

# **Digital Nomadism: A Literature Review**

*Review prepared on behalf of the Forum Vies Mobiles/Mobile Lives Forum*

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### **Table of Contents**

**Preface**

**Chapter 1 Introduction: Digital Nomadism in Historical Perspective**

**Chapter 2 Disciplinary/Interdisciplinary Perspectives**

2.1 Sociology

2.2 Geography-Political Economy Nexus

2.3 Anthropology/Cultural Tourism

**Chapter 3 Computer-Supported Cooperative Work**

**Chapter 4 Itinerant Lifestyles**

4.1 Introduction

4.2 Lifestyle Travel

4.3 Lifestyle Migration

4.4 Lifestyle Mobility

4.5 Recent Developments in Research on Itinerant Lifestyles

**Chapter 5 Global Nomadism**

**Chapter 6 Digital Nomadism**

6.1 Introduction

6.2 Defining Digital Nomadism

6.3 Working Lives of Digital Nomads

6.4 Non-working (Leisure) Lives of Digital Nomads

6.5 Co-spaces and the Digital Nomad Lifestyle

6.6 Mobility Practices of Digital Nomads

6.7 Political Economy of Digital Nomadism

6.8 Identity of Digital Nomads

**Chapter 7 Conclusion**

**Appendix 1: Summary and Typology of Literature Review**

**References**

**Endnotes**

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## Preface

The concept of digital nomadism has received considerable attention – especially in the years immediately prior to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic – in the popular press and has been a notable focus of attention in social media and various online channels. As numerous scholars have noted over the past few years, serious research that goes beyond the superficial veneer of the lifestyle is only being undertaken on a gradual and partial basis. Especially given the interdisciplinary nature of the phenomenon, we continue to lack comprehensive and systemic studies and there are numerous knowledge gaps. Nonetheless, a portrait has been emerging of the challenges and opportunities associated with digital nomadism and the position that the lifestyle occupies as a precursor for evolving changes in the organization of work, leisure, and mobility. These implications are likely to become increasingly important during the post-pandemic period as we come to learn the real extent of how the public health crisis has upended the lifestyles of digital workers.

This literature review was carried out between June 2020 and May 2021 and given the complexity of the topic is divided into several sections. First, the discussion highlights the early insights and forecasts advanced by computer scientists, electrical engineers, and visionaries of digital futures. Second, we situate the concept of digital nomadism in a broad social scientific context and accordingly draw on perspectives in three disciplinary/interdisciplinary domains: sociology, geography/political economy, and anthropology/cultural tourism. Third, an especially vital area of research on the practices of digital nomads has been the field of human-computer interaction, and more specifically the specialization focused on computer-supported cooperative work (CSCW).<sup>1</sup> Fourth, interest in digital nomadism has evolved out of a complex nexus of social scientific work on itinerant lifestyles that examines the intersections and overlaps between

travel, migration, and mobility. Fifth, we consider the notion of *global nomadism* that is an important precursor of digital nomadism. Finally, the review identifies and discusses the full range of publications to date on digital nomadism (comprising nearly three dozen peer-reviewed journal articles, book chapters, and conference papers). This assemblage comprises several categories: 1) definitional issues and debates, 2) working lives, 3) non-working/leisure lives, 4) specialized living arrangements (what we term *co-spaces*), 5) mobility practices, 6) political economy, and 7) identity. The literature review concludes with a summary and some reflections on the relationship between digital nomadism and the future of work.

In closing this preface, we take this opportunity to express our gratitude to Christophe Gay and Javier Caletrío from the Mobile Lives Forum for supporting this project. We are moreover grateful for their patience through what has been an overly long period of gestation to complete this project. We are hopeful that the eventual result has been worth the wait.

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## Chapter 1

### **Introduction: Digital Nomadism in Historical Perspective**

Prior to the Industrial Revolution in the middle of the eighteenth century, homeworking and other cottage-scale production activities were relatively common across large parts of Europe as a way for agricultural households to diversify their income and to put surplus labor within the family to work (Landis 1969; Kriedte et al 1981; Ogilvie and Cerman 1996; Duplessis 2008). While this system of social and economic organization allowed for a certain measure of flexibility in terms of working hours and the scheduling of remunerative activities, such so-called proto-industrial production was generally performed on a sedentary basis and there was not much scope for geographic mobility.

With the advent of water-powered machinery, and in due course the steam engine and other technological advances, the scale of industrial manufacturing increased. Concomitantly, reliance on ever-larger forms of mechanized equipment required substantial capital investment and discouraged the perpetuation of homeworking modes of fabrication and assembly. These were the facilities that the poet William Blake would famously term “the dark Satanic Mills.” They required hundreds of working hands to operate and, in combination with other factors such as legal changes in rural land occupancy and increasing agricultural productivity, led to the establishment of densely populated urban districts in nearby areas (Wrigley 2008; Williamson 1990).

During the nineteenth century, increases in industrial incomes and developments in urban transportation made it possible for some workers, generally of managerial status, to move their households a short distance away and to commute on a daily basis to their places of employment. Ongoing expansion of streetcar systems, rail networks, and, eventually advent of the automobile

augmented and accelerated these trends and led to construction of residential suburbs in the peripheral regions surrounding central cities (Jackson 1985; McShane 1994; Belenky 2019). Commercialization of the telephone beginning in the 1870s made it possible for high-ranking individuals to communicate from home directly with subordinates on factory floors or office conference rooms. Because business records were stored in central locations, logistics required coordination, and large numbers of workers needed supervision, the effect of telephony on operations was initially quite limited (Fischer 1992; McDougall 2014).

Beginning in the 1920s and with increasing pace in the years following World War II, urban economies in North America and Europe became gradually less reliant on manufacturing and more oriented around the delivery of producer and consumer services (Bluestone and Harrison 1980; Dintenfass 2017; see also Weiner 2004). By the 1970s, there was growing public and political concern about energy scarcity, traffic congestion, and air pollution, as well as consciousness about diversity (especially gender) issues in the workplace. These developments prompted initial consideration of the notion of “teleworking” or “telecommuting” (Nilles et al 1976; Harkness 1977; Nilles 1982; Pratt 1984). Rather than report to a central workplace, early application of telework involved the use of the telephone to communicate with colleagues while working from home one or more days each week. The concept had appeal as a way to reduce gasoline consumption and to enable teleworkers to blend paid employment and unpaid domestic responsibilities, but it did not prove particularly popular. Research at the time suggested that homeworking employees felt isolated laboring on their own, missed the sociability of the office, and became concerned that they would be passed over for promotions (Olson and Primpts 1984; Salomon and Salomon 1984). To overcome these liabilities, some subnational units of government, most notably California, created so-called “telecenters” which were early co-

working spaces designed as a hybridized alternative that combined aspects of a formal place of employment and a home. These facilities were generally located within geographic proximity of residential communities and offered computing equipment and other workplace infrastructure (Balepur et al 1998; Stiles 2020).<sup>2</sup>

By the early 1980s, the futurist Alvin Toffler began to envisage the emergence of the “electronic cottage” which functioned as both residence and workstation and would be outfitted with a “‘smart’ typewriter...along with a facsimile machine or computer console and teleconferencing equipment” (Toffler 1981; see also Toffler 1980, 194–207). During the same general timeframe, Steven Roberts famously rode a “computerized” recumbent bicycle across the United States while working as a freelance writer (Roberts 1988; see also Aroles et al 2020). By the early 1990s, researchers at Princeton University, MIT, and UCLA – with funding from Sun Microsystems, AT&T, Apple, and the United States Defense Department – had established the new field of “nomadic computing” (Alonso and Korth 1993; Sclunandt 1994; Kleinrock 1995, 1996; Bagrodia et al 1995).

Even before Tsugio Makimoto and David Manners published their widely lauded book entitled *Digital Nomads* in 1997, *The New York Times* reported on a “new breed of high-tech nomads who are changing the face and the culture of many companies” (Johnson 1994). Traveler’s Insurance and IBM, along with AT&T that had five percent of its staff working “on wheels or in other novel settings,” were early movers in shifting to an entirely footloose sales force. Sun Microsystems extended an offer to 24,000 of its employees in the United States that they could continue to work for the company on a “location-independent” basis (Birtchnell 2019).

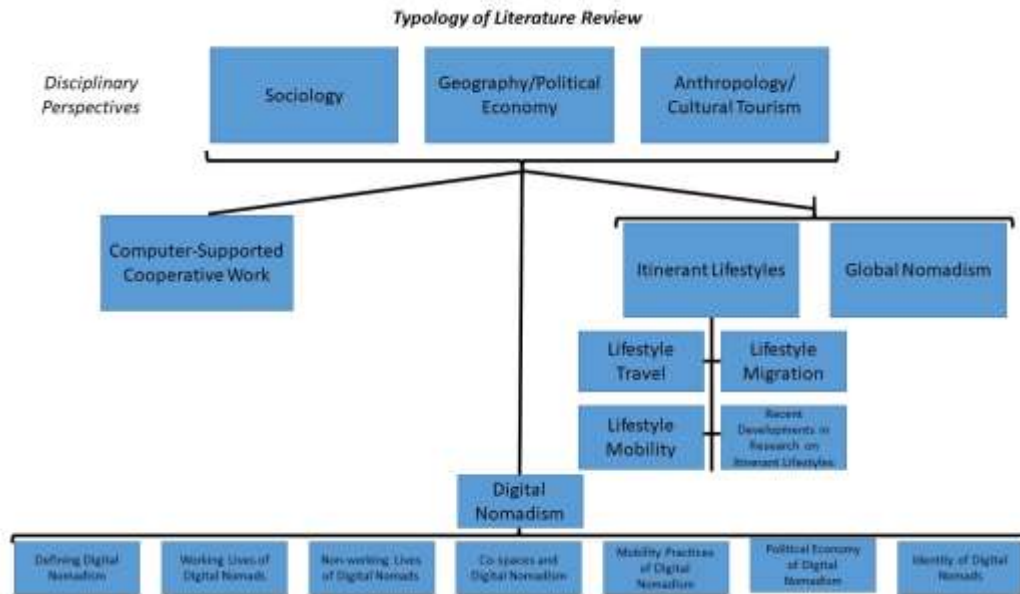


An emphasis on cost-cutting during the early 2000s encouraged a growing number of firms to reduce payroll expenses by laying off experienced workers – and in some cases recruiting them back as freelancers or in various non-waged capacities (MacDonald and Giazitzoglu 2017; Sutherland et al 2020). On one hand, a key contributing factor behind the availability of this work were processes of increasing labor casualization and de-standardization (or what more recently has come to be referred to as “uberization”), which led to the growing availability of short-term work assignments (Fleming 2017; Edward 2020). On the other hand, the widespread diffusion of Internet-based work-management systems, laptop computers, and mobile telephones (especially smartphones) was making it possible for workers to perform remunerated tasks from a distance and, in certain cases, to fashion lifestyles organized around continuous or intermittent travel. The trend was amplified in 2007 by Tim Ferriss’ bestseller *The Four-Hour Workweek*. Interestingly, this was the same year that *Forbes* used the term “digital nomad” in an article in the mainstream press.

The following sections of this review summarize the academic literature on itinerant working and living practices in general and digital nomadism in particular (see Figure 1). First, the review begins by considering perspectives from the field of sociology, the nexus between political economy and geography, and the facets of anthropology that engage with issues of cultural tourism. Second, the review summarizes investigations on the decreasing importance of proximity carried out to date by scholars in the subfield of computer-supported cooperative work. Third, the interdisciplinary notion of “lifestyle” has prompted development of several interrelated conceptual categories centered on “lifestyle migration,” “lifestyle mobility,” and “lifestyle travelers,” and this section of the review work examines work pertaining to each of these concepts. Fourth, a precursor of digital nomadism is *global nomadism*, a term that refers to

people who live for extended periods without a permanent address and are continuously engaged in travel. Fifth, over the last few years a modestly sized body of literature specifically focused on questions regarding digital nomads and their assorted lifestyles has coalesced. Finally, this review concludes with some speculations on what current developments with respect to the lifeways and routines of itinerant workers might suggest about the future of work in the post-pandemic period and beyond.

**Figure 1**



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## Chapter 2

### Disciplinary/Interdisciplinary Perspectives

It has become commonplace in the social sciences to encounter references to the so-called “mobility turn” which began to take hold during the early 2000s (see, for example, Urry 2003; Sheller and Urry 2006; Büscher and Urry 2009). One of the motivations behind this new direction was recognition of the scarcity of the non-economics social sciences (sociology in particular) in research on transportation which tended to privilege (and largely still does) technical perspectives informed by an engineering-oriented worldview.<sup>3</sup> This chapter provides cursory reviews of foundational perspectives in several disciplinary and interdisciplinary domains of the social sciences: sociology, geography-political economy nexus, and anthropology/cultural tourism. Because of the broad breadth of work in these areas, the overview provided here is necessarily quite cursory and interested readers should follow up with the references cited throughout the chapter for more detailed insights.

#### 2.1 Sociology

There is a large and voluminous literature in sociology that is relevant to the emergence of location independent lifestyles in general and digital nomadism in particular. For purposes of the current discussion, we have selected the two areas that have been especially central over the last few decades to research on these issues while at the same time drawing in important perspectives pertaining to globalization, migration, tourism, and changing work practices. This section first considers a wide assemblage of social theoretical work on identity and lifestyles before turning its attention to the “new mobilities paradigm.”

The past three decades have given rise to a wealth of perspectives on transitions to “late” or “post-” modernity which, construed in expansive terms, is characterized by increasing individualization and social fluidity (e.g., Giddens 1990, 1991; Beck 1992; Bauman 2000). The breakdown of traditional societal structures premised on tradition and established practices has given way to opportunities that allow – and indeed require – people to design their own biographies using a broad and continually changing spectrum of cultural resources. Anthony Giddens (1990) draws attention to the important notion of “disembedding” which refers to the lifting of relationships out of their customary contexts because of ongoing processes of social and economic change that have led to a situation whereby interpersonal relationships are forged on the basis of affinity rather than custom or propinquity. A related phenomenon, oftentimes regarded as a precursor for the establishment of market economies, is “social atomization” that seeks to capture the fragmentation of contemporary life into small and oftentimes individualized units (Bell 1962; Putnam 2001). This tendency makes it difficult for people to build wide-ranging and trusting bonds of social solidarity and encourages dispositions based on self-interest and market transactionalism. These evolving developments contribute to processes of pseudo-individualization (the recasting of people into consumers in order to sell them products that offer a simulation of individuality) and commodification (transformation of previously noncommercial goods and services into saleable products) (Marx 1992 [1867]; Adorno 2001) (see also Section 6.7).

Taken in combination, we can understand the contemporary period as a time when the state of society requires people to be continually – and reflexively – engaged in the challenging work of forging their own identities through the constitution and reconstitution of their lifestyles. The marketing and media industries clearly play a major role in these processes because of their

ability to design “pre-organized” sets of practices that people can appropriate and subsequently adapt in modest ways to conform to idiosyncratic preferences. A more recent development is the emergence of novel information and communication technologies (ICTs) that has resulted in a (partial) shift from corporeal to virtual worlds and put into the hands of people a new and supplementary array of capabilities with which to cast their identities and lifestyles.

Let us now turn our attention to what has been termed the “new mobilities paradigm” which has developed in some respects as a reaction to the social theoretical ruminations discussed above. In response to the largely “sedentarized” views that characterized European sociology during the 1990s, John Urry began to advance a shift in sociological thinking around the notion of mobility (see, in particular, Urry 2000a). He contended that the discipline was anchored in a deterritorialized conception of society based on discrete and sovereign nation states bounded by controlled borders. Moreover, this static system of global organization – in which vertically oriented constructs such as class, gender, and ethnicity were paramount – was giving way to “diverse mobilities of peoples, objects, images, information, and wastes; and of the complex interdependencies between, and social consequences of, these diverse mobilities (Urry 2000a: 185; see also Urry 2000b). Gathering a wide array of ideas from scholars such as Immanuel Wallerstein, Manuel Castells, Bruno Latour, George Ritzer, and Henri Lefebvre, Urry introduced into sociological thinking several novel concepts based on “new temporal-spatial patterns” including scapes, flows, and global networks and fluids. He ultimately contended that we need to understand mobility in “a horizontal rather than a vertical sense” and that ultimately the trend toward increasing mobility is contributing to the development of a “global civil society.”

By the middle years of the decade, Urry and growing group of colleagues were referring to this array of perspectives as constituting a “mobilities paradigm” and a broad discussion was opening up across a wide span of the interdisciplinary social sciences including human geography, demography, urban planning, migration studies, science and technology studies, and tourism studies about a “mobilities turn.” Interest subsequently exploded in the field and led to the development of a large and diverse body of published work (including the peer-reviewed journal *Mobilities* specifically devoted to the topic) and these circumstances make it extremely difficult to craft a summary that is simultaneously succinct and comprehensive.<sup>4</sup> The following discussion thus has the modest aim of exposing several of the key ideas that undergird the mobilities framework.

Sheller and Urry (2006, 213) begin their elaboration of the new mobilities paradigm by first noting that “travel is necessary for social life, enabling complex connections to be made” and that mobility confers social status. At the global scale, this has led to a differentiation between “the fast and slow lanes of social life” (pp. 213). Second, they observe that most transportation research has interpreted travel time as “dead time that people always seek to minimise” (pp. 213) when in fact oftentimes mobility involves multitasking and what they term “occasional activities” that are performed while “on the move” (pp. 213). Key examples of “dwelling in motion” (pp. 214) include emailing and phoning when traveling by train or shopping while traversing an airport. Finally, we cannot delineate between mobile people and physically rooted places. Sheller and Urry (2006) assert that “there is a complex relationality of places and persons connected through performances...places are separate from the places that happen contingently to be visited.”

Pioneers of the new mobilities paradigm have sought to build on a foundation comprising six conceptual building blocks. First, the work of sociologist and philosopher Georg Simmel during the latter decades of the nineteenth century is heralded as providing particularly provocative liminal insights pertaining to the relationship between mobility and modernity. Second, perspectives from the field of science and technology studies emphasize the importance of sociotechnical systems as important forms of hybridization that bring together social and material resources into functional configurations. Third, the so-called “spatial turn” (pp. 216) in the social sciences during the 1980s opened up new opportunities to assess the role of space as a variable for analysis.<sup>5</sup> Fourth, Sheller and Urry (2006) describe as a critical source of influence research on “sensuous geographies” (pp. 216) which refers to the emotional and affective relationships that form between travelers and their means of travel. The connections that people develop with their automobiles is a salient example, but similar affinities involve airplanes, trains, boats, and so forth. Fifth, the notion of “the strength of weak ties” originally introduced by sociologist Mark Granovetter (1983) speaks to the growing importance of connectivity of different levels of intensity in a world characterized by heightened mobility of various types. Finally, the new mobilities paradigm usefully draws on research on complex adaptive systems that have emergent properties and compel path-dependent routines such as those associated with contemporary forms of surface transportation.<sup>6</sup>

## **2.2 Geography-Political Economy Nexus**

Against a background of the decades-long trend of increasing income and wealth inequality, we have been witnessing the growth of new modes of social and economic interaction predicated on informal labor. These new kinds of “work” are oftentimes enabled by Internet-

based “platforms” and exist in several different forms. First, researchers have described how much of the online world is driven by bloggers, vloggers, aspiring influencers, video-game testers, and others who generate content without compensation. A handful of behemoth companies then monetize this work for profitable purposes (Fuchs 2013; Lanier 2014; Duffy 2015). For instance, untold numbers of people every day freely share Facebook posts, Amazon book reviews, YouTube videos, and various other kinds of creative content. The fuzzy distinction between recreation and work has prompted some commentators to refer to this type of activity as “playbor,” while other observers have described it more forthrightly as a form of self-exploitation (Kücklich 2005; Scholz 2012; Fuchs 2014; Pink et al 2018; Törhönen et al 2019).<sup>7</sup>

A second expression of digital work involves the so-called “sharing economy” and includes drivers who work for ridesharing companies, personal shoppers who pick and deliver groceries, home assistants who perform household jobs, and microworkers who execute rudimentary tasks like data entry and search-engine optimization for crowdsourcing websites like Amazon’s Mechanical Turk (Irimi 2015; Cockayne 2016; Schor 2017).<sup>8</sup> Though not all of these activities themselves involve computer-mediated work in the strict sense, the “digital labor platforms” are all facilitated by the Internet and participating freelancers need to devote a considerable amount of time to searching for short-term job assignments, to communicating with prospective clients, and to managing various other aspects of the work. Researchers have characterized these laborers as members of a “digital precariat” (Kost et al 2018; Bucher and Fieseler 2017; see also Kalleberg 2009; Malin and Chandler 2017; Zwick 2018) or “cybertariat” (Huws 2015; Ettliger 2016).

It is, though, the third manifestation of digital labor that is most immediately relevant to digital nomadism, and this form involves occupational tasks previously performed by employees



in exchange for a wage. A growing number of jobs are becoming increasingly casualized and redesigned so that they can be carried out on a freelance basis – often organized through digital labor platforms (Malecki and Moriset 2008; Kenny and Zysman 2016; Parker et al 2016; Flecker 2016; Merkel 2019).<sup>9</sup> This outsourcing of labor through so-called “virtual production networks” is an attractive business strategy because it enables companies to precisely calibrate their productive capacity in light of changing circumstances while simultaneously reducing overall labor expenses (Tuma 1998; Coe and Yeung 2015; Graham et al 2017; Stanford 2017). More specifically, there is no need for firms to keep employees on the payroll during slack parts of the year or when economic conditions ebb. Risks associated with market volatility, macroeconomic fluctuation, and other forms of variability are effectively shifted from management to its newly “flexibilized” workforce.

A related development is what Graham et al (2017, 136) refer to as the “spatial unfixing of work” that has reduced the need for converged production activities to occur in close proximity as was the case when, for example, automobile manufacturing was organized in integrated factories. As more and more production becomes “ephemeralized,” it becomes possible to disaggregate different tasks and to distribute them via digital labor platforms and crowdsourcing applications to diverse – and typically lower cost – locations (Urry 2014). As Graham et al (2017, 137) explain, “[i]n this context, workers can transcend some of the constraints of their local labour markets, and tasks such as translations, transcriptions, lead generation, marketing, and personal assistance can now all, in theory, be done by workers from anywhere for clients based anywhere.” A number of countries, most notably India, Malaysia, and the Philippines have made this strategy a core part of their national development policy plans.

A related development (discussed in detail in Section 4.3 and Chapter 5) is the growing tendency for digital workers to “offshore themselves” in order to take advantage of lower living costs or to access valued social and environmental amenities while working as employees or freelancers for a company or organization in their home or another country. As we will see in subsequent sections of this review, this is a core element of digital nomadism.

