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DIGITAL NOMADS AS POLITICAL FACTOR AND A HYPOTHETICAL POLITICAL ACTOR

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Abstract: Digital nomadism is a relatively recent yet rapidly expanding phenomenon characterized by a form of mobility in which work becomes location-independent and everyday life is organized through continuous movement. As a distinct group within contemporary cross-border migration processes, digital nomads appear not only as objects of state and institutional policies but also display elements of political agency. This article supplements existing multi-level analytical frameworks for studying migration by introducing several conflict-laden themes and proposing a typology that captures the internal heterogeneity of the category commonly identified as "digital nomads." Such heterogeneity reveals differentiated value orientations within neo-nomadic communities and enables preliminary assumptions regarding potential political platforms corresponding to these orientations. Noting the absence of political forces within existing nation-states capable of representing some of these interests, the article explores the possibilities for digital nomads to emerge as political actors through participation in new, network-based forms of organization and self-organization.

Keywords: *digital nomads; mobility; migration; social citizenship; political subjectivity; nomadic identity; sovereignty; freedom; belonging; networked communities*.

Introduction

In recent years, digital nomadism has attracted growing attention from scholars and policymakers. Definitions of the digital nomad vary widely and depend largely on the analytical perspective adopted. Traditionally - if the term "tradition" may be applied here, given that *digital nomad* was coined by Makimoto and Manners in 1997 (Makimoto & Manners, 1997) and that the rapid growth of research on the topic has occurred only within the past decade (Simova, 2023: 180) - the phenomenon has been examined primarily within tourism and leisure studies, as well as in relation to developments in information and communication technologies.

Acknowledging the limitations of these perspectives for understanding digital nomadism, several authors have proposed sociological frameworks situating the phenomenon within migration studies and conceptualizing it as a multi-level

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interaction between structural conditions and individual agency (Dreher & Triandafyllidou, 2025). While research on "reactive" state policies responding to the expansion of digital nomadism has become relatively widespread (Hary & Triandafyllidou, 2025), only a limited number of studies attempt to develop an overarching analytical framework for socio-political analysis. Existing work has focused primarily on the changing relationship between digital nomads and the state (Cook, 2022), which, in turn, necessitates a reconceptualization of social citizenship (Webb, 2024).

Rather than constructing such a comprehensive framework, this article aims to examine several conflict-laden domains in which digital nomads appear not only as objects of external actors' policies, but also as actual or potential political agents. The analysis seeks to systematize possible forms of political expression and institutionalization among nomads. Addressing this research objective requires engagement with several questions:

- *Do shared political values underpin the interests of digital nomads, and how are these values articulated?*
- *Are political structures capable of representing these interests already in place, and if not, on what platforms might they emerge?*
- *What are the sources of threats and opportunities for advancing these interests?*

The analysis begins by considering definitional approaches to digital nomadism that allow the phenomenon to be distinguished from other forms of mobility. It then examines the multi-dimensional interactions that constitute the basis and boundaries of digital nomads' political (proto)subjectivity.

In Search of a Definition for an Elusive Phenomenon

Efforts to delineate digital nomadism from its broader environment remain ongoing. Despite numerous descriptive definitions, a comprehensive conceptualization is still lacking. Scholars commonly identify two observable characteristics of digital nomad activity: cross-border mobility and remote work mediated by digital technologies. At the same time, researchers frequently note the large number of "nomad-like" groups, and existing typologies often clarify who digital nomads *are not* more successfully than who they *are*.

For example, Cook and Simonovsky propose a matrix defining nomadic groups along two dimensions: work-focused versus non-work-focused, and high versus low mobility (Cook, 2020: 357). According to this diagram, individuals identifying as digital nomads typically inhabit the quadrant combining strong work orientation with high mobility. This distinguishes them from backpackers, tourists, non-working elites, and lifestyle expatriates (non-work-focused), as well as from traditional expatriates and business travelers (low mobility). Nevertheless, some frequent business travelers still fall into the same category as digital nomads by these criteria.

Similarly, the boundaries within typologies that differentiate work-related mobility (remote workers, freelancers, traveling professionals) from lifestyle mobility (backpackers, flashpackers, global or neo-nomads) often remain ambiguous (Hannonen, 2020). Distinctions between digital nomads and expatriates, emigrants, and

other mobile groups are likewise blurred, frequently requiring additional criteria to achieve analytical meaningfulness[1].

Some researchers attempt to capture the complexity of digital nomadism by developing detailed operational definitions. Such definitions typically require the combination, or simultaneous enactment of two types of mobility. For example, digital nomads "use digital technologies to work remotely, they have the ability to work and travel simultaneously, have autonomy over frequency and choice of location, and visit at least three locations a year that are not their own or a friend's or family home" (Cook, 2023: 259). In this way, quantitative criteria supplement qualitative ones, which are deemed insufficient for analytical purposes when used alone.

