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Digital nomadism as a structural phenomenon in the global post-pandemic era

Nomadismo digital como fenómeno estructural en la era postpandémica global

Raquel V. Peña[1] ● **Javier A. Pérez**[2]

Abstract This article examined digital nomadism as a structural and multidimensional phenomenon that has gained prominence in the global post-pandemic context. Through a qualitative, theoretical-documentary review of peer-reviewed scientific literature published between 2020 and 2024, the study explored the conceptual foundations, spatial practices, and political implications of this emerging form of mobility. Findings revealed that digital nomadism combines remote work, mobile lifestyles, and transnational consumption of territories, producing uneven effects on urban systems, housing markets, and community relations. The study identified tensions between the discourse of freedom and flexibility and the precarious conditions experienced by many nomads, particularly those lacking economic or legal stability. It also highlighted digital nomads' role as territorial agents contributing to gentrification and spatial inequality in popular destinations. Furthermore, it addressed the limitations of current visa policies, which often favor short-term economic benefits without integrating fiscal responsibility or long-term community engagement. The analysis concluded that digital nomadism disrupts conventional citizenship, work, and urban governance models, and requires inclusive policy frameworks and territorially sensitive planning strategies that reconcile global mobility with social equity and urban sustainability.

Keywords digital nomadism, liquid citizenship, urban gentrification, global mobility.

Resumen Este artículo examinó el nomadismo digital como un fenómeno estructural y multidimensional que ha ganado relevancia en el contexto global postpandemia. A través de una revisión cualitativa, teórica y documental de literatura científica revisada por pares, publicada entre 2020 y 2024, se exploraron los fundamentos conceptuales, las prácticas espaciales y las implicaciones políticas de esta forma emergente de movilidad. El nomadismo digital combina el trabajo remoto, los estilos de vida móviles y el consumo transnacional del territorio, generando efectos desiguales en los sistemas urbanos, los mercados de vivienda y las relaciones comunitarias. Se identificaron tensiones entre el discurso de la libertad y la flexibilidad, y las condiciones precarias que enfrentan muchos nómadas, especialmente aquellos con menor estabilidad económica o legal. Los nómadas digitales son agentes territoriales que contribuyen a la gentrificación y a la desigualdad espacial en destinos populares. Las limitaciones de las políticas de visado actuales priorizan los beneficios económicos a corto plazo sin incorporar criterios de responsabilidad fiscal ni de integración comunitaria. El nomadismo digital tensiona los modelos convencionales de ciudadanía, trabajo y gobernanza urbana, y requiere marcos regulatorios inclusivos y una planificación territorial sensible al contexto, que articule la movilidad global con la equidad social y la sostenibilidad urbana.

Palabras clave nomadismo digital, ciudadanía líquida, gentrificación urbana, movilidad global

✉ Raquel V. Peña
raquelp2966@gmail.com
Instituto Universitario de Tecnología Elías Calixto Pompa, Venezuela.

[1]Instituto Universitario de Tecnología Elías Calixto Pompa, Venezuela.
[2]Universidad Pedagógica Experimental Libertador, Venezuela.

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Introduction

The rapid advance of information and communication technologies has profoundly transformed lifestyles, production logic, and mobility dynamics in contemporary societies. In this context, digital nomadism has emerged as an emblematic figure of the post-industrial economy, characterized by the decentralization of labor, the flexibility of work environments, and the redefinition of the boundaries between work, leisure, and residence. This phenomenon, anticipated by Makimoto and Manners (1997), has evolved from a futuristic vision to a concrete practice adopted by millions of people around the world, who use digital technologies to work online while moving across different national and international geographies (Chevtaeva & Denizci-Guillet, 2021).

