

Polish Digital Nomads

Marcin Majewski

Wroclaw University of Economics and Business

e-mail: marcin.majewski@ue.wroc.pl

ORCID: 0000-0003-3116-9020

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Abstract: Digital nomadism reflects the new trend among young people who work remotely so they can follow their passions and travel. The main research goal was to find out the determinant of the choice of such a lifestyle by Poles. The subject of the research were digital nomads of Polish descent. The method of literature analysis and in-depth interviews on a sample of 40 respondents was used. The study showed that Polish digital nomads do not identify with a larger community as they face misunderstanding and distrust the help of those they meet during their travels. A typical digital nomad works in the IT, marketing or education industry, is a young person looking for adventure while travelling, and not paying much attention to housing conditions. Characteristic features are also minimalism and a reluctance to start a family. The main determinants of the choice of a nomadic lifestyle include, first of all, the dissatisfaction with the living conditions in Poland, and the willingness to change.

Keywords: tourism, remote work, digital nomadism, coworking.

1. Introduction

Consumerism, which had its peak in the mid-20th century in the United States, set the stage for households. At the time, consumerism emphasised the benefits of capitalism in raising society's living standards. This entailed building a career to increase the level of household wealth. From the sociological point of view, however, the state of possession does not always reflect the usefulness for an individual, but builds its identity in society as a response to the pressure of the crowd (Kennedy and Krogman, 2008). In modern times, the value system has undergone significant changes since the height of consumerism, resulting in noticeable shifts in the balance between work and personal life. The digitalisation of the economy has made it possible to transfer many professions to virtual space, which has significantly affected the organization of work.

These changes have enabled the emergence of a phenomenon known as digital nomadism. The aim of this article was to create a digital profile of a nomad of Polish origin. The following research questions were asked:

1. What are the characteristics of a digital nomad according to the literature?
2. What are the main contributors to the rise of digital nomadism among Poles?
3. What are the needs of digital nomads in relation to “The Third Place” theory?
4. How do Polish digital nomads see themselves in relation to the global community?

Two approaches were employed to conduct the research: literature analysis and in-depth interviews.

2. The Concept of Digital Nomadism

The concept of ‘work on the go’ related to social mobility has been present in the literature since the 1980s. The increase in the importance of remote work has contributed to the growing importance of this concept. Previous research treated digital nomadism as a result of changing work culture, diversification of the travel division and social change. There is a noticeable division of the definition of digital nomadism into individuals focused on lifestyle and those focused solely on work.

2.1. A Definition of Digital Nomadism

The term ‘digital nomadism’ was first used in 1997 in the context of showing technological possibilities in everyday life. The authors foresaw the directions of technology development that will increase the mobility of society and remove obstacles related to location or time. According to the definition by Makimoto and Manners, digital nomadism is a lifestyle prevalent among mobile professionals who use new technologies to be able to work anywhere in the world (Makimoto and Manners, 1997). This is a definition that emphasises the use of information and communication technologies ubiquitous in modern life. New technologies are defined as instruments enabling more efficient use of resources, and are responsible for making work less of an effort. For digital nomads, the Internet is an essential tool, allowing them to view work as just a portion of their lives. They dedicate the majority of their time to exploring new locations, sharing experiences, and collaborating with others. It is a lifestyle open to other cultures and focused on constantly gaining new life experiences. The authors note that the frequent travels of these individuals today have the potential to turn into a regular lifestyle for the majority of society.

Digital nomads not only travel a lot, but also deliberately lead a lifestyle in which travel constitutes a permanent element. According to Wang, digital nomads are remote workers who choose to work independently of their location and live a life of perpetual travel. (Wang, 2018) It is not only a lifestyle, but also a way of organizing work. It is the ability to work using a mobile device connected to the network that allows one to work anywhere in the world and determines the existence of digital nomads.

The definition of digital nomadism can also be sourced from the State of Independence of America report, which highlights the existence of long-term digital nomads who engage in regular travel across multiple countries spanning various continents (State of Independence of America, 2018). Another type of digital nomads, are those who also travel, but for shorter periods, and such trips can be scientific or working vacations ranging from several weeks to several months. According to the authors of the report, all digital nomads have many things in common: they use the opportunity to work wherever the Internet is accessible, and are passionate about travelling and new adventures. This definition shows that remote work while travelling can be one of the processes taking place, but it is not a condition for classifying a given individual as a digital nomad.