It is noteworthy that, unlike many other definitions, this formulation does not require cross-border movement. Considering whether this element is important for understanding digital nomadism becomes significant in light of the widespread scholarly consensus that nomads' integration into host cultures tends to be low. If this is indeed the case, it seems unlikely that the primary motivation for crossing borders lies in the exploration of cultural differences - although such differences are undoubtedly more accessible through international travel than through domestic mobility. This implies either that cross-border movement is not essential to the core definition of digital nomadism, or that attention should instead be directed toward other motives, such as economic or political. Sociodemographic observations support this line of reasoning: digital nomads disproportionately originate from countries with "strong" passports, which directly facilitate crossing restrictive political borders and indirectly correlate with the economic capacity to travel extensively. More broadly, this raises a question - returned to later in the article - regarding the extent to which digital nomads depend on their ability to leverage meaningful differences between the environments through which they circulate.

Attempts have also been made to derive the digital nomad from the broader category of "nomad." For instance, terminological distinctions have been introduced to differentiate global, neo-, and digital nomads within this broader conceptual space (Hannonen, 2020). These definitions are typically linked to the idea of travel - sometimes described as "drifting" - as a normalized mode of life in which, unlike in tourism, the journey itself takes precedence over the destination (Cohen, 2010). The capacity to sustain oneself while on this journey becomes central. In this sense, digital nomadism has been interpreted as an ideology of a "full life in motion," one premised on the dissolution of the dichotomy between work and leisure. Rather than existing as separate activities, work and leisure are integrated and rendered independent from fixed space and time through the capacity to perform professional and personal activities from virtually any location. The appeal of nomadism is heightened by the claim that self-actualization and personal fulfillment through continuous movement allow individuals to satisfy an existential need to move - *Moveo ergo sum* (Mancinelli & Salazar, 2023). Here, the freedom associated with the figure of the nomad is realized both *in* and *through* mobility.

[1] A partial - though not exhaustive - set of such criteria and assessments, found in the scholarly literature, was presented by the author at the International Conference "Education and Research in the Digital Age Societies " (Yerevan State University, Armenia, November 4-5, 2025)

Understanding mobility as a need suggests that a conceptual definition of nomadism may be approached through typologizing movement according to its desirability and possibility. Movement is always movement *from* and *to*, shaped by the conditions of both departure and destination. A typology could therefore be constructed by defining the desirable and the possible in terms of the relationships individuals maintain with both spaces. Yet is it permissible to temporarily bracket the differences between departure and destination and focus solely on the movement itself? It appears so. Although linguistic and cultural conventions encourage the use of terms such as "home" and verbs such as "leave," "stay," or "return," a more neutral opposition between "movement" and "non-movement" proves analytically advantageous. This framework allows us to describe what may be called a *mobility decision* (Table 1).

For simplicity, let us assume that in the conditional decision "to be or not to be mobile," each alternative - "to initiate movement" (Move, M) or "not to initiate movement" (Not Move, –M) - is characterized by its *possibility* (P) and *desirability* (D), each of which may be either present (1) or absent (0). Additionally, axiom 1 (A1) stipulates that desirability cannot be absent for both alternatives (MD, –MD) simultaneously . At the same time, we provisionally allow desirability to be present for both alternatives - that is, ambivalent desire - on the assumption that such ambivalence may serve as a useful heuristic concept. In practice, this ambivalence ultimately "collapses" into a concrete decision (either {MD1, –MD0} or {MD0, –MD1}) through various evaluative processes, such that desire for movement exceeds (MD > –MD), or falls below (MD < –MD) desire for non-movement, or even equals it, as in the classical dilemma of Buridan's donkey (MD = –MD).

Table 1. Decision regarding mobility

	M		-M		Deci-sion	Interpretation	Ideal Type[2]
#	MP	MD	-MP	-MD			
1	0	0	0	0	(A1)	Does not exist	
2	0	0	0	1	-M	Absence of movement	
3	0	0	1	0	(A1)	Does not exist	
4	0	0	1	1	-M	Absence of movement	
5	0	1	0	0	-M	Absence of movement	
6	0	1	0	1	-M	Absence of movement	
7	0	1	1	0	-M	Absence of movement	
8	0	1	1	1	-M	Absence of movement	
9	1	0	0	0	(A1)	Does not exist	
10	1	0	0	1	M	Undesirable movement due to the absence of the possibility not to move	Exile***
11	1	0	1	0	(A1)	Does not exist	

[2] Note: nomadic (*), semi-nomadic (**), non-nomadic (***) groups.

12	1	0	1	1	-M	Absence of movement due to absence of desire to move	
13	1	1	0	0	M	Desirable movement without the possibility and alternative desire not to move	Rolling Stone*
14	1	1	0	1	M	Desirable movement without the possibility, but with an alternative desire not to move	Escapee**
15	1	1	1	0	M	Desirable movement with the possibility, but with no alternative desire not to move	Wanderer*
16	1	1	1	1	M or -M	Desirable movement with an alternative desire and the possibility not to move, or desirable absence of movement with the possibility and alternative desire to move	Tourist**

We will not comment on all scenarios in the resulting table in which a decision to move is *not* made, and will instead focus on those in which movement *is* chosen. The names of the ideal-typical categories used here are provisional and could certainly be refined; nevertheless, this approach already permits the identification of "nomadic" and "non-nomadic" groups within the mobility space. In our "nomad formula," grounded in the principle *Moveo ergo sum*, the state of "being a nomad" is most likely defined by the combination of three characteristics: the presence of both the possibility and desirability of movement, along with the absence of desirability for non-movement ({MP1, MD1, –MD0}), regardless of the possibility of remaining stationary.

