

## RESEARCH ARTICLE OPEN ACCESS

# Repositioning Work and Leisure: Digital Nomads Versus Tourists

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**Received:** 6 August 2023 | **Revised:** 6 May 2024 | **Accepted:** 9 July 2024

**Keywords:** digital nomadism | digital nomads | leisure travelers | mobility | remote working | work leisure nexus

## ABSTRACT

A growing yet fragmented debate addressing digital nomadism has recently emerged across different disciplines, including management, organizational behavior, and mobility studies. However, the intersection between digital nomadism and leisure and tourism activities remains blurred. Integrating existing theoretical assessments, this conceptual paper scrutinize digital nomadism from a tourism and leisure perspective, and attempts to provide a broader understanding of this phenomenon. The paper repositions digital nomads in the center of tourism and travel discourse by describing their key characteristics, mobility motives, destination selection process, and critical features, singling them out from conventional business/leisure tourists. This paper significantly contributes to an emerging stream of tourism research addressing digital nomadism as an emerging lifestyle market and provides timely practical implications for policymakers and industry practitioners.

## 1 | Introduction

With rapid advancements in technology, globalization, societal, political and economic shifts, and transformations in the business environment, the volume of remote work has expanded, and a new working-class has emerged (Arslan 2024). The recent pandemic has significantly accelerated this expansion, with 30% of all work staying remote even after the Pandemic in May 2022 (Sytsma 2022). These remote workers are often associated with people working from home (Chadee, Ren, and Tang 2021). As the distinction between life and work becomes less clear and the spatial definition of home changes, another divides between these remote workers appeared, referred to as digital nomads. Digital nomads work in places of leisure rather than dedicated fixed location (e.g., home office) (Chevtaeva et al. 2023). Utilizing their spatial freedom (Günay, Toksöz, and Aslan 2024) and the changing perceptions of work and leisure (Mancinelli and Germann Molz 2023), most digital nomads integrate leisure travel into their professional life. This has raised the need for new mobility procedures and hospitality services

tailored for digital nomads. As these lines are being written (mid of July 2023), around 66 countries now offering digital nomad visas (Marting 2023).

Parallel to developments in information and communication technologies (ICT), transportation systems, relaxation of mobility restrictions, and socioeconomic transformations, digital nomads increased exponentially, particularly among pre-COVID generation of knowledge workers. The lifestyle of digital nomadism has become particularly attractive among younger generations, aspiring to be global persons developing their cultural and social capital while enjoying professional, spatial, and temporal freedom. With the globalization of businesses and increasing focus on digitalization, the expectations of organizations from their actual and potential workforce have been subject to significant transformation (Parsons et al. 2023). Organizations becoming more focused on management by objectives have been increasingly renouncing their regular “9-to-5” work structure and transforming into flexible and fluid work methods regarding their workforce’s

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physical and temporal presence. Organizations outsource temporary jobs whenever possible so they can refrain from paying taxes, annual leave expenses, office space, health insurance, and social benefits. A significantly growing portion of these jobs is being outsourced to foreign markets, mainly digital jobs, to take advantage of lower costs. This replacement of domestic jobs with less expensive talent in another country is recognized as *digital offshoring*—the unprecedented growth in digital work since the pandemic is expected to make digital offshoring even more common. Most digital nomads work on project basis; making them more attractive to organizations, those avoid other legal requirements, such as taxation and social security. Businesses save valuable office space when they recruit remote workers, such as digital nomads. This trend, known as *digital offshoring*, is expected to grow into a global phenomenon (Sytsma 2022).

With the endless flexibility and mobility of individuals today, there is a great deal of liberty in terms of remote working not only at home but also while moving to a different country (Figure 1). Digital nomads are remote workers but also utilize contemporary offices (coworking spaces) and home offices (rental homes) in their host destination. They also exercise work in other places, including public libraries and coffee houses. These nomadic movements have become particularly popular for residents of regions where the cost of living is more expensive (e.g., global north), resulting in relocation to tourism regions offering a better quality of life for less. This removes a significant share of the financial burden on digital nomads. Over the past years, Thailand, Bali, the Philippines, and Indonesia have emerged as leading digital nomad destinations (Cook 2020).

Despite the growing market of digital nomadism (as evidenced by the increasing number of countries introducing digital nomad visas) (Bednorz 2024; Zhou et al. 2024), scholarly debate in this area remains in its infancy (Šímová 2023). Extant research addresses coworking spaces of digital nomads (Chevtaeva and Denizci-Guillet 2021), their lifestyles (Demaj, Hasimja, and Rahimi 2021), and their mobility (Mancinelli and Germann Molz 2023). Recently, a flourishing yet fragmented stream of tourism research has emerged addressing well-being of digital nomads (e.g., Von Zumbusch and Lalicic 2020), their work-life balance (e.g., Cook 2020), lifestyle (Chevtaeva and Denizci-Guillet 2021), destination selection process (Akgış İlhan et al. 2024; Günay, Toksöz, and Aslan 2024; Lacárcel, Huete, and Zerva 2024), characteristics of digital nomads' destinations

(Zhou et al. 2024), impacts on locals and visitor economies (Jiwasiddi et al. 2024), and government response to this growing market (Bednorz 2024).