Regardless of whether the emphasis is on domestic workers who are becoming increasingly connected to global economic flows and systems through digital labor platforms and crowdsourcing applications or their expatriate counterparts who are using personal capacity for “location independence,” the tendency has been to regard these trends in celebratory terms. Commentators regularly herald participants in such production processes as enterprising “micro-entrepreneurs” who are ambitiously and autonomously enhancing their livelihoods and through their emancipation contributing to the pursuit of national developmental objectives (Adams 2018). This uplifting and encouraging representation often captures only part of the population of digital workers, and it especially mischaracterizes the experiences of people who are performing the least remunerative and regulated tasks offered through these channels (Bergvall-Kåreborn and Howcroft 2014; Shibata 2020).

Graham et al (2017) instructively examine the status of digital workers in terms of four criteria. First, *bargaining power* tends to be unequally allocated because of the large number of people available to supply labor relative to the amount of work to be done. Most of them have very little bargaining power because digital labor platforms can easily increase the pool of available laborers and freelancers have little choice but to passively accept the offered compensation level. Under such conditions, these digital workers often find themselves in a collectively destructive race to the bottom. Social solidarity of a scale that could reverse

prevailing trends is extremely limited and catalyzing such activity, and developing it in ways that would have appreciable effects, seems beyond reasonable reach given the degree of geographic dispersal and lack of institutionalized resources.

Second, champions of digital labor platforms often like to highlight that technology can enable people to overcome localized forms of *economic exclusion* imposed by discriminatory practices based on race, ethnicity, citizenship or legal status, formal educational qualifications, and so forth. Research by Graham and colleagues (2017) provides evidence that the anonymity of the Internet allows digital workers, at least in some cases, to overcome barriers, to secure gainful economic opportunities, and to achieve livelihoods that would not otherwise be available. Nonetheless, forms of prejudice and ignorance that exist in the corporeal world tend to be replicated in online contexts, and there is evidence that digital workers from geographically marginalized countries in sub-Saharan Africa have to purposefully veil their identities if they are to be successful in securing opportunities.

Third, the conventional understanding is that online *intermediation* between providers and suppliers of labor would reduce transactional distance and complexity and enable digital workers to capture a larger share of the value created by global supply chains. Graham et al (2017, 149–151) contend that the actual situation is more complicated due to a combination of *disintermediation* (simplifying and shortening of lines of communication) and *reintermediation* (re-establishing and lengthening of lines of communication). Digital labor platforms can – at least under certain conditions – enable digital workers to build closer relationships with clients and to learn about end-user requirements in ways that give them subsequent leverage. In addition, especially successful digital workers can gain a dominant position in the labor market

that allows them to crowd out less agile competitors and to then reposition themselves as outsourcing intermediaries.

Finally, there is a widespread impression that digital workers, if sufficiently devoted and entrepreneurial, can get themselves on a career ladder whereby skill and capability upgrading becomes a way to secure more lucrative opportunities. Again, to draw on Graham et al (2017), the reality is less sanguine and assured. Contractors who recruit freelance labor on a global scale tend to break projects into small parts that make it difficult for digital workers to gain an appreciation for the overall undertaking on which they are engaged. As the authors observe, “ICT-enabled outsourcing can also make it easier for workers to be kept at an arm’s length from core business practices, hindering knowledge flow from the core to the periphery and thus perpetuating rather than erasing skill and capability disparities” (pp. 151). Moreover, clients seem to be extremely reticent to share information when digital workers seek to enhance their understanding of how their input is ultimately being deployed. Graham and colleagues summarize the situation by grimly noting that “information asymmetries afford little in terms of providing digital workers with the possibilities of upgrading their skills in order to take on new functions or positions in the value chains in which they are embedded.”

The current situation with regard to the recruitment of marginalized digital workers to maintain virtual production networks through online outsourcing is clearly problematic and not in alignment with the advocacy of champions like the World Bank and various philanthropic foundations (Kuek et al 2015; World Bank 2016). Recommendations for reform have included the establishment of certification schemes to enhance transparency (Anwar and Graham 2020; Graham et al 2020), the organization of resistance movements through national and transnational mobilization (Ettlinger 2016; Arora and Thompson 2019; Chen et al 2020), the formulation of

boundary-spanning regulations (Lettieri et al 2019), and the design of more cooperative institutional forms for organizing digital work (Scholtz 2013).

### **2.3 Anthropology/Cultural Tourism**

As anthropologist Greg Richards (2018, 12) observes in a recent overview of the field that “culture and tourism have always been inextricably linked” with customary emphasis devoted to the impact of tourists on host communities (see also Graburn 1983; Nash 1984). What is a more contemporary development is the notable focus on how travel specifically in the form of “cultural tourism” constitutes a mode of consumption. Cultural tourism – in a variety of manifestations ranging from “heritage tourism” to “arts tourism” to gastronomic tourism” – first became prominent in the years following World War II and was driven by relatively wealthy travelers, but by the 1990s it had become a mass-market phenomenon.<sup>10</sup> Research attention during this time shifted from the emergence of nascent touristic interest in particular locales to concerns with cultural appropriation, economic exploitation, and commodification of heritage (Shaw and Williams 2004; Cole 2007; Bunten 2008). This is not the place for an ambitious review of research on cultural tourism by anthropologists and other allied disciplinary specialists. The focus of the following section is instead on several themes that are presently prominent in the field and is based on Richards’ (2018) typology that comprises cultural consumption, motivation, economic aspects, cultural heritage, creative economy, and emerging identities.<sup>11</sup>

First, as consumerism has become an increasingly pervasive feature of contemporary lives, tourism has evolved from a form of leisure and recreation into an established mode of consumption (Bourdieu 1984; Urry 1990; Richards 1996; Richards and van der Ark 2013). While tourism has certain unique features that differentiate it from more ordinary consumer

products and services, travelers tend to engage with (and consume) touristic experiences using many of the same sensibilities and capabilities. Accordingly, researchers can study tourists using many of the same tools, techniques, and conceptual frameworks used to investigate consumer behavior such as commitment, attachment, and emotional investment.

Second, the impulses that motivate tourists to embark on cultural excursions (and to return for subsequent visits) has unsurprisingly been a notable focus of research (see, for example, Woosnam et al 2009; Leong et al 2015). An emblematic feature of this work is the strength and level of interest that prompts desire to visit sites of cultural significance or to partake in other related activities. Though various authors have codified the underlying distinctions in different ways, the prevailing intent is to distinguish between tourists for whom cultural attractions are a primary or secondary consideration. More elaborated taxonomies distinguish between, for instance, relaxation seekers, sports seekers, family-oriented tourists, escapists, and achievement and autonomy seekers (Özel and Kozak 2012).

Third, especially for policy makers, cultural entrepreneurs, and managers of cultural facilities there is a strong desire to organize cultural tourism in ways that optimize financial returns (Moulin and Boniface 2001; Herrero et al 2006; Rogerson 2013; Torre and Scarborough 2017). By encouraging cultural tourists to extend their visits, to return on a regular basis, and to make evermore-lavish expenditures, the emphasis is on identifying strategies that facilitate the economic benefits of cultural tourism both in the form of private profits and public tax revenues. Foreign cultural tourists are especially lucrative from these perspectives because they tend to spend more due to higher levels of disposal income, to extend the season for visitation, and to offset the costs of operating expensive cultural venues such as museums, theaters, and art exhibitions.

Fourth, the proliferation of destinations designated as World Heritage Sites and the interest that tourists demonstrate for locales with heritage significance and value has prompted high interest in the value of the label and the degree to which demarcation contributes to touristic popularity (Nuryanti 1996; but see also Lowenthal 1985). Other issues of notable consideration include debates over authenticity and integrity as well as the inseparability between tangible and intangible heritage (Cohen 1988; McIntosh and Prentice 1999; Cole 2007 (see also Chapter 5 and Section 6.8). Central to this work has been an emphasis on the extent to which cultural tourism plays a role in helping to conserve fragile elements of local communities or debases the artifacts and practices that prompt and animate touristic appeal.

Fifth, as awareness of the economic importance and social relevance of so-called “cultural creatives” and the creative industries more generally has taken hold, local and national governments have sought to reorient their tourism strategies around the generation and amplification of creative content (Florida 2002; Prentice and Andersen 2003; Richards and Wilson 2006, 2007; Richards 2011) (see also Section 6.5). These developments have prompted the integration of previously disparate activities centered on urban planning and policy, cultural programming, placemaking, and tourism (sometimes termed “creative tourism”) which has led to themed opportunities featuring, for example, olive-oil routes, wine tours, arts festivals, and immersive language experiences.

Finally, studies of how the tourism industry represents and portrays Indigenous communities unsurprisingly occupies an important position in research by anthropologists and others interested in cultural tourism (Hollinshead 1992; Ryan and Aicken 2005). This mode of tourism has long suffered from neo-colonial and ethnocentric conceptions of aboriginal peoples and reform of long-standing practices has unfortunately been slow to take hold. Rather than seek

to benefit local inhabitants, providers of these touristic experiences continue all too frequently to focus on, as Richards (2018, 16) scornfully and correctly observes, “the needs and priorities of non-Indigenous people.” Through the advocacy efforts of organizations such as Cultural Survival and the advent of more culturally responsible tourism companies there are indications that at least some shameful practices are being supplanted by less problematic alternatives (see, for example, McIntosh and Zahra 2007; Aoyama 2009).

More recent years have seen the emergence of several new issues pertaining to research on cultural tourism with many of them prompted by seemingly inexorable growth prior to the COVID-19 pandemic in the popularity of mass-market tours. Specific attention has focused on the difficult challenges of destinations that have become “over-touristed” (Seraphin et al 2018; Muler Gonzalez et al 2018) and the displacement of local residents by wealthier tourists through processes of touristic gentrification (Gotham 2005; MacRae 2016; Cocola-Gant 2018; Cocola-Gant and Lopez-Gay 2020). These developments are leading to a shift in the conception of cultural tourism as a desirable strategy that enables destinations to create economic opportunities and to increase public revenues to a new view where local residents and municipal officials come to regard it as not worth the problems that it creates. Richards (2018, 16) characterizes the current situation in the following terms:

The crumbling position of cultural tourism as a desirable form of tourism is also directly related to the decline in elitism in the cultural tourism audience. Cultural tourism used to be seen as a kind of socially desirable filter that would help attract “good” tourists. Growing numbers have meant that it can also be seen as the thin



end of the mass tourism wedge, entering to destroy the very culture that the tourists seek.

New perspectives in the field of cultural tourism research also contribute in important ways to contemporary interest in and understanding of digital nomads, specifically through the breakdown of customary and static binaries (for example between resident/tourist and local/global) and the emergence of new categories such as “global citizen” and “global nomad” (See Chapters 4 and 5). A critical issue will be how the shutdown of cultural tourism – and essentially all modes of tourism – during the COVID-19 crisis will provide an opportunity for a reset so that going forward the diseconomies and excesses of pre-pandemic mass tourism can be more effectively managed. Some interesting ideas are emerging that involve the use of advanced digital technologies such as virtual and augmented reality (Pascoal et al 2021; Silva and Henriques 2021). One approach that has garnered particular attention is the creation of “revived originals” (which are replica sites created using holograms) and operate as “digital twins” (Frey and Briviba 2020, 2021).

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## Chapter 3

### Computer-Supported Cooperative Work

Advances in information and communication technologies (ICTs) over the last decade have enabled researchers working in the field of computer-supported cooperative work (CSCW) to identify a paradigm shift from the more localized, static, and situated use of mobile computing with fixed computing platforms to digital nomadicity and ubiquitous environments (Patokorpi and Tétard 2008; Sutherland and Jarrahi 2017). The rise of mobile technology has helped to create anticipation for fully portable and perfectly connected capabilities in which people are more or less continuously “on the move” and have their computing, communications, and storage functionality needs met in a transparent and integrated manner. Under such circumstances, computing disappears into the background of users’ lifestyles, and they are empowered to focus on their “real” tasks rather than on the technical features of using their tools (Weiser 1991; see also Turner 2006 and Weldon 2016).

The history of mobile computing can be traced back to the 1990s and computer scientist Leonard Kleinrock’s (1996) presentation of a technology-centered vision of “anytime, anywhere” and his prescient use of the term “nomadicity.” As is often the case in the history of technology, the initial days of a novel idea can be a bit challenging to interpret because prophetic engineers use the same terms to describe different understandings and applications. In the case of mobile computing, nomadic metaphors at the time conveyed both the vision of a perfectly connected environment and the phenomenon of a mobile user being temporarily disconnected because the environment did not support seamless connectivity. Accordingly, in the early mobile computing literature, there are frequent references to both “nomadic computing” and “going nomadic” (see Patokorpi and Tétard 2008).

Even before researchers supplanted the second meaning (“going nomadic”) and reserved the term “nomadicity” to refer to being on the move, the dominating rhetoric in the mobile computing literature focused on the location of where a device was being used, intrinsically connecting issues of nomadicity, technology, and place. Researchers regularly highlighted the inability of contemporary systems to support such forms of mobility so that the computing environment would adjust itself to the user rather than the user adapting to their environment (Kleinrock 2001).

As Patokorpi and Tétard (2008) noted, information systems scientists later began to blend the concepts of “nomadicity” and “ubiquity” into the notion of “micromobility.” “Nomadicity” assumed users carried mobile technology with them for “placeless use” independent of context. The term “ubiquity” signaled a pending shift to a world of intelligent environments that enriched interaction via circumstantial factors. These underlying conceptions of technology supporting geographically independent nomads and ubiquitous computing environments began to suggest that background factors were more rather than less important. Consequently, the focus of research began to shift toward these context-dependent issues.

By 2014, the presence of cloud computing and its related web applications and data services convinced researchers that Kleinrock’s pioneering vision was indeed coming to fruition, but they started to question the optimism underlying the notion of always being connected (see, for example, Rossitto et al 2014). As technologies became increasingly enmeshed, information systems scientists increasingly began to examine the tensions inherent in dynamic technological landscapes and to focus on the underlying applications and devices involved in a variety of digitally-mediated relationships and the practices of orchestrating “constellations of technologies” that nomadicity required. This shift in focus and the rise of the “sharing economy,”

and more specifically the “gig economy” (see Section 2.2), prompted researchers to emphasize the high degree of agency involved in how a prospective digital nomad community would develop, navigate, and negotiate various digital platforms (Rossitto et al 2014, Sutherland and Jarrahi 2017; see also Kessler 2018).

Although researchers have discussed ICT-enabled geographic mobility and the location independence of digital nomads for more than two decades, there exists a tension in the CSCW literature regarding to what extent digital technologies enable freedom from traditional constraints of time and place. For instance, the term “making place” has been used to call attention to the places, digital technologies, and local infrastructures (such as a reliable high-speed Internet connection) that itinerant digital workers leverage in constructing and maintaining their work practices (Sutherland and Jarrahi 2017). They have noted that footloose users must regularly find space to work and then harness technology in place to make a workspace functional (see Section 6.5). Through exploring these technologies and their mediational roles in how digital nomads “make place,” researchers came to describe emerging patterns of organizing and realized that learning to work on a location-independent basis meant acquiring the skills to navigate and leverage information infrastructures. As digital platforms enabled users to more readily share knowledge, to engage in peer-to-peer networking, and to initiate in-person interactions and other forms of community building (Sutherland and Jarrahi 2017), freelancers began to increase their technological skills (e.g., website and application development). Moreover, they often deployed these skills to undertake infrastructuring efforts intended to address the inability of contemporary systems to support their mobility. As Sutherland and Jarrahi (2017) noted, in this way, digital platforms enabled infrastructuring practices of contingent workers this new capacity recursively shaped the digital landscape.

In addition to increased uses of digital technologies that gave rise to new resources, connections, travel partners, and flexibilities, the grassroots efforts by individual users signaled, as noted by Jarrahi et al (2019), the emergence of a shift in sociotechnical dynamics from organization-centric knowledge management to personal and community-oriented knowledge activities. These developments also prompted researchers such as Ens et al (2018) to draw attention to the role of technology in simultaneously increasing the mobility and precarity of digital work. Others like de Carvalho et al 2018 and Kong et al 2020 began to explore the nuanced lived experiences of users and the factors underpinning and driving nomadic practices. Recent work by Dubosson et al (2019) has investigated the impacts of digitalization and more broadly its influence on quality of life, society, and the future of work. In addition, Ferreira et al (2019) have built on the theme of uncertainty through their exploration of the relationship between work and leisure through the lens of technology-mediated nomadicity leisure practices (e.g., crowd-sourced services, online hospitality exchange systems, bike touring). They have reported that sociable interaction and, in some cases, unpredictability are tied to what makes radical notions of mobility enjoyable for the practitioners of these routines.

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## Chapter 4

### Itinerant Lifestyles

#### 4.1 Introduction

Despite claims that the social sciences have been biased toward sedentariness (see Section 2.1), across a range of fields there actually has been long-standing interest in itinerancy and how travelers forge and manage lifestyles that are simultaneously premised on rootedness (sometimes referred to as “topophilia” or “mooring”) and footlooseness (for a useful review see Erskine and Anderson 2014). Over the past two decades, much of this work has been informed by and organized around three concepts that, generally speaking, coalesced as lenses for engaging with growth in population movements to amenity destinations. First, researchers in tourism studies operationalized the notion of *lifestyle travel* to understand how extended travel contributes to the formation of personal identity. Second, geographers coined the term *lifestyle mobility* as part of an effort to simultaneously broaden and unify perspectives pertaining to the movement of entrepreneurs, retirees, and other increasingly location-independent individuals. Finally, sociologists of migration advanced the concept of *lifestyle migration* to refer to the practices of relatively affluent people seeking to relocate to regions that offered a better quality of life. Despite their different points of departure and emphasis, a common feature of the three concepts is their focus on travel, mobility, and migration as forms of consumption (see also Sections 2.1 and 2.3). It is important to note that this agenda is distinct from customary conceptions of transnational movement that are impelled by persistent poverty and/or abrogation of human rights (see, for instance, Cohen and Deng 1998; Pérez-Bustillo and Hernández Mares 2017).

The following section more fully defines each of the aforementioned terms, traces their development in the literature, and discusses the key questions that have been central to the respective perspectives. It is, however, important to acknowledge at the outset that these conceptions are not isolated from one another. Ample interaction that has occurred over time and some of the most prominent authors have contributed to developments and subsequent refinements in more than one domain.

## 4.2 Lifestyle Travel

Since at least the days of the Homeric epics there has been a tendency to regard extended travel as an opportunity for inward reflection and discovery – in common parlance as a way to “find oneself” or to learn about one’s “true inner self.” Drawing on a prior literature focused on “lifelong wanderers,” “contemporary drifters,” and “international long-term budget travelers,” tourism and leisure studies scholar Stuart Cohen (2011; see also 2010a, 2010b, 2010c, and 2013) coined the term *lifestyle travel* to describe the experiences of long-term backpackers and others who are on the move as a way of life. The intent of this work has been to recast travel as a lifestyle in more positive terms than was previously the case. Prior to the 1990s, the tendency was to regard such individuals as socially deviant or aimless, as suggested by the terms “wanderer” and “drifter.” Cohen’s landmark studies situate lifestyle travel in the framework of social change associated with post-industrialism and the emergence of enduring backpacking as a form of lifestyle consumption through which practitioners strive to (re)construct identity (Cohen 2010a, 2010b; see also Giddens 1991 and Bauman 2000 as well as Section 2.1). In other words, as processes of late modernity have led to the “disembedding” of people from geographically circumscribed contexts, production has lost relevance as a means of ascribing identity. Under the

circumstances of so-called “liquid modernity,” it becomes imperative to construct a life project through consumption and a lifestyle of permanent travel among a subculture of likeminded itinerants offers a distinctive alternative for achieving this objective.

Using ethnographic interviews, Cohen (2011) captures the experiences of long-term backpackers who have become lifestyle travelers. Typically originating from relatively affluent countries of the global North and holding strong passports, they embark on extended periods of primarily leisure travel (lasting for many months and sometimes years at a time), often gravitating to India, Southeast Asia, and Latin America and congregating in enclaves populated by other kindred spirits.<sup>12</sup> For such individuals, travel is not recreational or restorative as it is for most tourists, but rather is a form of normality. Many of Cohen’s respondents took up a life of continuous travel because of escapist impulses prompted by pronounced disruption in their pre-traveling lives (i.e., broken relationship, lost job, drug dependency), though a significant number of them traced the origins of their decision to very favorable childhood travel experiences.

Other features of lifestyle travelers is that while they demonstrate certain affinities with the indigenous communities to which they are attracted, it is not customary to have a great deal of direct social engagement. The tendency instead is to congregate in locales like Auroville in southern India and the islands of Koh Phangan and Koh Tao in southern Thailand and to assume an identity of “mundane cosmopolitanisms” that is expressed principally in food and clothing preferences rather than in more immersive cultural experiences. Accordingly, most lifestyle travelers socialize among themselves and utilize infrastructures designed and intended for tourists. As Cohen (2011, 1545) describes, “Drawing on hybridisation of orientalism, romanticism, and 1960s counterculture, lifestyle travelers (re)produce ideals of freedom,



spontaneity and challenge that are embedded in a shared ideology of backpacking in order to justify their lifestyle choice.”

To support themselves financially during their extended journeys, lifestyle travelers either return intermittently to their home country to work intensively for short periods to recharge their cash reserves or pick up casual work for while continuing to travel. Working as an English teacher, dive or yoga instructor, or tour guide are popular ways to gain local employment. It is not unreasonable to suggest that long-term backpackers refined the notion of lifestyle arbitrage and pioneered this opportunity for contemporary digital nomads.<sup>13</sup>

Anticipating practices that would become more widely undertaken in subsequent years, Cohen (2011, 1547) relates the experiences of one his respondents, a 29-year old Cuban male, who financed his travel while doing ITC work (see also the discussion on “flashpacking” in Chapter 5 on global nomads). In describing the case, he writes, “Technology thus allowed Felipe to dislocate work from place through virtual commuting.”

Most lifestyle travelers demonstrate little interest in returning to their country of origin and instead envision maintaining their “home-on-the-move” or setting themselves up as a service provider to other members of the backpacker subculture (e.g., operating a hostel or owning a local firm specializing in adventure tourism) (Germann Molz 2008). At the same time, while it is common for them to want to find a partner and settle down, how to achieve this objective while continuing to maintain allegiance to a life on the move is often a work in progress.

Other notable work on lifestyle travel includes Anderson and Erskine’s (2014) study on how long-term mobility inculcates what the authors term “tropophilia” (love of travel) as a contrast to the more familiar notion of “topophilia” (love of place). This distinction has also given rise to a stream of research that considers how home is made in a lifestyle of continuous

travel. Expressed in different words, this research centers on how mobile people make place (Iaquinto 2020) and how they achieve well-being when the elemental motivations of stability and adventure pull in different directions. These studies exemplify the evolving and increasingly inseparable relationship between dwelling and mobility which is not only relevant in the exceptional case of devoted backpackers but raises important questions for portable lifestyles that are likely to become more widespread in years to come (Light and Brown 2020; see also Urry 2007, Sheller and Urry 2008, and Grundstrom 2018, 2021).

