatial dimension (transnational mobility between or among specific locations), a temporal dimension (the pace and frequency of the mobility and its duration), and a scope dimension (consideration of profession, modality or employment, and work/leisure balance).

The key characteristic of digital nomadism's spatial dimension is location independence. Location independence describes a work-lifestyle that is not tied to a specific place of reference, and it is often described as a key motivation for digital nomads and other lifestyle migrants (Korpela, 2020; Thompson, 2018). Location independence can also imply a lack of attachment to one's place of origin. The lack of attachment to a locality is emphasised in digital nomad terminology: the place of origin or of habitual residence is not one's home or homeland but one's *homebase*—signifying a place where one returns to for extended periods of time. The notion of

homebase, though, emphasises the functional rather than symbolic or emotional role of this place of origin and return (Cook, 2022).

Our proposed definition of digital nomadism excludes those who work remotely in their home countries, having perhaps relocated to a smaller city or a home in the countryside. Digital nomads are, by definition, transnational; they move across borders, like temporary migrants albeit instead of searching for work at their destination, their work is portable and delivered remotely through their laptops.

The key temporal feature of digital nomadism is their transient nature. As Hannonen (2020) describes, digital nomads are "traveling on a (semi)permanent basis" (p. 12). What semi(permanent) means is difficult to say, and ethnographic research from various scholars suggests that some nomads change location every few weeks while others move every few months. The pace of the nomadism is in fact dynamic. Ferriss (2007) refers to mini-retirements that involve "relocating to one place for one to six months before going home or moving to another locale" (p. 188). *Slow travel* is a similar concept and implies spending extended periods of time in a single location before relocating again or returning to a homebase. While the meaning of semi-permanent movement is an important part of the temporal dimension of our framework and requires more investigation, we argue that it is difficult to quantify semi-permanent travel. Thus, we do not find analysis such as Richards (2015), who suggests that the average flashpacker travels 62 days per year, particularly relevant for defining the digital nomad.

The temporal dimension of digital nomadism does not only refer to its pace or rhythm—the length of each stay at a different destination—but also the overall duration of this lifestyle choice. For now, digital nomadism is closely identified with young, single adults without family obligations (although some studies include participants outside of this norm including families and older adults). However, some within the community suggest that digital nomadism reflects a cultural shift away from sedentary lifestyles (Levels, 2015). Indeed, the notion of the nomad as it was introduced in mainstream contemporary society by Deleuze and Guattari (1986) and Braidotti (1994) is a metaphor in reference to traditional nomadic communities who engage in this kind of iterant mobility as a cultural practice. On the other hand, Wang et al. (2018) suggest that digital nomadism might be understood through the historical antecedent of the *Wanderjahre*, a Medieval European tradition of journeyman who travel for a period of two to three years in one's early adult life. There is a need to understand whether digital nomadism is a phase in life—a new gap year or *Wanderjahre*—or whether it proposes itself as an alternative lifestyle for a longer duration.

The temporal and spatial dimensions distinguish digital nomads from temporary labour migrants or *expats* who may move between different places but do so less frequently (their temporary stays being a full year or more). Meanwhile, the scope dimension highlights the importance of work for digital nomads and characterizes them as different from other kinds of lifestyle migrants and nomadic travelers. In addition, our scope dimension distinguishes digital nomads from temporary migrants or expats who often (although not exclusively) work within the same country as their (temporary) residence. Thus, while digital nomads share with expats, temporary migrants, or working holiday makers the employment feature of their mobility (unlike visitors and tourists, they work at their destination), they are distinct from those in function of the temporal and spatial character of their mobility. In addition, unlike expats or intra-company transferees or other temporary migrants, their work travels with them and is not necessarily situated at a particular location.

Concerning profession and modality of employment, our definition of digital nomads is flexible and inclusive to a point. Most professions that have the technical feasibility for remote work from another country—including those in the ICT sector, financial services, scientific research, or other professional sectors, and those covered in the term *knowmad* (Iliescu, 2021)—can be considered in our work scope dimension. Likewise, our scope dimension is broad and incorporates the five modalities of employment proposed by Aroles et al. (2020): remote employment, entrepreneurship, freelancing, travelling through work as an employee and having

more than one professional activity. Future research needs to unpack how these different modalities form different types of digital nomadism and link up with socio-economic and other characteristics of the digital nomads.