The two categories highlighted in the table - the "Rolling Stone" and the "Wanderer" - both satisfy this condition. Intuitively, one might assume that the "spirit of nomadism" is more vividly expressed in the second case, in which the decision to move is fully detached from external constraints at the point of departure, rather than being driven by the *impossibility* of staying, as in the first case. Conversely, the opposite interpretation is also plausible: one could argue that the Rolling Stone's inability to choose non-movement binds them more reliably and irrevocably to mobility, and is therefore more fundamentally nomadic.

Leaving aside debates over who might qualify as the "truest nomad," it becomes evident that the category of "nomad" is internally differentiated, and that existing empirical research on digital nomadism often uses less stringent criteria than those employed in this model. As a result, the empirical literature often includes the "Tourist," the "Escapee," and occasionally even the "Exile," whereas in our typology the first two ({MP1, MD1, –MD1}) constitute, at most, semi-nomads, and the latter - while common in broader migration flows - is entirely non-nomadic, as it lacks the desirability of movement ({MP1, MD0, –MD1}).

Acknowledging the limitations inherent in this simplified approach, we can nonetheless return from the general definition of the nomad to the more specific category of the digital nomad. In our model, remote work functions as a concrete - and indeed important, though ultimately only one - mechanism for maintaining the "decision to move"; it therefore belongs to the set of "Possibility to Move" [MP]. Yet

is it the only element of this set? The evidence suggests otherwise. Research on digital nomadism identifies numerous factors that extend far beyond the technological feasibility of location- and time-independent work: these include individual professional qualifications, labor-market structures, macroeconomic conditions, visa regimes, passport strength, and broader features of the global political order. While our primary concern here is the structure of the "Possibility to Move," the same wide range of determinants shapes the "Possibility Not to Move," and, indirectly, the corresponding value-oriented desires.

Thus, the opposition between the desirable and the possible in our model may - and indeed should - be interpreted through the dynamics of the internal and the external, the individual and the structural. This interpretation points toward the need for a multi-level framework capturing how interactions among these factors unfold both *within* and *across* analytical levels.

Integrating the Nomad Model into a Model of the World

In one of the studies mentioned in the introduction, the authors creatively adapt the model proposed by Benson and O'Reilly (2018) to analyze interactions between agents and structures in migration processes (Dreher & Triandafyllidou, 2025). Their approach distinguishes three levels of interaction:

1. **The macro-level**, comprising large global and historical systems (such as neoliberalism or postcolonialism);
2. **The meso-level**, encompassing more flexible structures within which policies on digital nomadism are formulated (such as visa regimes); and
3. **The micro-level**, where individual agents, their practices, and their worldviews are situated.

Building on this framework, we further develop the discussion of agent–structure interactions outlined by these authors and introduce additional dimensions that seem equally relevant for reflecting on the political subjectivity of nomads.

Macro-level narratives

Dreher and Triandafyllidou (2025) argue that the principal structural framework shaping the existence of digital nomads is **neoliberalism**, understood as the generator and normalizer of "neoliberal subjectivity." This form of subjectivity prioritizes personal responsibility and assumes that individuals should optimize their lives through rational choice. The outcomes of such choices are interpreted as purely personal achievements or failures, detached from the structural conditions in which they occur. This framing conveniently absolves the state and other collective institutions from responsibility for individual futures. As earlier forms of solidarity erode, individuals are increasingly compelled to become "self-entrepreneurs" in pursuit of their own version of the "good life." Simultaneously, growing instability in employment, income, and career prospects - characteristic of many advanced economies of the Global North - has become a defining factor that, for many, creates an **"impossibility of non-movement."** Despite their privilege in education, financial resources, and citizenship, digital nomads find themselves in circumstances where **geoarbitrage** - a term popularized by Ferriss (2009), referring to the "geographic solution to economic

precarity" through relocation to cheaper destinations - becomes the only viable strategy for preserving a familiar standard of living. Some respondents even describe themselves as **"economic refugees"** (Hayes, 2014: 1961), positioning themselves not as nomadic "Wanderers" but rather shifting toward the semi-nomadic "Escapee" or even the non-nomadic "Exile" categories within our model.

Dreher and Triandafyllidou conclude their macro-level discussion by emphasizing another foundational factor enabling geoarbitrage: the **postcolonial context**, reproduced in the present through vast global inequalities of wealth, power, and status. From this perspective, the question of whether digital nomads could sustain their lifestyle without substantial differences between places of departure and destination must, in most cases, be answered in the negative - at least if freedom and movement remain central structuring values of the phenomenon.