### **4.3 Lifestyle Migration**

Research on migration has tended to focus on migrants who have been prompted to move by a desire to improve their economic circumstances, to avoid persecution, or to escape violent conflict.<sup>14</sup> It is only within approximately the past decade that scholars have actively sought to understand the migratory motivations of relatively more privileged and financially secure individuals who are seeking to live in locales that are deemed to offer a better quality of life.<sup>15</sup> This mode of relocation, made possible by global and regional developments of the past half century, has been termed “lifestyle migration” (Hayes 2018; Benson and O’Reilly 2018; Dominguez-Mujica et al 2021). It has given rise to a robust body of literature that seeks to understand the common circumstances and lifestyle choices that underpin such forms of migration and the decisions, conditions, and rationales that inform the lived experiences of migrants after relocating. This section focuses on the foundational contributions to this literature and encourages interested readers to follow up via the copious references mentioned throughout the subsequent discussion.

As conceived by Benson and O'Reilly (2009a), lifestyle migration entails a search for a better way of life – often referred to as the “good life.” Although most migration researchers broadly recognize the pursuit of enhanced livelihood as meaningful for more traditionally defined migrants (Bommes and Morawska 2005; Castles and Miller 2003; Papastergiadis 2000), it merits recognizing that the contemporary population of migrants is much more diverse. As Benson and O'Reilly (2009b) describe, it is the search for and framing of a better lifestyle by more affluent migrants that marks this field of research and distinguishes it from standard migration typologies. Unlike a singular act of compelled relocation, lifestyle migration represents the ongoing efforts of relatively affluent individuals – generally originating from “developed” countries – to overcome what they perceive as the negative constraints and shortcomings of home and to pursue aspirations for self-realization and work-life balance (O'Reilly 2000; Sunil et al 2007; Benson 2010) as part of the reflexivity evident in post-/late modernity (Benson and O'Reilly 2009b) (see Section 2A). Through often exaggerated comparisons between life before and after migration, lifestyle migrants challenge customary depictions as consumers and prioritize achieving and maintaining new and preferable lifestyles (Madden 1999). As Stone and Stubbs (2007) note, to fund their new lifestyles, many migrants run small businesses as “self-employed expatriates” and engage in these entrepreneurial activities, which are often a departure from their pre-migration careers (Hoey 2005), to generate the financial means to pursue their dreams and to advance their envisioned mode of living.

In addition to highlighting this search for a better quality of life, Benson and O'Reilly (2009b) also note the construction of particular places as offering alternative lifestyles and increased general ease of movement as central to the concept. They suggest a destination-based typology that includes three categories of lifestyle migrants: the residential tourist, the rural idyll

seeker, and the bourgeois Bohemian. First, although there has been extensive research on “heliotropic” migration and North-South migration (Casado-Díaz 2006, Gustafson 2001, Huber and O’Reilly 2004, O’Reilly 2000), what sets residential tourist lifestyle migration apart is its emphasis on “leisure, relaxation, and ‘tourism as a way of life’” (Benson and O’Reilly 2009b) rather than a desire to be with other tourists (Sunil et al 2007).<sup>16</sup> Second, lifestyle migrants who move to the countryside either in their home country or abroad are regarded as rural idyll lifestyle migrants because they are primarily attracted to a (often nostalgic) conception of a pastoral lifestyle. Finally, bourgeois Bohemians tend to seek destinations that are characterized by “certain spiritual, artistic, or creative aspirations and unique ‘cultural’ experience” (pp. 613). Through this typology, Benson and O’Reilly (2009b) call attention to the search by lifestyle migrants for particular destinations, landscapes, and cultural imaginings that signify and enable the lifestyle variant that they aspire to achieve.

This conceptualization of lifestyle migration simultaneously runs contrary to and builds upon prior research in the fields of tourism and counter-urbanization. In the first instance, the study of tourism shares several links with the aforementioned notion of lifestyle migration. The binary distinctions – between leisure and work, home and away, and routine and “exotic” experiences – that underpin tourism (Urry 1990) are similar to the lifestyle migrant’s desire to escape the constraints of the everyday. Similar to tourism-informed mobility (Williams and Hall 2002), some migrants decide to migrate because of their positive experience while on vacation and their anticipation of daily life at the destination. In this way, tourism may even facilitate lifestyle migration by expanding how putative migrants construct imaginings of their ideals. However, as Benson and O’Reilly (2009b) note, not all lifestyle migrants begin as tourists. The study of counter-urbanization helps explain the trends and flows underpinning the physical

movement of people from cities and metropolitan areas to more rural areas (Halliday and Coombes 1995). Lifestyle migration shares the pull of destinations that denote a different and “better” way of life than was available prior to migration. However, not all lifestyle migrants are attracted to the countryside which is commonly stressed in the counter-urbanization discourse and relocation to urban locales has also been a popular alternative over the past few decades (Van Noorloos and Steel 2016; Cocola-Gant and Lopez-Gay 2020).

Although lifestyle migration overlaps with these areas in terms of a similar search for a better life and a common ideology of escape, overwhelmingly, tourism and counter-urbanization research tends to focus on the movement of populations. By contrast, lifestyle migration is interested in the lifestyle choices inherent in the decision to migrate. These choices of privileged migrants may appear to be due to individual motivations to break from their past, but the lifestyle before migration frames and, in many ways, prescribes the individual’s decision to migrate, selection of destination, means of travel, and post-migration lifestyle (Benson and O’Reilly 2009b; Benson 2010; Birtchnell and Caletrío 2014).

Lifestyle migration also draws on existing research about how relative economic privilege facilitates relocation. In the cases of second-home owners and retirees, their often-enhanced financial capacity enables them to search for a new way of life and also makes it easier to travel following migration. However, as Koh (2020) highlights, the economic privilege and circumstances of lifestyle migrants are more varied. The rise of lifestyle migration is not, therefore, simply a matter of heightened financial reserves. In some cases, lifestyle migrants must consolidate their monetary resources to be able to move – not to a second home but to acquire a new primary residence. In other words, as Benson contends (2012), whether and how individuals migrate is the result of various structural, cultural, and biographical contingencies.

The “good life” takes many forms. However, the unifying theme in this body of research is that “lifestyle migration is about escape, escape from somewhere and something, while simultaneously an escape to self-fulfillment and a new life – a recreation, restoration or rediscovery of oneself, of personal potential or of one’s ‘true’ desires” (O’Reilly and Benson 2009, 3). It is this drive to find a “more meaningful life” that is key to the concept and a critical distinguishing criterion of this mode of mobility. As O’Reilly and Benson (2009) note, the narratives of lifestyle migrants reveal that this drive also gives rise to a variety of contradictions and ambivalences. For example, as much as lifestyle migrants may contend that they want to escape their former lives, they continue to rely on aspects of their pre-migration experiences to make their migration and post-migration lifestyles possible. In addition, it is through lifestyle migration that unsustainable consumption patterns often transfer from the global North to the global South (Winkler and Matarrita-Cascante 2020), as people employ practices of geographic arbitrage (or “geoarbitrage”) as part of their advancement strategy (Hayes 2014; see also Mancinelli 2020 and the extensive discussion in Sections 2.2 and 6.7). The ability to redeploy accumulated savings from a higher to a lower cost-of-living location accentuates global inequalities and undermines social and environmental sustainability (Sampaio 2020). Furthermore, as migrants become more rooted in their post-migration home, they tend to connect with other migrants rather than integrate with host communities (see Sections 2.3 and 4.2). It also seems that the quest for “good life” is a perpetual search for many lifestyle migrants, or as O’Reilly and Benson (2009) creatively phrase it, “one lifestyle choice within a wider lifestyle trajectory.” Although the concept of lifestyle migration has become the basis of a distinct field of research, Benson and Osbaldiston (2016, 419) urge lifestyle migration scholars to increasingly question the thematic underpinnings of the current and ongoing conceptualizations of lifestyle

migration and to take steps toward a more nuanced understanding of and “critical sociology of lifestyle migration.”

#### **4.4 Lifestyle Mobility**

Interest in the notion of lifestyle mobility, the third focus of this chapter devoted to research on itinerant lifestyles, emerged in large part from prior work on amenity migration and has sought to integrate social theoretical insights about lifestyles (Giddens 1991) with complementary conceptions from the “mobilities” paradigm (Urry 2006) (see Sections 2.1 and 2.2). Paralleling developments in the other two lifestyle-oriented perspectives highlighted above, McIntyre (2009) originally defined lifestyle mobility as “the movements of people, capital, information and objects associated with the process of voluntary relocation to places that are perceived as providing an enhanced, or at least, different lifestyle.” The aim of early investigations sought to widen the focus beyond more customary consideration of “people mobility,” voluntary relocation, and amenity destinations and to formulate conceptual frameworks that could apply to a broader range of “flows.”

This work provides an important corrective on prior conceptions of the practices of relatively affluent migrants induced to voluntarily move on a seasonal, temporary, or permanent basis: to gain access to second homes, to partake in recreational opportunities, to embark on retirement, to benefit from the economic advantages of a lower cost of living, to start a business, or to enjoy a more leisurely lifestyle (see Section 4.3).<sup>17</sup> A key insight is that transboundary relocation does not simply involve people in their corporeal form. Such movements typically entail the geographic supplanting of financial capital, political skills, technological capabilities, expert knowledge, and so forth from a sending to a receiving location (Janoschka 2009, 2011;

Van Noorloos 2013). Moreover, the redeployment of these resources can have notable impacts on the respective regions as residents divest asset from one place and subsequently reposition in another. A particular focus for researchers of lifestyle mobility has been the transformation of economically depressed rural and formerly resource-reliant communities that have been revitalized as destinations for outdoor recreational pursuits. This means of operationalizing the concept has led to notable overlap with research on communities organized around counter-urbanization and the opportunities that it creates for social and economic renewal (see, for example, Mitchell 2004; Gosnell and Abrams 2011; Stiman 2020).

The availability of numerous service providers and supporting infrastructures including low-cost air travel, convenient ICTs, and a dense array of intermediaries who provide accommodation, advice on property acquisition, and expertise regarding taxes and other financial matters has enabled and facilitated lifestyle mobility (Åkerlund 2012, 2013). Nonetheless, these migrants encounter numerous challenges and recent work has highlighted the particular obstacles experienced by, for example, Swedish lifestyle movers in Malta (Åkerlund 2017), British retirees in Thailand (Botterill 2017), internal migrants in China (Zhu 2018), and self-styled “countercultural” Bohemians in India (Korpela 2019).

At the same time, Scott Cohen, Tara Duncan, and Maria Thulemark (see Duncan et al 2013 and Cohen et al 2015) have in a subsequent phase further refined the initial conceptual foundations of lifestyle mobility advanced by McIntyre and others and distinguished their perspective from lifestyle migration (see also McIntyre 2013) (see Section 4.3). Drawing on prior work on lifestyle travelers discussed in Section 4.2, they seek to blur the distinction between tourism and migration. In discussing how lifestyle mobility differs from lifestyle migration, they contend that it is “a more fluid and dynamic process” and argue that we should



regard “lifestyle mobility and lifestyle migration as distinctly separate phenomena” (Cohen et al 2013, 5–6). They further differentiate the two forms of movement by asserting that lifestyle migration implies a “one-off lifestyle-led transition” with an emblematic example being northern Europeans who move to Spain or Portugal. By contrast, lifestyle mobility is ongoing and multi-transitional and has a “‘rhizomatic’ multiplicity in which movement through space is both roots and routes.”

Cohen and colleagues also import into their conception of lifestyle mobility a more complex and arguably contemporary understanding of attachment and detachment to place. Peripatetic tendencies do not necessarily lead to an alienated sense of home as conventional wisdom might contend. As they explain, “[i]ncreased mobility can create multiple places of belonging and aspects of transnationalism” (Cohen 201, 6). Such people may be “at home in the world” or simultaneously dwell – at least in terms of identities – in multiple locales. This capability is facilitated in important ways by ICTs that enable practitioners of lifestyle mobility to easily maintain relationships with distant others while continuing to travel. As a practical matter the difference between “home” and “away,” or alternatively between proximate and remote, becomes increasingly insignificant.

#### **4.5 Recent Developments in Research on Itinerant Lifestyles**

The past few years have given rise to efforts to reassess lifestyle travel, lifestyle migration, and lifestyle mobility with attention devoted to both delineating the interface between *migration* and *mobility* (or *mobilities*) and critiquing the underlying premises of the two notions (Duncan et al 2013; Benson and Osbaldiston 2014, 2016; Benson 2015; Cohen et al 2015; see

also Korpela 2019). The following section provides a review of the issues and debates that have received attention as part of this work.

In their elaboration of lifestyle mobilities, and as part of an explicit effort to distinguish this perspective from conceptions outlined by work on lifestyle migration, Cohen et al (2015, 156) contend that the latter “does not fully grasp the complexities of time and space found in more varied and multi-transitional manifestations of lifestyle mobility.” They further assert that their own research offers “a deeper and wider understanding of the interrelations of travel, leisure and migration.” As discussed above, these authors strive to situate lifestyle mobility as a form of movement that does not fit into fixed categories; it is neither temporary (as would be the case for episodic tourist visits) nor permanent (as migration is generally conceived). In an observation that is critical to emergent formulations of digital nomadism (see Chapter 6), they argue that practitioners of lifestyle mobility presuppose a more flexible disposition with respect to “home” and “away” as well as between “work” and “leisure” (see also Germann Molz 2008). They also point out that regularized use of ICTs can amplify this process of blurring customary binary divisions for people whose lifestyles are predicated on more or less continual movement.

Duncan et al (2013) and Cohen et al (2015) moreover cast a circumspect eye on the contention made by proponents of lifestyle migration that a key feature of this mode of travel is the quest for “a better quality of life” (Benson and O’Reilly 2009b, 609). They argue that this emphasis on superiority and inferiority with respect to lifestyles entails a normative judgment that crosses into romanticism. It is further asserted that this orientation is both awkward and problematic in light of the protracted legacy of treating nomads and other unmoored people and communities in nostalgic and idealized terms (see also Sheller and Urry 2006).

Several sociologists of migration have advanced another line of inquiry at the nexus of these different lifestyle perspectives on mobility and migration.<sup>18</sup> A notable example is Benson and Osbaldiston (2016) who offer several points of critique. First, they contend that researchers have rushed to analysis without carefully appreciating the implications of the theoretical formulations that undergird their research. One source of vulnerability centers on the rather open-ended and weakly specified conceptions that are part of the notion of “lifestyles.” This problem has been compounded by the fact that insufficient effort has been devoted to rigorously explaining what constitutes an improvement in quality of life. They assert that this tendency is emblematic of how “contemporary social theory is adopted uncritically to understand social phenomena” (pp. 408) (see Section 2.1). Benson and Osbaldiston further charge that researchers have engaged with a certain set of social theoretical insights that lack sufficient sociological grounding and historical understanding. In particular, they contend that there has been an overenthusiastic tendency to deploy “safe concepts” and “periodizing constructs” such as individualization that “come ready-made and can be easily applied to any empirical problem” (pp. 409). As a result, research on lifestyle migration has tended to place undue emphasis on the capacity of people to exercise personal agency over their lifestyle choices and to underplay the role of structural (and more traditional) considerations such as class, gender, social status, ethnicity, and race.

As a practical matter, only a small minority of people are able to participate in transnational forms of lifestyle migration. In addition to the aforementioned factors, other long-standing physical and legal barriers like borders, immigration policies, visas, and various legal and financial controls limit the pursuit of individualized ambitions to move at will. Benson and Osbaldiston (2016) write that a “significant consequence of the turn towards understanding

social and cultural phenomena through the lens of theories promoting individualism is that the host of structures that continue to dictate choice to individuals (and which frame migrant lives) are not given as much attention as they deserve” (pp. 413). This observation gives credence to the claim that most research to date on lifestyle migration has overly stressed the centrality of human agency, as well as, generated a discernible Eurocentric bias that fails to recognize the hurdles that characterize the permanent relocation of, say, retirees from the United States and Canada to Central and South America (Morrissey 2018; Pallareas 2018).<sup>19</sup>

Bensen and Osbaldiston (2016) additionally are critical of the tendency of researchers of lifestyle migration to embrace the so-called “mobilities turn” in social theory and the social sciences more generally (see Section 2.1). Moreover, lifestyle migration researchers have displayed “significant investment and interest in adopting the mobilities paradigm as a frame” for their work. As outlined above, sociologist John Urry initially outlined this conception and its core idea is that movement has become an indispensable variable of social analysis. Some proponents of this theoretical formulation have expanded the framework of lifestyle mobilities and situated it as a middle ground between impermanent tourism and permanent migration (Cohen et al 2013; McIntyre 2013). Bensen and Osbaldiston (2016, 417) question the need for this new formulation “when this area has been well considered in both second home, tourism, and even lifestyle migration literature.” They further contend that the term seems to have been developed in the absence of empirical validation and hence does not effectively capture the experiences of lifestyle migrants. In short, lifestyle mobilities, to their minds, is an idea in search of an application. They conclude their critique by maintaining uncertainty about “what mobilities as a lens might uniquely add to understandings of lifestyle migration...mobilities has caused us to

forget our disciplinary roots and overlook some rather substantial recurring features of migration and cultural phenomena in general” (pp. 419).

A final contribution that Bensen and Osbaldiston (2016) make as part of this discussion is to outline in very broad form a “critical sociology of lifestyle migration.” This undertaking entails “interrogating issues such as the individual and cultural imagining that underpins the motivation to ‘lifestyle migrate’ and which subsequently structures migrant lives” while at the same time recognizing that specific interpretations are likely to be quite variable (pp. 419). In addition, they make the important assertion – and this, too, has implications for digital nomadicity – that research on lifestyle migration should be more attentive to overall patterns of labor migration.

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## Chapter 5

### Global Nomadism

The concept of global nomadism emerged during the 1990s in response to increasing internationalization and proponents built on many of the ideas discussed in earlier sections of this literature review. Multinational corporations were at the time deploying growing numbers of staff (along with their accompanying families) to offshore locations and these developments began to create new challenges regarding cultural assimilation and managerial integration of migrant employees (Yeoh and Huang 2011; Bennett 2014; Whitehead and Halsall 2017). Additional issues involved the complications of children growing up abroad and attending international schools and this phenomenon gave rise the notion of so-called “third culture kids” (McLachlan 2007; Grimshaw and Sears 2008; Gilbert 2008; Greenholtz and Kim 2009; Langford 2012; Dillon and Ali 2019). Still other dilemmas centered on the reintegration of returnees back into their home countries (Isogai 1999; Yoshida et al 2002, 2009; Sohl 2019). Travel researchers during this period were also exploring the salience of global nomadism as a theme as part of extensions of pre-existing studies on backpackers (and flashpackers) (Richards and Wilson 2004; Hannam and Diekmann 2010; Paris 2012; Butler and Hannam 2014; see also Section 4.2) and countercultural and youth travelers (D’Andrea, 2006, 2007; Richards 2015).

Work on global nomadism constitutes a large and diverse literature and complete treatment of it is beyond the scope of the current review. The emphasis instead is on distilling a few key insights that are relevant from the standpoint of digital nomadism and we focus in particular on work of mobilities researcher (and global nomad herself) Päivi Kannisto. She defines global nomadism as “travel full-time without a home and a permanent job, and [global nomads] cross national borders in frequent intervals” (Kannisto 2015). In a lengthy series of

books and journal articles, she explores “settled” versus “mobile” location independent travelers and contends that because global nomads are not tied to a home country or a fixed abode, their lifestyle choices are in opposition to more conventionally mobile individuals. Although global nomads (and other lifestyle migrants) are willing to detach themselves from conventional comforts of “home,” the “conscious detachment” of global nomads means that they also forgo the securities of their home country (e.g., health care, steady income, social security).

Unlike dominant conceptions of nomadic lifestyles such as lifestyle migrants and backpackers who are location-driven (e.g., O’Reilly 2000, Benson and O’Reilly 2009, see also Chapter 4), both modes include a certain level of being “settled.” Kannisto suggests that global nomads deviate from this contemporary societal norm and often face “power games” that are not typical of location independence. For example, the dominant discourse among global nomads is adventuring which suggests that they hold an optimistic understanding of travel. They typically view their journeys as an investment – “the school of life” – and thus through this conception enhance their status. In contrast, Kannisto (2015) found that practitioners of more sedentary lifestyles tend to regard global nomads as vagrants and lacking a sense of rootedness. This emphasis on vagrancy highlights an underlying power dynamic that threatens the agency of global nomads, many of whom hold university degrees. Vagrancy suggests shiftlessness and a lack of willingness to contribute meaningfully to society. She argues that neither treatment is accurate, but that by having to explain their lifestyle choices global nomads frequently find themselves in a subordinate power position (especially in comparison to more “settled” or sedentary individuals).

In other work, Kannisto suggests that global nomads serve as a mirror on society and can help researchers identify existing and emergent themes regarding the direction of societal

evolution and processes of change. For instance, through their frequent border crossings and unmoored lifestyles, global nomads practice extreme mobilities in an effort to detach themselves from both geographic locations and notions of territorial belonging that are implied by “citizenship” and “nationality.” They challenge traditional conceptions of “home” in provocative ways. She writes that “[a]lthough global nomads themselves do not regard lack of home and address as a distress, it complicates their everyday life, because societies are built on the assumption that everybody has a home” (Kannisto 2016, 226). In this way, the author asserts that global nomads challenge the dominant discourse of “home” as a sedentary, anchoring point in the world. However, she found the notion of “home” is an essential reference point for global nomads, who use this concept to describe both their friends and family in their original country and their own “homelessness” as a means to highlight their privileged lifestyle of freedom of movement and choice. At the same time, although global nomads may lack traditional comforts and securities of “home,” they are not entirely self-sufficient or countercultural. Kannisto (2016) highlights how global nomads create networks and safety nets for themselves while traveling, which calls into question just how “alternative” their lifestyle really is.

In terms of how they organize their lifestyles, Kannisto (2018) writes that global nomads seek detachment from conventional notions of geographic locations and practices of market-based consumption. They place a premium on “authenticity” and aim to travel frequently while also avoiding the infrastructural dimensions of the tourism industry (see Sections 2.3 and 6.8). This orientation constitutes a type of market resistance that informs and, in many respects, is emblematic of many aspects of their lives. Global nomads tend to avoid accumulating possessions, burdening themselves with fixed expenses, and spending money (to a degree that rivals even the most parsimonious budget travelers). To compensate for this disposition, there is



a predilection for non-monetary exchanges as well as a more general attitude that privileges voluntary simplicity and an eschewal of money.

However, there are practical limits to this emphasis on frugality. In the case of non-monetary exchange, for example, global nomads still need a “market” where supply and demand exist so a transaction can take place. Under such circumstances and without realizing it, Kannisto (2018, 304) argues that “they end up imitating and reinforcing the logic and conventions of the market.” Further, global nomads might be critical of consumerism, but they still partake in some of its practices. Although global nomads challenge customary forms of commercial exchange, their frequent lifestyle changes tend to require regular alterations of what and how they consume. Many members of this community travel with a variety of digital devices and while they try to spurn tourism, they are beneficiaries of the existing infrastructure of travel, transportation, and hospitality services.