One underexplored question in relation to the modality of work is the quantity of work: are digital nomads working full time or part time? This poses a question related to work/leisure balance: how much work is necessary for someone to be classified as a digital nomad? Is someone who works the five-hour work week that Ferriss champions a remote worker? Our framework does not directly engage with this question. In sum, the scope dimension of our framework is flexible concerning profession and modality of employment. The principal consideration is that the digital nomad works remotely in a country that is different from the one in which they are employed or have citizenship ties.

A research agenda for the future

More than 25 years ago, Makimoto and Manners (1997) coined the term digital nomad, anticipating that advances in technology and an emerging population of transnational travel-workers would challenge key political and social institutions, including the nation-state. This literature review has shown that today, there is indeed a community of digital nomads and transnational remote workers who are posing questions to our current notions of work and our nation-state centered frameworks for employment, taxation, and citizenship. At the same time, we note that digital nomads are enabled to live their location-independent transnational lives thanks to their citizenship and strong passports. There are also implications for employers, host communities, and policymakers at municipal, regional, national, and transnational levels. We suggest that migration researchers, as part of interdisciplinary collaborations, can make an important contribution to better understanding this phenomenon. Below, we identify a set of research questions that form an agenda for understanding better the phenomenon of digital nomadism.

Implications for the future of work: Part of a remote-work revolution or a niche alternative lifestyle?

A question arises as to whether digital nomadism is developing as an important element in the transformation of work and the workplace through advanced digital technologies or whether it is rather a novel version of lifestyle migration for a privileged few. Or is digital nomadism emerging as a close combination of the two: a new work-life culture that epitomises a globalised capitalism and placeless work in which mobility is employed by increasingly precarious workers to maximise economic and personal benefits. On the other hand, if digital nomads simply represent an outlier or extreme case in work-lifestyle mobility, a better understanding of their experiences might shed light on other kinds of remote transnational employees.

A better understanding of the scale of the digital nomad movement (current and projected) would help toward this end. Emerging digital nomad visas should provide a new insight to the movement habits of some digital nomads. However, we suggest that quantitative scholars consider innovative approaches to getting a better understanding of the current and prospective numbers of digital nomads globally and in specific regions.

This topic begs the related question regarding digital nomad identity and experience. As we noted above, the literature makes a largely unstated assumption that digital nomads are young, white, highly educated, and hold a strong passport from a country in the Global North. If digital nomadism does indeed represent an important element of the transformation of work, scholars should endeavor to better understand the gendered, ethnicized, racialized, citizenship-

based, and intersectional experiences of actual and prospective digital nomads. Our review of digital nomad visa requirements around the world suggests that there is regional or national variation in the kinds of digital nomads that policymakers intend to attract. Regional comparison of digital nomad populations would provide insight on how countries intend to capitalise on this phenomenon, especially as these visas begin to take full effect.

Another aspect that is so far missing in the literature is a more in-depth study of the ramifications of digital nomadism for employment relations and the nature of work overall**.** Why would employers allow their workers to work completely remotely from another location? Is it a typical case of engaging freelancers and avoiding the indirect costs of welfare, onboarding, training, or career advancement? Is it, in other words, another form of work precarity where employers favour mobile, highly skilled workers precisely because they are not interested in the perks of the sedentary normal workplace? Or is it that employers adapt to the demands of a workforce that becomes increasingly atypical as the pandemic experience has shown that working from home or from a third location is both possible and desirable? And indeed, do digital nomads have employers in the first place? Or are they all freelancers or gig workers offering their services to a number of customers? These are important questions that have implications both for the future of work and the workplace but also in relation to labour migration policies—policies related to the localities where these nomads are temporarily staying; their countries of origin or previous residence to which they are attached at least by passport; and the related work, welfare, and citizenship implications for either.

Finally, the co-working and co-living spaces where digital nomads work and interact may be explored as the workplaces of the future offering flexible arrangements, fostering innovation, and alternative workplace or onboarding cultures (Ciolfi & de Carvalho, 2014; Haking, 2018; Liegl, 2014; Naz, 2017; Wang et al., 2018).