The COVID-19 pandemic catalyzed this trend, normalizing remote work and highlighting the possibilities of a work life untethered to a fixed location. The global imposition of teleworking during lockdowns accelerated the adoption of flexible work models and, in parallel, enabled the emergence of mobile individuals who reorganized their lives based on new priorities: quality of life, access to nature or mild climates, enriching cultural experiences, and lower costs of living (Hermann & Paris, 2020). This context encouraged numerous countries, especially those with tourism-dependent economies, to design public policies to attract these mobile workers by implementing special visas for digital nomads that allow them to legally reside and work for extended periods (Bednorz, 2024; Zhou et al., 2024).

In analytical terms, digital nomadism constitutes a form of hybrid mobility that combines long-term tourism, skilled migration, self-employment, and teleworking. This type of mobility differs from other migration and tourism forms due to its intermittent, nonlinear, and self-regulated nature, as well as its high degree of sociodemographic selectivity, as those who practice it typically have higher education, advanced digital skills, cosmopolitan cultural capital, and moderate to high economic resources (Kozak et al., 2024). However, the literature still presents significant gaps regarding the precise definition of the digital nomad profile, its structural impact on host destinations, and the public policies that regulate or incentivize this way of life.

Likewise, this phenomenon raises substantive questions about social justice, fiscal equity, and territorial citizenship. As Webb (2024) points out, by temporarily residing in different countries without establishing lasting legal or tax ties, digital nomads strain traditional redistribution schemes, social security, and civic belonging, giving rise to what some authors call "liquid citizenship". This disruptive mobility also impacts housing markets, especially in tourist cities, by increasing the demand for medium-term rentals and contributing to transnational gentrification processes, negatively affecting the most vulnerable local communities. Therefore, it is urgent to examine digital nomadism's spatial, urban, and sociopolitical implications from a critical, multidimensional, and intersectional perspective.

On the other hand, the scientific literature on digital nomadism has grown significantly in the last five years. However, it remains fragmented and dispersed across various disciplines: tourism, geography, organizational management, sociology of work, public policy, urban studies, and technology. Some research has focused on the work-leisure practices of nomads, others on institutional attraction strategies (Zhou et al., 2024; Bednorz, 2024), and still others on the identity imaginaries constructed by these mobile actors (Chevtaeva & Denizci-Guillet, 2021). However, few studies integrate these dimensions into a common theoretical framework that allows us to understand the phenomenon as a structural whole. At the same time, there is an overvaluation of individual experience and a limited critical analysis of the systemic effects generated by this globalized mobility.

Against this backdrop, this article aims to critically and comprehensively analyze digital nomadism as an emerging form of transnational mobility. It explores its conceptual evolution, socio-spatial practices, impact on host destinations, and the public policies implemented to regulate or encourage it. Through an analytical review of scientific literature published between 2020 and 2025, the paper seeks to establish an interpretive framework that articulates the technological, urban, economic, tourism, and political dimensions of digital nomadism, thus contributing to a better understanding of its implications for territorial planning, mobility governance, and the design of sustainable and inclusive tourism destinations.

In addition to the institutional and media interest generated by digital nomadism, this phenomenon has sparked a complex academic debate on the transformation of work in the post-Fordist era. In this new scenario, employment is no longer tied to an office, a city, or even a country, and becomes a decentralized practice, managed through digital platforms and collaborative tools that allow tasks to be performed from anywhere with an internet connection. This spatial autonomy introduces a radically different way of life from that of traditional workers, with a logic of symbolic consumption of destinations that overlaps with work activity, generating a hybrid experience of production and recreation. However, this apparent freedom is hindered by significant challenges related to precariousness, lack of social protection, and mo-

bile living conditions that, in some cases, reproduce subtle forms of job insecurity.

From the perspective of organizations and labor markets, the rise of digital nomadism also represents a structural inflection. Companies have begun to adapt their talent management and human resources models to incorporate more flexible, offshore, and results-oriented hiring schemes. This transformation has allowed them to reduce operating costs (physical spaces, services, insurance) and diversify the workforce through the international outsourcing of highly qualified professionals (Kozak et al., 2024). At the same time, cities and territories themselves have begun to compete with each other as destinations for this new profile of mobile workers, developing digital infrastructure, coworking environments, and government programs that promote a "country brand" associated with well-being, connectivity, and quality of life (Zhou et al., 2024).