Another important voice in the literature on global nomadism is anthropologist Fabiola Mancinelli (2018) who explores “location-independent families” (LIF) and the ways in which they imagine and socially construct home since they do not have a fixed residence. She describes how LIFs engage in a slower form of continuous travel than is common among lifestyle travelers and migrants. However, the lifestyle constitutes a permanent way of life and enables members of the family to earn a livelihood and to study while being on the move. This form of mobility combines slow but endless travel, remote work, and “worldschooling,” a form of child-driven, experiential and immersive learning.

Unlike other travelers who tend to have a home that serves as a reference point, LIFs do not generally have a fixed residence as they encounter ever-changing environments and cultures. The home-making practices of LIFs (or families-on-the-move) demonstrate that while they may

lack a traditional home base there are opportunities to create multiple “homes along the way.” In this way, LIFs “transform space into place.” Mancinelli (2018) found that the explanatory discourses produced by LIFs tend to move away from dominant narratives of “home as house” and transcend the conventional notion of a physical place in favor of “creating a home through living and having experiences together.” By freeing themselves from a physical place, LIFs are able to reinvent the notion of home as “a set of social, symbolic, and emotional” practices (pp. 14).

A final example from the literature on global nomadism is an article by cultural tourism researcher Greg Richards (2015) who explores the travel styles of young nomads and contends that the rise of youth travel highlights the general increase in mobility facilitated by globalization (see Sections 2.3 and 4.6). Based on a large-scale survey, the author calls attention to three forms of youth nomadism: the backpacker, the flashpacker, and the global nomad. He distinguishes between these groups in the following terms.

The traditional backpacker can be seen as a form of “neo-tribe,” gathering in self-sufficient enclaves. In contrast, the flashpacker, or “digital nomad” utilises existing digital and logistic infrastructure to maintain a fluid, individualised lifestyle. The global nomad, or “location independent traveller,” tries to integrate with the local community, while trying to avoid the strictures of “system.”

According to this typology, backpackers tend to be the youngest (approximately 25 years old) and most likely to be meeting friends from home while traveling. Gatherings with other backpackers are important social moments and reinforce status in a group. In contrast,

flashpackers (synonymous with what he regards as digital nomads) tend to have the highest income and be the most connected travelers due in part to their frequent use of social media. They are also the least likely to try to connect with local people or to immerse themselves in everyday life when traveling (see also Green (2020)). Global nomads, however, tend to be notably older (approximately 28 years old) and are the most active in connecting with local people and everyday life in a destination.<sup>20</sup> Richards (2015) discusses the paradox of flashpackers sustaining their “self-contained” existence by relying on the infrastructure and services available in their local context and the efforts of global nomads to reject the system (e.g., full-time job, paying for accommodations) and situate themselves on the periphery of society while simultaneously seeking integration into the local community. The flashpackers that Richards describes occupy a conceptually pivotal position because in many respects this travel modality became the point of departure for more recent interest in the relationship between digital affordances, communication, and continuous travel (see also Germann Molz and Paris 2015; Rosenberg 2019).

\* \* \*

## Chapter 6

### Digital Nomadism

#### 6.1 Introduction

Many of the perspectives thus far highlighted in this literature review preceded the manifest onset of what is today understood as digital nomadism. In particular, research on computer-supported cooperative work, itinerant lifestyles, and global nomadism – as well as the more theoretical conceptions from sociology, geography/political economy, and cultural anthropology/cultural tourism – provide a solid conceptual foundation for understanding emergent developments surrounding ICTs, changes in the organization of work, and emergent preferences for location independence. Especially important is the depth of detail regarding new modes of living that blur prior distinctions between work and leisure, home and away, and sedentarism and mobility.

Nonetheless, the specific contours of digital nomadism, situated at the confluence of digital labor, knowledge work, extreme leisure, and hypermobility, can sometimes be difficult to ascertain. The challenge has become still more challenging in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic that has expanded interest in remote-working practices and prompted speculation that, for example, an estimated 40 percent of all jobs in the United States could be successfully performed from home (Dingel and Neiman 2020; see also Coombs 2020; Nagel 2020; Kudyba 2020). Arguably, if this number of people can productively work from their residence, a significant fraction of them could just as readily work from virtually anywhere.

We divide the growing corpus of academic literature on digital nomadism into six themes: definitional parameters, working lives, non-working (leisure) lives, co-spaces and the digital nomad lifestyle, mobility practices, political economy, and identity. These themes are

inevitably not discrete and clearly differentiated classifications but rather overlapping and interdependent categories. To compensate for this situation, we continue here our practice of cross-referencing so that the interested reader can readily see how certain contributions are relevant under more than one heading.

## 6.2 Defining Digital Nomadism

While earlier published accounts alerted small and generally technology savvy subcultures of the arrival of digital nomadism it was arguably a series of articles in *The Economist* in April 2008 that brought the lifestyle to popular attention.<sup>21</sup> In the intervening years, various authors who have grappled with the problem of defining digital nomadism have characterized the relevant body of literature as “fragmented and scattered through different disciplines and perspectives” and “primarily focused on digital nomads’ lifestyles” with “comparatively less focus on framing digital nomadism.” A frequent point of frustration is that the prevailing formulation “remains rather vague and describes the phenomenon in rather general terms” (Hannonen 2020; see also Wang et al 2018). In fact, prior to 2016 there was very little systematic research on the topic and this situation prompted some scholars to question whether digital nomadism was simply a mere buzzword in contemporary society rather than a serious research category (Müller 2016). As studies about the phenomenon have increased, so has terminological uncertainty. The status of the field is effectively summed up by mobilities researcher Olga Hannonen (2020) who has recently written that “[c]ontemporary studies provide various perspectives, definitions and categorizations of digital nomads but lack a coherent understanding of the term and phenomenon.”<sup>22</sup>

As part of an examination of the history of digital nomadism, information-systems expert Daniel Schlagwein (2018b) notes the role of several enabling factors, converging developments, and intersecting historical trends related to business, technology, and travel that have spurred more explicit attention in the general topic of digital labor and itinerant lifestyles. The 1970s gave rise to, for example, pre-Internet computer networks, emergence of the notion of “work-life balance,” and publication of *Lonely Planet* travel guides that helped to expand opportunities for independent modes of travel. Technological innovations during the following decade shaped the rise of Internet-service providers and satellite phones, telecommuting, and inexpensive backpacker setups around the world. By the 1990s, the so-called e-lance economy began to emerge due to mainstream adoption of the Internet, availability of mobile phones and laptop computers, peer-to-peer and other similar business models, and digital platforms. This assemblage of affordances made online business possible and enabled inexpensive travel options due to discount providers and early disintermediation of the booking process (see Section 2.2). Because of these coalescing developments, possibilities for digital nomadism began to take shape, and the term “technomads” took hold to describe the practices of long-term travelers who used technology to maintain connections with friends and family. Work, however, was not at the time a central aspect of this trend. According to Schlagwein (2018b), later developments in cryptocurrencies and, perhaps more significantly, in social media, specialized conferences, online communities, and co-working spaces influenced and structured the emergence of a digital nomad identity (see Section 6.8). In this way, he describes digital nomadism as a historically significant achievement that is both driven by societal changes and advanced by a shared notion and understanding among lifestyle participants of what it means to be a digital nomad.

Because digital nomadism is – at least metaphorically – connected to traditional nomadism, Schlagwein (2018b) also attempts to distinguish practitioners of customary forms of wandering from settlers and migrants (see also Section 4.2). He argues that the two latter classifications share a form of location permanence in that settlers live and work in static locations and migrants leave their homes, moving from one “permanent” location to another. Schlagwein also highlights the similarities and differences in their intentions related to movement. On one hand, traditional nomads maintain the intention of movement, making them similar to settlers who may move periodically from one location to another to establish a new fixed location for themselves. On the other hand, migrants redeploy from their original home to another location while nomads “move more often or move continuously as a lifestyle choice” (Schlagwein 2018b, 1). However, he acknowledges that distinguishing the practical movements of nomads and migrants is admittedly a “grey zone.” Schlagwein (2018b) nonetheless notes that relative mobility can be used to distinguish historical variations in nomadic lifestyles – hunter-gatherers, pastoral nomads, and peripatetic nomads. Similarly, he contends that the aspiration of digital nomads to move freely and to work from remote locations using ITC equipment and infrastructures seems to differentiate this type of neo-nomadism from its preceding variants (see also D’Andrea 2006, Korpela 2019).

Although Schlagwein (2018b) argues that “modern ‘expat’ workers are migrants but not nomads,” in a separate study, he defines digital nomadism as “a form of digital work combined with overseas travel and expat living” (2018a, Section 2.1). In doing so, he is suggesting that digital nomadism is a further development of existing types of digital workers, overseas travelers, nomads, migrants, and expats who he notes are a particular kind of migrant. He recognizes digital nomadism as a technology-enabled form of digital work that is both apart from

and, in some cases, inclusive of, backpacking, flashpacking, freelancing, solo entrepreneurship, teleworking, and related work-travel modes. To overcome some of this confusion over definitional debates, Schlagwein (2018a) sidesteps the issue and advances the notion that distinct from the specific practices, the underlying collective and shared value system of digital nomads is a defining parameter of the practice.

Information-science student Caleece Nash and her advisors (2018) echo the collective and community-oriented disposition of digital nomads and the characterization of their life and work as sharing some commonalities with remote workers, freelancers, location-independent workers, online entrepreneurs, and even tourists. However, this array of terms, they argue, falls short of providing “a holistic perspective on the nuances of digital nomadic work” and are “ill-equipped to accommodate the dynamic work arrangements of digital nomads.” Instead, the group views digital nomads as “perpetual travelers” and situates them at the intersection of four interdependent elements: digital work, gig work, nomadic work, and adventure and global travel. They contend that these key elements define who digital nomads are, what their work entails, and how digital nomadism entwines with digital technologies.

In addition, Nash et al (2018) note that digital nomadism is both similar to and different from other related and partly overlapping categories, once again highlighting the elasticity of the lifestyle. According to their research, digital nomads embody features from all four of the categories in their framework, but an individual classified under one heading – for example a performer of nomadic work – is not necessarily a digital nomad. While work is often the reason why nomadic workers travel, Nash and her collaborators highlight that digital nomads tend to travel *while* also working. Similarly, work is often what draws them to specific locations, but for



their part, digital nomads must be able to do work that is flexible enough that they can execute it from whatever location they choose.

Although the four-point typology advanced by Nash et al (2018) provides a foundation for understanding the particularities of digital nomadism, their taxonomy derives from a study based only on research involving online forums and only 22 interviews with digital nomads themselves. It is necessary to contrast this limited amount of empirical evidence with the fact that, by the authors' own acknowledgement, the total number of contemporary digital nomads ranges from 200,000 to 500,000 (see Schlagwein 2018b).<sup>23</sup> Moreover, the formulation by Nash and colleagues employs several generalizing and stereotypical characterizations regarding digital nomads – such as constant mobility and lack of a home base – that other studies have been less inclined to take on board.<sup>24</sup>

From yet another vantage point, information-systems expert Blair Wang and his colleagues define digital nomads as “teleworkers whose extreme geographic mobility allows them to work and live from anywhere” and who “therefore choose to work from everywhere, living a life of ongoing interleaved work and travel” (Wang et al 2018, 9). The authors identified three dominant theoretical framings of digital nomadism based on the degree to which the lifestyle is an economic activity, a cultural phenomenon, and an emerging technology-enabled form of both working and organizing.

We may understand digital nomadism as an example of economic activity, wherein digital nomads challenge traditional dichotomies such as production/consumption and government/business. We may understand digital nomadism as a cultural phenomenon arising from lifehacking subculture and

fulfilling a modern analogue of the wandering journeymen of old. We may understand digital nomadism as an example of limited but effective technological progress, wherein underlying infrastructure and subsequent digital communications are imperfect but have allowed significant progress to be made in terms of regional inequality and flexible working.

In other words, this appraisal asserts that digital nomads are challenging the status quo, a determination that these authors share with information-technology specialists Shahper Richter and Alexander Richter (2020, 78) who contend that digital nomadism is about demonstrating fierce independence on the part of people who combine gig work and digital platforms to live their desired lifestyle.

Digital nomads operate outside of the classical organizational boundaries and can be considered “contemporary entrepreneurs” who bring disruptive business models into different industries and have a different working culture and value different types of capital (e.g., reputation, information, symbolic). Those who adhere to this style of life are defining work life by pursuing employment that allows for global travel, flexibility in work hours, and a departure from the traditional office environment.

However, such definitions that connect digital nomadism to a particular kind of “work” are complicated by the persistent lack of formal agreement on the underlying characteristics as to what constitutes work and leisure. Credible debates exist on whether current conceptions are too

narrow and inadvertently fail to include various types of remote workers, freelancers, and others who travel on an intermittent rather than continuous basis. One can also legitimately contend that prevailing understandings of digital nomadism have become a grab bag that oversimplifies important distinctions (see Sections 6.3 and 6.4). There are also multifarious questions about the paradoxical and often crosscutting and contradictory motivators that often drive people to take up a digital nomad lifestyle (Dal Fiore et al 2014, Reichenberger 2018). We explore these issues in the sections that follow.

The foregoing discussion makes clear that a widely accepted definition of digital nomadism has not yet coalesced. Despite several attempts by various researchers in recent years to articulate the boundaries of the phenomenon, the formulations advanced thus far have been mostly idiosyncratic (see Table 1). Olga Hannonen (2020) effectively captures the status of the issue when she writes that “[s]tudies on digital nomadism are growing, but the term is used in a variety of, and often contradicting, ways.” We take the view that this contestation is not necessarily a problem at this stage. By developing and justifying their definitions, researchers are highlighting different aspects of the lifestyle and bringing contrasting characteristics to attention. In addition, current scholarship is grounding digital nomadism in existing patterns of understanding. In other words, they are leveraging preceding and allied concepts (e.g., flashpacking, entrepreneurship, remote workers, freelancers, location-independent workers, online entrepreneurs, tourists, migrants, nomads, settlers, expats, and *Wanderjahre*) and using prevailing knowledge scaffolds to explain why these conceptions do not fit the patterns and practices of digital nomadism.

Moving forward, part of the challenge in defining digital nomadism with a higher order of precision rests on the fact that location independence, continuous travel, and working on the

move are widely understood as key aspects. However, these features are simultaneously common among other similar and conceptually adjacent types of location-independent work and lifestyles. For example, using Schlagwein's (2018a) definition that digital nomadism is "a form of digital work combined with overseas travel and expat living," it remains unclear when someone falls only into this characterization. Consider the following hypothetical example: a businessperson leaves her home country and travels to France where she lives in a co-living community for two weeks while traveling and working remotely. She is doing digital work while living as an expat and this (temporary) lifestyle would make her, according to Schlagwein's definition, a digital nomad. But, because this conception is an extension of existing and familiar patterns, it is unclear which features set this subject apart from, say, a remote worker who travels to another country or even a tourist who is traveling for leisure but who continues to work on a project that needs to be completed on a tight schedule. Or consider, for instance, someone who sells all their belongings, moves to Thailand, and builds websites to support his lifestyle. He would fall into Schlagwein's definition, but it is unclear which practices distinguish him from a customary expat. In this way, much like Makimoto and Manners' 1997 conceptualization that laid the foundation for the term, many of the attempts to define digital nomadism suggest that the lifestyle is a further developmental stage of existing patterns. As Hannonen (2020) provocatively observes, current understanding of digital nomadism encompasses "possibilities" rather than denotes clear "conditions" that must be met.

**Table 1 | Definitions of Digital Nomadism from a Selected Sample of Notable Sources**

| <b>Authors</b>                                   | <b>Date</b> | <b>Definition of Digital Nomadism</b>   |
|--|-------------|---|
| Liegl  | 2014        | Borrows from pioneering computer scientist Leonard Kleinrock’s notion of digital technologies that enable “anytime, anywhere” connection and describes a digital nomad as “a mobile knowledge worker equipped with digital technologies to work ‘anytime, anywhere’” (pp. 163).   |
| Müller   | 2016        | <p>“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” (pp. 344).</p> <p>“A new generation of location independent freelancers, young entrepreneurs, online self-employed persons” (pp. 344).</p>  |
| Nash, Jarrahi, Sutherland, and Phillips          | 2018        | “A community of digital workers” who are “best described by the confluence of four key elements: digital work, gig work, nomadic work and global travel adventure” (pp. 9).   |
| Schlagwein                                       | 2018a       | <p>“Professionals using a range of information systems (IS) and information technology (IT) tools to perform work digitally over the Internet so to enable a lifestyle of perpetual travelling and expat living” (Section 1).</p> <p>“A form of digital work combined with overseas travel and expat living” (Section 2.1)</p>  |
| Schlagwein                                       | 2018b       | “A form of highly mobile digital work that has emerged as an information technology (IT)-enabled global phenomenon” (pp. 1).  |
| Wang, Schlagwein, Cecez-Kecmanovic, and Cahalane | 2018        | <p>“Digital nomads are teleworkers who have become so geographically mobile that they are free to work from almost anywhere in the world” (pp. 2).</p> <p>Digital nomads are “teleworkers whose extreme geographic mobility allows them to work and live from anywhere” and who “therefore choose to work from everywhere, living a life of ongoing interleaved work and travel” (pp. 9)</p> <p>“We may understand digital nomadism as an example of economic activity, wherein digital nomads challenge traditional dichotomies such as production/consumption and</p> |

|                     |      |  |
|---------------------|------|--|
|                     |      | <p>government/business. We may understand digital nomadism as a cultural phenomenon arising from lifehacking subculture and fulfilling a modern analogue of the wandering journeymen of old. We may understand digital nomadism as an example of limited but effective technological progress, wherein underlying infrastructure and subsequent digital communications are imperfect but have allowed significant progress to be made in terms of regional inequality and flexible working” (pp. 9)</p>  |
| Thompson            | 2018 | <p>The digital nomad lifestyle is “the ability for individuals to work remotely from their laptop and use their freedom from an office to travel the world” (pp. 2).</p> <p>“Digital nomads are remote workers often employed in tech fields such as web design, programming, or online marketing. Exploiting the advantage of their remote employment, they travel the world; in contrast to telecommuter workers of past decades who used their remote work flexibility to work from home, cut down costs of transportation, avoid office-based distractions, and provide childcare-friendly scheduling” (pp. 2).</p>  |
| Richter and Richter | 2020 | <p>Conceptualizes “digital nomadism at the interface of individual preferences (e.g., more flexibility), organizational development (e.g., more dynamic markets) and technological advances (e.g., broadband internet)” (pp. 78)</p> <p>“Digital nomads operate outside of the classical organizational boundaries (Makimoto and Manners 1997) and can be considered as ‘contemporary entrepreneurs’ who bring disruptive business models into different industries (de Vaujany 2016) and have a different working culture and value different types of capital (e.g., reputation, information, symbolic) (Nash et al 2018). Those who adhere to this style of life are redefining work life by pursuing employment that allows for global travel, flexibility in work hours, and a departure from the traditional office environment” (pp. 78).</p> |
| Hannonen            | 2020 | <p>“The term ‘digital nomad’ describes a category of mobile professionals, who perform their work remotely from anywhere in the world, utilizing digital technologies, while ‘digital nomadism’ refers to the lifestyle that is developed by these highly mobile location independent professionals” (further understanding and framing of this lifestyle as a mobility phenomenon).</p>   |

### 6.3 Working Lives of Digital Nomads

It is perhaps unsurprising that a significant share of scholarship to date on digital nomadism has focused on the working lives of location-independent workers. This work has been carried out by an interdisciplinary array of researchers from fields including sociology, human-computer interaction, information technology, and organizational studies.

An early contribution in this line of inquiry is Sutherland and Jarrahi (2017) who situate their understanding of digital nomads in the context of the more extensive (and some respects more familiar) context of the “sharing economy” and the “access economy” (see, e.g., Rifkin 2000; Belk 2014; Hamari et al 2016; Martin 2016; Cohen 2017; Frenken and Schor 2017). Both academic and popular accounts use this terminology to characterize developments in recent years around the provisioning of contingent labor or “gig work” as well as related activities pertaining to micro-entrepreneurship and freelancing. Their specific focus in this article is on how digital nomads, who do not normally have access to the same kinds of centralized organizational resources as is customary for employees, create and recreate the “information infrastructure” required to perform their daily activities.<sup>25</sup> The authors observe that in addition to the economic and social dimensions of relevant processes of labor casualization, comprehensive understanding requires appreciation of the digital platforms – such as Upwork and TaskRabbit – that mediate relationships and provide the technological foundations for virtualized interaction and exchange through fluid and reliable communication, scheduling, and management of administrative tasks. The prevalent discourse around these online marketplaces is that they enable the “freedom” and “autonomy” of workers and less attention has focused on how the underlying business models and algorithms support objectives that are not necessarily consistent with these widely perceived aims.

Maintenance of effective work arrangements requires digital nomads to assemble their infrastructural resources on a distributed basis and to combine them in ever-evolving and innovative ways to identify remunerative opportunities, to facilitate relationships with customers and clients, to carry out job tasks, to receive training in new skills, to collaborate with other location-independent workers, to organize financial transactions, and so forth. The need for these activities stems from the fact that itinerant workers do not normally have access to an information-technology department or other institutionalized facilities so must instead rely on their own ingenuity or reach out to friends and colleagues for ad hoc support to ensure the viability of their self-fashioned ICT arrangements. The fact that the digital nomads are frequently repositioning themselves in new locales and tend to utilize workspaces on an impermanent basis means that some portions of their professional (and social) infrastructure need to be regularly reassembled and inability to do so in an effective manner can have serious consequences. The hazards of a breakdown are palpable because as Sutherland and Jarrahi (2017) explain, “[a]s independent workers, digital nomads always face the risk of sliding into ‘precarious work’ situations with uncertainty of finding more work, feeling loneliness, and confusion around how to contract.”

Sutherland and Jarrahi (2017) collected data from several online digital nomad forums and conducted interviews with sixteen remote workers who self-identified as digital nomads. They examine five different dimensions of the relationship between digital nomadicity and information infrastructure: branding and marketing, transacting and contracting, “marking place,” knowledge sharing and professional mentoring, and community building.

First, branding and marketing (or what is also termed “managing web presence”) is an important way that itinerant workers establish and maintain their online reputation. Using social



media services such as LinkedIn, as well as personally customized and curated websites, digital nomads seek to draw attention to themselves and to provide prospective clients and customers with information about their technical skills and other competencies. Other frequent tools for managing web presence include Twitter, Instagram, and blogs.<sup>26</sup> Some digital nomads enter into tacit agreements and rely on mutually understood norms to promote one another by, for instance, linking to or reposting content and publicizing the activities of others in their networks.