Implications for the social contract between nation-state and citizen/denizen

The question posed by Makimoto and Manners (1997) 25 years ago remains, notably whether digital nomadism and the location-independent worker can undermine the social contract between the citizen and the nation-state, creating the nomad/digital nation. Critical scholars have evaluated digital nomadism against the radical notion of the nomad developed by Deleuze and Guattari (1987) and Braidotti (1994). In particular, they evaluate the discourses of freedom presented in popular and journalistic literature (e.g., DW Documentary, 2019; Ferriss, 2007; Hart, 2015), emphasising that digital nomadism is not subverting neoliberal capitalism or the nation-state but rather reinforcing their contradictions as it precisely exploits strong passports and higher salaries in ways that disregard the needs and interests of local communities (who may benefit from additional income but suffer from increased competition for housing). For example, Aroles et al. (2020) argue that the digital nomadism movement has become institutionalised and corporatized over the years, and they suggest that capitalism relies on the production and reintegration of these nomadic lifestyles.

Future research should continue to explore the relationship between the digital nomads and other remote workers with their country of citizenship. We still lack longitudinal studies that consider people who remained nomadic for a number of years and the implications of such nomadism from socio-economic, political and identity perspectives (for an exception see Cook, 2020). This research could test the suggestion proposed by Makimoto and Manners (1997) that digital nomadism expresses a decline in both materialism and nationalism. There is also a dearth of studies on the structural aspects of digital nomadism, notably its implications for taxation, access to welfare and health or education (limited examples include Bosinaki, 2021; Kostic, 2019; Nanopoulos et al., 2021).

Implications for destination countries, cities, and communities

The relationship between digital nomads and their temporary host communities remains underexplored. Studies have shown that digital nomadism can facilitate processes of gentrification (e.g., McElroy, 2020) or lead to innovation and other benefits in the local economy (e.g., Haking, 2018). However, the impacts of digital nomadism on various aspects of local communities remains an important gap in the literature. The literature so far suggests that digital nomadism is a unique type of labour migration that brings migrants but not their labour. The potential for local innovation aside, most evidence from ethnographic research suggests that the digital nomads are not really contributing their skilled labour to the local economies where they temporarily reside. This is also suggested by our review of digital nomad visas (see Appendix; see also Hooper & Benton, 2022; OECD, 2022), which typically prohibit local work authorization. However, the future relationship between digital nomads and the local economy is open for debate as new visa programmes are introduced to attract these skilled migrants, like Malaysia's DE Rantau Nomad Pass.

A "communities within communities" dynamic is common among digital nomads, expats, and other kinds of lifestyle migrants, in which privileged immigrants build enclaves or insular communities where they have little interaction with local communities. Korpela (2020) notes that

> [I]nstead of immersing themselves in local cultures, they move within the (Western) bohemian – alternative – space and, rather than being at home everywhere, they are with people who share their lifestyle and values. It is thus not simply migration to a specific place but migration to a specific alternative social scene that exists in various places. (p. 3360)

Some scholars suggest that nomads are interested in connecting more with the local community but don't know how (Thompson, 2018), while others argue that nomads more actively seek to keep a distance from locals as a way of maintaining the exotic appeal of the location (Aydogdu, 2016). While research has tended to focus on digital nomads themselves, we still do not know much about how locals perceive these temporary migrants. These varied place-based relationships warrant more investigation and parallel other research on migration and integration.

A digital nomad policy for the future?

The proliferation of digital nomad visas and similar programs since 2020 also requires research attention (see Appendix; see also Hooper & Benton, 2022; OECD, 2022). More than 30 of these programmes have been implemented by governments wishing to attract and regularize digital nomad movement. While there has been some variation in the visa particulars, the typical digital nomad visa allows employed or self-employed foreign nationals (and often their families) to work and live in a country for 12 months or more, provided they can document their employment and a minimum income (minimum income requirements vary by country, see Appendix). These visas appear to be quick responses to a situation and not examples of pre-planned evidence-based policy.

Also, around the world there are variations in their use with different tax implications or tax incentives, varying income and application fee requirements, and different allowances of time in the country (it is worth noting that currently the largest single source of digital nomads is the United States, which is one of only two countries in the world where all citizens, regardless of their country of residence, have a tax liability). These variations suggest that countries are using the digital nomad visas with different motivations in mind.

Recent policy initiatives introducing these digital nomad visas point to the anticipated benefits that host cities and countries expect to have by hosting relatively affluent globetrotters to whom they need not provide any form of social protection (see, for instance, Octavia (2022) on Indonesia and Bosinaki (2021), Nanopoulos et al. (2021) on Greece). Time and research will tell whether these visas are effective in reaching policy goals.