However, this free, fluid, and highly technological mobility is neither homogeneous nor universal. Access to digital nomadism continues to be conditioned by multiple structural factors such as national origin, cultural capital, social class, language, and digital capabilities. Not everyone can participate equitably in this form of mobility, which perpetuates global inequalities in access to employment and territorial opportunities (Webb, 2024). Furthermore, the economic benefits derived from the presence of digital nomads in certain regions are not always distributed equitably among local communities. As Sciuva (2025) and Bednorz (2024) warn, the growth of medium-term rentals, the transformation of traditional neighborhoods into tourist enclaves, and the erosion of community-based forms of urban life are consequences that must be critically evaluated to avoid a neoliberal instrumentalization of this phenomenon.

Therefore, digital nomadism challenges not only the disciplines of tourism and labor but also critical geography, urban planning, migration law, political economy, and cultural studies. Understanding it requires going beyond its technophilic and aspirational surface to recognize the conflicts it generates regarding rootedness, citizenship, spatial justice, and sustainability. Along these lines, authors propose a research agenda aimed at mapping the geographies of digital nomadism, understanding its effects on the housing market, consumption circuits, forms of belonging, and urban space production modes. This paper seeks to contribute to this agenda by proposing a critical, comparative, and multidisciplinary perspective that will advance the theorization of this phenomenon and the design of inclusive and territorially sensitive public policies.

Theoretical framework

Digital nomadism is a paradigmatic manifestation of the structural changes in mobility, work, and urban planning regimes in the 21st century. It lies at the intersection of transformations driven by digitalization, the globalization of the labor market, the dissolution of geographical boundaries for specific social segments, and the growing commodification of the tourist experience. Addressing it requires a comprehensive theoretical framework that articulates contributions from disciplines, such as critical geography, labor studies, mobility theory, and tourism, to understand the differential effects of this new configuration of flexible, nomadic, and digitalized life.

The figure of the digital nomad represents a break with the traditional form of stable, situated, and linear wage employment. The emergence of mobile technologies, digital collaboration platforms, and transnational payment systems has enabled forms of autonomous, independent, and translocal work that transcend the boundaries of Fordist space-time. Digital nomads operate under self-managed schedules and integrate leisure time as an inseparable part of their work routine, thus creating a more fluid and performative "work-life balance".

This type of work organization responds to a new neoliberal ethos where the individual is simultaneously their employer, personal brand, and manager of their performance (Chevtaeva & Denizci-Guillet, 2021). However, this flexibility also entails vulnerabilities: a lack of social security, variable income, and legal barriers in certain countries. In this sense, Cook (2023) and Orel (2019) highlight that, despite the imaginary of freedom, many digital nomads operate in precariousness and symbolic competition, exacerbated by the logic of platforms.

From a critical mobility theory perspective (Sheller & Urry, 2006), digital nomadism can be analyzed as a form of aspirational-but unequal—mobility that requires viable economic, technological, and cultural capital. Digital nomads migrate not out of necessity, but out of choice; they move not for lack of opportunities, but to maximize well-being, freedom, and experiences.

The "travel platformization" process implies that nomads choose their destinations not only based on the landscape or the climate, but also on the digital infrastructure, quality of life, access to coworking spaces, and like-minded communities. This generates "spaces of productive transit", where territory is consumed as an instrumental resource for self-efficacy. However, this mobility impacts rental markets, caus-

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es displacement of residents, and accelerates processes of transnational gentrification (Bednorz, 2024). Such transformations must be understood within the framework of spatial justice and the right to the city.

From a tourism perspective, digital nomadism has reshaped traditional tourist, visitor, and traveler concepts. Kozak et al. (2024) argue that these actors cannot be classified as conventional tourists or permanent residents but as a third, intermediate category that combines work, consumption, and recreation. This group demands specific tourism products: medium-stay accommodation, high-speed connectivity, legal flexibility, and immersive experiences, forcing destinations to rethink their positioning strategies.