However, these studies define digital nomads based on their perspectives and objectives, creating a fragmented structure. Moreover, except for the initial yet valuable attempt of Arslan's (2024) recent work, none of the previous studies have critically reviewed, in a comprehensive manner, push and pull factors of emergence of this lifestyle, digital nomads' leisure behavior, their characteristics, travel motivations, impacts at different levels, and position within the tourism system. Acknowledging this theoretical gap, the present paper explores digital nomads from a travel and tourism perspective with a holistic approach. Its main aim is to position digital nomads within tourism by addressing their motivations, destination selection processes, and impacts on individuals, tourism products, services, generating and host societies. The study reviews and integrates existing theoretical assessments around digital nomads while also providing insights into future transformations.

## 2 | Digital Nomads and Their Lifestyle

Digital nomadism is a lifestyle choice (Özgen Çiğdemli, Yayla, and Çiğdemli 2024) and a growing culture-sharing phenomenon with global social media and blogger networks (e.g., digital nomads world), jobs search engines and community events at different destinations. Work is a tool enabling digital nomads to travel rather than the primary motivation. Digital nomads prefer life experiences to material goods and finances. They perceive self-development as a holistic concept beyond work-related professional development (Reichenberger 2018) to include different experiences, places, and people. Travel creates such opportunities for self-development and learning. This makes digital nomadism a lifestyle rather than a particular type of work.

Hence, digital nomadism is referred as location-independent remote work (Cook 2020). However, digital nomads prefer international travel for self-development and financial reasons as discussed above. They use low-cost carriers and frequently travel with nonresident tourist visas across countries. Hence, they are usually from strong passport countries, which do not require a visa application effort, because they move frequently, they travel light which resemble backpackers. They engage in digital work and online platforms, requiring only portable

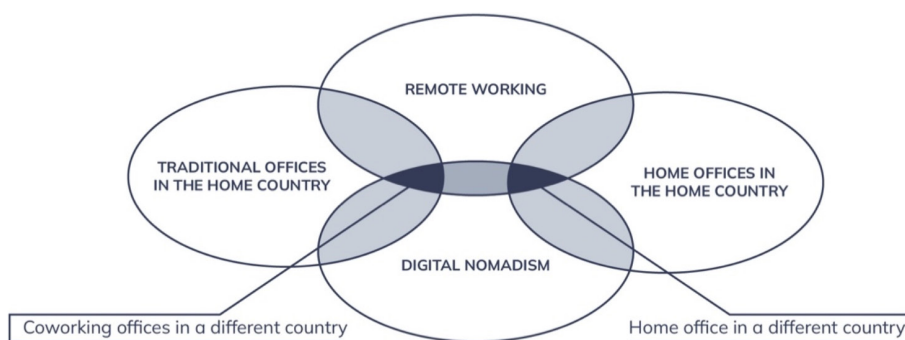


FIGURE 1 | Transition in working environment. Source: Own elaboration.

equipment. Most use cloud spaces to work from different devices from anywhere. Most digital nomads define themselves as minimalists (Nash et al. 2018).

Reichenberger (2018) suggests three classifications for digital nomads. The first group is static and usually based in their place of residence, for example, journalists, writers, and entrepreneurs. They stay close to their regular home while working in different spaces. The second group has a base home in their residence. However, they also occasionally travel and conduct remote work in other places, in marketing, consultancy, project management, accounting, architecture, and so forth. The third group of digital nomads do not have a home. They are constantly on the move, usually employed in copyediting, translation, graphic design, blogging, social media, IT, and web design. This third group is the common perception of digital nomads in public and reality. They are usually from the third group; however, unlike the common perception that digital nomads travel internationally, they perceive the requirement of location mobility as confined to a change in the workplace, even without incorporating travel. Hence, anyone who goes to a café, a library, or a shade under a tree to work is defined as a digital nomad by digital nomads (Reichenberger 2018).

Figure 2 visualizes the list of popular jobs among digital nomads that allows remote working. However, digital nomads usually multitask and are also constantly looking for new career opportunities and exploring ways to improve their skills. Some engage in voluntary work in destinations they visit. Hence, it becomes harder to classify them under different professions. Most knowledge-based (European Commission 2022) and skill-intensive jobs with higher barriers to entry, requiring less face-to-face interaction and extensive use of ICT, are considered more suitable for digital outsourcing (Sytsma 2022).

Most digital nomad profiles match the rapid development in ICTs after the 1990s. Digital nomads are responsible for their lives, independent of any institution or state. They are educated millennials under 35 (Reichenberger 2018) and are heavily skewed towards younger, male, and single travelers. However, the profile is rapidly spreading to older generations, particularly in the global north, where the responsibility for performance is shifting from the state and organizations to individuals. Digital nomads can be full-time and part-time employees, freelancers, and business owners (Cook 2020), like consultants or bloggers. Hence, digital nomadism includes entrepreneurial capabilities and management of “CEO of Me Inc.” (Gershon 2018). Fifteen percentage of digital nomads define themselves as entrepreneurs (Nash et al. 2018). Digital skills, time management skills, entrepreneurial skills, flexibility, productivity, outcome orientation, cultural intelligence, interpersonal communication skills, and open-mindedness are shared characteristics of digital nomads (Reichenberger 2018).

Digital nomadism is depicted as happy youngsters on exotic beaches at the back of their laptops shading under coconut trees (Hart 2015). However, most digital nomads describe themselves as highly mobile but also work-focused. They heavily engage with digital work to maintain their lifestyle while traveling (Nash et al. 2018). The digital component of their work makes them location-independent.