Several additional macro-level factors are also crucial for understanding digital nomadism. While inequality will remain, for the foreseeable future, a key enabling condition for geoarbitrage and thus for the "possibility of movement" available to some (or nominally available to many aspiring) nomads, the broader neoliberal world order - and in particular the ideal of open borders - faces mounting challenges. The COVID-19 pandemic illustrated vividly how "black swan" events can suddenly undermine mobility by prompting widespread border closures. A parallel emerging threat is the normalization of discourses depicting global military conflict as imminent. Such discourses often lead to reduced border permeability for "potential adversaries," mirroring Cold War logics and further jeopardizing the assumptions of free movement upon which many nomadic practices depend.

Another macro-level trend is *the global shift toward autocratization* - a widespread movement toward authoritarianism observable in both 'traditionally' autocratic and 'traditionally' democratic regimes[3]. Within the scope of this text, it is difficult to definitively assess how this trend might threaten the nomadic way of life, although one cannot help but make the ironic observation that both the ideal-typical nomad and the autocrat share at least one formal aspiration: the desire to free themselves from institutional constraints on their individual will. Simultaneously, analyses of pandemic management suggest that 'some democracies have implemented such an extensive range of digital citizen-control technologies that they have become difficult to distinguish from autocracies', often subsequently 'forgetting' to revoke these measures, which were initially justified as temporary and extraordinary (Fedorchenko, 2020:13). The trend toward *tightening control over digital space* has thus become virtually universal, blurring distinctions between regime types and, in the context of growing dependence on digital platforms, challenging one of the key elements of freedom - the freedom to communicate.

The unrealized - but partially plausible - 'The Great Reset' program (Schwab, Malleret, 2020), rather postponed than fully removed from the agenda, highlighted another challenge likely to affect global mobility: the potential radical reduction of the 'desire not to move'. The slogan 'You own nothing, and you are happy,' first voiced in a

[3] V-Dem Institute (2023). Democracy Report 2023. Defiance in the Face of Autocratization. URL: https://www.v-dem.net/documents/29/V-dem_democracyreport2023_lowres.pdf

2016 WEF video[4] as part of an initiative aimed at abolishing or *transforming private property relations*, promoting large-scale deprivatization within the sharing economy, and shifting governance to 'stakeholders' if ever implemented, could, by severing ties with points of origin, multiply the number of potential nomads (though not necessarily their actual 'possibility of movement'). At the same time, similar structural preconditions for the expansion of nomadism already exist today. Among digital nomads, Millennials and Generation Z dominate the age profile[5], whereas accumulated wealth - including a substantial share of residential property - is heavily concentrated among older generations. In the United States - the key 'exporter' of nomads - these two 'most nomadic' generations, constituting more than 35% of the country's population[6], control only about one-tenth of its total net wealth[7].

It is also worth noting that many of these ideas, underlying various *'grand projects'* proposed by global organizations, although often rooted in real and pressing global problems, suggest total regulation of all aspects of human life as a tool for addressing them, in the name of optimizing the use of the planet's shared resources. Regardless of the nature of the motivations for such regulation (though ecological concerns are usually central), it ultimately leads - following the logic of the 'Spaceship Earth' metaphor - to the creation of '*the most total institution* ever known in human history' (Rott, 2024).

It is not difficult to assume that while the challenges outlined above, associated with a potential new fragmentation of the world, may still leave the ideal-typical nomad some (albeit limited and certainly not guaranteed) space to exist, the logical extreme of the opposite trajectory - that is, total institutionalization under a single, universal framework on a global scale - would signify its symbolic and practical demise. However, unlike these more or less distant potentials, real interactions mostly unfold at the next, densest level.

Meso-level narratives

As Dreher and Triandafyllidou note, the principal actors at the meso-level include both states and local formations often referred to as *digital nomadlands*. These are understood not only as communities and locations where nomads establish temporary bases, but also as nodes within a broader mobility network - "a complex set of [concurrent, fluid, and multi-scalar] dynamics … that impact the movement decisions of digital nomads" (Dreher & Triandafyllidou, 2025). While significant scholarly attention is devoted to nomadlands as social hubs - frequently developing their own intermediaries who facilitate interaction between nomads and local communities -

[4] 8 predictions for the world in 2030. URL: https://www.facebook.com/worldeconomicforum/videos/8-predictions-for-the-world-in-2030/10153920524981479/

[5] MBO Partners (2024). Digital_Nomads Report 2024. URL: https://info.mbopartners.com/rs/mbo/images/2024_Digital_Nomads_Report.pdf

[6] US Population by Age 2025. Demographics Stats & Facts. URL: https://theworlddata.com/us-population-by-age/?utm_source=chatgpt.com

[7] UBS (2025). Global Wealth Report 2025. URL: https://elements.visualcapitalist.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/global-wealth-report-09072025.pdf

states, in this framework, tend to be reduced to providers of attractive visa schemes and passport policies. Their role is framed largely as the provision of *technical*, rather than *political*, solutions aimed at increasing mobility and attracting temporary residents.

However, for the purposes of our analysis, this one-dimensional portrayal of the state is insufficient. At the meso-level, crucial political narratives emerge, and these cannot be captured by treating the state merely as an administrative mechanism for visa issuance. To address this, it is useful to return to our nomadic model and attribute concrete characteristics to the abstract notion of "non-movement" - specifically, its dual role as both a base (*homebase*) and a country of citizenship (*homeland*). Destination points lack this latter status, creating a fundamental asymmetry between how these two types of political entities perceive nomads: either as *citizens* or as *foreigners*. This distinction has substantial political consequences.