Hannonen believes that digital nomads are a group of mobile professionals who work regardless of location (Hannonen, 2020). They work while travelling, which is either continuous or intermittent, and in this way create a new, mobile lifestyle. Most often, digital nomads are young people belonging to the Millennial or Z generation, and their main goal in life is to combine travel and exploring the world, with

their professional life. The author notes that the mere use of new technologies while traveling does not yet allow to define a given individual as a digital nomad. A digital nomad uses the technology necessary to work and does not interrupt work while travelling.

According to Müller's definition, digital nomads are social figures who combine work with a new version of private life (Müller, 2016). Professionally, they are most often entrepreneurs, freelancers independent of location. The author divides digital nomads into two groups:

- Flashpackers – individuals with only the necessary tools needed for work.
- Mobile workforce – who travel for their work.

Digital nomadism is a relatively new concept that has gained importance with the increasing use of remote work. This is possible thanks to innovations in Internet technologies that allow to stay connected to the workplace, even when being far away. Despite the existence of numerous definitions, the authors have identified several key characteristics that distinguish digital nomads, including:

- constantly being on the move and embodying high mobility,
- engaging in remote work conducted via digital platforms and computers,
- predominantly belonging to the younger age demographic,
- utilising tools and technologies that facilitate remote work,
- embracing a lifestyle centred around discovering new places and seeking adventure.

Digital nomadism is also accompanied by the concepts of neo-nomads and global nomads, defined as people from wealthy, industrialised countries who do not live permanently in a given location, but move around the global arena and live on the go. Typically, digital nomads tend to gravitate towards semi-peripheral locations that offer basic working conditions, while also prioritising climate conducive to pursuing their interests and passions. In addition to remote work, these people are looking for additional work locally in the wellness, entertainment or catering industry. According to Naz (2017), neo-nomads are described as a fresh wave of information technology professionals, entrepreneurs, and freelancers. Unfortunately, the definition proposed by Naz does not fully explain the differences between neo-nomads and digital nomads.

2.2. Terms Synonymous with Digital Nomadism

Digital nomadism has not been clearly defined so far, which means that this concept can be perceived in different ways. Jacobs and Gusseklo argued that the mobility of digital nomads cannot be effectively defined and categorised from a top-down approach, as only the individuals themselves have the authority to unequivocally claim membership in this group (Jacobs and Gussekloo, 2016). For this reason, it is important to analyse synonymous terms to distinguish digital nomads from other groups.

The first group is flashpackers. These individuals are technologically advanced tourists who typically travel with only a backpack. Jarvis and Peel (2010) described how these individuals utilise technology as a means of connectivity, using it to plan and arrange their trips as well as stay connected with social networks. Flashpackers are constantly online to share their videos, blogs and social media posts. Their physical mobility is linked to online connectivity. This category of a traveller is a combination of a digital nomad and a backpacker who travels only with a backpack. An important difference between the two is the fact of working on the go; digital nomads are constantly working, while flashpackers tend to travel, but they may also work occasionally, which makes them even more difficult to identify. In addition, their work may consist of blogging, and thus differs significantly from traditionally perceived work. The described type of travel is associated not only with the development of technology, but also with far-reaching demographic changes in society (Molz, Paris, 2013). Across the globe, there has been a noticeable trend in recent years towards individuals opting to start a family at an older age. As a result, 20 and 30-year-olds have more free time to travel, mostly on a low budget. In the literature, flashpackers are sometimes synonymous with digital nomads. According to Richards (2015),

flashpackers can be identified by their average annual travel duration of 62 days and an estimated total of four trips within a span of five years. Flashpacking is, therefore the closest concept to digital nomadism.

A broader category of individuals who could be linked to digital nomadism includes those who engage in remote work. Remote work, also known as working from home, virtual work, or distributed work, distinguishes this group. There is no clear definition of remote work (Athanasidou and Theriou, 2021). The prevailing assumption is that remote work constitutes a work arrangement within a conventional setting, where employees allocate a portion of their time away from the physical workplace, such as their homes, while relying on computer technology for communication. This definition shows that remote workers do not need to travel or be away from the office. Technology enables them to work from home, which is only an alternative to working in an office environment. Remote workers stay at home or only travel locally most of the time, pursuing a balance between family responsibilities and work, whilst digital nomads travel much further and take the concept of remote work to another level. They are not motivated to work remotely by the desire to perform household duties, but by spending their free time in search of adventure.