Conclusion

This paper has highlighted what we know about the emerging phenomenon of digital nomadism in the academic literature and most importantly what we do not know and need to find out. We have set forth a three-part framework, that looks at the spatial and temporal dimension as well as the scope of digital nomadism, seeking to understand who digital nomads are. We have also explored the implications of digital nomadism for the future of work and future of migration. Such implications are manifold and can be far-reaching. A niche phenomenon for now, the proliferation of forms of transnational remote work raises important issues about the nature of the work place, the legal, financial, and social aspects of work, the geopolitical inequalities on which digital nomadism seems to be predicated (strong passports and low cost destinations with beautiful nature) which also translate into socio-economic inequalities (crowding out local people from neighbourhoods, creating a whole cottage industry related to the phenomenon). In addition, digital nomadism poses a challenge for our understanding of labour migration and related policies aimed to regulate it.

This paper develops a systematic research agenda for future research. This research agenda requires diverse methodologies that capture and analyse the multiple facets of digital nomadism. Multi-sited ethnography and digital ethnography are important approaches and need to be complemented by policy research and quantitative studies. This research agenda calls for multi-disciplinary perspectives that bring together business management and human resources, with migration studies, urban studies, tourism, and leisure approaches as well as social psychology and political science.

Appendix

The typical digital nomad visa

Based on our review of the programs listed below, we have created a typology of a typical digital nomad visa (DNV). There are 19 typical DNV programmes and a further 12 DNV programmes with slight variations on the typical DNV.

Characteristics of the Typical Digital Nomad Visa

- Program launched since August 2020 (first program in Estonia)
- Visa or visa program includes language that specifically refers to "digital nomads," "nomads," "freelance work," or "remote work"
- Time period: 6, 12, or 24 months with most (13) being 12-month visas
- Target audience: Employed or self-employed foreign nationals without limitations based on origin (programs with certain limitations on employment or country of origin are categorized as DNV with special features)
- Employment is a requirement of the visa, and self-employment, if appropriately documented, is accepted
- Income requirement: applicants must be able to document income sources. Countries vary widely in the amount required. Most income requirements are posted in USD or EUR. Some are posted as monthly income while others are yearly income.

In addition, the following describe most but not necessarily all Typical DNVs

- Extension or renewal typically allowed
- Dependents are permitted (although some programs require a separate application, separate visa fee, higher income amount)
- Most do not allow local work authorization

Typical DNV Programmes by country

- Antigua and Barbuda
- Barbados
- Belize
- Brazil
- Costa Rica
- Croatia
- Cyprus
- Dominica
- Ecuador
- Estonia
- Greece
- Hungary
- Malta
- Montserrat
- Namibia
- Panama
- Portugal (Digital Nomad Stay Visa)
- Romania
- Seychelles

Countries with DNV with special features

Albania	Very similar to typical DNVs but with a provision for renewal up to 5 years (possible pathway to PR).
Anguilla	This program is also open to students. Information vague on income requirements.
Argentina	Program is explicitly limited to those from visa-exempt countries. Information is sparse on self-employment: it seems possible that self-employed people can take advantage of this program, but it is unclear.
Bahamas, The	This program is open to students. No evidence that this program has sunset per the Hooper and Benton (2022) report.
Bermuda	This program is also open to students.
Cabo Verde	Program limited to foreign nationals from the Community of Portuguese-Speaking Countries, Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), Europe, and North America who are employed by a company outside Cabo Verde or who are self-employed.
Latvia	Program limited to those employed (or self-employed) by an OECD-registered employer.
Malaysia	The DE Rantau Nomad Pass (launched in October 2022) is similar to the typical DNVs, but it has a specific requirement that applicants work in digital related sectors: IT, digital marketing and content creation, software development, cyber security, and digital currencies.
Norway	The Svalbard Digital Nomad Visa is a unique program. It bears many similarities to the typical DNV, but it is region specific. It grants lifetime residency to eligible visa applicants to the island of Svalbard. Norway also has an independent contractor visa that is a potential pathway to residency for DNs but is categorized as a similar programme.
Portugal	Digital Nomad Residence Visa is granted for up to 5 years and is explicitly a pathway to permanent residency (note that Portugal has two programs, this one and the Digital Nomad Stay Visa which is a typical DNV).
Spain	Program is similar to typical DNVs but allows for renewal of up to 3–5 years. Similar to Portugal's Digital Nomad Residence Visa, it appears to be a pathway to permanent residency and citizenship.
Urban Arab Emirates	UAE has two programs: Remote Working Visa Scheme is only open to remote employees, not freelance workers. The Virtual Working Program is specific to Dubai and is for business owners. This second program has a higher income requirement.