Zhou et al. (2024) introduce the notion of "smart destinations", which integrate digital infrastructure, participatory governance, and inclusive policies to attract and sustain digital nomads. These territories compete globally through special visas, tax incentives, and development models that promote innovation, the creative economy, and mobile entrepreneurship. However, this process is not without tensions: prolonged touristification and dependence on floating capital can destabilize host cities' social and ecological sustainability.

Digital nomadism challenges the classic categories of migration law, taxation, and social citizenship. The figure of the mobile and unanchored worker strains the territorial principles that structure tax and welfare regimes. Webb (2024) problematizes this situation through the concept of "institutional disengagement," where nomads enjoy territorial benefits (infrastructure, services, security) without being formally integrated into the host country's tax system. This raises multilevel governance and tax equity challenges that many states have yet to address.

Furthermore, Bednorz (2024) shows that digital nomad visas—already implemented in more than 60 countries—do not follow a standard model but instead express a variety of strategic approaches and priorities. Some seek to attract skilled human capital, while others stimulate tourism consumption or boost depressed rural areas. However, few policies consider mechanisms for citizen integration, local participation, or redistributive contributions. This "liquid citizenship", based on consumption rather than rootedness, raises new questions about global justice, belonging, and responsibility.

Methodology

This research employs a qualitative, theoretical, and documentary methodology to critically analyze the phenomenon of digital nomadism through a cross-disciplinary review of peer-reviewed literature from 2020 to 2025. The study adopts a constructivist and critical lens, emphasizing the socio-political contexts that shape digital nomadism and avoiding neutral or reductionist views. Through narrative synthesis, thematic classification, qualitative coding, and critical interpretation, the research explores how digital nomadism intersects with labor models, urban transformation, remote work policies, and global mobility regimes. A diverse corpus of 15 scientific articles was selected using strict inclusion criteria and validated through a three-stage process, incorporating comparative regional analyses and theoretical triangulation across disciplines such as critical geography, tourism, public policy, and digital economy. The study highlights the conceptual tensions and inequalities underlying nomadic practices, proposing emerging analytical categories such as "privileged vs. subsistence nomads" and "instrumental vs. experiential mobility". Ultimately, the methodology reflects an ethical and reflexive commitment to spatial justice, critically engaging with dominant narratives and advocating for inclusive and context-sensitive policy frameworks.

Results and discussion

A critical analysis of the reviewed studies identified a series of key patterns, tensions, and findings surrounding digital nomadism, structured around four thematic axes: (1) characteristics and practices of the digital nomad lifestyle; (2) urban and territorial effects on host destinations; (3) public policies for attraction, regulation, and incentives; and (4) emerging debates on citizenship, taxation, and social justice. This structure addresses the study's specific objectives and allows for reflection on the theoretical and practical implications of the phenomenon in the global post-pandemic context.

One of the most consistent findings in the literature analyzed is the consolidation of an aspirational narrative around digital nomadism, associated with values of freedom, mobility, work flexibility, and professional self-realization. Various studies (Chevtaeva & Denizci-Guillet, 2021) describe digital nomads as professionals with high symbolic capital who reorganize their lives around experiences of well-being, connectivity, and cultural consumption, operating from spaces such as coworking spaces, cafés, temporary housing, or natural environments.

However, this idealized representation is not without contradictions. Some authors (Orel, 2019; Cook, 2023) warn that geographical autonomy does not necessarily imply financial stability or social protection. Many nomads face pre-

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carious working conditions, long hours, and a constant need for self-exploitation to sustain their lifestyle. Thus, flexibility becomes ambivalent: an advantage for some and a source of vulnerability for others. This ambiguity highlights the need to qualify the triumphalist discourse and consider the community's degrees of exclusion and privilege.