A group of people other than digital nomads are freelancers, who, however, are often digital nomads. These are working people, self-employed mostly by choice, who most often do not have a traditional job and are flexible in terms of location. According to Schad (2022), the personality traits of digital nomads can be described as entrepreneurial and oriented towards profit maximisation. However, an even more significant value for digital nomads is the pursuit of adventure. Freelancers stay in touch with their clients through online communication channels. They do not work in a specific time frame, which means that the line between their professional and private life is blurred. It is assumed that freelancers do not follow life on the go. Some freelancers may be digital nomads, but not all freelancers are digital nomads.

3. Who Are the Polish Digital Nomads?

Given the intricate nature of the digital nomadism concept and its relatively recent emergence, there have been no studies conducted so far that specifically explore the magnitude of this phenomenon. The lack of a uniform definition currently makes it impossible to classify individuals as digital nomads. Nonetheless, digital nomadism is an increasingly significant phenomenon that holds growing importance in society.

3.1. Research Methodology

The difficulties in studying the phenomenon of digital nomadism mean that the size of this population is unknown. As a supplementary research method alongside the literature review, individual in-depth interviews were conducted with persons who self-identify as digital nomads and whose lifestyles align with the key characteristics outlined by the authors of the definition.

The purpose of the interview was to answer the research questions. The study was not intended to examine the entire phenomenon, but only to show certain trends related to it. Qualitative research is primarily used to understand reality, not to measure it (Haberla, 2018). The interview was semi-structured, and conducted among 40 respondents who were carefully selected and voluntarily answered the questions. The respondents were asked 4 to 5 questions and metric questions; the duration of each interview was 40 to 90 minutes. Before the interview, each research participant received questions that were later asked during the interview. The fact that digital nomads often share reports from their own lives on blogs and in social media allowed for the initial qualification of the person for the interview. Only those permanently absent from their place of residence, who often travel and work remotely

were selected. The survey was conducted by telephone and in the form of a conversation via Microsoft Teams between December 2022 and January 2023.

3.2. Research Sample

The research group consisted of 40 people, 20 men and 20 women. The vast majority of the respondents (90%) were aged 19-26, i.e. belonging to the Z generation, only one person belonged to the Millennial generation (aged 35). None of the respondents had started a family yet.

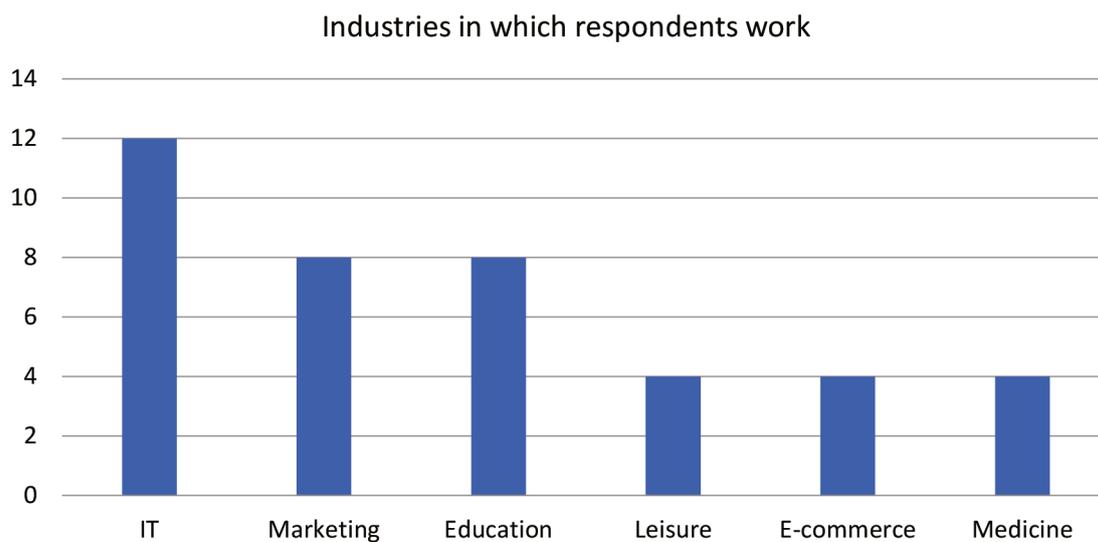


Fig. 1. Graph showing the industries in which respondents work

Source: own study.