The Typical DNVs and DNVs with special features are the focus of most of the data identified below. For ease of reference, we use the term DNV without a modifier, when referring to "typical DNVs" and "DNVs with special features" together. Our research has also identified 18 similar programmes and 8 pending or not yet active programmes. These are briefly discussed at the end.

Geography of Digital Nomad Visas (DNVs)

DNVs and similar programmes are found all over the world. However, there is a concentration of DNVs in the Caribbean and Latin America (in large part thanks to the widespread adoption of these programmes by small island nations in the Caribbean) and in Europe. To date, few countries in Africa and Asia have launched DNV programmes, although there are rumors of programme development in Asia especially. Interestingly, small island nations in the Pacific have not participated in these programmes at all.

	DNVs (typical and with variation)	Special Programs	Not Active / Pending
Africa (including island nations)	3 - Cabo Verde, Namibia, Seychelles	1 - Mauritius	1 - South Africa
Asia (including Middle East)	2 - Malaysia, UAE	4 - Indonesia, Japan, Taiwan, Thailand	3 - Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Thailand
Caribbean and Latin America	13 - Anguilla, Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, Bahamas Barbados, Belize, Bermuda, Brazil, Costa Rica, Dominica, Ecuador, Montserrat, Panama	5 - Aruba, Cayman Islands, Curaçao, Mexico, Saint Lucia	
Europe* *Norway has multiple programmes and is reflected twice	12 - Albania, Croatia, Cyprus, Estonia, Greece, Hungary, Latvia, Malta, Norway, Portugal, Romania, Spain	6 - Czechia, Georgia, Germany, Iceland, Italy, Norway	6 - Andorra, Finland, Italy, Lithuania, Montenegro, North Macedonia

Countries with DNV programmes

Total states with DNV programmes: 30	
Income (according to World Bank country classifications)	
High income countries (16)	Antigua and Barbuda, Bahamas, Barbados, Bermuda, Croatia, Cyprus, Estonia, Greece, Hungary, Latvia, Malta, Norway, Portugal, Seychelles, Spain, United Arab Emirates
Upper middle income (10)	Albania, Argentina, Brazil, Costa Rica, Dominica, Ecuador, Malaysia, Namibia, Panama, Romania
Lower middle income (2)	Belize, Cabo Verde
Not applicable	Anguilla, Montserrat (both are UK territories)
UN Small Island Developing States (9)	
Antigua and Barbuda, Bahamas, Barbados, Bermuda, Belize, Cabo Verde, Anguilla, Montserrat, Dominica	
Small states (defined by World Bank) and/or microstates/territories (less than 500,000 pop. and/or 1000 sq km. (14)	
Antigua and Barbuda, Bahamas, Barbados, Bermuda, Cyprus, Estonia, Malta, Seychelles, Belize, Cabo Verde, Anguilla, Montserrat, Dominica, Namibia	
EU/ECC (11 of 30 member states)	
Croatia, Cyprus, Estonia, Greece, Hungary, Latvia, Malta, Norway, Portugal, Romania, Spain (Albania is an EU candidate country)	
OECD member states (8 of 38 member states)	
Estonia, Greece, Hungary, Latvia, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Costa Rica	

There is variation in the countries participating in these programmes. There are a lot of small states, including those participating in UN SIDS (Small Island Developing States) as well as other small and microstates/territories. Notably, 14 of 30 participating countries meet the definition of small state or microstate/territory. There is some logic to this as many of these countries are more reliant on tourism income than larger economies.

At the same time, this is not just a phenomenon of small island countries. Eleven members of the EU/ECC and 8 members of OECD have launched DNVs. These include high income economies like Costa Rica, Croatia, Greece, Norway, Portugal, and Spain. Several other large economies have also launched DNV programmes including Argentina, Brazil, Malaysia, and the United Arab Emirates.

Most countries with DNV programmes are high income countries or upper middle-income countries. There seems to be a correlation between national income and capacity for tourist and IT infrastructure necessary to be a DN destination.

Income Requirements

We can categorise DNVs based on the variation in required income to apply for the visa. An income minimum is one of the core application requirements of these visas, but the income that is required varies widely. We have calculated income requirements in USD. Note that depending on the region, most DNVs post income requirements in either Euros (mostly European countries) or USD (most other countries).