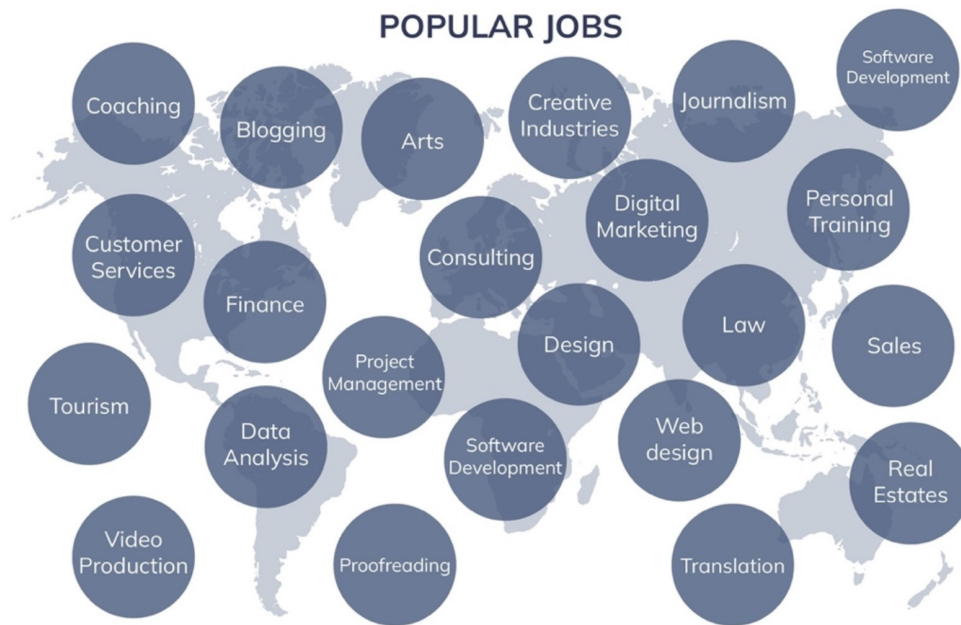
In short, digital nomads are off holiday; although they relocate to different places, they live and work in them. The home and work are merged, becoming a single space for the private and work-life. They employ digital tools to work remotely and enjoy subjective but very disciplined freedom contrasting with the public image of digital nomadism displaying a laptop at a tropical beach under a coconut grove, living and working in a paradise. They sometimes sleep and work simultaneously, trying to manage time between leisure and work. However, they usually use coworking spaces around other digital nomads to discipline themselves and filter tourism and leisure-related distractions. Novelty-seeking personality, the desire to experience different cultures, places and people also reinforces their aspiration to travel (Chen and Yoon 2019).

## 2.1 | Push Factors of Digital Nomadism

Keeping with globalization and technological developments, the expectations of organizations from their actual and potential workforce have transformed. The pandemic has further contributed to this emerging business model whereby all sectors introduced remote working systems. The remote work arrangements, particularly amid quarantines during the pandemic has eventually encouraged organizations to keep their remote working structures while downsizing their expensive office space even after social distancing measures were relaxed. Realizing management efficiencies *by objectives*, they also focused on outsourcing some of the organizational tasks to digital nomads, which allowed organizations to create further advantages in terms of taxation, health insurance and other social benefits provided for the conventional workforce. Some sunk costs associated with digital offshoring include creating the IT infrastructure, identifying digital talents, and developing policies and actions to integrate digital nomads into the organizational system (Sytsma 2022). However, organizations have already invested in many of these fixed costs during the pandemic.

Even organizations with regular “9-to-5” work structure became more focused on *management by objectives* and started to adopt more flexible and fluid forms of spatial and temporal working arrangements. In short, what is achieved is considered more important than the time spent in the workplace. By utilizing digital nomads, organizations can reach a global digital talent pool anywhere in the world, increasing the effectiveness of organizational tasks. The flexible and digital working conditions are expected to improve employees’ well-being and efficiency (European Commission 2022). Research also suggests that remote workers may be more productive than their in-person counterparts (Sytsma 2022).

Because organizations allocate less physical (e.g., office space, equipment) and financial (e.g., social benefits, annual leave) resources to digital nomad tasks, they can increase their productivity. Global expansion of digital payment methods (e.g., PayPal, WISE) made it easier and cheaper for firms to transfer money to digital nomads working and traveling outside the conventional office space. Network services that connect firms with digital nomads (e.g., Upwork, Remoteok, Mechanical Turk) also emerged and reinforced such transformations.



**FIGURE 2** | Popular jobs/roles among digital nomads. *Source:* Own elaboration.

Several digital technologies (i.e., cloud computing) facilitated services to be transmitted across distances. This encouraged some remote workers to become digital nomads. Besides the developments in ICT, blockchain, cryptocurrencies, electronic payment methods, online meetings software, booking engines, distant learning and so on made it more convenient for remote workers to travel. Increased computing power and decreasing prices of hardware needed, provided critical support for digital nomads to perform their tasks online (Chevtavaeva et al. 2023). Political transformations, globalization, open economy, visa facilitation between countries, the emergence of international organizations and unions, and agreements on the free movement of trade, services and even workforce (i.e., GATS) created a suitable environment for digital nomad work to flourish.