Most of the respondents worked in the IT industry, but marketing and education were also important. It is worth emphasising that each of the listed professions can be performed remotely via a computer. Most of the respondents (85%) have a higher education, while the rest (15%) secondary education.

3.3. Definition of Belonging to Digital Nomads

The first question concerned belonging to digital nomads. The respondents were asked to list the characteristics that, in their opinion, define their belonging to the community of digital nomads. The most obvious features were listed, such as being constantly on the go, using new technologies and remote work related to it, and seeking adventure, some less obvious traits included solitude, financial independence, minimalism and freedom.

The respondents were also questioned about their sense of belonging to this global subculture, seeking to discern whether they viewed themselves as individual entities or part of a larger collective. Most of them (85%) believed that they are digital nomads because their characteristics fit the definition, and they also see themselves as such, but they do not feel connected to this community in any way. Two main reasons were listed: lack of trust in other people met during the trip and being misunderstood by others.

3.4. Determinants of the Development of Digital Nomadism among Poles

The second thematic block discussed in the interview concerned the determinants of the development of digital nomadism among Poles (Table 1). The category of determinants was not imposed on the respondents, which resulted in a large discrepancy in the answers. The theme of unsatisfactory working and living conditions in Poland became the leitmotif.

Table 1. Respondents' quotes about determinants

Determinant	Quote
Form of work	„I work on a computer, so it doesn't matter if I do it in Poland or in some more beautiful place”.
Cost of living	„Inflation has made living in Poland neither cheap nor pleasant. I'd rather live in a cheaper country. Living costs are lower in Asia.
Living conditions	„The purchase of my own apartment in Wroclaw remains unthinkable for me, and renting is becoming more and more expensive. For the price of (renting) a room in Wroclaw, I can rent a studio apartment in the Canary Islands.”
Life values	„I collect experiences, not items.”
Low risk	„I only really pay for the plane ticket; I can always go back to my parents.”
The pressure of friends	„I envied my friends' photos from the beach. I always went only to our sea (Baltic). Now I can boast photos from every continent.”
Climate	„November and December are no longer dark months for me. I change my place of residence so that I am in the weather I like at the moment.”
Working conditions	„I write a travel blog, so I have to travel to have something to write about and not lose advertising sponsors.”

Source: own study.

Digital nomads tend to showcase the positive aspects of their nomadic lifestyles on social media. However, insights gathered from the respondents indicate that negative factors played a significant role in influencing their decision to adopt such a lifestyle. They chose this lifestyle not only because they wanted to travel, but also to escape the high cost of living in Poland. This is also due to the desire to improve their standard of living. The respondents indicated that in their home country, they dislike the financial conditions and the environment, including the climate, which is why they decided to live in remote corners of the world.

3.5. The Needs of Digital Nomads in Relation to “The Third Place” Theory

Digital nomads are a relatively new group of people, so their needs have not yet been thoroughly explored. It is worth considering the changing needs of digital nomads caused by the development of modern technologies. Due to the lack of a permanent home, digital nomads find places on the go that replace the classic home. In sociology, the concept of home is closely connected to the idea of the primary location, which refers to the place where an individual resides with their household members. The 'second place' is the workplace, usually the space where the individual spends the most time away from home. The Covid-19 pandemic has meant that not only freelancers moved their place of work to their home: an important role in maintaining the balance between first and second place is played by the 'third places'. Oldenburg explained that it is in “third places” with a neutral character that people interact (Oldenburg, 1989). The examples include beer gardens, restaurants, post offices, busy streets, religious sites, and neighbourhood stores, etc.

In the case of digital nomads, identifying the first, second or third place is much more difficult, because they are constantly travelling and do not attach much importance to where they live. Nevertheless, human beings have needs that are intertwined with the desire for a sense of belonging to a place,

as well as the need for human interaction. This aspect is explored in *The Social Infrastructure of Co-spaces: Home, Work, and Sociable Places for Digital Nomads* (Lee et al., 2019). This study involved collecting information from internet forums. Using previous research, interview questions were formulated regarding the needs of Polish digital nomads.

The respondents were asked what places they perceived as related to home, work and places of social interaction. The questions were asked in a simplified way, so the respondents did not have to demonstrate knowledge of the theory.

Table 2. Classification of places according to Polish digital nomads

First place	Second place	Third place
Airbnb	Library	Pub
Overnight with friends	Shopping mall	Beach
Tent	Open Space	Disco
Motorhome	Waiting room	Forest
Booking	Plane	Mountain trail

Source: own study.