Low income requirement (less than $30,000 USD per year)
Albania, Brazil, Cabo Verde, Croatia, Ecuador, Hungary, Malaysia, Namibia
Medium Income requirement (between $30,000 to $49,999 USD per year)
Costa Rica, Cyprus, Greece, Malta, Norway, Panama, Portugal (both programmes), Romania, Spain, United Arab Emirates (Remote Working Visa Scheme)
High income requirement ($50,000 and above USD per year)
Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, Belize, Dominica, Estonia, Montserrat, United Arab Emirates (Virtual Working Program, Dubai)
Insufficient data available
Anguilla, Argentina, Bahamas, Latvia, Seychelles

There are a few patterns in the income requirement variations. Surprisingly, there is not a direct correlation between country income and income requirement. Some of the highest income requirements are medium income countries in the Caribbean. In fact, some Caribbean countries have higher requirements than OECD countries with much higher costs of living. This, in addition to much higher application fees for many of the Caribbean programmes, suggests that the digital nomad or remote worker they are trying to attract might be more of an economic elite than the typical vision of the millennial with a backpack.

In other parts of the world, DNV requirements are tied to local cost of living or local minimum wage. For example, in Ecuador the requirement is three times the basic salary each year (in 2022, required $1275 USD/month). Similarly, in Portugal, proof of 4 times the minimum wage is required (in 2023, requires $2750 USD/month). Other countries require information on sources of income but have vague requirements. For example, Argentina does not state a specific minimum income. However, DN websites provide estimates and suggest that about $2500 USD/month is required.

Special programs and pending programs

In addition to the typical DNVs and DNVs with special features, we have found 15 countries with special programs. These programs have some overlap with DNV programs, but they are different enough from the typical DNV to be classified as another kind of program. Note that digital nomads may still be able to apply for some of these programmes; DNV navigation websites provide information on these programmes, and some use language of remote work.

Aruba	One Happy Workation program is a special permit that allows US nationals to stay in Aruba for an extended period of time (up to 90 days). While remote work is part of its recruiting language, employment is not a requirement.
Cayman Islands	Global Citizen Concierge Program has some similar requirements to the typical DNV but it requires an exceedingly high income ($100,000+ USD for an individual and more with dependents). This plus some of the visa marketing language suggest that it is a broader visa targeting investor class and retirees, similar to a Golden Visa programme
Curaçao	@HOME in Curaçao includes an option for remote workers but this is part of a larger program that also includes investor class and retirees.
Czechia	The Zivno is a long-term business visa for freelancers. It's one of a set of European visas that are open to non-EU citizens who intend to work as contractors or freelancers or business owners. It's a complex visa process and seems to predate the DNVs but appears on websites designed for DNV navigation. It does not appear in the Hooper and Benton report.
Georgia	Remotely from Georgia is included in Hooper and Benton (2022) who report it has been discontinued. According to DNV websites, this program was not a permit or visa but a special application form that granted an invitation and travel-letter to remote workers to come to Georgia during COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns. Georgia has a flexible visa-free entry program for nationals of 95+ countries that allows them to travel, work remotely and reside in the country for up to 1 year. This program predates the pandemic and DNVs.
Germany	The Freelancer (Entry) Visa and Residence Permit is not a specialized DNV, but it is a program that allows foreigners in "liberal professions" to work in Germany for German clients. It is similar to the programs for Czechia and Italy. It pre-dates DNVs but it is listed on some DNV websites as a pathway. Has a low income requirement.
Iceland	The Remote Worker Visa is an update or extension of the long-term visa for remote workers in the country (updated in 2020). It requires a high income requirement ($7,700 USD per month) and is only available to those who do not need a visa to visit the Schengen area.
Indonesia	The conversation around the B221A appears to be a tourist visa for 60 days with option to renew twice (up to 180 days total). Indonesia is also in discussions on "second home visa" and other options.

Italy	The self-employment visa is an option for freelancers but also allows local work authorization. It seems similar to the Germany and Czechia programs mentioned, and also has a low income requirement. It is discussed on DNV forums as an option. Online sources also suggest that Italy has a DNV in the works.
Mauritius	Premium Visa is a general-entry visa valid for up to 1 year available to foreign nationals from select countries and with a minimum income. It works for DNs but is also geared toward holidaymakers and retirees.
Mexico	Temporary residence permit is a 1-year resident visa that can be renewed for up to 4 years. It is a general residence permit available to DNs but also a common option for retirees and lifestyle migrants.
Norway	Norway offers an Independent Contractor Visa that allows self-employed individuals to live and work in Norway for up to 2 years. To be eligible requires at least one Norwegian client and a minimum income of about 36,000 Euro. Norway also offers the Svalbard DNV.
Saint Lucia	Live It is a program that allows 1 year in the country to broad categories including investor class, families, as well as DNs
Taiwan	Employment Gold Card is a high income skilled worker visa that allows people to work for Taiwanese companies; but can be used by some digital nomads as well.
Thailand	The Smart Visa is a more "elite" option than the typical DNV. According to their website: "To be a work-from-Thailand professional, you need to have earned $80,000/year, for at least two years (there are some exceptions). You must also have at least five years of experience and work for a company with at least $150 million in revenue over three years." Rumor is that Thailand is working on a more typical DNV as well.