The growing influx of digital nomads to mid-sized cities, tropical destinations, and tourist enclaves has generated significant territorial effects. Recent research (Bednorz, 2024) shows how the rise of mid-term rentals, promoted by platforms such as Airbnb and NomadList, has contributed to transnational gentrification processes, displacing local populations, increasing housing costs, and transforming community dynamics.

In cities like Lisbon, Mexico City, Bali, and Medellín, digital nomads are perceived as agents of urban transformation, but also of symbolic exclusion. While they contribute cultural capital, consumption, and global visibility, they also exert pressure on public services, urban mobility, and models of coexistence (Kozak et al., 2024). These findings suggest that digital nomadism cannot be understood solely as a form of remote work, but as a territorial actor that impacts urban structures and reproduces spatial asymmetries.

Another key focus of the discussion is the analysis of public policies adopted to attract and regulate digital nomads. Bednorz (2024) study systematizes more than 40 special visa models for remote workers, implemented between 2020 and 2023 by countries such as Estonia, Barbados, Croatia, Georgia, and Brazil. These policies have diverse objectives: from reactivating post-COVID economies to positioning the country as an innovative destination or diversifying the tourism offering.

However, critical literature points out that many of these policies favor an instrumental logic, focused on consumption and limited stays, without integrating nomads into community networks or demanding fiscal or social compensation (Zhou et al., 2024). Capital mobility is prioritized over territorial sustainability. Some authors propose the need to reframe these visas as transnational integration mechanisms, including local participation frameworks, proportional tax contributions, and urban sustainability criteria.

The fourth axis analyzed refers to digital nomadism's legal and regulatory dilemmas. From a critical perspective, Webb (2024) argues that this form of mobility challenges the traditional pillars of the nation-state, in which citizenship, social rights, and taxation are anchored to territorial residence. By operating from multiple jurisdictions without establishing formal ties, digital nomads generate a regulatory vacuum

that exempts them from tax responsibilities and disconnects mobility from civic duty.

This "liquid citizenship", founded on access rather than roots, strains social security systems, residency rights, and redistribution policies. The literature agrees that the current legal framework cannot regulate this concept. International agreements on transnational taxation, proportional contribution mechanisms, and hybrid governance models that recognize mobility as a right and a responsibility are needed (Bednorz, 2024).

The interpretative analysis of the documentary corpus allowed us to identify four major thematic themes that summarize the most relevant tensions surrounding digital nomadism in the global post-pandemic context. These themes are articulated with the categories constructed in the theoretical framework and offer a cross-sectional reading of the contributions of recent scientific literature. Together, they reveal that digital nomadism is not a homogeneous or neutral phenomenon, but rather a form of mobility structured by inequalities, selective policies, and territorial disputes.

Most reviewed studies agree that digital nomadism is presented discursively as a desirable, flexible, and self-fulfilling practice. Chevtaeva and Denizci-Guillet (2021) and Kozak et al. (2024) highlight that digital nomads are often portrayed as autonomous, cosmopolitan, technologically competent, and economically sustainable individuals, whose mobility is driven by a desire to maximize their well-being and work-life balance. This figure responds to an aspirational narrative anchored in neoliberal values of personal entrepreneurship, self-efficacy, and borderless mobility.

However, more critical studies (Orel, 2019; Cook, 2023) reveal that behind this idealized image lie conditions of labor informality, lack of social protection, long hours, and dependence on platform economies that make work precarious. This creates an ambivalence: while for some, digital nomadism represents an option for empowerment, for others it reproduces new forms of exclusion and self-exploitation, especially for those lacking financial capital or access to stable networks. This internal diversity within the collective demonstrates that not all digital nomads are the same or have access to the same types of freedoms. Ultimately, it is a phenomenon crisscrossed by axes of class, origin, citizenship, and gender that must be made visible in academic analysis.