Homeland: Pushing State and Retaining State

Although populations - alongside territory - have traditionally been regarded by states as valuable assets, whose unregulated loss is generally seen as undesirable, history provides numerous examples in which the deliberate outflow of people has functioned as a demographic "pressure valve." Out-migration, in such cases, releases "steam," alleviating social and political tensions within the country of origin. Such processes may reduce unemployment, mitigate discontent, or externalize politically inconvenient groups. Thus, while modern states often publicly frame emigration as a challenge, it may simultaneously operate as a covert strategy for preserving internal stability[8]. Considering the earlier observation that, for a significant share of the digital nomad community, the *impossibility of non-movement* often outweighs the *desire to move*, one may infer that, for many Global North states, the departure of groups perceived as symbolic challengers to dominant social or political values is not a process that policymakers are necessarily inclined to restrict. Moreover, such "push" dynamics frequently unfold almost spontaneously, driven by structural features of the domestic economy and, at times, by internal political conditions. These dynamics require minimal direct state intervention while simultaneously reducing domestic protest potential by enabling dissenting or disillusioned groups to depart.

At the same time, states also possess **retention motives**, which sometimes give rise to hybrid strategies such as "push with retention" (e.g., the U.S. tax system, which subjects citizens to worldwide income taxation regardless of residence) or "push followed by return" (e.g., Peter the Great's decree sending nobles abroad for education, or contemporary Chinese *Thousand Talents* programs). Retention policies often carry an ethical dimension, framing departure as a failure to repay society for its prior investments or as an unfair breach of the social contract, which presumes that individuals owe certain obligations to their homeland and state.

The digital nomad's relationship to their state reflects this same ambivalence. On the one hand, distancing is common: nationality is downplayed, and the nomad

[8] RCIA (2025). Migrations and international security | Migracii i mezhdunarodnaya bezopasnost`: doklad № 101 / 2025 / [pod red. S.M. Gavrilovoj, I.A. Bocharova, A.P. Korzun, D.O. Rastegaeva]; Rossijskij sovet po mezhdunarodny`m delam (RSMD). Moskva: NP RSMD, 2025. (In Rus.) URL: https://russiancouncil.ru/papers/RIAC-Migration-Security-Report101.pdf

foregrounds a cosmopolitan sense of self, treating the state not as a homeland but as a point of origin or a temporary base. Yet this distancing coexists with a continued dependency on the privileges associated with holding a strong passport, which remains fundamental for sustaining mobility.

Furthermore, research has identified cases in which digital nomad communities - despite living highly mobile and ostensibly individualistic lives - develop what might be termed **"tailor-made nationalism"** (Mendelovich, 2025). Here, Bauman's tension between freedom and belonging (Bauman, 2007) is mitigated through diasporic or ethnic structures organized as forms of "club culture," positioning themselves simultaneously against the state that imposes restrictions and against the less mobile segment of their compatriots who accept such constraints.

Homebase: Attracting State and Obstructing State

The relationship between host states and digital nomads is more complex than the technical design of special visa policies might suggest. Mancinelli and Molz (2023) employ the metaphor of **friction** to describe situations in which nomads "leverage state-imposed constraints into creative forms of 'border artistry' that allow them to achieve their lifestyle goals in the shadow of the state." At the same time, states themselves act as "border artists," crafting visa regimes that require mobile individuals to *organize themselves* around characteristics the state finds desirable - self-sufficiency, "consumer citizenship," and depoliticized mobility. In this sense, "mobility regimes emerge as the mutual interface between digital nomads' individual strategies to stay on the move and states' institutional strategies to codify and commodify their legal status" (Mancinelli & Molz, 2023).

Within this dynamic, the concept of **"liquid citizenship"** becomes relevant, operationalized through processes of commodification and confiscation: citizenship can be *purchased* ("economic citizenship"), but it can also be *revoked* - for example, "to prevent citizens from, or punish them for, engaging with "hostile" ideas or groups"[9]. Discourses of 'duty to the homeland' and prohibitions on multiple citizenships for current citizens may coexist with programs of 'citizenship by investment' aimed at prospective citizens.

States not only encourage nomads who have mastered the 'art of borders' *to integrate* into their institutional frameworks, but are also *pressured to respond to social tensions* arising from effects that may be less favorable for local populations. In countries experiencing significant inflows of digital nomads, such as Mexico[10], Spain[11], Thailand[12], and others, mass protests have already occurred against rising

[9] Herregraven, F. (2015). Liquid Citizenship.
URL: https://femkeherregraven.net/liquidcitizenship/
[10] New York Post (2025). Mexico City plans to tackle gentrification after protests.
URL: https://nypost.com/2025/07/19/world-news/mexico-city-plans-to-tackle-gentrification-after-protests-against-mass-tourism/
[11] The Guardian (2023). Barcelona residents protest against 'digital nomads' and gentrification.
URL: https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2023/nov/15/barcelona-residents-protest-digital-nomads-gentrification

living costs, displacement from residential neighborhoods, destruction of cultural heritage due to tourism, and infrastructure developments designed to accommodate newcomers. Digital nomads are often indirectly blamed in these conflicts, seen as symbols of globalization and economic pressure on local populations.