Second, digital nomads often rely on online payment platforms such as Paypal or Transferwise to transact and contract their work. However, because financial transfers need to occur across national boundaries and can involve different currencies complications can arise which method is the most efficacious under various and frequently changing circumstances. Some itinerant workers embed themselves into subcontracting relationships that involve the assignment and/or performance of work on an outsourced basis and they manage both the workflows and resultant payments via specially designed digital platforms.

Third, digital nomads find themselves following each change of location with a need to recreate their physical and digital environments to be able to work productively (and live more generally; see Sections 6.3 and 6.4). This task, termed “making place” (see also Brown and O’Hara 2003), involves identifying facilities such as co-working spaces and coffee shops with reliable Internet connections and other affordances including electrical outlets, comfortable furniture, collegial peers, and so forth. This undertaking can be more challenging than it may at first appear and entails, as Sutherland and Jarrahi (2017) describe, “bringing local infrastructural affordances into sync with more global, broadly accessible infrastructural elements.”

Fourth, in the absence of centralized resources to support their work, digital nomads have developed social norms and codes of conduct that encourage mutual assistance and group

solidarity. For instance, there is within the community a notable penchant to share knowledge and for itinerant workers to help one another with professional mentoring and coaching as well as to communicate informal information about the comparative advantages of different destinations and workspaces.

Finally, according to Sutherland and Jarrahi (2017), digital nomads need to work collaboratively and assiduously to build their individual and collective identities in this emerging professional role and to differentiate themselves from other communities with which they often encounter (and sometimes intersect) such as tourists, “hippies,” backpackers, and flashpackers (see also Section 4.2 and Chapter 5). The focus is also on distinguishing the notion of digital nomadism from other types of freelance, contingent, micro-entrepreneurial, and remote work and these activities occur on an evolving series of forums including the websites NomadList and NomadBase as well as dedicated channels on Slack.

In summary, digital nomads are agents who conduct themselves within a technology ecosystem that is created and recreated on a distributed basis and hence lends itself to continual innovation and reinvention. As Sutherland and Jarrahi (2017) write, itinerant workers “are not constrained by the conventions of installed IT [information technology] systems of an organization or platform, but rather they are able to pick up new technologies and practices in a highly flexible way, selecting those which complement their specific situation, their current location, or their current client.” There is modularity to their activities that compensates for the fact that they are not able to rely on centralized technology infrastructures and so cultivate a culture that encourages mutual learning, collaboration, and community. There is reason to speculate that as centralized work organizations give way to new alternatives (a process that the

COVID-19 pandemic may accelerate), the experiences of digital nomads hold important insights for the future of work and the use of technology.

The sociologist Beverly Thompson (2018) offers further important perspectives on the relationship between freelancers and the “gig” or “sharing” economy and underscores the precariousness of the associated work opportunities. Focusing specifically on digital nomads, she demonstrates how this particular type of remote work is characterized by financial insecurity and how the quest for strong online endorsements often encourages them to “work below market rate, or even for free, in order to have more gigs” (pp. 5). Based on a sample of 38 respondents from the United States, Australia, continental Europe, and the United Kingdom, Thompson examines the varying circumstances that have contributed to general patterns of downward mobility and work casualization (especially among members of the Millennial generation with credentialed educations and high cultural capital) and encouraged them to take up work as digital nomads.<sup>27</sup>

While it is important not to reify the specific categories, Thompson highlights three primary paths that itinerant workers move along as part their journey to become digital nomads. One alternative involves individuals who start out doing customary forms of gig or irregular work in their home country and then, either through communication with friends and wider social networks, gradually move into the world of more globally location-independent work.<sup>28</sup> This sort of background tends to lead to “soft skills” sorts of digital nomad work doing copyediting, drop-shipping, website design, and social media marketing. A second pathway is characterized by people with high-demand skills in technical fields such as computer programming, software engineering, and digital marketing who step away – either voluntarily or because of dissolution of a former employer – from waged careers. They pursue livelihoods as

freelance workers and then develop the awareness that moving abroad to take advantage of lower costs. A final route to digital nomadism is exemplified by individuals who previously had relatively well-paying but stultifying corporate jobs and embarked on life as location-independent worker in a way that allowed them to leverage their organizational and administrative skills (especially with respect to embedding themselves in both formal and informal social networks).

Jeremy Aroles, Edward Granter, and François Xavier deVaujany are researchers in the field of organizational studies and they explore how the working arrangements of digital nomads might point to certain emergent developments in the future of work. They ground their insights in the theorizing of philosopher Gilles Deleuze and psychoanalyst Félix Guattari (1987) on the notion of nomads more generally as revolutionary figures who seek to subvert conventional systems of social organization. Aroles and colleagues assembled a variety of sources including forums, blogs, social media posts, and news articles. Their dataset comprised more than 300 “profiles of self-reported digital nomads on online forums.”

In the first instance, the authors examined the mutability of the concept of digital nomadism and found that rather than it being a clearly demarcated category, it variously combines elements of remote work, freelancing, entrepreneurship, and employment-motivated travel (see also Section 6.2). Interestingly, individuals in similar situations would differently regard (or not regard) themselves as digital nomads. For instance, some people who live abroad while working for a company in their home country (but not necessarily actively traveling) might consider themselves digital nomads while others in like positions do not. Differences of opinion exist as to the extent of travel in which one needed to engage to credibly adopt the identity of a digital nomad. The researchers surfaced other conceptual debates pertaining to, for instance,

whether one could be a digital nomad while maintaining a home base as well as the extent to which the associated working practices represented a clean break with the “corporate world.”

Through analysis of their data, Aroles et al (2020) also consider the commodification of digital nomadism through the proliferation of profit-making facilitators. The past few years have given rise to sizable growth in the number of commercial events and services that seek to engage both established and aspiring practitioners of the lifestyle. These activities – which can be quite costly for participants– include festivals, conferences, co-working retreats, camps, cruises, co-living spaces, makerspace facilities, and networking encounters. In addition, numerous businesses cater to digital nomads by providing vocational counseling, entrepreneurship training, website design, and other related forms of assistance on a consultancy basis. The authors contend that this process of commodification has been contributing to a schism in the community whereby more careerist-oriented digital nomads avail themselves to these events and services while less financially capable counterparts are denied access to (or otherwise avoid) these status-enhancing venues and knowledge resources.

Finally, Aroles et al (2020) reflect on the tension that exists between the widely disseminated perception of digital nomadism as a carefree and exotic existence and the actual experiences of practicing digital nomads. They observe that “these romanticised accounts of hyper-connected individuals who can establish themselves virtually anywhere have occulted the practicalities of being a digital nomad.” Beneath the veneer of self-development, emancipation, and conviviality are the circumstances that success depends on persevering commitment to professional conduct and preparedness to manage loneliness and isolation. Novice digital nomads who fail to acknowledge the distinction between the marketed conception and the hard-bitten reality of “nomadic capitalism” often struggle to find success. Nonetheless, and regardless

of specific proclivities and dispositions digital nomads are members of, as Aroles et al (2020), phase it, “a privileged elite who can afford to travel.” They further observe that these itinerant workers are members of a “privileged group of rich individuals who can afford to brand themselves as representing some kind of ‘alternative.’” At the same time, “not all digital nomads fall into category and it is important not to overlook issues of precarity and lack of benefits for digital nomads.”

A third contribution to this body of literature is by business-information specialists David Kong, David Daniel Schlagwein, and Dubravka Cecez-Kecmanovic (2019) who focus on the institutional logics between digital nomads and the corporations that recruit them for various work assignments. The authors observe that

[T]here are “different institutional logics – the socially-constructed patterns, beliefs, values and rules that provide meaning and enable shared experiences – that characterize digital nomadism vs. transitional corporate cultures.

Consequently, when engaging digital nomads to perform work, corporate clients may face conflicting institutional logics which is concerning for work performance and their mutual relations (pp. 2).

Kong and colleagues interviewed twelve digital nomads based in Sydney and Bali and six corporate managers who regularly recruit digital nomads to complete freelance work assignments. Their analysis highlights several different dimensions of the “fit” between digital nomad and corporate dispositions: values, norms, and logics; alignment of expectations, and management and mitigation of interactive frictions.

First, two key values among digital nomads are respect for diversity (due to the need to adapt to different cultures and to navigate between cultural contexts) and resilience (due to the need to adapt to rising and falling business conditions). These two values become manifest in the ability to establish and maintain extensive networks of contracting and subcontracting relationships (often at the global scale) because it is oftentimes not obvious from where the next remunerative opportunity will emerge. In addition, the authors point to the salience of trust and reliability in working engagements that lack a corporeal presence (referred to as “line-of-sight management”) and are frequently conducted over long distances (and stretching across multiple time zones). As discussed elsewhere in this literature review, personal discipline also becomes a matter of critical importance because of the temptation to submit to the recreational and other diversionary opportunities found in destinations favored by digital nomad. Such circumstances can prompt itinerant workers, especially when involved in asynchronous assignments, to overcompensate by sending copiously detailed progress reports that transmit excessively effusive communications.

Second, Kong et al (2019) draw attention to the problems caused by the misalignment of expectations that often emanate from the fact that digital nomads (and remote workers more generally) are only able to “see” a small part of what is oftentimes a much larger project and lack understanding of the politics of the companies for which they are working. This situation can lead, according to the respondents interviewed as part of this study, to “low-quality work,” a problem that is especially notable among novice digital nomads who lack prior corporate experience. A further compounding factor is that itinerant workers often want more work but their subcontractors are unable to provide it and this situation “demotivates them to provide the ‘high quality’ work that the corporate clients expect.” Another source of mismatch is that digital

nomads place a premium on flexibility but the firms outsourcing work to them expect assignments, which are sometimes delegated with ambiguous directions, to be completed on demanding deadlines. Some of these issues arise because companies are not set up, both administratively and technologically to manage project a workforce made up of decentralized freelance workers.

Finally, the lack of co-presence compounds the likelihood of miscommunication and misunderstandings, and the authors highlight the importance of standardizing expectations during the “pre-communication period” and establishing an “outcomes-based culture.” Issues can arise at the onset because of the tendency of digital nomads and their corporate clients to use rival or incompatible technologies. While some itinerant workers advise that the optimal solution is to adapt themselves to the customer/client’s accustomed platforms and tools, others contend there are times when it is advantageous to “advocate the client to adopt their [the digital nomad’s] technology.” This latter strategy has its obvious pitfalls and success relies on “strong trust between digital nomad and client” and requires showing “the client the available digital tools, resources and providing case studies to back its usage and efficiency.” However, tension is an inevitable feature of the relationship due to digital nomads’ need for work (which creates a motivation to overpromise) and the desire by companies to commission assignments at low rate of remuneration. This situation prompts a respondent of this study to observe that the most suitable and successful relationships are premised on the outsourcing of “small, quantifiable units of work like one article or design of a page.”

We conclude this section on the working lives of digital nomads with consideration of the perspectives presented by a group of social informatics specialists led by Mohammed Hossein Jarrahi. In their article, Jarrahi et al 2019 focus attention on the notion of personal knowledge



management (PKM) and the role of so-called “knowledge ecologies.”<sup>29</sup> From an analytic vantage point, the conception is useful for moving away from “organization-centric approaches” to encompass the full range of ICTs and capabilities (especially those that derive from extra-organizational sources) that people assemble to create sociotechnical systems of practice. Such a framework is necessary because contemporary workers rely on increasingly flexible and self-assembled capabilities to create their work arrangements and the singular role of an employer has diminished in significance. The decline of physical workplaces, the rise of zero hours contracts, and the proliferation of freelancing opportunities are just a few of the manifestations of this shift.

Using a methodology based on assembling postings from digital forms and interviews, the authors identified five PKM activities that digital nomads use to create knowledge ecologies that are produced outside of conventional organization-centric contexts: social sharing, networking, self-managing and reflecting, reinventing, and managing and making sense of information.

First, because of the physical isolation that oftentimes characterizes the working lives of digital nomads and the lack of permanent embeddedness in an organization (and as well as the resources that such a relationship confers), itinerant workers tend to develop close reliance on peers to solutions to everyday challenges. This social sharing, and the attendant knowledge exchange that occurs, builds bonds of reciprocity among “nonorganizationally bound workers” and occurs in both co-working spaces and in digital platforms such as Slack and Google Hangouts and customary social media like Twitter, Facebook and Instagram (see also Sutherland and Jarrahi 2017).<sup>30</sup>

Second, and closely connected with social sharing, are networking activities that are less oriented around seeking solutions to particular problems and more focused on building up webs

of social interconnectivity among like-minded people. Jarrahi et al (2017) highlight how specific activities can include participation in online forums devoted to building up the digital nomad community and meet-ups where co-located itinerant workers gather on a prearranged basis to interact socially, to exchange knowledge about technological applications or other aspects of the lifestyle, to build professional connections, and to find travel partners. In combination with social sharing, networking gives rise to what the authors refer to as a “collective intelligence.”

Third, in the absence of being able to rely on organizational resources, (successful) digital nomads need to be self-directed, self-aware, and strategically astute. As a practical matter, itinerant workers do not have an external source for measuring their productivity or indeed for determining when and where they should be engaged in remunerative labor. Motivation needs to be self-generated and poor calibration can lead to both under- and overwork. Especially in the case of the latter, personal care and maintenance is an important skill that digital nomads need to acquire to prevent burnout and other pathologies. For some digital nomads, periods where they unplug from online platforms and actively seek to control disruption caused by distractions becomes an essential part of PKM.

Fourth, digital nomads are generally not engaged in work that is predicated on undifferentiated and standardized production. There is an inherent need for problem-solving capabilities where the level of ambiguity is high (compounded by distance and lack of deep understanding of the culture of the organizations with which they are bound in transactional relationships). Accordingly, they must take general knowledge acquired through sharing and networking and reinvent it for context-dependent application within their own knowledge ecology, and this process, to be successful and effective, needs to be continuous and ongoing – an undertaking that Jarrahi (2019) refer to as building “infrastructural competence.”

Finally, the fact that digital nomads are part of information-intensive sociotechnical systems means that they need to develop procedures for managing and personally curating knowledge to avoid clutter and overload. More specifically, they need to be able to make fine-grained distinctions between information that is useful and immediately pertinent, less urgent but potentially important for future purposes, and extraneous “noise” that can be confidently ignored. This situation requires specialized work-assistance tools (the application Pocket seems to be popular for managing certain forms of information like news articles and other online readings) to store and retrieve materials that cannot be assimilated in the moment.

#### **6.4 Non-working (Leisure) Lives of Digital Nomads**

Popular media frequently portray the lifestyles of digital nomads as an exciting and dynamic combination of flexible work, leisure, and travel. However, a series of recent investigations involving itinerant workers provides a more comprehensive – and oftentimes more revealing and critical – appraisal of the practices associated with digital nomadism. The aim of this section is to survey this literature on the non-working lives of digital nomads with particular emphasis on how they conduct themselves when they are not engaged in remunerative labor. Researchers have examined the motivations for pursuing this lifestyle and, as discussed in earlier sections of this literature review, have pointed to a desire on the part of digital nomads to free themselves from alienating and stultifying work routines, to expand opportunities for recreational activities, and to break down the often spatially and temporally binary relationship between work and leisure. Investigations have also sought to provide a more arguably objective assessment of digital nomadism and to challenge common assertions conveyed through specialist blogs and social media devoted to digital nomadism.<sup>31</sup>

We begin this section with a discussion of the work of tourism management specialist Ina Reichenberger (2018) who conducted an early exploratory analysis of digital nomad lifestyles. The investigation involved a content analysis of online resources and nearly two dozen semi-structured interviews with individuals who self-identified as members of the digital nomad community (while simultaneously recognizing the limitations of digital nomadism as a definitive term). When seeking to formulate a conception of work and life as a digital nomad, respondents in this study emphasized attributes such as “freedom to work anywhere” and “location independence.” The extent to which one needed to travel to maintain the lifestyle was conveniently fluid and it was common for most practitioners to conceive of a hierarchy of digital nomadism based on frequency of travel and length of journeys (with an especially important distinction between domestic and international mobility). Accordingly, Reichenberger (2018) usefully distinguishes more ordinary forms of remote work (that involve, for instance, working in an online environment and varying one’s place of work) from digital nomadism which is premised on combining work and travel and possibly the lack of a permanent residence.

This work further demonstrates that digital nomadism places a premium on “freedom” which in the eyes of individual itinerant workers is understood to entail “intrinsically motivated, fulfilling and enjoyable activities – in the realms of both work and leisure...[and related to] freedom within paid employment, freedom relating to location independence and freedom to pursue self-development” (Reichenberger 2018, 8). More formally, this distinction is differentiated in terms of the interdependency of three different types of freedom. First, *professional freedom* is experienced through elimination of hierarchical domination and external evaluation. Second, *spatial freedom* is the ability to break away from a home environment that is

regarded with dissatisfaction and to live and work in a variety of locations. Finally, *personal freedom* is based in large part on non-pecuniary means with which to strive for satisfaction.

Yet for all of the emphasis on autonomy and blending of work and leisure that features so prominently in the digital nomad discourse, Reichenberger (2018) notably found that most itinerant workers subscribe to a rather traditional conception of these two spheres. Rather than a seamless lifestyle, they endeavored to keep their working and recreational lives relatively separate, and this was especially the case among novice digital nomads. She writes that “professional freedom was considered the prerequisite for being able to maintain spatial and personal freedom and thus took predominance” (pp. 11). This work further draws attention to the ways in which ensuring the completion of everyday obligations, creating social networks, and overcoming loneliness can interfere with efforts to realize the idealized expectations of how digital nomads should conduct themselves. Some digital nomads who contributed to this project even described travel as fraught with onerous challenges that needed to be overcome and the related tasks as a form of “work.”

In a similar undertaking, sociologist Beverly Thompson (2019a) conducted interviews with approximately forty self-described digital nomads with the specific aim of understanding how privilege and inequality, (virtual) community, and shifting employment opportunities contribute to the main features of this lifestyle.<sup>32</sup> First, itinerant workers demonstrate privilege in how they exercise superiority over the local communities (“hotspots”) in which they reside while simultaneously (and paradoxically) maintaining patterns of what she describes as “nihilistic (or social) distancing.”

Second, Thompson (2019a) contends that the popularity and dynamism of online forums for digital nomads is the result of efforts to forge communities via the Internet and social media

can compensate for the loneliness and isolation engendered by lifestyles predicated on continual mobility (see also Mancinelli 2020). It is through their virtual lives and networks that itinerant workers are able to give vitality to identities premised on digital nomadism.<sup>33</sup>

Finally, Thompson (2019a) suggests that one path to digital nomadism starts during teenage years with work in the service economy or the “gig economy” (see also Thompson 2018 and Sections 2.2 and 6.3). After attending college or early in their careers candidates for the lifestyle either became disillusioned with participation in the corporate sector or find themselves unable to develop a viable career that enables use of their commendable educational qualifications and professional skills. Digital nomadism thus became a way to shift from a trajectory of downward socioeconomic mobility that many members of the millennial generation currently face due to macroscale changes in economic opportunities. Under such circumstances, lifestyle priorities are reordered with leisure and travel taking precedence and work becomes just a way to earn enough money to survive. Put in especially provocative terms, the author writes, “Moving to Thailand on an income that will barely cover U.S. rent and student loan debt may be less of an empowering dreamlife and more of an economic coping strategy” (pp. 28).

Thompson (2019a) also provides a first-hand report on the world of digital nomad conferences that she characterizes as a form of “commodified community.” These events tend to cater to novice digital nomads and recent years have seen a steady stream of new recruits looking for a combination of inspiration and guidance. As others have noted, the various applications of remote work have given rise to a veritable industry of enablers and facilitators who for a fee will offer assistance on a range relevant issues. The author makes the compelling observation that “[s]elling the lifestyle and practical tips on expanding one’s potential business to remote work

and strategic travel becomes almost like a pyramid scheme of selling the dream to the next group of aspirants in order to fund another's lifestyle" (pp. 38–39).

A further form of commodification emblematic of digital nomadism involves the creation of co-living and co-working spaces that offer access to curated social networks that can be both professionally and personally rewarding (see also Section 6.5). However, Thompson (2019a) regards these arrangements as a form of consumption or "creative tourism" that combines pseudo-spirituality with entrepreneurialism and "is based on nothing more than a collective of individuals purchasing the same experience" (pp. 39).

Another contribution to the literature on the non-working or leisure dimensions of digital nomad lifestyles is by anthropologist Paul Green (2020) who offers a thoroughgoing report based on his ethnographic research on itinerant workers in Chiang Mai. This work is grounded in nearly forty face-to-face interviews and conversations with a globally originating group of digital nomads over a two-year period as well as a variety of other both virtual and unmediated interactions with knowledgeable informants and participant observation. He also systematically investigated several social media platforms including blogs, Facebook groups, and so forth.

Green (2020) describes how digital nomads – for all of their wanderlust and stated desire for cultural diversity – tend to gravitate to global hubs like Bali and Penang where they live in "bubbles" or "metaworlds" and mostly interact with other middle-class westerners much like themselves (see also Section 6.3). Such destinations have given rise to restaurants, co-working spaces, and residential accommodations that local entrepreneurs purposefully customize to meet the specific requirements of digital nomads. These facilities also serve as familiar and protected places where itinerant workers are able to insulate themselves from the poverty, inequality, and other disagreeable aspects that often characterize daily life in developing countries.

Once they are anchored in a setting and have availed themselves of these services, digital nomads can grow relatively comfortable in a particular locale to the point that they are sedentarized and become what Green (2020) oxymoronically terms “static nomads.” This situation is perhaps not surprising. Despite the way in which continuous mobility is idealized, it can, especially for low-budget travelers, become wearying and monotonous.<sup>34</sup> It is necessary to reconstitute one’s living and working arrangements upon arrival in a new place and navigating the necessary circuits can be both costly and time consuming. Some digital nomads regard the understandable pull of a less peripatetic lifestyle as a “trap” that detracts from the underlying rationale of digital nomadism. Yet attachment to place and failure to “move on” can derive from practical considerations driven by a need to ensure discipline, to maintain work productivity, and to limit sources of disruption that detract from efforts to maintain a viable livelihood.<sup>35</sup> This observation is evidence of another point of tension in how the multiple objectives underlying the hypermobile lifestyle that digital nomads seek to uphold can be inconsistent and difficult to harmonize while at the same time activating what the author refers to as “ontological insecurities.”