We also found countries with plans for digital nomad visa programs that are not yet active. These countries appear on multiple visa navigation websites, including websites for digital nomad visa navigation. Finland and Lithuania appear in an OECD report on digital nomad visa planning as places where discussions are taking place.

List of countries with pending, potential, or not yet active DNVs
Andorra, Finland, Indonesia, Italy, Lithuania, Montenegro, North Macedonia, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Thailand

DNV information cottage industry

A lot of the up-to-date information on digital nomad and freelancer visas is available on websites dedicated to the subject.

These include:

Citizen Remote: claims to be one of the biggest online communities for digital nomads and remote workers. In addition to a comprehensive list of digital nomad visas, they have info on travel, remote jobs, co-living spaces, and remote work insurance.

Schengen Visa: a public information site mostly dedicated to the benefits and application process for the Schengen Visa. It also covers some of the current and prospective DNVs and special programmes in Europe.

Nomad Girl: a travel blog focused on the female digital nomad experience. It has multiple writers and has developed a focus on DNVs including where they are located and application processes.

VisaGuide.World: an online visa guide launched in 2017. It covers application processes and tracks policy changes for visas around the world. It has pretty good coverage of digital nomad visas

It is worth noting that these sites are typically up to date in following the latest news on DNVs, especially visa programmes that are being developed. These sites also promote some of the special programmes or alternative kinds of visas that allow digital nomads to travel and work in other locations (for example, Citizen Remote discusses both Peru and India, which do not have DNVs but have extended tourist visas for travelers from certain countries).

Visa applications and lack of data

As the OECD report (2022) suggests, it is very hard to find data on how many people have applied or currently hold a digital nomad visa. A review of several international organisations for data: EuroStat, Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) Data Migration project, OECD.Stat, Caribbean Migration Consultancy did not bear any results. A closer review of some national migration data web sites did not lead to any results either. It is worth noting that the level of disaggregation is not conducive to separating digital nomad visas from other types of visas. According to IDB Migration Flows in Latin America and the Caribbean 2021 Statistics on Permits for Migrants, most of the available data in this region is disaggregated by "temporary" and "permanent" status. The Database on Immigrants in OECD Countries (DIOC) also does not produce disaggregated data on permit/visa type.

Glossary

Key Terms and Concepts

Communities within Communities
This is a digital nomad dynamic that parallels other kinds of lifestyle migrants, in which privileged immigrants build enclaves or insular communities where they have little interaction with local communities. This is a concept that is worth more investigation and has parallels in other research on migration and integration. For more on this concept, see Hannonen (2020) and Korpela (2017, 2020).

Dropshipping
Describes a common entrepreneurial enterprise of digital nomads popularized by Ferriss (2007) as a way of generating a near passive income. As Cook (2020) describes, dropshipping is "a fulfilment method where … the store purchases the item from a third-party supplier, and has it shipped directly to the customer. As a result, the seller doesn't have to handle the product directly" (p. 12).

Flashpacker
Flashpackers are backpackers that use a diverse range of digital equipment as part of their travel, including mobile phones, laptops, digital cameras to facilitate their travel. These flashpackers are not necessarily digital nomads, but some use digital tools to work while traveling (for example, travel bloggers). Unlike digital nomads, work is not necessarily a primary part of the flashpacker lifestyle. See Müller (2016) and Richards (2015).

Geoarbitrage
The concept of geoarbitrage is critical in understanding the top destinations for digital nomads. The term, popularized by Tim Ferriss and his book The 4-hour Workweek (2007), is the practice of scaling down living expenses by relocating (temporarily) to countries that are cheaper due to currency exchange rates and cost of living. It comes from the economics and finance term, arbitrage, which refers to taking advantage of price differences across markets. Simply, it can be understood as a dollar having greater value in Mexico than in the United States. Mancinelli (2020) critiques Ferriss' promotion of this concept as an opportunistic use of systemic privileges of nationality for the benefit of leisure.