Traditional security discourses also justify obstructing the entry of digital nomads, framing them as potentially "harmful" or "alien" elements. Although such concerns are usually unfounded, the historical embeddedness of the discourse of "protection from migration" remains significant (Dizikes, 2010). Moreover, digital nomads do occasionally participate - symbolically or actively - in local protests when their interests or ideological positions align with local movements.

Interactions between States

States not only compete for digital nomad flows by offering increasingly permissive visa policies, but also cooperate in forms of restriction. For example, intergovernmental agreements on the avoidance of double taxation simultaneously ensure that no individual can avoid taxation altogether.

Finally, with regard to the formation of nomad hubs, these locations are becoming increasingly "overlaid with infrastructure," particularly through intermediary agencies that facilitate newcomers' adaptation, as well as through influencer-driven businesses that "sell" the idea of the nomadic lifestyle. In some cases, even satirical reinterpretations of traditional nomadism emerge, such as agencies organizing group travel for "nomads." These narratives share a common thread: the processes through which the ostensibly emancipatory essence of the nomadic individual becomes intertwined with a complex web of institutional influence and commodification.

Micro-level narratives

Micro-level experiences largely reproduce the same tension between prescribed and actual motivations. The exploration of selfhood coexists with attempts to escape the corporate world; declared opposition to dominant values runs parallel to an embrace of neoliberal discourses of the self - an individual to whom no one owes anything.

At the same time, the literature shows that some nomads maintain a degree of agency within their interactions with surrounding structures. Indirect evidence of a desire to act in the spirit of the "authentic nomad" is provided by the comparatively small number of special visas actually obtained - typically no more than several tens of thousands in the most popular destinations, and only a few hundred or thousand in less frequented states - compared with estimates of **18 million American digital nomads alone**. While this may partly reflect the fact that relatively few nomads meet stringent visa requirements, it also suggests that the practice of *"slipping out of the embrace"* has not disappeared, and that nomadic values continue to serve as a potential foundation for future political solidarity.

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[12] Bangkok Post (2024). Expats and digital nomads face protest backlash in Chiang Mai. URL: https://www.bangkokpost.com/thailand/general/2123456/expats-digital-nomads-face-protest-backlash-in-chiang-mai

(Non-)Nomadic Values and Political Projects

It is important to note that discussions of digital nomad values often rely on self-declarations or values implicitly attributed by researchers. None of the established theoretical frameworks typically applied in comparative value studies (e.g., Hofstede, Schwartz, Inglehart) have been fully applied to digital nomadism in the literature we reviewed. When these frameworks are invoked, researchers tend to examine correlations between national-level values and the number of remote workers (e.g., an inverse relationship with Hofstede's *power distance* and a direct relationship with *indulgence versus restraint*) (Beno, 2021), or they simply attribute to nomads the "average values" associated with Global North countries, such as high *individualism* (Mäkinen, 2024).

The contradictory nature of empirical observations regarding what is usually treated as a single digital nomad community calls for distinguishing **terminal** and **instrumental** values - ends versus means (Rokeach, 1973). Given that "the motivations of digital nomads can be understood as engaging three intersecting forms of freedom: professional, spatial, and personal" (Dreher & Triandafyllidou, 2025), the concept *Moveo ergo sum*, introduced earlier as the core internal value structuring nomadism, may also be understood as an **instrumental** value in the pursuit of one or more of these freedoms.

Moreover, for many mobile individuals in the globalized world, freedom - at least in some of its aspects - may not be an end in itself but a means. As G. Diligenski observes, "demands for freedom and equality stem from the need for individual autonomy," and political freedom or democracy may function primarily as instrumental conditions - a backdrop enabling individuals to "discover and assert individuality outside the socio-political sphere (in business, intellectual or cultural creativity, and in choosing one's occupation and location)" (Diligenskij, 2007: 79). While this interpretation is debatable, it is difficult to contest that many mobile individuals reject not institutionalization *per se*, but particular, unsatisfactory forms of institutionalization. Alongside the previously mentioned example of "networked nationalism," one might consider how vanlifers or RVers organize their everyday lives, sometimes replicating state structures and introducing administrative elements of the very order they ostensibly reject (street nameplates, fees for parking spaces, etc.) (Forget, 2023).

Thus, we must recognize that for many contemporary nomads, the central conflict lies **between freedom and belonging**, and this tension cannot be resolved simply by proclaiming the absence of belonging. In Madison's concept of "existential migration," *home* is not a place but an interaction in which "the sense of home" can potentially emerge anywhere and at any time (Madison, 2006). However, the transition from "nothing is home / home is nowhere" to "everything is home / home is everywhere" is not attainable for everyone. Those who "move to stay" (and who are not nomads in the Deleuze and Guattari sense (Deleuze & Guattari, 2010)) require belonging no less than freedom. For them, the "desire to move" is instrumental to fulfilling the "desire not to move."