This new generation of the workforce also has different expectations from work and life, such as freedom, self-development, autonomy, and self-determination. This freedom and self-determination usually present themselves in hypermobility and the search for new life experiences, as in the case of digital nomads. The population increase, congestion, pollution, increased crime rates, and time commuting to work in these expensive generating regions usually affect well-being. Traveling to other regions, staying in natural, less congested areas, experiencing different cultures, meeting with different people, doing location-specific activities, and having fun might potentially result in positive emotions, enhance life satisfaction, and well-being (Chevtavaeva et al. 2023) of digital nomads.

In a routine life, vulnerable people face various problems, such as not being mobile. This may force people to make a choice that may end with staying home without any travel plans (Wen et al. 2023). Nomadism brings advantages for vulnerable people who travel and take vacations with their care people. The ability to remote work and be in a different country simultaneously brings opportunities for such people to take control of their private life.

For instance, those who may be committed to looking after their kids, parents who need health and physical support such as disability, mental disorders, and so forth. Through nomadism, anyone can coordinate their homestay, work, and holiday plans with the people to be cared for. This may improve all parties' well-being (Coghlan 2015; Kozak 2023), regardless of their ability or disability.

Another socioeconomic transformation is the globally diverse income parity and cost of living between countries. For example, living in Norway is around four times more expensive than in India (Nakamura et al. 2020). Weather and daylight may make the global north less attractive places to live during winter. Some digital nomads, particularly those engaged in entrepreneurial activities, are also interested in nomadism because of its tax advantages. They receive payments in electronic accounts in different countries and sometimes in cryptocurrencies.

## 2.2 | Pull Factors of Digital Nomadism

After deciding to transform their life based on the push factors described above, digital nomads choose their destinations considering pull factors at the destination. Similar to tourists, digital nomads select their destinations based on their accessibility, attractions, entertainment, local hospitality, climate, safety and security, value for money, infrastructure, regulations, visa regime, health services, and quality of life (Akgiş İlhan et al. 2024; Günay, Toksöz, and Aslan 2024; Lacárcel, Huete, and Zerva 2024; Özgen Çiğdemli, Yayla, and Çiğdemli 2024; Pacheco and Azevedo 2023; Zhou et al. 2024). These are not different from the motivations of regular tourists choosing a particular destination to vacation (e.g., Kozak 2002). However, some other characteristics of digital nomad destinations (e.g., reduced language barriers, services for foreigners, infrastructure, residency permits, etc.) might emerge

as more critical than the tourist resources offered at a location. For example, their online remote work makes digital nomads dependent on cheap, fast, secure internet connections, and a reliable power source.

They choose destinations with easier access to their home base. The time zones also affect their destination choices. For example, Portugal and Bulgaria are emerging destinations for digital nomads from Europe because of their quality of life, value for money, and time zone similarity with the rest of Europe. They look for comfort, silence, privacy and other like-minded digital nomad communities (Nash et al. 2018) in the destinations they wish to relocate next. They consider the seasonal patterns of spending winter in tropical destinations while moving north during summer. They seek attractions and availability of their hobbies, such as hiking, surfing, climbing, and camping, which relate to backpacking nomadism. Some of these hobbies develop at the destinations they stay in. Novelty-seeking behavior, new places, new cultures, new experiences, and new people drive their destination decision (Müller 2016).

Because they stay months at the destination, navigating through local infrastructures, local business environment, the state of their profession in the destination, networking opportunities, and the presence of other digital nomads are other significant criteria. In this respect, characteristics of institutions (Scott 1995) in host destinations could affect digital nomads and their work, and they condition the attractiveness of destinations for nomads. For example, regulative aspects of institutions (i.e., formal rules, such as startup law and tax burden), as well as normative ones (i.e., social values, e.g., those concerning residents' openness to foreigners), and cognitive ones (i.e., consolidated business practices, such as cooperation and entrepreneurship of local firms) can offer a favorable or unfavorable institutional framework to digital nomads. Hence, digital nomads select their destinations not only because of the tourism attractions they provide but because most of these destinations have better physical (e.g., internet) and social structures (e.g., services for foreigners) by being tourism destinations.

### 3 | Digital Nomads Within the Tourism System

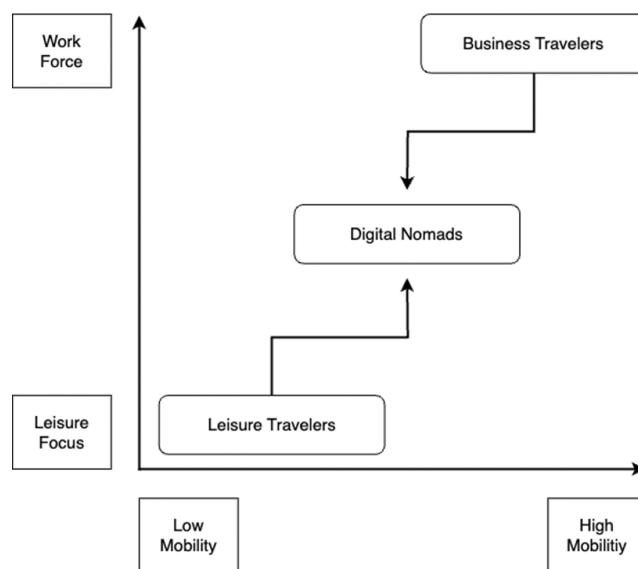
Defined as the work performed outside of normal organizational confines of space and time, remote work also triggered migration from urban areas and thus relieved the environmental pressure while helping regional economic parity. This has triggered the emergence of a working-class often called digital nomads. Unlike conventional migrant workers, who immigrate from their home countries to host countries for primarily economic purposes (e.g., economic migrants and expats) and reside there for a particular duration, digital nomads are continuously mobile (Nash, Jarrahi, and Sutherland 2021), hold little attachment to physical space and combine economic interests with lifestyle goals. With the limited physical connection to their organizations, if any, some of these individuals preferred to move across multiple independent regions for both work and leisure motivations, renting furnished houses for temporary stays or staying in co-living facilities. Working online and traveling conveniently, these young professionals made a significant part of remote work (Reichenberger 2018) for those wishing to travel before waiting for retirement.