Another source of anxiety among digital nomads stems from ongoing efforts to distinguish themselves both socially and physically from the tourists and other so-called transients that they encounter on a regular basis because the groups often occupy overlapping geographic spaces and move around on similar routes.<sup>36</sup> Green (2020: 439) explains how this can be strenuous and time-consuming work because the “boundaries require constant policing and maintenance.” He goes on to suggest that a “continual need to talk about work and productivity is fuelled, in part, by a fear of the tourist within.” This need by digital nomads to define their lifestyles as being apart from tourism also stems from the fact that they are exercising the same



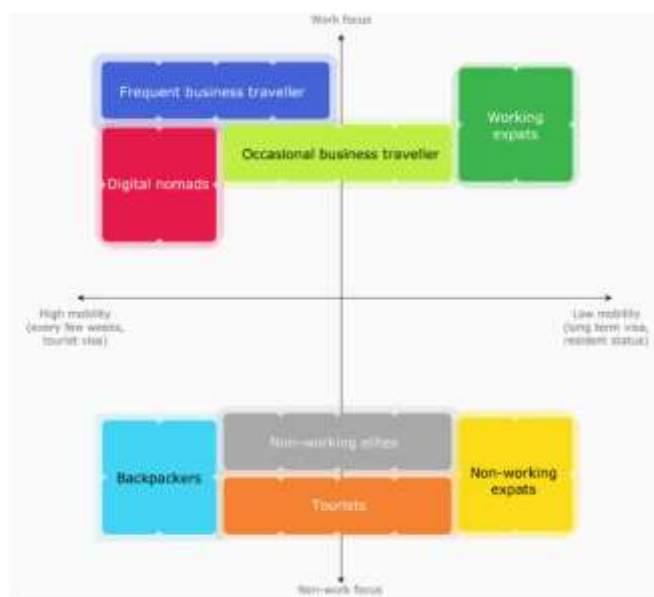
privilege, utilizing the same strong passports, drawing on the same neo-colonial imaginaries, and invoking the same idealized fantasies as recreational travelers. In addition to constructing status hierarchies with fellow westerners, digital nomads demonstrate a tendency to create ranks among themselves when, for instance, more seasoned veterans of the lifestyle go to special lengths in terms of physical appearance and disposition to avoid being confused with so-called “digital newbies.” In some cases, more experienced practitioners of the lifestyle even avoid referring to themselves as digital nomads and instead prefer “location independent,” “entrepreneur,” or other nomenclature.

Anthropologist David Cook (2020) offers another set of perspectives on the lifestyles of digital nomads in his ethnographic study and builds on some of the observations of Green (2020) pertaining to the role of discipline (and specifically self-discipline) (see also Mancinelli 2020 and Section 6.7). The tendency of itinerant workers to gravitate to locales that have high amenity value and are popular tourist destinations means that success (or even viability) is to a large degree dependent on the ability of digital nomads to restrain their impulse to partake in recreational or leisure pursuits. The need to devote significant effort and time to remunerative activities oftentimes clashes with the desire to head to the beaches, mountains, cafes, bars, and so forth and personal regulation becomes important in managing these temptations. Accordingly, the much acclaimed desire for “freedom” that is such a central part of the idealized digital nomad lifestyle becomes, due to practical considerations, an elusive and unrealistic aspiration.<sup>37</sup> Cook (2020) expresses this point in especially unambiguous terms and writes, “For many digital nomads, how freedom is experienced is often very different to how they first imagined it to be.” Another consideration is that for some itinerant workers, leisure and work do in fact successfully meld into a seamless lifestyle and, as the author terms it, freedom is attained when the

boundaries between work and leisure merge and freedom is experienced holistically, whether one is working or at leisure (see also Reichenberger 2017).<sup>38</sup>

Cook (2020) begins his analysis by first situating digital nomads within a larger conceptual landscape of mobile workers and tourists. Digital nomads are distinguishable from, for example, working ex-pats and backpackers because of their proclivity to combine high mobility with a focus on work (see Figure 2). Highlighting in particular the role of discipline in the lifestyle-management practices of digital nomads, Cook (2020) distinguishes between “external discipline” (which is further divided into “volitional participation” and “forceful imposition”) and “self-discipline.”<sup>39</sup> In combination, these strategies for organizing time have the effect of separating work and leisure into clearly demarcated categories rather than blending them into a seamless whole. Moreover, the enactment and maintenance of this division itself requires dutiful and meticulous labor—a process that some commentators focused especially on Silicon Valley have referred to as a “worker/smartphone hybrid” (see Mazmanian 2018; refer also to Wajceman 2018).

**Figure 2: Cook’s Typology of Mobile Workers (Source: Cook 2020)**



Cook (2020) describes eleven different ways in which digital nomads are required to exercise discipline and self-discipline. First, the lifestyle of digital nomads, especially the requirement to change locations every few weeks or months, is disruptive and to ensure time for non-working (as well as working) activities, it is necessary to be able to exercise discipline when arriving and setting up in a new locale (see also Sutherland and Jarrahi 2017 and Section 6.3). The related tasks typically involve a “hybridized” combination of both externally and internally generated disciplining (and self-disciplining) practices involving working and living spaces, device compatibility, time zones, and so forth. Several of these issues are further elaborated in the following sections.

Second, the reliance of digital nomads on electronic devices is a nontrivial feature of the lifestyle. While a laptop computer is the primary device for work projects, Cook (2020) highlights the ways in which his informants used their smartphones to coordinate their leisure and other social activities. Notably, co-working spaces maintain strict norms that discourage digital nomads and others from using the telephone feature of their smartphones, a form of communication often associated with non-work affairs. Hence, digital nomads must exercise discipline in how (and where) they can coordinate the non-working aspects of their lives.

Third, digital nomadism requires participants to construct and reconstruct their working arrangements rather than to rely on an office environment that is set up and maintained by an organization. In addition, informants in this study found that working in a global tourism destination could be “irritating and distracting” and it was necessary to create buffers by, for example, retreating to co-working spaces, to avoid giving into readily available leisure diversions. Under such demands, digital nomads end up, through their own disciplining practices, producing conditions for themselves that resemble what they were trying to escape

when first embarking upon the lifestyle. In addition, the lure of continuous travel can lose its attraction over time as the disruptions of travel take their toll and a more sedentary lifestyle becomes to be regarded as more desirable.

Fourth, digital nomads often need to draw on their capacity for discipline and self-discipline, as well as to organize their working and living arrangements, to account for the fact that their activities are out of sync with local schedules. This occurs because their clock is controlled by demands generated in distant time zones and this can interfere with time otherwise set aside for leisure. As noted by one of Cook's (2020) informants who was based in Asia but in regular communication with clients in New York: "It interrupts my evening and wrecks my social life." To remedy this situation new hotspots have more recently developed in destinations such as Portugal and Bulgaria because they offer comparable opportunities and generally low costs of living while not requiring European digital nomads to deal with the challenges of significant time differences.

Fifth, the author puts his finger on a key paradox of the digital nomad lifestyle that involves identifying that there is "a clear gap between the utopian ideal of working in paradise and the daily realities of getting stuff done." Particularly, the need to be responsive to work demands during off hours and the characteristic social isolation means that work often encroaches on leisure time in the absence of sufficient capacity for discipline and self-discipline.

Sixth, personal control and regulation is relevant in terms of engaging (or disengaging) from efforts to enable social interaction or to create community. According to Cook (2020), the challenges can be especially difficult for solo digital nomads who need to learn how to balance work and leisure on their own; miscalibration can result in too much time being devoted to work.

By contrast, couples (or so-called “couplepreneurs”) seem to be able to manage this situation more successfully because of the ability to rely on one another for support and feedback.

Seventh, many digital nomads gave up their prior lifestyles because of an inability to tolerate deadlines, work rules, fixed working hours, and surveillance of intrusive bosses yet once on the road they came to appreciate the value of such discipline. According to Cook (2020), his informants “reframed [them] as positive, organising, and motivating forces.” In the cases of entrepreneurs who do not have specific clients, the tendency is toward self-discipline that requires self-management of deadlines and organizational structures. The author writes that “attempts to become self-directed and to gain freedom often entail a shift of responsibility from outside institutions (in this case employers) to the individual, by so doing create an additional layer of responsibility and labour.”

Eighth, Cook (2020) relates how his informants relied on a technique called “timeboxing” to keep track of how they were spending their time that involves allocating specific hours of the day to specific activities. When applied robustly, the embedded routines enable practitioners to avoid distractions, to stay focused, and to optimize productivity and hence serve as useful self-disciplining strategies.

Ninth, digital nomads utilize digitally mediated tools to discipline themselves. Especially popular are software systems for managing project teams as well as online calendars, meeting schedulers and electronic notetakers. Also used are tools to stay on task such as apps that measure productivity with Momentum Dashboard serving as an especially popular alternative. Digital nomads also rely on distraction-blocking apps like FocusMe (part of Microsoft Word) that when turned on black out certain websites, social media, and other sources of potential diversion.

Tenth, and in a related vein to the issue outlined immediately above, is that digital nomads have an ambivalent attitude about Facebook and the conflicts that it creates in terms of self-discipline. On one hand, some of the author's informants reported relying heavily on the popular social media platform to recruit clients, to find customers, or to network with other professional colleagues. On the other hand, digital nomads are cognizant that it could draw them "away from work tasks, and was usually perceived as a threat to carefully curated self-discipline practices." Other digital tools serve dual functions for both work and leisure. For instance, some digital nomads use the note-taking tool, Evernote, to organize both kinds of activities. Further, there is a suite of electronic resources that are used exclusively to provide personal control and to enhance productivity in the pursuit of certain leisure activities, especially meditation, mindfulness, self-improvement, and language instruction.

Lastly, Cook (2020) considers the provocative claim that "digitally mediated discipline" is a means of communicating status and building cultural capital. In other words, the customary understanding of digital nomadism has the situation exactly backwards. Digital nomads are not escaping from disciplining structures, but rather creating such arrangements anew and there is an evolutionary process that occurs whereby these controls start out in the work domain and then gradually seep into the sphere of leisure. The author equates this development with other trends related to the "quantified self" including self-tracking, tools for measuring labor productivity, and wearable technologies.

A final contribution in this section on leisure and lifestyles is by Beverly Thompson (2019b) who pursues an interesting line of investigation that explores the intimate lives of digital nomads and the practices that characterize their romantic relationships. This is a logical pursuit and stems from questions related to how the online tools and routines that itinerant workers use

for their professional lives transfer to their social lives. At the heart of the research is the paradox of how digital nomads who are regularly changing locations can establish and potentially maintain amorous bonds with partners who are engaged in similarly peripatetic lifestyles. The author relies on a sample of 38 respondents, comprised primarily of women from strong passport countries, to examine the strategies for reconciling this conundrum and, in particular, overcoming the isolation and loneliness that can often characterize the daily experiences of digital nomads (see also and Sutherland and Jarrahi 2017; Reichenberger 2018; Thompson 2019a; Aroles 2020).

The conceptual framework for this study borrows on sociologist Zygmunt Bauman's (2000) notions of a "liquid world" and "carnival communities" whereby people "gather for a short period of time with a specific group of people, never lasting long enough to forge real connections" (Thompson 2019b, 73; see also Sections 2.1 and 4.2). Thompson begins by observing that digital nomads tend to demonstrate "homogeneous partner selection" by which she means that they gravitate to others in their own demographic group rather than connecting with indigenous partners. She remarks that "[u]like some ex-pats, who may settle in a new country and marry a local citizen, digital nomads are often looking for other travellers to join their nomadic adventures" (pp. 73).

The author questions the validity of the widely popularized and pejorative conception of the "digital bromad" or "digital gonad" though the apparent lack of prevalence of this stereotype, she acknowledges, may be an artifact of her dataset that was primarily female (see also Cook 2020). More specifically, the men in her sample did not focus their romantic lives on "dating local women" (pp. 79) though one of the females that she interviewed did observe that "[b]ecause of the temporariness—especially men—there is a mindset that they're here for a good

time, not to be caged in or held down by dating someone. They are like Tinder culture. They just want to have fun, hook up at night, go to the beach in the morning, work on their business in the afternoon and party.”

Despite this characterization, Thompson contends that many digital nomads are striving to meet “someone who could travel with them and form an independent unit” (pp. 80). She identifies co-living facilities as especially common venues for this partner-seeking activity (see Section 6.5). Also popular are dedicated Facebook groups and other online platforms that cater to digital nomads (including one website called Digital Nomad Soulmates). At the same time, there is a palpable ambivalence about joining in a durable relationship. The author describes that “many [digital nomads] worried about finding a partner that was location *dependent*, and who may ask them to stop travelling” (pp. 80; italics in original). She also considers the sexual lives of gay, lesbian, and queer-identified digital nomads and reports that such individuals demonstrate a tendency to adapt their travel itineraries in accordance with the human rights records of different countries and to limit their time (or avoid altogether) destinations that afford weak protections.

Thompson (2019b) additionally devotes attention to how an itinerant lifestyle can disrupt romantic commitments and the tensions that ensue when one person has an opportunity to remain in a particular location and the partner wants or needs to move on. Other relationships are sustained in a semi-casual mode with couples planning their travel routes so that they periodically intersect in the same location. Regardless of the specific patterns, affairs are inevitably shaped by gender dynamics (especially centered around power), employment prospects, financial realities, and so forth. Because of these circumstances, Thompson (2019b) summarizes her work by observing that “For many nomads, the lifestyle proves to be temporary,



and establishing and maintaining relationships are one aspect of the challenges that pressure people to once again become location *dependent* (pp. 85; italics in original).

### **6.5 Co-spaces and the Digital Nomad Lifestyle**

The recent rise of communal living and working spaces, often referred to as community-based places or spaces (or “co-spaces”), is attributable to evolving changes in the relationship between labor and capital, and more specifically the connections between housing and work. This emergence of these new residential and occupational alternatives has been a notable feature of remote and freelance livelihoods for the past decade (see, e.g., Morrison 2018; Bergan et al 2020; Florida et al 2020). These shared facilities are often purposefully designed to meet the needs of individuals whose working-while-traveling and traveling-while-working routines require that they can easily – and often affordably – establish a temporary base suitable to their itinerant and temporary needs. We review in this section the literature that has developed over the past few years to explore various dimensions of co-spaces and the facilitating role that they are playing to enable the digital nomad lifestyle.<sup>40</sup>

As is typical of many facets of digital nomadism, co-spaces bring to the fore a paradox. Although much of the popular rhetoric surrounding the lifestyle emphasizes the blurring of distinctions between work and leisure, detailed investigation reveals that clear boundaries are essential to the well-being of digital nomads. Notably, co-spaces become an important means for achieving this objective. We begin by distinguishing between co-living and co-working spaces.

On one hand, *co-living spaces* are a residential option that entails multiple co-residents sharing the same accommodation through either self-coordination or the mediation of a commercial or third party provider. The concept springs from broader interest in intentional

communities, co-housing, and other strategies that have evolved in response to the mismatch between increasingly diverse residential needs and static and outmoded housing stocks (Heath and Kenyon 2001; Heath and Cleaver 2003; Bella 2015; *Economist* 2017; Heath et al 2018; Kim et al 2020; Mellner et al 2021). In the case of commercial providers of this form of housing, there is not typically an effort to exclude a diverse range of residents, but the overwhelming tendency is for the alternative to be marketed to tenants engaged in tertiary and quaternary labor (and often termed “cultural creatives”) (see Florida 2002 and Section 2.3).<sup>41</sup> While shared housing in various forms has a long history, recent manifestations of co-living initially came to prominence in San Francisco and the adjoining Silicon Valley area during the 1990s with the popularization of so-called “hacker houses” established by young co-residents with connections to technology companies and/or the local start-up scene (Widdicombe 2016; Blau 2018 see also Maalsen 2021). In the intervening years, the model was formalized and contemporary options for co-living allow residents to maintain subscriptions and to access a global network of residential facilities, oftentimes entailing abbreviated commitments that can be as short as one week or even one day (Frichot and Runting 2017; Harris and Nowicki 2020). Under such circumstances, “home” becomes spatially fluid and experiential rather than fixed and durable (Roelofsen 2018).

On the other hand, *co-working spaces* are shared workspaces that allow mobile virtual workers and others access to working facilities on a temporary basis (the interval can be as short as one hour) for a modestly priced fee or subscription. Itinerant workers generally are assigned a desk (or table) and chair in an open-plan office area and have the ability to plug into a convenient electrical outlet and permission to connect to the Internet through a local router (Andriessen and Vartiainen 2006; Gandini 2015; Berbegal-Mirabent 2021). The co-working space may also include access to refreshments and other amenities on a gratis or cash basis. According to data

reported in Orel (2019), there were globally in 2017 an estimated 1.27 million co-working users and approximately 15,500 co-working spaces. Forecasts (pre-COVID) anticipated that growth over the subsequent three years would more than double these amounts (but see also Ceinar and Mariotti 2021; Zukin 2021).

The following discussion reviews the literature published to date on how co-spaces construct and enable the digital nomad lifestyle.<sup>42</sup> An important motivation for this work is a desire to use methodologies from sociology, anthropology, computer-supported cooperative work, and human-computer interaction to identify insights that could lead to the design of more effective co-spaces.

Mobilities researcher Michael Liegl (2014) explores issues of why digital nomads and other remote freelancers gravitate to particular working environments and how the aesthetics of places contribute to creative production (see also Brown and O'Hara 2003; Korma et al. 2014; Di Marino 2018; Fauzia et al 2019; Grazian 2020).<sup>43</sup> He highlights that while itinerant workers engaged in computer-supported creative work embrace arrangements predicated on the notion of working whenever and wherever they choose and seeking creative insights while on the move, “it has become apparent that not all places seem to be equally suitable.” The key question that Liegl asks is what then gives certain places special affective significance as desirable settings for location-independent workers who can execute professional tasks “anytime, anywhere”?

Based on an extensive corpus of ethnographic research gathered over seven years in three cities (New York City, Berlin, and Wiesbaden), Liegl begins his analysis by noting that the “nomadic” nature of computer-supported creative work is both a resource and a concern. On one hand, changing locations can, for example, spark creativity, offer inspiration, and enable new social connections. On the other hand, the frequent need to find or create the technical and

practical conditions of a space and organize it in a way that is conducive to working can be an obstacle to productivity (see Section 6.4).

Given this tension, Liegl first describes how digital nomads are regularly involved in what he evocatively calls “the care of place.” This characterization comprises a range of social, technical, and aesthetic features – as well as a quest for some exciting buzz to induce one to get out of the house (consistent with what Spinuzzi (2012) separately refers to as “working alone together”). He describes how the desire to be in a public setting is not necessarily about sociality, but the co-presence of others provides a source of watchful discipline that can energize creativity.

Second, Liegl discusses the ways in which digital nomads frequently combine or supplement physical co-presence in public settings with virtual co-presence by utilizing social media. The latter enables people to communicate their geographic location and to demonstrate that they are working to networks of friends and potential collaborators even if they remain at a distance.

Third, mobility itself can be a resource for creativity in three different ways – 1) observing others participate in the bustle of movement, 2) quieting of the mind that occurs when traveling, and 3) serendipitous options that arise from being on the move.

Finally, Liegl (2014) describes “nomadic enactments” intended to foster creativity that are simultaneously peripatetic and static. These activities can involve, for instance, so-called “jellies” whereby location-independent workers convene at someone’s house or other venue for a potluck event where they randomly share their work with the aim of cultivating encounters that can spark chance sources of inspiration.<sup>44</sup>

Tourism researchers Jennifer Sin Hung von Zumbusch and Lidija Lalicic (2020) investigate the extent to which co-spaces help to reduce feelings of isolation experienced by digital nomads and enhance their overall sense of well-being. Based on a sample of twelve digital nomads, they distinguish between three types of resources conferred by co-spaces: social, physical, and psychological.

First, social resources refer to the sociability and mutual support available through friendship networks that develop in co-spaces (see also Meerwarth et al 2009; Akhavan 2021; cf Waters-Lynch and Duff 2021). Upon arrival, digital nomads have access to a pre-formed array of like-minded acquaintances with whom to organize excursions and to rely on for disciplining pressure – to avoid both over-working and over-recreating. Access to a network of colleagues also provides entrepreneurial support for fleshing out new business ideas, seeking professional opportunities, and learning about new travel alternatives. All of these opportunities provide ways to decrease isolation and improve well-being.

Second, a key feature of co-spaces is that they provide services and facilities that hold important value for digital nomads (see also Kojo and Nenonen 2017). Chief among these amenities is the assistance of the onsite manager who functions as both a concierge and social director, a role that involves resolving everyday problems, organizing recreational events, and providing bedsheets, towels, computer supplies, and other sundry items. In addition, co-spaces ordinarily have available an array of communal facilities ranging from libraries to movie rooms to ping-pong and pool tables.

Finally, co-spaces help digital nomads psychologically by enabling them to develop a secure identity as itinerant workers (Servaty et al 2018; Robelski et al 2019; see also Section 6.8). This is especially useful given that the lifestyle remains outside of the mainstream and

practitioners continue to face challenging questions from friends and family who do not understand the motivations and appeal of digital nomadism. Being able to live and work amidst a community of other digital nomads and to find affirmation of a “neo-tribal” affiliation reduces social anxiety and affirms the experiences of individuals who have opted for this lifestyle.

A team of human-computer interaction researchers led by Ahreum Lee (Lee et al 2019a; see also 2019b) assembled a database of online conversations carried out among digital nomads on the social networking site reddit.com and focused in particular on postings that included terms such as “co-work,” “co-live,” and “community.”<sup>45</sup> The authors use the distinction between “first place” (home setting), “second place” (work setting or co-working space), and “third place” (social setting) and investigate how itinerant workers communicate and define the norms of each of these contexts and the advantages and disadvantages of different options within each category. For instance, coffee shops were discussed on the subreddit site as both spaces where one could find “community” but needed be careful not to transgress certain norms about striking up conversations with other workers.

The authors also consider the pros and cons of using different types of places, for instance when one’s home setting (say in a hostel or an Airbnb) is used simultaneously for work and for social activities. Interestingly, digital nomads seem to use the notion of co-living to describe places that offer opportunities to live, work, and socialize under one roof. By way of comparison, co-housing – at least in the conception utilized by digital nomads – is an alternative that serves a more delimited range as a combined residence and social hub. It tends to be especially associated with proprietary programs such as Hacker Paradise that provide a kind of package-tour for digital workers who might be hesitant to strike off on their own as fully fledged nomads and others who are just looking for a “pre-built” travel experience. For more seasoned

itinerant workers, the concept of “co-living” is objectionable on its face because it does not foster the autonomy and independence that is regarded as a key element of the digital nomad identity (see also Section 6.8). At the same time, Lee et al (2019a) suggest that some nomads value the ability to integrate living, working, and socializing under one roof and hostels provide, at least under certain circumstances, an atmosphere that is conducive to this type of co-living possibility.<sup>46</sup>

Drawing on insights from Morrison (2018) and Klinenberg (2018), the authors contend that there is a need (and a commercial opportunity) for an all-inclusive arrangement that simultaneously embraces the domestic, professional, and social dimensions of the digital nomad lifestyle. This speculation leads to recognition that the models for co-living that have become common in some cities as a preferred residential alternative for isolated urbanites and entrepreneurs seeking to cope with high costs of living could be adapted as a source of “social infrastructure” for the digital nomad community (*The Economist* 2017; Florida et al 2020)

In the final contribution reviewed in this section, urban studies scholars Tegan Bergan, Andrew Gorman-Murray, and Emma Power (2020) build further on the co-spaces concept. They apply a critical analytic lens to examine how the demands of capital are encouraging casualized labor, hypermobility, and precarious livelihoods and the ways in which these conditions in turn are driving changes in the provision of housing. Through a study of the marketing of co-living companies in San Francisco and New York City, their work considers how dominant cultural and functional conceptions of home are evolving from an understanding predicated on the notion of a domestic refuge fixed in space to a mobile resource that enables the performance of work and serves as a social hub. The perspective advanced by the authors asserts that co-living represents a

mode of “shared housing that constitutes a response to increasingly precarious economic conditions” (Bergan et al 2020, 3; see also Cohen 2020).<sup>47</sup>

The authors distinguish three features of this new role of home in this shifting economic landscape. First, the economically insecure working conditions of Millennials and vulnerable workers means that living arrangements need to enable temporariness and mobility instead of more customary priorities centered on permanence and fixity. Itinerant workers require short-term leases and dwellings in multiple locations (termed “multi-local” and affording opportunities of “being at home anywhere in the world”) that are accessible through a single subscription with a co-living provider.<sup>48</sup> The lack of locational stability and the inability to commit to a long-term mortgage or lease undermines protracted commitments. Bergan et al (2020, 10) observe that under such circumstances “the aspirational home is marketed as short term and flexible rather than long term and secure” (see also Owen 2020; Uyttebrouck 2020).