Homebase
The homebase typically refers to a place in the country of origin or sometimes another "digital nomad locale" that the nomad returns to for extended periods of time. Cook (2022) suggests that digital nomads prefer the language of "homebase" to "home country" as a way of distinguishing their identity as citizens of the world. Nash et al. (2018) suggest that perpetual travel and the decision to not have a homebase is an important defining characteristic of the digital nomad.

Knowmad
A related concept to digital nomad that refers to "knowledge worker nomads" and is used in the knowledge management literature (Iliescu, 2021). Described as meritocratic professional elite with a skill set that makes them highly desirable and they have power in a relationship with companies seeking to hire them.

Lifestyle migration or lifestyle mobility (also amenity migration)
Lifestyle migration refers to a subset of migration research concerned with those who decide to move based on the desire to live a certain lifestyle. This area of scholarship predates digital

nomadism in the literature and forms an important conceptual and theoretical starting point for digital nomadism as a lifestyle or work-lifestyle hybrid. Unlike digital nomads, the employment of lifestyle migrants is not a major discussion topic in this literature. Benson and O'Reilly (2009) introduce a typology of lifestyle migrants; Osbaldiston (2011; 2014) attempts to bring historicity to lifestyle migrant research, and Korpela (2020) develops the concept of bohemian lifestyle migration literature and provides a connection between this concept and digital nomadism. Cohen et al. (2015) introduced the related concept of lifestyle mobilities, which emphasizes voluntary and continuous mobility.

Location Independence
Description of the lifestyle and motivation of digital nomads for work and lifestyle that isn't tied to place. This term is used to describe other kinds of nomads, as used by Korpela (2020): "An important feature of the bohemian/ neo-nomadic lifestyle is that the more meaningful life the participants claim to have found abroad is not necessarily tied to a specific location—it can materialise in various destinations" (p. 3359). In the context of the digital nomad, "They are not required to show up in person to conduct their job, thus they are 'location independent'" (Thompson, 2018, p. 3).

Neo-Nomad / Global Nomad
Neo-nomads "people from affluent industrialised nations who do not live permanently in a specific location but move in the global arena and make their living along the way, in the various places in which they reside" (Korpela, 2020). The term draws, from among other places, from the work of Delueze and Guarttari (1987) in which they were distinguishing the neo-nomad from other more traditional nomad lifestyles. The literature refers to neo-nomads interchangeably with the global nomad. Neo-nomads are discussed in the lifestyle migration literature and are related to digital nomads; the main difference is that work is implied in digital nomadism while it is not for all forms of neo-nomads. Reviews of these concepts can be found in Hannonen (2020) and Korpela (2020).

Nomadicity
Describes a work-mobility relation that is similar to that of digital nomadism but is primarily used in literature that predates "digital nomadism" in IT and business disciplines, primarily in the late 2000s. This earlier concept is distinct from digital nomadism in that nomadicity can be associated with a range of motivational forces: choice, opportunity, obligation. Digital nomadism generally does not refer to those who move their labor due to obligation. See Bean and Eisenberg (2006), Ciolfi and de Carvalho (2014), Liegl (2014) for a discussion of this concept and additional sources.

Nomadlands
Our term for the destinations that digital nomads frequent during their travels. Nomadlands are typically peripheral urban centres that offer a combination of "exotic" or touristic appeal along with work infrastructure like high-speed internet access and digital nomad workspaces. As many digital nomads practice geoarbitrage, nomadlands often have lower cost of living and weaker currencies compared to the countries from which digital nomads are employed.

Slow travel (and fast travel)
Slow travel generally refers to staying in a location for an extended period of time and is contrasted with the fast travel of typical tourists who visit a city for only a few days or weeks. Slow travel is the preferred lifestyle of digital nomads, and this is one of the main distinguishing characteristics of a digital nomad and a tourist. It should be noted that there is no specific timeframe for slow travel and fast travel. Aroles et al. (2020) suggest a definition of fast traveling that others would consider slow: "'fast travelling' (i.e., changing locations several times a year)" (p. 121). Others suggest that "slow travel" implies having a homebase.

Strong passports / Strong passport countries
Refers to the mobility advantage that many digital nomads have because of their ability to travel on Global North passports that allow access to many countries without visas. "A passport's strength is measured by how many visa-free countries one can enter." (Thompson, 2018, p. 7)

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