Therefore, digital nomadism represents freedom by transforming and living without temporal boundaries and geographic borders (Arslan 2024). Digital nomads, by definition, are remote workers, using coworking spaces or home offices in a different country, but they are qualified as tourists. Although they do not classify themselves as tourists (Thompson 2019), they travel to a destination and usually stay less than a year. However, they remain more than a regular visitor. Unlike other remote workers, they do not have a home base either. They are not business travelers whose primary motivation is business; neither are they leisure tourists on vacation.

Digital nomads distinguish themselves from tourists by daily work tasks and deeper integration with the host community and from expats with their spatial independence. They are also different from backpackers. Although most digital nomads have economic concerns in travel like backpackers, they benefit from distinct skills in IT and high-tech industries to finance themselves, and therefore, hold knowledge and abilities with a specific demand from the labor market. They believe in freedom of movement and try to balance leisure and work (Orel 2019). Digital nomads distinguish themselves from business travelers as they usually personally decide where to go and stay 2–3 months on average, and their leisure purpose is more important (Reichenberger 2018). Hence, they lie between frequent business and leisure travelers depending on their work focus (high) and mobility frequency (high), as shown in Figure 3.

#### 3.1 | Digital Nomads as Tourists

Since a certain level of income is required to work and live at leisure destinations and enjoy the autonomy of working outside confined space and time, digital nomads require high self-discipline (Cook 2020) and set nocturnal working hours to enjoy the day for leisure. Different time zones made it harder for them to synchronize work and life. Sometimes they must wake up at midnight; other times, they are distracted by work emails during



**FIGURE 3** | Positioning of digital nomads. *Source:* Adapted from Cook 2020.

leisure. Hence, different time zones affect their productivity and quality of life. Some isolate themselves from social contact during work hours and in workspaces. Workspace is seen as sacred and shown a certain level of respect. They use similar work patterns and structures regardless of where they travel (Orel 2019). This is why coworking spaces are popular among digital nomads trying to isolate leisure from work, although it consumes commuting time and resembles corporate office work.

Therefore, ironically, digital nomads did not escape conventional offices' time and space-based restrictions but merely softened and replicated them by setting up their own pace to match externally set deadlines and frequent coworking places. Although more subjective, there is still a tension between freedom and discipline for digital nomads, just like conventional work. Deadlines are even described as positive, organizing, and motivating by digital nomads (Cook 2020). Some even perceive travel as a way to be more productive and creative in their profession (Orel 2019).

Digital nomads “select and structure work-related tasks in a self-imposed manner” to create “a more flexible and tailored life outside of externally imposed structures (e.g., specific working times, restricted free time, geographical dependence)” (Reichenberger 2018, 317). In short, digital nomads control their relationships over time and space. They also discipline themselves by setting deadlines, goals, and working hours (Cook 2020), trying simultaneously to set boundaries and balance work and life (e.g., putting mobile phones away during work). Deviations from this balance between leisure activities and work-related tasks are strictly avoided (Reichenberger 2018).

Leisure time is sometimes spent even to improve productivity (e.g., Yoga, physical exercise, meditation, and skills training), evolving into a protestant work ethic where efficiency and effectiveness in work and leisure emerge as life itself. This is paradoxical as nomads usually choose leisure and tourism destinations as locations for their work. Because of their considerable involvement in work, digital nomads are not considered traditional tourists (Thompson 2019). However, they also differentiate from traditional business travelers as digital nomads travel more for leisure purposes. They have more freedom in selecting

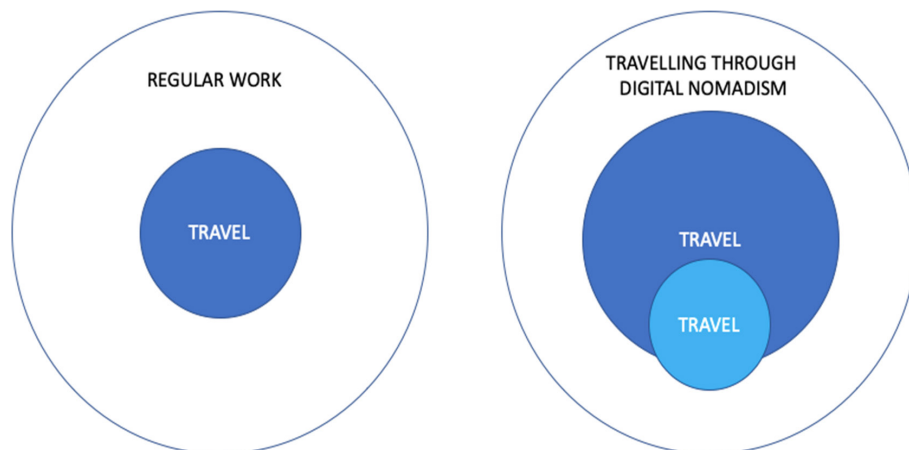
destinations than business travelers, and the social component of their trip is usually more substantial.