Second, the decentralization of work from customary geographic locations means that residential spaces are no longer sites largely for domesticity but rather are becoming integrated and inseparable sites for production.<sup>49</sup> As the authors explain, “Coliving [especially when combined with co-working facilities] provides an extreme minimization of the physical boundaries of home and work, explicitly merging “(re)productive spatialities.” Moreover, some joint co-living/co-working facilities do not just provide customary business services, but also “non-tangible business amenity services including inspiration, success and even wellness.”

Finally, emergent forms of economic organization privilege collaboration over retreat into private spaces and this gives rise to novel conceptions of domesticity rooted in social networks rather than familial ties. It is common for co-living facilities to seek to create a “curated” or “commodified” community of like-minded individuals with ample communal areas



for meal preparation, doing laundry, socializing, and networking. Bergan et al (2020, 12) observe that “every space is an opportunity for sociality” and this emphasis on continual social networking provides a source of economic protection. As the authors explain, prevailing “[e]conomic conditions require strong professional networks for the precarious creative class...[and] [t]he potential for isolation and loneliness among digital nomads due to their hypermobility is capitalised upon by coliving organisations...Coliving is a largely commercialised response to this precarity, offering the new creative class security for a fee.”<sup>50</sup>

## **6.6 Mobility Practices of Digital Nomads**

An ironic – and in many respects unfortunate – aspect of the current state of research on digital nomadism is that we know frightfully little about the actual mobility practices of contemporary itinerant workers. Anthropologist Fabiola Mancinelli (2020) reports that the fifty respondents in her admittedly limited sample lived and worked in three to five different destinations per year but aside from this account there are not many other credible assessments of the specific movements of practitioners of this lifestyle.<sup>51</sup>

Stepping back for wider perspective, social informatics specialists Daniel Schlagwein and Mohammed Hossein Jarrahi (2020) provide one of the only studies that focuses on the peregrinations of digital nomads. They begin by noting that this phenomenon is “an exemplary case of extremely mobile forms of digital working” and perhaps “the ideal-typical manifestation of the multiple mobilities of digital work.” They further observe that increasingly adaptable forms of work continue to run contrary to institutionalized labor practices. Moreover, the flexible nature of performing digital work remotely and blending work and leisure means that digital nomads are untethered from the traditional demands imposed by industrial society to “go to work” and to stay there from nine to five (see also Section 6.6). Instead, as has been discussed at

several other places of this literature review, digital nomads harness digital infrastructures and other ancillary support services while they live, work, and travel around the world. But, it is not just people who are moving. Schlagwein and Jarrahi (2020) observe that digital nomadism also very much involves the movement of tangible objects and concepts/information, as well as the social implications engendered by the lifestyle. In other words, the lifestyle requires mobility, is characterized by mobility, and embraces multiple mobilities.

While tautological in its construction, it nonetheless merits observing that the term digital nomad suggests that the nomadic nature of itinerant workers means that its practitioners are mobile. However, according to Schlagwein and Jarrahi (2020, 4), the movement of digital nomads from one place to another represents only one of several forms of mobility inherent in the lifestyle. They contend that “four distinct but interrelated dimensions of mobility are apparent in the work-life of digital nomads; these dimensions together set this group apart from both conventional nomadic workers and non-nomadic digital workers.”

First, *administrative mobility* refers to the organizational independence of digital nomads. Since many members of this community (or “neo-tribe” according to some authors) work independently of organizations and conduct themselves as freelancers, entrepreneurs, or contractors, they regularly move between clients, teams, and other aggregations without a traditional “boss” to set project milestones or work schedules (see Section 6.3).

Second, *content-related mobility* is connected to the ability of digital nomads to move between various kinds of work and to make decisions about which projects to accept or reject based on their level of interest. Schlagwein and Jarrahi (2020) note that the rise of online platforms where digital nomads can find work significantly enhances their potential content-related mobility.

Third, *temporal mobility* is the ability of digital nomads to have variations in their work schedules based on personal or professional preferences. This type of mobility means, at least in theory, that these itinerant workers can more easily move between work and leisure than if they had to fit themselves into a more customary work regiment.

Finally, *spatial mobility* is the ability of digital nomads to choose where to work. Untethered from a particular location, many digital nomads move both between different workspaces throughout the day and more broadly from country to country over the course of a year. The lifestyle engenders an extremely peripatetic quality (though there are numerous practical considerations that typically limit the more extreme forms to which it can be meaningfully practiced). It is though instructive to recognize that not all digital nomads are highly mobile. As discussed in Section 6.4, Green (2020) identifies the notion of “static nomads” and other authors (see, e.g., Aroles et al (2020, 121) make a distinction between “fast travelling” (which involves changing locations several times a year) and “slow travelling” (which necessitates less movement and can even entail a home base).

Schlagwein and Jarrahi (2020) usefully highlight the interconnectedness between these different types of mobility. For instance, there tends to be a strong correlation between the amount of administrative mobility that a digital nomad has and the degree to which they are able to exercise content-related, temporal, and spatial mobility. In this way, these mobilities are also a resource that digital nomads can use to shape their work and life to more closely resemble the lifestyle and work-life balance they envision (see also Liegl 2014). Mobility is not only inherent in digital nomadism but also allowed by, characteristic of, and beneficial to the overall lifestyle. In summary, mobility defines what the work of digital nomads looks like, how digital nomads

source and perform their work, when they work, what work they do, how they establish work-life balance, where they live and work, and even who their clients are.

### **6.7 Political Economy of Digital Nomadism**

A key feature of digital nomadism, at least in terms of the rhetorical and promotional dimensions of the lifestyle, is that it represents a break from the ordinary workaday world and provides practitioners with a pathway for freeing themselves from the stultifying and exploitative strictures of neoliberal capitalism (see Section 2.2 for a more comprehensive discussion). Indeed, in certain instances itinerant workers – like prior generations of wanderers and vagabonds – are rebelling against the tenets of an unjust system and taking up practices that transcend national boundaries and customary forms of allegiance. This narrative understandably provides rationale for hypermobility and nomadicity while simultaneously injecting a higher-order purpose into the pursuit: digital nomads are valiantly challenging the status quo and are in the vanguard of historically significant change. But is this really the case? Does digital nomadism represent a radical rupture in the evolutionary progress of capitalism? This section summarizes a small handful of recent contributions that seriously question this interpretation from a standpoint informed by political economy.

In an important publication, anthropologist Fabiola Mancinelli (2020) observes that the nomad, both literally and metaphorically, is a subversive actor, challenging modern-day conceptions of nationally demarcated and sovereign spaces.<sup>52</sup> This view is conveyed by numerous commentators who regard digital nomads as a kind of resurrected (and laptop-toting) variant of the nomads often colorfully featured in history books and ethnographic accounts. With no need to be rooted in discrete physical places, the digital nomad is free to roam the world

seamlessly combining work, leisure, and mobility – and if in possession of a strong passport – demonstrating nary a care about sociocultural or geopolitical boundaries. However, this is only half the picture. Viewed from the perspective of political economy, digital nomadism is not a strategy for challenging the prevailing system, but as Mancinelli (2020) remarks, “rather an opportunistic adaptation to the conditions created by the impacts of neoliberal ideology of entrepreneurial freedom” (see also Harvey 2005).

Each digital nomad is her or his own micro-enterprise, one that needs to be continually maintained and in large part reconstructed whenever one moves from one locale to another (see Section 6.3). As Mancinelli (2020) writes, “the mobile life project of digital nomads has to be run like an entrepreneurial project and relies on an ideology of entrepreneurialism that is the hallmark of neoliberalism.”<sup>53</sup> The reality is that it takes a tremendous amount of work – and considerable good luck – to nurture a personal enterprise to a level where it is able to provide an effective livelihood even to digital nomads of relatively modest expectations. For the vast majority of aspirants, the commitment to a micro-entrepreneurial life leads to extended periods of financial precarity and pronounced uncertainty, albeit conditions that are buffered to some extent by lower costs of living and panoramic landscapes.

A related consideration is the notion of geographic arbitrage (or “geoarbitrage”) discussed in Sections 4.2 and 4.3.<sup>54</sup> Initially popularized by author Timothy Ferriss in his lifestyle-design book, *The 4-Hour Workweek*, the term refers to opportunities to exploit the difference between compensation rates for online work in nations of the global North and expenses to maintain a livelihood in countries of the global South. As Mancinelli (2020) explains, this disparity enhances financial capacity to nurture a nascent enterprise during its formative period, to explore ancillary business opportunities, and to work fewer hours out of an

ability to “stretch” income. Geoarbitrage is also an “opportunistic strategy” that allows higher-earning digital nomads to recruit personnel to assist with household tasks that would likely be prohibitively expensive to outsource in their home locales (see also Hayes 2014).<sup>55</sup>

While geoarbitrage has certain features that digital nomads regard as favorable, it has its challenges as well. It creates circumstances in which some itinerant workers (especially individuals engaged in lower skill activities) find themselves part of a vast and increasingly globalized labor pool where compensation rates are subjected to continual downward pressure (see Section 2.2). In addition, removing oneself from more formalized modes of work in Western countries detaches digital nomads from state-sponsored systems for healthcare and retirement savings, as well as – if circumstances pertain – public education for children.<sup>56</sup> In addition, the obstacles that geoarbitrage imposes in terms of working and living across multiple time zones can become debilitating due to the need to adopt a nocturnal (or completely sleepless during certain extreme periods) lifestyle. Needing to work at night to service customers and clients half a world away and to rest during daylight hours then interferes with ability to participate in recreational activities and other leisure pursuits.

A final consideration that Mancinelli (2020) addresses centers on the commodification of the digital nomad lifestyle (see also Aroles (2020), Thompson (2019a), and Sections 2.1, 2.3, 6.3, and 6.4). As noted elsewhere in this literature review, itinerant workers often regard themselves as renegades who are forging a new future of work and leisure. They celebrate their avowed countercultural practices that seek to blend remunerated labor with hobbies and hypermobility, to fuse customary conceptions of “home” and “away,” and to break from a decaying lifestyle model predicated on sedentarism and asset accumulation. At the same time, many digital nomads remain dolefully reliant on neoliberal routines predicated on self-branding where there is an

incessant need to market the lifestyle in ways that, as Mancinelli (2020) explains, “give[s] voice to false experts and improvised gurus, as well as multi-level marketing schemes directed at newcomers” (see also Thompson (2019a) and Section 6.3). The resultant narratives – widely communicated through blogs and other social media – display an uncomfortable (but nonetheless mostly ignored) tension between rejection of consumerism and deep and dependent reliance on its institutional logics.<sup>57</sup> This process is usefully connected to Urry’s (2007) understanding of “network capital” which he defines as “the capacity to engender and sustain social relations with those people who are not necessarily proximate...which generate emotional, financial and practical benefit” (see Mancinelli 2020; see also Section 2.1). More practically, network capital is the commodifiable value that some members of a virtual community are able to generate and use to monetize their “personal brand” (or to create the “branded self”) for potentially profitable purposes (see also Hearn 2008; Labrecque et al 2011).<sup>58</sup>

Also grounded in a political economy worldview, Wang et al (2019) make an instructive observation that the conception of digital nomadism has been applied in an overly broad way and is at risk of becoming a muddled catchall that oversimplifies what are actually multifarious motivations and activities. The authors develop a typology that disaggregates the commonly characterized notion of the digital nomad into five different and largely distinct groups and explain how each simultaneously challenges and supports conventional work arrangements under neoliberal capitalism.

First, *digital nomadism as collaborative consumption* is practiced by people who want to escape from the stranglehold of consumer society.<sup>59</sup> Rather than ownership of goods, the emphasis is on access to physical products through “usership” arrangements predicated on rental, leasing, bartering, sharing, and so forth (see, e.g., Rifkin (2001) and Cohen (2017)). Digital

nomads of this variety selectively participate in certain activities that privilege cooperation and mutualism but for the most part remain reliant on customary anchors of the market economy while pursuing a mobility-oriented lifestyle.

Second, *self-driven and self-disciplined digital nomadism* comprises location-independent freelancers and entrepreneurs who strive to step away from customary “nine to five” jobs (also termed “the rat race” or “the script”) because they view this kind of regimented schedule as inefficient and inappropriate for meeting their own professional goals (Mancinelli 2020; see also Schlagwein 2018). The dilemma is that when one decides to abandon conventional boundaries for distinguishing worktime from other aspects of daily life, it often becomes necessary to create an alternative disciplinary regime to ensure a sufficient livelihood (see also Section 6.4).

Third, a subset of *digital nomads seeks to reimagine the organization of work materials*. These itinerant workers avoid investing in permanent facilities and equipment because they rarely need to meet clients and customers on a face-to-face basis and prefer instead to rely on electronic communication that allows for work anywhere. However, the dissolution of formal fixtures often creates reliance on various online brokers that mediate business relationships and other services such as co-working and co-living spaces (see Section 6.5). These platforms can ease the work and life of digital nomads in important ways (offering what is sometimes referred to as a “soft landing”), but the costs can sometimes be exploitative. What started out as a way to break the shackles of capitalist dependence can end up as a new form of reliance (see also Aroles et al (2018) and Thompson (2018a)).

Fourth, there is *digital nomadism as interjurisdictional prospecting* whereby itinerant workers seek to stay a step ahead of business cycles by moving to a new locale ahead of a period



of financial weakening in their current place of residence. This lifestyle recognizes that booms and busts are a normal feature of the market economy and the clever trick is to move on to a new – and hopefully more lucrative – place just as the bottom is starting to drop out in one’s current “home.” Rather than overcoming neoliberal capitalism, this is an individualized and strategic response to its very realities.

Finally, digital nomads are *unregulated de-facto citizens* who strive to fashion customized strategies that enable globalized business activities while avoiding the need to pay taxes (typically by residing in places on tourist visas) (see also Henderson 2018).<sup>60</sup> The dilemma is that these same individuals are reliant on certain elements of the public infrastructure – Internet, airports, roadways – and reticence to contribute to the commonweal has ramifications (at least potentially) that undermine their own livelihoods. This contradiction can be offset to some degree by personal efforts to engage in pro-bono charitable work and “co-giving programs” that provide, for example, professional services to local businesses.

## **6.8 Identity of Digital Nomads**

As discussed elsewhere in this literature review, the identity of digital nomads is often portrayed through picture-perfect social media accounts as one of location independence and carefree disregard of the mundane features of everyday life. Without the routines and rituals of a traditional, hierarchical corporate workplace and all the geographical, professional, technological, and temporal constraints typical of such an environment, digital nomads present themselves – and mass media tend to amplify these portrayals – as hypermobile with the flexibility to be wherever and do whatever they want. Without attachment to a traditional

profession, co-location with an organization, or fixed workspace, digital nomads appear to embrace a truly autonomous identity.

However, as interest in location-independent work arrangements has grown and increasingly mobile identities have emerged and coalesced among members of the global North's middle-class, researchers have begun to more deeply explore issues of identity among freelance digital workers and to question the extent to which their actual mobile identities correspond with the ubiquitous narrative (see, e.g., Bellesia et al 2019; Kaine and Josserand 2019). In addition, questions are being posed in particular about how digital nomads construct their identities and if they corroborate with celebrated conceptions of freedom and autonomy. In contrast to common depictions of digital nomad identities as unencumbered by geography, economic role, or other more customary determinants, researchers have uncovered how itinerant workers are in fact exemplars of nuance and dissonance and more inextricably tied to navigating these opposing, and often contradictory, forces than to idealized notions of independence (see also Sections 6.3 and 6.4). The current body of research suggests that digital nomads do create work identities, but that those identities are not as entirely fluid and mobile as depictions often suggest. They are regularly negotiating and renegotiating the boundaries between stabilizing- and autonomy-seeking practices and that part of the identity of digital nomads is rooted, to a certain degree, in its performative rather than authentic nature.

In an especially poignant contribution, sociologist Thomas Birtchnell (2019) questions whether the tendency to embrace the popularized and idealized notions of hypermobility that are emblematic of the digital nomadism discourse overlooks the immobility of identity. He explores the role that attachment to family, place, and other fixed and anchoring aspects of life play in the identity-making process and inquires whether it is possible for mobile lives to still have

immobile identities. The author suggests that the digital nomad identity blends mobility and immobility. Although digital nomads lead mobile lives and have distributed identities, he suggests that the concept of living on the move is inherently tied to moving away from home, “the place they ‘belong’ and locate their memories and invest surplus money and time into” (pp. 280; see also O’Connor 2020). In this way, Birtchnell (2019) notably highlights that, although digital nomads are continuous travelers, there are fixed cultural and demographic conceptions and considerations – home, citizenship, family, commitments to care – that they maintain or from which they try to decouple in their efforts to construct a mobile identity.

Motivated by similar concerns, social informatics specialists Julian Prester, Daniel Schlagwein, and Dubravka Cecez-Kecmanovic (2019) examine whether and how mobile digital workers who do not embed themselves within an organization might construct stable work identities (see also Jarrahi et al (2019) and Section 6.3). As noted above, the identity of digital nomads is often understood as based on independence and itinerant workers do not generally undertake activities that are consistent with standardized approaches for engendering a work identity. As Prester and his colleagues have noted, digital nomads tend to avoid integrating themselves into traditional organizational work environments, associating themselves with a strong organizational culture, or closely attaching themselves to colleagues in customary workplaces. Although they seem to lack the institutional support and consistent connections needed to develop an established work identity, digital nomads appear to enact a process of identity emergence by pursuing two opposing practices: gaining professional autonomy and maintaining self-assured stability.

More specifically, through their work practices, digital nomads seek to construct the commonly presented digital nomad identity of independence. Prester et al (2019) observe that

digital nomadism encourages frequent changes of geographic location and even ongoing adjustment of individual workspaces (e.g., coffee shops, apartments, co-working spaces) (see Section 6.5). In this way, they advance practices and construct an identity that is detached from specific geographies. Digital nomads also undertake work activities that demonstrate an emerging identity decoupled from time. As freelancers and micro-entrepreneurs, many members of this community also focus on output and productivity rather than on completing a set number of traditional work hours. However, the authors found that, in direct contradiction to these autonomy-pursuing routines, digital nomads identify, create, and maintain anchor points in their work practices. For instance, their research reveals that itinerant workers often employ the same procedural rituals regardless of their physical location as a way to maintain stable work routines for themselves. Accordingly, and indicative of another paradox inherent in the lifestyle, is that digital nomads use stability to enable locational autonomy. In this context, ICTs serve a dual purpose. They are simultaneously the means through which digital nomads produce their work from anywhere and the stabilizing tool that keeps them connected with clients, colleagues, family, and friends. These opposing forces reveal a more complex, and in some respects internally contradictory, reality of the digital nomad identity.

Through her study of British travel bloggers, geographer Nina Willment (2020) uncovered further incongruities regarding the role of identity in the lifestyles of digital nomads (see also Section 6.5). Her research suggests that subtle forms of both self-presentation and the need to contribute to the “performance” of digital nomadism are both inherent in the identity of travel bloggers. With the increase of location-independent working arrangements and the proliferation of self-publishing platforms, there has been over the past two decades a marked rise in the online publication of travel information, and travel blogging in particular. Many travel

bloggers undertake gig work or seek to monetize their writing through paid partnerships, affiliate links, and other income-generating activities. It is against this background that Willment (2020) conceptualizes travel blogging as “a particular form of work, where individuals see themselves as digital nomads.” A digital nomad identity, she suggests, is therefore not disconnected from place but rather strongly tied to specific locations. The author writes that “[t]here is an inherent need for travel bloggers to produce diverse travel content from across the globe and to perpetually share this content, whilst on the move, with their online audience” (pp. 3). In addition to the locations that travel bloggers visit, their digital nomad identity is linked to their ability to use a Wi-Fi connection to transform any physical space into a workstation. This inherent connection to place runs contrary to popular notions of the digital nomad lifestyle as being independent from location. It turns out that specific geographies are actually central to the digital nomad identity.

Through her exploration of the work practices of travel bloggers, Willment (2020) also uncovered the performative nature of this type of digital nomadism. In an effort to convey their digital nomad identity, travel bloggers use deliberately crafted and intimate self-disclosure to create and cultivate an impression of authenticity (see also Potter 2010, Section 2.3, and Chapter 5). In other words, they use strategically created content and imagery to demonstrate to both blog readers and to social media followers that the content is candid, uncensored, and provides representative glimpses of the blogger’s true life. These carefully curated presentations are then positioned as credible and aspirational sources of expert information. However, these performative self-presentations are themselves work, which runs contrary to popular renderings of the digital nomad identity as a means to escape the traditional spatial and temporal constraints of work. Through staged authenticity, travel bloggers attempt to “sell” the digital nomad identity

of location independence and freedom from the traditional constraints of work when, in fact, they must deeply immerse themselves in both place and customary working practices to be successful. Willment (2020) also found that the pressures of these practices often lead travel bloggers to be unable to maintain boundaries between “places of work” and “places of experience.” This pressure to always be “on” can lead to burnout rather than advance the kind of independence that is commonly assumed inherent in the digital nomad identity.

When taken together as a body of emergent knowledge, research on the foundations and motivations of the digital nomad identity suggests that the reality of the widely embraced notion and aspiration of location independence is inextricably linked to and derived from a constant interplay between the fixed and mobile aspects of life.