This raises a crucial question: **Can existing states offer political programs that accommodate both the internal heterogeneity of nomad-like groups and the nuanced balance between freedom and belonging that each group exhibits?** Are

there political forces willing - and able - to reshape the social contract accordingly? And is such a transformation possible at all?

Reflecting on what such principles might look like, K. Webb argues for a **"division of sovereignty"** into spheres that *can* be detached from territory and those that cannot. In practical terms, this could mean, for example, that territorial taxation of digital nomads would apply only to public goods that require physical presence to be consumed, while social insurance would be decoupled from territoriality and become *portable* across borders through reciprocal systems not bound to any single state (Webb, 2024: 310).

Nevertheless, in practice, nation-states - rather than following the "conventional idea of quid pro quo, where citizens pay taxes and pledge allegiance in exchange for protection and welfare" - continue to pursue strategies aimed at **capturing** depoliticized, high-spending long-term residents and talented professionals. These individuals are attracted primarily through lifestyle conveniences rather than through social support programs (Mancinelli & Molz, 2023). In theory, digital nomads - positioned at the vanguard of global mobility - could play a catalytic role in reimagining citizenship for society as a whole, including its immobile majority. Such a model would avoid both "the jealous reassertion of the [old paradigm of] social citizenship" and its dissolution into "an abandonment of solidarity altogether by bubbles of privilege" (Webb, 2024: 311).

However, at present, neither the political left nor the political right is willing to advance such a project. The left, heavily reliant on state power to secure democratic equality, finds the idea of a "division of sovereignty" unappealing - particularly since equality within borders is often achieved "at the expense of the world's neediest outside those borders, despite cosmopolitan pretensions on other fronts." The right, meanwhile, may champion society against the state on questions of domestic freedom, yet simultaneously promotes nationalized discourses of belonging that exclude those beyond the border (Webb, 2024: 311). As Webb notes, there is some truth to the quip that "the Anglosphere [is] selling out society in the marketplace, and bureaucrats from Brussels to Beijing" leave no room "for society outside state control." For this reason, if any hope exists, it may lie in the **Global South**, which tends to be more community-oriented and less rigidly attached to the sanctity of national borders (Webb, 2024).

If such political programs have not yet matured within states themselves, could they emerge **outside** state boundaries? In a certain sense, they already have. An anecdotal yet illustrative example is the recent statement submitted to the United Nations by a small community known as **DoNonDo**, proposing the creation of a **"State Without a State"** - a multi-territorial, transnational social formation combining elements of a Network State and Decentralized Autonomous Organizations (DAOs)[13]. The organization identifies itself as 'a multi-territorial union of people, machines, robots, AI, and other forms of life into a single community with the purpose of declaring sovereignty and quantum neutrality'[14].

[13] United Nations Notification of State Without a State Formation.
URL: https://social.donondo.com/post/72

[14] State Without a State URL: https://www.statewithoutastate.com/about/

At the same time, a far larger community has formed around the idea and project of the *network state*, which possesses significant economic, intellectual, and even political resources. As envisioned by its initiator, American entrepreneur Balaji Srinivasan, The Network State - built on blockchain technologies - is 'a highly aligned online community with a capacity for collective action that crowdfunds territory around the world and eventually gains diplomatic recognition from pre-existing states' (Srinivasan, 2022).

Despite the seeming utopianism of the idea of recognizing a *non-territorial* formation within the existing concept of sovereignty, the project is often described as a serious *challenge to the nation-state*, as it involves privatizing most of its traditional functions. Moreover, as is claimed, the 'Network State Movement' has already seen tangible success in creating territories where the economic sovereignty of the state is at least partially limited[15]. S. Zizek believes that the real aim and likely outcome of such projects is the replacement of democracy with a form of *techno-monarchy*[16]. L. Ropke calls it *techno-colonialism*[17], and G. Duran suggests that within these frameworks, 'free cities', removed from state regulation, would fall entirely under the control of their corporate owners[18]. Some even argue that we are witnessing the formation of a *'global autocratic alliance'*, where techno-capitalists, either inadvertently or consciously, collaborate with traditional autocracies in nation-states to coordinate an attack on democratic liberalism[19].

If these assessments are accurate, then digital nomads - as the target audience of such competing models - find themselves confronted with a choice between the undeniable control of the **"Empire of Equality"** and the equally pervasive control of the **"Corporation of Freedom."** Yet within the latter scenario, the nomadic *"warrior's path"* and the possibility of political agency remain theoretically accessible. A. Neklessa, drawing on examples such as Musk, Thiel, and other proponents of ideas aligned with *The Network State*, introduces the term **manterpriser** to describe a self-sovereign, corporate individual who embodies resistance to impersonal, bureaucratic institutions (Neklessa, 2018: 84).