### 3.2 | Digital Nomads as Business Travelers

Despite their approach to work and self-disciplining work practices, unlike conventional business travelers, digital nomads have the freedom to choose their destination and their work activities. Business travelers usually travel to a specific destination because their work demands it (Chevtaeva and Denizci-Guillet 2021), and they have a minimal relationship with the destination, if any. This differentiates digital nomads from expats whose work activity is directly tied to the location. In contrast to digital nomads, business travelers are less interested in interacting with the host destination elements (Chevtaeva and Denizci-Guillet 2021). Digital nomads stay less than expats in a destination and more than traditional business travelers. Figure 3 displays the positioning of digital nomads within the tourism system.

### 3.3 | Digital Nomads as Leisure Travelers

Despite the uncertainties of whether digital nomads are tourists, similar to a “matryoshka,” they can be qualified as tourists if they travel to a different destination than the one they reside in for remote work. This aligns with being a regular tourist—traveling for leisure, staying no longer than 12 months and targeting no economic income at the host destination. There are no restrictions regarding their mobility to a different destination, so they may take this opportunity to spend a few days in a different destination. They can either carry on their regular tasks while staying on the beach or nearby the swimming pool or be work-free by enjoying their vacations. This behavior may be repeated to the same or other destinations during their stay at a particular destination chosen only for remote work. If this is repeated to multiple destinations, this can be called the “matryoshka effect” on taking holidays (see Figure 4). Digital nomads, as tourists in a destination, may become derivative leisure tourists when they visit another destination and return to their original destination. Hence, a digital nomad tourist destination becomes a generating region for another tourist destination.



**FIGURE 4** | “Matryoshka effect” of traveling through digital nomadism. *Source:* Authors' own elaboration.

Because they stay in a destination longer than average tourist, digital nomads can also trigger another significant market, visiting friends and relatives (VFR) travel (Munoz, Griffin, and Humbracht 2017), further multiplying its direct impact on the destination.

## 4 | Digital Nomads and the Tourism Industry

Realizing the potential of nomadic millennials, combining work and leisure, the tourism industry also tries to adapt to these emerging needs in their market (Zhou et al. 2024). Reliable high-speed internet, kitchenette and workstations in lodging services have become essential criteria. The digital nomad market has entirely created new products and services. For example, coworking centers have been introduced, providing office services in a relaxed and open environment. Coworking spaces serve three objectives, they provide the infrastructure for efficient work outside the home (i), they offer opportunities for social interaction, collaboration, and employment (ii), and they represent the community of digital nomads (iii).

Various research supports that spatial diversification of workplaces enhances creativity, innovation, and productivity (Surman 2013). Around 16,000 coworking spaces worldwide serve 1.27 million users (Orel 2019). Digital nomads usually live alone and struggle to stop working and socialize in a different environment. Coworking spaces help them meet like-minded people with intercultural understanding, collaboration and learning opportunities, and create a shared identity (Garrett, Spreitzer, and Bacevice 2017). Some coworking spaces offer communal lunches, movie nights, and video gaming evenings as a break away from complete isolation (Cook 2020). Most digital nomads use low-cost carriers because they travel light. They do not usually need the additional luggage allowance provided by legacy airlines. Additional airline services providing short stays between arrival and departure destinations emerged (e.g., air wander) to welcome digital nomads as additional leisure travelers (matryoshka effect discussed above). Sharing economy among digital nomads providing discounted accommodation within digital nomad networks (e.g., Noad) was initiated as innovative products in hospitality and tourism services.

## 5 | Future of Digital Nomads

The future of digital nomads might be affected by various factors. Developing new technologies might create additional opportunities for the digital nomad market. One of these technologies, Virtual Reality, might enhance the quality of interaction among colleagues and may result in the inclusion of other professions currently unsuitable for remote work. Some in-person jobs will also transform into digital jobs with advancements in technology. For example, as more autonomous cars are introduced to the market, taxi services might shift into data management jobs, where logistics information and usage data can be processed for the distant operation of transportation services. Robotics and automation might further create additional remote jobs facilitating digital nomadism. Remote operators might conduct physical

jobs requiring in-person presence, such as facility inspections or assembly line operations. Digital nomadism also has various impacts on individuals, organizations, and societies. These impacts directly affect the future of digital nomadism, leading to an indirect change in the structure of the tourism, travel and hospitality industry, designing new products, restructuring spaces and rooms, and so forth.

### 5.1 | Individual Impacts

Because they relocate every few months, digital nomads usually have problems with their relationships and usually feel lonely (Mäkinieni, Oksanen, and Mäkikangas 2021; Lacárcel, Huete, and Zerva 2024). Unlike traditional offices, they do not meet with coworkers (Chevtaeva and Denizci-Guillet 2021). A sense of isolation and longing for family and friends are familiar (Orel 2019). However, they meet new people, both locals and other digital nomads. Literature also suggests that general traveling might benefit well-being even when work tasks are involved (Ye and Xu 2020). However, as discussed earlier, digital nomads must complete various tasks. Since they sometimes multitask different jobs without precise lead times, it might create stress and overwork problems while traveling (Wang et al. 2021). Because they rarely switch off completely, and the borders between work and life become blurred, their technostress levels increase (Suh and Lee 2017). Despite these costs, the benefits outweigh them; for example, their travel and leisure activities might still enhance their well-being (Chevtaeva et al. 2023). Further, literature has yet to measure the difference between the pros and cons of digital nomadism on individuals.