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## Chapter 7

### Conclusion

This literature review has attempted to situate the phenomenon of digital nomadism in the context of a broad conception of modernization, changing work practices, and contemporary discourses pertaining to mobility (and immobility). We have in addition sought to ground our understanding – albeit selectively – in expansive bodies of work drawn from the disciplines of sociology, geography/political economy, and anthropology/cultural tourism, as well as to integrate insights generated by the field of computer-supported cooperative work. We have furthermore considered several diverse, yet overlapping, bodies of research regarding itinerant lifestyles and global nomadism. This literature review also provides a comprehensive survey of assemblage of work published to date (mostly over the past five years) on several key features of digital nomadism.

Most scholars who have devoted serious thought to aspects of the digital nomad lifestyle have recognized that it is fraught with paradoxes and actual experiences deviate sharply from widely held “fun-in-the-sun” portrayals. The manifest tendency has been to regard the lifestyles of itinerant laptop-toting digerati as carefree wanderers who are “living the dream” working a minimal number of hours and spending the rest of the day luxuriating at the beach or partaking in adventure pursuits. At the same time, up until quite recently, the predisposition of most commentators has been to regard digital nomads as an interesting micro-trend, a mostly peripheral development attributable to changing determinants in the organization of work and structural evolution in the global system. Forecasts suggested modest increases in coming years in the number of people who might pursue location-independent lifestyles, but the overall extent was expected to be gradual and incremental rather than precipitous and radical.

The onset and diffusion of the COVID-19 pandemic throughout 2020 and 2021 has led to a transformation in how we understand the implications of digital nomadism. Few knowledgeable observers would any longer contend that digital nomadism represents an interesting but otherwise marginal phenomenon. Millions of people around the world have become untethered from their formal workplaces and have had the opportunity to take up residence in Alvin Toffler's long-envisioned "electronic cottage." While indications are that the vast majority of these "liberated" laborers have been ensconced in home offices or at kitchen tables, others have relocated to distant locales where they have been able to test – purposefully or inadvertently – their proclivities for digital nomadism. Indeed, internationally recognizable companies such as Google and Facebook have notified thousands of employees that they could continue to work indefinitely on a remote basis. As we write this conclusion, an unknown number of firms, both large and small, are contemplating what the future might look like if they do not renew their leases when the current term expires. While it will take some time for the full picture to become clear, it is probably the case that the ranks of digital nomads – both genuine practitioners and diffident daydreamers – will increase significantly over the coming months and years.

Global proliferation of the coronavirus has not only given new relevance to emergent transitions associated with the locational relationship between work and "home," it has also hastened the rate at which these two embodiments of everyday life are being reconceived as a result of crosscutting opportunities for distancing and co-proximity. Novel affordances are enabling footlooseness while concurrently facilitating innovative kinds of "co-spaces." This situation raises the prospect that digital nomads are at the vanguard in creating imaginative "live-work mixes" and models for "dwelling on-the-move" and "multi-local dwelling." Expanding



awareness of these pioneering practices is likely to lead to growing attention for this lifestyle on the part of researchers interested in the future of work, housing, mobility, or other allied issues. The hope is that this literature review, despite its inevitably imperfect and partial treatment of the phenomenon of digital nomadism, will nonetheless provide readers with some instructive guidance.

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## Appendix 1

### Summary and Typology of Digital Nomad Literature

#### 1. Defining Digital Nomadism

- Hannonen, O. 2020. In search of a digital nomad: defining the phenomenon. *Information Technology and Tourism* 22:335–353.
- Liegl, M. 2014. Nomadicity and the care of place: on the aesthetic and affective organization of space in freelance creative work. *Computer Supported Cooperative Work* 23: 163–183.
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- Richter, S. and A. Richter. 2020. Digital nomads. *Business Information and Systems Engineering* 62(1):77–81.
- Schlagwein, D. 2018a. The history of digital nomadism. International Workshop on the Changing Nature of Work (CNOW), San Francisco, CA, USA.
- Schlagwein, D. 2018b. “Escaping the rat race”: justifications in digital nomadism. *Research in Progress Papers* 31, [https://aisel.aisnet.org/ecis2018\\_rip/31](https://aisel.aisnet.org/ecis2018_rip/31).
- Thompson, B. 2018. Digital nomads: employment in the gig economy. *Glocalism* 1:1–26.
- Wang, B., D. Schlagwein, D. Cecez-Kecmanovic, and M. Cahalane. 2019. Digital nomadism and the market economy: resistance and compliance. Fortieth International Conference on Information Systems, Munich, Germany.

#### 2. Working Lives of Digital Nomads

- Aroles, J., E. Granter, and F.-X. deVaujany. 2020. “Becoming mainstream”: the professionalization and corporatisation of digital nomadism. *New Technology, Work and Employment* 35(1):114–129.
- Jarrahi, M., G. Philips, W. Sutherland, S. Sawyer, and I. Erickson. 2019. Personalization of knowledge, personal knowledge ecology, and digital nomadism. *Journal of the Association for Information Science and Technology* 70(4): 313–324.
- Kong, D., D. Schlagwein, and D. Cecez-Kecmanovic. 2020. Issues in digital nomad-corporate work: an institutional theory perspective. 27th European Conference on Information Systems, Stockholm-Uppsala, Sweden.
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- Sutherland, W., and M. Jarrahi. 2017. The gig economy and information infrastructure: the case of the digital nomad community. *Proceedings of the ACM: Human-Computer Interaction* 1(1): Article No. 97.
- Thompson, B. 2018. Digital nomads: employment in the online gig economy. *Glocalism: Journal of Culture, Politics and Innovation* 1:1–26.

#### 3. Non-working (Leisure) Lives of Digital Nomads

- Cook, D. 2020. The freedom trap: digital nomads and the use of disciplining practices to manage work/leisure boundaries. *Information Technology and Tourism* 22:355–390.

- Green, P. 2020. Disruptions of self, place and mobility: digital nomads in Chiang Mai, Thailand. *Mobilities* 15(3):431–445.
- Reichenberger, I. 2018. Digital nomads: a quest for holistic freedom in work and leisure. *Annals of Leisure Research* 21(3):364–380.
- Thompson, B. 2019a. The digital nomad lifestyle: (remote) work/leisure balance, privilege, and constructed community. *International Journal of the Sociology of Leisure*, 2:27–42.
- Thompson, B. 2019b. “I get my lovin’ on the run”: digital nomads, constant travel, and nurturing romantic relationships, pp. 69–90 in *The Geographies of Digital Sexuality*, C. Nash and A. Gorman-Murray, Eds. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

#### **4. Co-spaces and the Digital Nomad Lifestyle**

- Bergan, T., A. Gorman-Murray, and E. Power. 2020. Coliving housing: home cultures of precarity for the new creative class. *Social and Cultural Geography*, Published online March 2.
- Lee, A., A. Toombs, I. Erickson, D. Nemer, Y.-S. Ho, E. Jo, and Z. Guo. 2019a. The social infrastructure of co-spaces: home, work, and sociable places for digital nomads. *Proceedings of the ADM on Computer-Human Interaction 3*: Article No. 142.
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- Von Zumbusch, J., and L. Lalicic. 2020. The role of co-living spaces in digital nomads’ well-being. *Information Technology and Tourism* 22(3):439–453.

#### **5. Mobility Practices of Digital Nomads**

- Schlagwein, D., and M. Jarrahi. 2020. The mobilities of digital work: the case of digital nomadism. 28th European Conference on Information Systems, Marrakesh, Morocco.

#### **6. Political Economy of Digital Nomadism**

- Mancinelli, F. 2020. Digital nomads: freedom, responsibility, and the neoliberal order. *Information Technology and Tourism* 22(3):417–437.
- Wang, B., D. Schlagwein, D. Cecez-Kecmanovic, and M. Cahalane. 2019. Digital nomadism and the market economy: resistance and compliance. Fortieth International Conference on Information Systems, Munich, Germany.

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## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> For a useful introduction to the field of CSCW, see <https://www.interaction-design.org/literature/book/the-encyclopedia-of-human-computer-interaction-2nd-ed/computer-supported-cooperative-work>.

<sup>2</sup> The telecenter concept has also been implemented as an economic development strategy and a way to promote “digital inclusion” in India, sub-Saharan Africa, and other developing countries/regions. See, for example, Madon (2005) and Madon et al (2009).

<sup>3</sup> The work of geographer John Adams (see, e.g., 1999, 2001) on the notion of “hypermobility” is also an important contributing factor to the mobility turn in the social sciences.

<sup>4</sup> In addition to Urry’s extensive oeuvre, Adey (2006), Shaw and Hesse (2010), Creswell (2011) provide useful overviews of the broad field of research organized around the mobilities paradigm.

<sup>5</sup> A line of thinking is that the “spatial turn” began to occur much earlier in some of the social sciences. For instance, the field of regional science established during the 1950s was part of an effort to spatialize the study of economics. Interest in space and mobility can also be traced back earlier to the 1920s and the activities of the so-called “regionalists” in the United States, which included notable figures such as Lewis Mumford, Benton MacKaye, Catherine Bauer, Clarence Stein, and Henry Wright. For a useful discussion, see Friedmann and Weaver (1979).

<sup>6</sup> This conceptual foundation has also contributed to a robust field of research centered on sociotechnical transitions and sustainable systems innovation (Elzen et al 2004; Geels 2005).

<sup>7</sup> It merits noting that some creators of online content are able to develop their activities into financially remunerative businesses over which they exercise personal control. See Brydges and Sjöholm (2019) on the experiences of fashion bloggers.

<sup>8</sup> The “sharing economy” is an unfortunate and erroneous term because in most manifestations of this mode of labor there is little evidence of anything that most people would readily recognize as sharing. See, for example, Martin (2016) and Cohen (2017).

<sup>9</sup> It has become increasingly difficult on the basis of the inherent characteristics of a specific job task to distinguish whether a work assignment is most appropriately performed by an employee or an independent contractor.

<sup>10</sup> There has been long-standing disagreement in the research community over the precise definition of “cultural tourism.” Though it is unlikely to settle the debates, the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) recently defined cultural tourism as a type of tourism activity in which the visitor’s essential motivation is to learn, discover, experience and consume the tangible and intangible cultural attractions/products in a tourism destination (UNWTO 2017, 18; see also Richards 2018).

<sup>11</sup> For comprehensive treatment of topical issues in the field of cultural tourism research, refer to Smith and Richards (2013), Du Cros and McKercher (2014), and Artal-Tur and Kozak (2020). While the discipline of anthropology is most prominent, cultural tourism also includes work in sociology, economics, and psychology.

<sup>12</sup> In one study, Cohen's (2011) respondents (n = 25) ranged in age from 23 to 50 and had been traveling more or less continuously for 3 to 17 years. It is important to emphasize that "enduring" backpackers represent only a small number of the overall population of backpacker tourists.

<sup>13</sup> Backpackers are not the only kinds of "enduring" travelers and Cohen (2011) includes in this category people who engage in long-term ocean yacht cruising and caravanning.

<sup>14</sup> This is clearly a very large and diverse literature. Some of the most important and compelling accounts are not research reports, but rather memoirs of personal experiences. For a useful overview of some of the most eloquent and poignant contributions, see <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2020/feb/05/migration-book-recommendations-american-dirt>.

<sup>15</sup> As Benson and O'Reilly (2009b, 609) observe, this work on lifestyle migration builds on earlier investigations centered on retirement migration, leisure migration, second-home ownership, and amenity migration.

<sup>16</sup> First used by botanists, heliotropism refers to the tendency of a plant to turn toward the sun. The term was adopted by researchers in lifestyle migration to describe the human variant of this behavioral inclination with respect to North-South migration, especially in the context of migratory travel to Spain.

<sup>17</sup> Despite their frequent geographic proximity, it is useful to distinguish between residential migrants and so-called seasonal work-oriented migrants who are generally less affluent, have a different set of motivations, and manifest a weaker sense of place attachment. Despite the fact that both groups are attracted to the destination by its amenity attractiveness, the latter are likely to face financial challenges securing adequate housing and satisfying other living expenses, in part because of higher costs of living attributable to wealthier lifestyle migrants. See, for example, Tuulentie and Heimtun (2014) and Thorpe (2017).

<sup>18</sup> Notably, this work aims to provide a reflexive corrective on research on relatively affluent migrants – including important perspectives to which the authors themselves have contributed – and to offer a "critical sociology of lifestyle migration."

<sup>19</sup> Since 1985, based on the Schengen Agreement, the citizens of the countries that comprise the European Union have been able to move freely across national borders and to move from one country within the bloc to another without undue complication.

<sup>20</sup> Contrast this observation with the discussion in Section 4.2.



<sup>21</sup> See <https://www.economist.com/sites/default/files/special-reports-pdfs/10950383.pdf>, <https://www.economist.com/special-report/2008/04/12/nomads-at-last>, and <https://www.economist.com/leaders/2008/04/10/our-nomadic-future>.

<sup>22</sup> As exemplified by Cook (2020), is not uncommon for authors to sidestep the challenge of developing a precise definition of digital nomadism and to instead rely on the loosely constructed formulations that are part of journalistic characterizations.

<sup>23</sup> Some estimates put the number at upwards of one million and other approximations are higher still.

<sup>24</sup> For example, a survey of more than 500 digital nomads conducted by FlexJobs in 2018 found that digital nomads are not necessarily 100% nomadic. On the contrary, 12% of survey respondents said they settle in one location for 3+ months at a time, 11% for 1–2 months, and 11% for 3–4 weeks. Approximately 27% reported that their movement varies, leaving 22% who change locations every 1–2 weeks and 17% who move around more frequently. See <https://www.flexjobs.com/blog/post/flexjobs-digital-nomad-survey-insights-remote-lifestyle>. A 2016 global survey of digital nomads conducted by Welance, a Berlin-based collective for contingent workers, found (contrary to stereotypes) that approximately 44% of digital nomads stay in one place for 1–3 months, while only 25% stay 1–2 weeks. See <https://welance.de/journal/digital-nomad-survey-results-infographic>.

<sup>25</sup> Sutherland and Jarrahi (2017) define an information infrastructure as a “configuration of heterogeneous digital platforms...[that is leveraged by] a community of location-independent, remote workers.”

<sup>26</sup> Digital nomads seem to rely less on Facebook because of both its reputation and functionality as a tool for social as opposed to professional communication.

<sup>27</sup> In some cases, especially for digital nomads from the United States, their educational credentials and certain aspects of their cultural capital come with a significant cost in the form of accumulated student-loan debt. Another financial consideration for many itinerant workers is the inadequacy of retirement savings or eventual access to pension plans (see Section 6.6).

<sup>28</sup> A related form of experience involves prior work in the retail and hospitality industries where, after a time, the opportunities afforded by digital nomadism assume an allure that is more attractive than continuing to remain underemployed and engaged in activities that do not align with their education and professional aspirations.

<sup>29</sup> Social computing expert Mohamed Chatti formulated the concept of PKM in 2012 and it has come to be defined as the “situated, individual-level activities in which workers ideate to make sense of work environments and interactions with other actors.” PKM gives rise to “a set of adaptive, personalized sociotechnical systems that an individual worker uses to insure his or her productivity” (quoted in Jarrahi et al 2019).

<sup>30</sup> Jarrahi et al (2019, 323) articulate this prospect in especially succinct terms when they write that “the primacy of organizations and organizational resources is likely to face into the background as knowledge workers increasingly operate as free agents and as a significant proportion of knowledge work is executed through alternative or non-standard work arrangements.”

<sup>31</sup> Some Facebook groups – most notably Digital Nomads Around the World – have over 100,000 members. Among digital nomads and related fellow travelers, Instagram is an extremely popular platform for the sharing of photographs, memes, and other social media content (see Gretzel and Hardy 2019; Bozzi 2020).

<sup>32</sup> See Section 6.3 for a discussion of related work by Thompson.

<sup>33</sup> Mancinelli (2020) echoes these observations when she writes that [d]igital nomads’ sociality develops in a blended world, resulting from the meaningful interaction between offline and online social spheres.”

<sup>34</sup> The situation, of course, is different for digital nomads who are part of organized work-tourism packages and for whom the logistical complications of frequent travel are handled on a pre-arranged basis and facilitated by a congenial staff.

<sup>35</sup> See also Wang et al (2019) which discusses “self-driven and self-disciplined work” as a specific mode of digital nomadism. Mancinelli (2020) describes how the need to create lifestyle structure through self-regimentation induces digital nomads to gravitate to “commodified communities” based on mindfulness and meditation.

<sup>36</sup> See also the discussion about authenticity and identity in Sections 2.3 and 6.8 as well as Chapter 5. Green (2020, 439) remarks that digital nomads “invest in identity projects that create symbolic and spatial distance from tourists, especially Western backpackers. Traveling light is considered a virtue of the savvy nomad, who has little need for the excessive material yet symbolically charged resource of a large backpack.”

<sup>37</sup> Perhaps because of the challenges that digital nomads encounter reconciling idealized conceptions of digital nomadism with practiced realities, Cook (2020) describes how “disciplining practices were rarely mentioned in initial interviews with aspiring digital nomads and only emerged gradually over four years of fieldwork.” The author proceeds to note that he “never expected to be writing about the disciplining practices of digital nomads. Likewise, the digital nomads on this study were equally surprised to discover disciplining strategies becoming such a central part of their everyday lives.” Such commentary suggests that disciplining is a mostly tacit aspect of digital nomadism and an aspect of the lifestyle that practitioners are either not consciously aware of or reticent to acknowledge.

<sup>38</sup> In some contexts, this assimilation of work and leisure into a holistic set of lifestyle practices is referred to as “flow” and the concept has been popularized by psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1991) and other proponents of “positive psychology” (see, for example, Seligman 2002).

<sup>39</sup> On one hand, “volitional participation” comprises institutionally imposed deadlines and other forms of goal setting that are common in organizational contexts. On the other hand, “forceful imposition” is more coercive and punitive and typically involves warnings for late arrival and various sanctions for irregular behavior (see Cook 2020). Self-discipline, by contrast, is regarded as being rooted in neoliberal narratives of personal responsibility and entrepreneurial autonomy. It also derives from a need to embrace “self-branding” and thinking of oneself as a business (which in the extreme entails operationalizing the notion of “CEO of Me, Inc.” (see Gershon 2017 and Section 6.3).

<sup>40</sup> It is noteworthy that some authors such as Lee et al (2019a) include makerspaces and hackerspaces in their conception of co-spaces.

<sup>41</sup> The term “cultural creative” derives from the “creative class theory” developed by Richard Florida (2002) which posits that contemporary forms of urban economic development are driven by so-called creative professionals and others involved in knowledge industries. The recommendation is thus that it is incumbent on urban policy makers to focus their attention on providing the amenities and other features of urban life that are attractive to such individuals as a means of attracting them as residents and tourists.

<sup>42</sup> Lee et al (2019a, 2) make the important point that co-spaces are not necessarily a new idea and the concept derives from pre-existing forms such as communal living for families, fraternities/sororities for students, and open café spaces.

<sup>43</sup> Related to this issue is an interesting literature on “hotdesking” (and “flexdesking) which refers to working arrangements where individual workers do not have a permanent workspace but are rather assigned a desk (or reserve a desk) for a day when they are scheduled to be on site in a central location (Brown and O’Hara 2003; Brown 2004).

<sup>44</sup> See <http://workatjelly.com/>.

<sup>45</sup> Lee et al (2019a) relied specifically on the subreddit /r/digitalnomad which describes itself as a site for “individuals that leverage technology in order to work remotely and live an independent and nomadic lifestyle.” At the time of this research, it reportedly had approximately 380,000 subscribers but a recent review indicates 1.2 million subscribers.

<sup>46</sup> Lee et al (2019a) observe, “The separation and merging of the work and social life boundaries is one of the important factors to design a hostel as a space that might encompass all three place.”

<sup>47</sup> This analysis is rooted in a historic process of evolutionary change that first led to the establishment of company-owned towns to support industrialization during the nineteenth century and then to privately owned single-family homes with the rise of tertiary services.

<sup>48</sup> Previously conceived as *Multikokalität* by German geographers to describe such co-living arrangements (Kramer and Schier 2015), Hilti (2016) introduced the English language term “multi-local” (see also Gorman-Murray and Bissell 2018).

<sup>49</sup> Uyttebrouck et al (2021) have recently developed the concept “live-work mix” to describe the intertwining of living and working activities of the sort described here.

<sup>50</sup> Human-computer interaction specialist Ahreum Lee and her colleagues (2019a) observe the apparent irony of co-spaces geared to digital nomads. On one hand, digital nomadism encourages people to join evolving communities that by their very nature require acknowledging certain rules. On the other hand, participation in spatially fixed forms of sociality limits autonomy and freedom of movement. In addition, at least among more seasoned and extroverted digital nomads, co-spaces have a negative valance suggeseting that the kind of community created in such settings is contrived and not worth the added expense.

<sup>51</sup> It is hard to have confidence in the estimates generated by service providers for the digital nomad community because their surveys are typically based on very small samples and it is difficult to determine the representativeness of the respondents.

<sup>52</sup> Mancinelli (2020) is not, as she herself acknowledges, the first to make this connection and numerous philosophers and others have drawn on romanticized conceptions of the nomad to challenge the authority of the nation-state and its fixation with borders and geographic accountability. See, in particular, Deleuze and Guattari (1986) which tends to serve as the springboard for contemporary consideration of these ideas.

<sup>53</sup> This aspect of the digital nomad lifestyle has its parallel in the sharing economy where micro-entrepreneurialism is also celebrated as a libratory feature of neoliberal capitalism. Refer, for example, to Kuhn and Maleki (2017).

<sup>54</sup> Some digital nomads use the term “bootstrapping” to describe the arbitrage opportunity created by the difference between earning potential and cost of living (see Schlagwein 2018b).

<sup>55</sup> Other aspects of geoarbitrage include investing in passive-income sources, automating revenue-generating activities, and subcontracting work to personnel in lower-wage/weaker currency countries.

<sup>56</sup> Mancinelli (2020) also highlights how some of her respondents reinterpreted the lack of access to these institutionalized forms of provisioning in terms of a neoliberal conception of “freedom to choose.”

<sup>57</sup> In essence, then, anti-consumerism and “alternativeness” become commodities that are repackaged and sold as products and services to digital nomads and related fellow travelers. For a historical perspective on these processes, see Frank (1998), Heath and Potter (2004), and Turner (2006).

<sup>58</sup> Refer to Duffy (2015), Gandini (2016), Khamis et al (2017) for more detailed consideration of the relationship between self-branding and digital labor.

<sup>59</sup> Efforts to detach from consumer society have a longstanding history as a form of resistance to industrialism and related commodified sensibilities. See, for example, Gura (2008) and Cohen

(2017). Particularly popular at present is the emphasis on so-called minimalist lifestyles as discussed by Chayka (2020).

<sup>60</sup> This characterization is roughly analogous to the notion of “nomad capitalists” developed by Henderson (2018). Mancinelli (2020) describes the constituent practices as emblematic of “an individualistic exit strategy to the growing inequalities of affluent industrialized countries” and this characterization is an updating of what Ong (1999) referred to more than two decades ago as “flexible citizenship.”