Table 2 shows the most popular responses from digital nomads regarding the classification of places. In the category of first places, digital nomads perceive only temporary places of residence, divided into short-term rentals such as Airbnb, Booking and temporary shelters such as a tent or motorhome. In the category of second places, i.e. those related to work, there are places intended for this, such as open space in the sense of a co-working place, but also means of transport, e.g. an airplane. Other locations included libraries, shopping malls, and even waiting rooms. According to the respondents, these are places that have access to the Internet, but do not always have appropriate ergonomics for work. However, of greater significance is the aspect of the availability of such locations and their accessibility to the general public. When considering third places, a distinct division can be observed between those traditionally associated with social integration, such as pubs or nightclubs, and those connected to natural environments. The respondents indicated that their daily life means using public transport and working in crowded places. As a place of integration and rest, they often chose beaches, forests and mountain trails.

In reference to the previous question, the respondents were also asked what requirements a given city or country must meet in order to decide to come to it. All of them indicated that the Internet infrastructure as the most important because without it is impossible to work. Financial aspects were also mentioned. One of the respondents stated that: "Both Vietnam and Japan have beautiful monuments and an interesting natural environment, but for a month of living in Japan you can live half a year in Vietnam, so there are more of us (digital nomads) there." The answers clearly show that digital nomads avoid countries that are known for their high cost of living. However, most of them did not want to elaborate on financial issues. Among the responses, the prevalent indication was that the climate of the chosen location would vary significantly from the temperate climate commonly found in Poland. The respondents completely omitted criteria such as safety, the level of environmental pollution or the quality of transport infrastructure.

The needs of digital nomads focused on the climate and the natural environment. Financial aspects are important, as the choice of country depends on the cost of living in individual places. Digital nomads adapt to the conditions and look for low-cost 'first places', which is why they often stay overnight in temporary shelters. 'Second places', or workspaces, can be found in means of transportation as well as any location with Internet access that provides seating arrangements.

4. Conclusions

Digital nomadism is a new phenomenon that has gained popularity since the start of the pandemic. This phenomenon has not yet been fully systematised in the literature on the subject. Due to the complexity of the behaviour and processes of the examined individuals and the lack of statistical data, it is not possible to fully illustrate it.

The literature highlights several characteristics commonly associated with digital nomads, including their young age, use of Internet technologies for remote work, and a strong inclination towards seeking adventure.

Digital nomads opt for this lifestyle due to various factors associated with their dissatisfaction with living conditions in Poland, which encompass the cold climate, high cost of living, natural surroundings, and a desire to explore diverse locations.

The research conducted so far has not distinguished the nationality of digital nomads – they are being treated as one global community. However, this study shows that Polish digital nomads usually do not identify themselves with a larger community. The cultural differences of digital nomads can be an important starting point for further research.

With regard to “The Third Place” theory, the needs of digital nomads were examined. Most of them indicated beaches, mountain trails and forests as a place of relaxation and social integration, with discos and pubs given equal importance.

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Polski nomadyzm cyfrowy

Streszczenie: Cyfrowy nomadyzm stanowi odzwierciedlenie nowego stylu życia młodych ludzi, którzy pracują zdalnie. Mogą więc nieustannie podążać za przygodą i rozwijać swoje pasje. Głównym celem badawczym jest poznanie determinant wyboru takiego stylu życia przez Polaków. Obiektem badań są cyfrowi nomadzi polskiego pochodzenia. Zastosowano metodę analizy literatury oraz wywiadu pogłębionego na próbie czterdziestu respondentów. Badanie wykazało, że polscy cyfrowi nomadzi nie utożsamiają się z większą społecznością, ponieważ spotykają się z niezrozumieniem i nie ufają osobom poznanym w trakcie podróży. Typowy cyfrowy nomad pracuje zdalnie w branży IT, marketingu lub edukacji. Jest osobą młodą, szukającą przygód w trakcie podróży, nieprzywiązującą większej wagi do warunków mieszkaniowych. Cechami charakterystycznymi są również minimalizm i niechęć do zakładania rodzin. Do głównych determinant wyboru koczowniczego trybu życia należy przede wszystkim nieusatysfakcjonowanie warunkami życia panującymi w Polsce oraz chęć dokonania zmian.

Słowa kluczowe: turystyka, praca zdalna, cyfrowy nomadyzm, coworking.