### 5.2 | Socioeconomic Impacts

While digital nomadism has become an attractive lifestyle particularly for the emerging workforce, it also comes with various challenges as it demands a balance between freedom and stability, leisure and work (Richter and Richter 2020). There are some socioeconomic impacts of digital nomads on families, generating countries and host destinations. First, starting a family while being a digital nomad is challenging. Even if couples agree to travel to the same destinations frequently, they will need more time to travel with their children. Kids' education, health, care, and security might require much planning (Shields, McGinnis, and Selmeczy 2021). However, being a nomad from childhood and getting a diverse international education might benefit children in their adult lives (Hayden 2011). There are also diverse distance education opportunities for kids of every age offering formal curriculum (e.g., Education World Wide). Because of the physical inability at a later stage, the need to access reliable health services also impedes senior digital nomad couples. The social security and health care system at the origin becomes an essential criterion for senior digital nomads. Often, health care services in digital nomad destinations (i.e., Thailand) can be more reliable, convenient, and cheaper than some origin countries (i.e., USA).

Digital nomadism has pros (e.g., removes pressure on urban regions) and cons (e.g., triggers brain drain from generating

regions) for the generating society. For example, income taxes decline as most digital nomad works happen in informal digital environments, and payments are made through international online platforms, sometimes in the form of cryptocurrencies. Besides the tax revenues, digital nomadism may reduce demand for local retailers and public services and affect the effectiveness of regional planning at the origin. Because of the informal nature of their work, digital nomads can receive unemployment benefits while working in the informal economy. On the other hand, it might provide opportunities for less advantaged groups like people with disabilities, senior citizens, and single mothers who may have challenges commuting to work. These workstations might create opportunities for lower-income citizens to travel and vacation on a budget while working.

Digital nomadism also threatens local jobs, which can face increased competition from remote workers in other countries. However, overall, digital nomads and offshoring practices create some efficiencies for local companies and strengthen their competitive position. This would result in economic growth and new local employment opportunities. For example, in 2003, every dollar of services offshored to India created 1.47 USD in the USA (Sytsma 2022). Trying to prevent digital nomadism, on the other hand, may affect local firms' organizational strengths, increase their unit costs, and deter innovation rates and quality of HR. This would result in business closures and thus decrease local jobs available.

From the host regions' perspective, as a tourist or not, digital nomads are attractive to any destination, because they stay more than mainstream business tourists and they spend more than leisure tourists. Some destinations and hospitality organizations have already started to develop strategies focusing on digital nomads as a tourism niche market (Borges et al. 2022; Hall et al. 2019; Prabawa and Pertiwi 2020). Besides the income generated for local economies, interactions in the coworking spaces can also contribute to local professionals and firms; opportunities emerge to create business networks between locals and digital nomads, share practical knowledge, and develop joint business projects. Digital nomadism brought by multiculturalism might trigger innovation and creative collaboration at the destination. Digital nomads become neighbors rather than clients to serve; hence, they closely interact with local people. Such intense interpersonal interaction might bring cultures together and promote peace.

## 6 | Discussion and Conclusions

This conceptual study offers a series of theoretical and practical issues surrounding digital nomads and their place in the tourism system. First, the study explores digital nomads as tourists, identifying their characteristics, push and pull factors of digital nomadism, their needs and destination decision processes. This paper also discusses the future of digital nomads and their impact on different stakeholders, including themselves, families, generating and receiving societies, organizations, and the political and natural environment. Theoretical contributions, managerial implications, limitations, and further research are summarized in the following sections.

### 6.1 | Theoretical Contributions

Despite its growth with the pandemic and various individual and organizational motivations, research on remote work and its intersection with leisure behavior are still at infancy. The resulting evolution of digital nomadism has initiated a growing yet, fragmented discussion across various disciplines, including psychology, sociology, organizational behavior, management, economy, and law (e.g., Sytsma 2022; Thompson 2019; Wang et al. 2021). However, the interface between this growing lifestyle and tourism activities are neglected. This paper contributes to the conceptual development of digital nomadism research by offering a novel perspective that intersects with tourism and leisure studies providing a broader understanding of this phenomenon. It advances our understanding of digital nomadism beyond the confines of management and organizational behavior, delving into the implications for tourism and travel.

First, the paper provides a comprehensive review of digital nomadism, delineating its key characteristics and the factors that drive individuals toward this lifestyle. By synthesizing existing literature, it offers a clearer conceptualization of digital nomads as distinct from traditional business or leisure tourists (see Table 1). This distinction is significant as it acknowledges the unique blend of work and leisure (Cook 2020) that defines the digital nomad lifestyle and its position within the tourism and travel discourse. Moreover, the paper examines personal attributes of digital nomads, their mobility motives and destination selection processes. The paper further examines the complex decision-making processes and motivations those underpin digital nomads' transient lifestyle and the various factors that

**TABLE 1** | Positioning of digital nomads.

	Digital nomads	Leisure travelers	Backpackers	Business travelers	Expats
Work focus	High	Low	Low	High	Moderate
Leisure focus	Moderate	High	High	Low	Moderate
Mobility frequency	High	Moderate	High	High	Low
Travel duration	High	Moderate	High	Low	High
Travel spending	High	Moderate	Moderate	High	Moderate
Freedom of movement	High	High	High	Low	Low

Source: Authors' own elaboration.



influence their choice of destinations. This analysis is important as it provides insights into the preferences and priorities of digital nomads, which can inform tourist behavior, tourism marketing, destination planning, and policy development literature.