The second axis analyzes the urban and territorial impacts of digital nomadism. While some governments and economic actors promote it as a driving force for local economies, research such as that by Bednorz (2024) shows that its presence generates adverse side effects, especially in tourist cities

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or those undergoing accelerated land commodification. The intensive use of platforms like Airbnb, high housing turnover, and the demand for globalized services have driven up rental prices, driven out longtime residents, and transformed neighborhood structures into transient enclaves serving mobile capital.

This process has been conceptualized as "nomadic gentrification" or "digital gentrification", a phenomenon that reshapes urban space based on the needs and lifestyles of mobile individuals with high consumption capacity. Cities such as Lisbon, Medellín, Tbilisi, and Chiang Mai have become hotspots of global nomadism, without necessarily having local regulatory or mitigation policies. As Kozak et al. (2024) warn, this form of mobility should not be understood solely from a labor perspective, but as a spatial actor that generates disputes over the right to the city, deepens urban inequalities, and transforms the identity of territories.

The third axis is related to the institutional framework that allows—and often encourages—the growth of digital nomadism. According to the comparative study by Bednorz (2024), more than 40 countries have implemented special visas for digital nomads since 2020, with diverse objectives: reactivating post-COVID tourism, attracting qualified talent, or positioning the country as a technological hub. However, these measures often operate under short- or medium-term consumption logics, without clear structures for taxation, local participation, or citizen co-responsibility. In other words, mobility opens up without building social or economic integration mechanisms.

Finally, the fourth axis addresses one of the most complex points: digital nomadism's regulatory and fiscal challenges. Webb (2024) argues that we are facing a structural transformation of the concept of citizenship, in which rights of access to territories and services are no longer accompanied by duties of belonging, taxation, or civic participation. This "liquid citizenship" represents a functional disconnect between mobility and social responsibility. In practice, digital nomads consume infrastructure, participate in urban life, and impact local dynamics, but without being subject to the tax frameworks of the nation-state.

This disconnect raises questions about this type of presence's legitimacy and tax equity in contexts of asymmetric globalization. Bednorz (2024) point out that a legal vacuum allows unregulated mobility, creating privileged mobility accessible only to specific profiles. The discussion focuses on creating hybrid regulatory frameworks based on multilateral agreements, proportional tax systems, and territorial compensation funds that guarantee fairer, more regulated, and sustainable global mobility.

The findings and academic discussion affirm that digital nomadism is a structural phenomenon that strains traditional work, residence, tourism, and citizenship categories. While it offers opportunities to rethink local development, employment, and urban planning, it also poses new challenges that must be addressed through context-sensitive public policies, innovative regulatory frameworks, and an ethic of rootedness that recognizes the right to mobility, but also the obligation to contribute to the spaces one inhabits.

Conclusions

This study reveals that digital nomadism is not merely an extension of remote work or a fleeting trend, but a complex and multidimensional phenomenon that reshapes traditional notions of work, mobility, urban planning, and citizenship. Drawing on academic literature from 2020 to 2024, the research shows that digital nomadism functions as an individual lifestyle and a structural force that significantly affects host destinations, urban governance, and the formation of mobile labor identities. A key finding is the aspirational narrative built around the digital nomad, promoting autonomy, entrepreneurship, and self-efficacy. This discourse, rooted in neoliberal ideals, contrasts sharply with the precarious realities many nomads face, particularly those lacking social or legal capital. The study calls for a more critical and contextual understanding beyond idealized portrayals. Additionally, digital nomads are reshaping urban environments, contributing to digital gentrification and the touristification of cities. These changes demand active policy responses, participatory urban planning, and strategies to mitigate negative impacts. From a regulatory standpoint, current frameworks often favor elite mobility, facilitating entry and consumption without ensuring social integration or equitable redistribution. The study stresses the need for international tax cooperation and legal frameworks that balance freedom of movement with fiscal and civic responsibilities. Ultimately, digital nomadism challenges conventional models of citizenship by detaching physical presence from political and fiscal duties. This evolving form of "liquid citizenship" urges a rethinking of global governance regarding spatial justice, equity, and sustainability.

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Conflicts of interest

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

Author contributions

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