At the same time, a **"third path"** is emerging - one that rejects both alternatives and positions *both* as adversaries. For instance, the **Logos** movement, co-founded by J. Hope (co-author of the manifesto *Goodbye, Westphalia…* (Hope & Ludlow, 2025)), declares:

"We are part of a generation sick of big banks, big government, and Big Tech. We are taking power back into our own hands. Our mission is to restore subjectivity, trust,

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[15] Troy, D. (2025). Decoding the "Network State". URL: https://america2.news/decoding-the-network-state/

[16] Zizek, S. Network States? No Thanks! URL: https://slavoj.substack.com/p/network-states-no-thanks

[17] Worst New Trend of 2024: Techno-Colonialism and the Network State Movement. URL: https://gizmodo.com/worst-new-trend-of-2024-techno-colonialism-and-the-network-state-movement-2000525617

[18] Startup City' Groups Say They're Meeting Trump Officials to Push for Deregulated 'Freedom Cities'. URL: https://www.wired.com/story/startup-cities-donald-trump-legislation/

[19] Troy, D. (2025). Decoding the "Network State". URL: https://america2.news/decoding-the-network-state/

and civil power through the provision of tools … [that enable] people to explore and innovatively use decentralized technologies."[20] A movement infused with the spirit of *cyberpunk* and *hacktivism*, emphasizing its *non-elitist* nature, declares its goal to create *'parallel institutions'* and self-governing digital communities based on politically neutral means of ensuring privacy, autonomy, and secure communication, *free from centralized control.*[21]

Conclusion

Agreeing with the position that the figure of the 'authentic nomad' may, under certain conditions, prove to be little more than a superficial trope (Engebrigtsen, 2017:51), we nonetheless do not consider it a non-existent abstraction in the real world. Rather, the issue lies in the fact that in the practice of cross-border mobility, and consequently in the lenses of digital nomadism researchers, *it is less often the 'authentic nomad' that is observed, but other, semi- or non-nomadic groups*. As a result, the 'suspected' digital nomads more frequently follow not an 'uprising' in their individual strategies, but passive adaptation to old forms, and in collective terms - sometimes uncreative borrowing and reproduction of these forms. In this sense, *neither individually nor collectively can digital nomads 'jump over' the structural frameworks of the current world order*, engaging with it opportunistically and exploiting the structural inequalities to their advantage.

The vector of potential and already observable changes in the world order does not substantially broaden the 'actor potential', as the alternatives that are emerging still align with existing power structures, particularly in terms of 'control and accountability'. For now, *'takeover' and 'integration' dominate over 'merging' and 'interaction'* in the ideology of state policies for nomads. This same view of their 'insufficient agency' to negotiate on equal terms is likely also interpreted by the nomadic community as something hidden behind the welcoming gestures in the programs of some new *networked actors*. In other words, although nomads possess *some degree of agency* (and here P. Hanna is absolutely right in asserting that the act of migration itself is always political[22]), especially when creatively utilizing the gaps in mobility restriction regimes, *no political models* fully aligned with the interests of any of the defined groups have yet been developed.

More than a century ago, the poet and thinker Vaja-Pshavela published an essay titled *Cosmopolitanism and Patriotism*, in which he persuasively argued that there is no inherent contradiction between these two concepts. While he considered the independent development of nations as a prerequisite for the advancement of humanity as a whole, he nonetheless emphasized a conception of true cosmopolitanism - not as a denial of belonging or love for one's own nation, but as a complex ethical program that fosters solidarity while respecting national identity. He wrote (Pshavela, 1964: 252-254):

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[20] Pioneering a new era of freedom. URL: https://logos.co/

[21] Logos: A Declaration of Independence in Cyberspace. URL: https://logos.co/manifesto

[22] Khanna P. Digital Nomadism Is a New Form of Activism.
URL: https://medium.com/@PlumiaCountry/digital-nomadism-is-a-new-form-of-activism-parag-khanna-dcf65cf6846b

"Listen to the needs of your country, heed the wisdom of your people, dedicate yourself to their wellbeing, don't hate other nations and don't envy their happiness, don't prevent other nations from achieving their goals. Work towards the day when no one will subjugate your nation and work for its progress until it equals the leading nations of the world".

In this understanding - which acknowledges both the impossibility of *"truly loving ten thousand places simultaneously"* and the rational necessity, for the sake of one's own progress, to *"love humanity as a whole"* - cosmopolitanism could serve as an ideological alternative to both excessive **"protective" nationalism** and all-encompassing **"dissolving" universalism**. Such a framework would likely appeal to the majority of **"semi-nomadic"** participants in migration processes, who, of course, bear little resemblance to the media's flattened, stereotypical figure of a *person without attachment to home*. However, today these individuals have little chance of realizing representation through an existing political party - without such a vehicle, their interests will only be represented if they succeed in creating one themselves.

The small number of **"true nomads,"** on the other hand, are likely less troubled by the absence of political representation. Historically, the desire "to classify and typologize nomads was closely linked with attempts to *"capture"* certain groups of people and bring them under symbolic and material control by the state" (Howarth et al., 2024: 19). Not without irony, we may identify yet another potential manifestation of nomadic subjectivity: the ability **not to be counted or studied**. Against this backdrop, aligning with the previously mentioned alternative of cyberpunk might represent a reasonable political choice for that portion of the nomadic community that does not view its *desire to move* as a temporary transitional phase toward achieving the *desire and ability not to move*.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no ethical issues or conflicts of interest in this research.

Ethical Standards

The authors affirm this research did not involve human subjects.