Finally, the paper explores the socioeconomic, organizational and cultural impacts of digital nomadism on both generating regions and receiving destinations. It considers how the influx of digital nomads affects individuals, families, local economies, social dynamics, and cultural exchanges. This contribution is particularly pertinent given the growing number of individuals adopting the digital nomad lifestyle and the potential for significant impacts on tourism and hospitality sectors (Bednorz 2024). Hence, the paper also contributes to tourism sociology and sustainability. Therefore, this paper provides significant theoretical contributions by repositioning digital nomads at the center of tourism and travel discourse. It not only enriches the academic conversation on digital nomadism but also offers practical insights those can guide the strategic planning of destinations and businesses seeking to engage with this dynamic market segment. These are discussed below.

## 6.2 | Managerial Implications

The conceptual insights provided in the paper offer significant implications for practitioners and policymakers as well. Destinations and tourism organizations trying to attract digital nomads should first understand the characteristics of this distinct market. Hence, the paper offers actionable understanding into how destinations can attract and cater to digital nomads, suggesting that a targeted approach could lead to mutually beneficial outcomes for both nomads and host communities. For example, because of the digital component of their work, the infrastructure, including internet, at the destination, should satisfy specific standards. Legislation and regulatory framework should also be designed based on digital nomads' needs, particularly on visa and residency permits, public services including healthcare, education, and taxation.

Leisure experiences, particularly those that offer physical and mental development (e.g. hiking, Yoga, etc.), would be provided. Coliving and coworking spaces at the destination emerge as essential structures to enhance networking, productivity and social interaction among digital nomads (Garrett, Spreitzer, and Bacevice 2017). Adventure activities, cultural experiences, and networking events tailored for digital nomads can also enhance attractiveness of the destination. These decision criteria (e.g., suitability to digital work) should be used in marketing communications and destination image formation (Chevtvaeva et al. 2023). Online networks and forums might also be used to reach digital nomads. There might be also potential of benefitting from existing digital nomads as they can create an *influencer effect*, hence, fostering the destination image (Ay and Güzel 2024).

Organizations usually require their remote workers to reside at their place of employment, demanding them to come to the office when needed physically. However, businesses must design their tasks and processes suitable for remote work and digital nomads, allowing their remote tasks to be accomplished

at different locations. International healthcare, travel allowances, provision of adequate IT tools, and visa services might strengthen employee motivation, create a larger pool for recruitment and ultimately enhance the HR quality for organizations. Refraining from discarding the demands of this new generation of workforce might result in talent loss and affect the future innovation capacities of corporations.

There are challenges with digital nomads' rights and working conditions (e.g., work hours, right to disconnect, provision of IT tools, monitoring tools, etc.), just like remote workers. Particularly wage gaps for online labor still exist across countries. Digital nomads should be treated equally with their colleagues working at the office. However, they are usually paid less than they would if they were doing conventional office work (Sytsma 2022). Organizations should strive to offer comparable workload, compensation, benefits, performance indicators, training, and career opportunities for digital nomads to attract their talent.

Employing digital nomads might have some challenges for organizations as well. Organizations first need to identify jobs that are compatible with digital nomads. Orientation of newcomers, training, motivation, creating and maintaining organizational culture, transmitting knowledge, informal collaboration among employees, effective teamwork, and so on can become more difficult without face-to-face interaction. However, organizations might use the cost efficiencies created by the remote work of digital nomads to organize face-to-face orientation programs, meetings, incentives, and training where all staff, including digital nomads, are physically present. Moreover, virtual reality platforms have been developing where participants can use avatars to react to each other in real time and move objects digitally. The cyber security and data management failure risks associated with digital nomad work (Sytsma 2022) can be addressed using IT security tools and training.

Digital nomadism might also be a solution to offshoring of services by organizations, which results in job losses in local economies. Instead of offshoring jobs to foreigners, organizations might be encouraged to employ digital nomads from the generating country. This would provide similar cost efficiency, considering digital nomads will have a lower cost of living in the host destinations, and therefore, might be satisfied with lower wages. Increased regulation on remote work and digital offshoring might discourage organizations from utilizing digital nomads. Hence, future research might focus on legislative aspects of digital nomads, both as employees and tourists. Empirical research might focus on different segments of digital nomads with shared needs based on family life cycle, profession, location, and so forth. attributes of digital nomad-friendly destinations might also be explored. Suggestions for future studies are discussed in the next section with limitations of the paper.

## 6.3 | Limitations and Future Research

Despite this study provides conceptual insight into factors that lead to digital nomadism and how they decide on their

following destinations, the process by which digital nomads become digital nomads, how they prepare themselves and their motivations to become digital nomads needs to be addressed empirically. Despite scattered information about digital nomad destination selection (e.g., Akgiş İlhan et al. 2024), a holistic approach is needed to identify their selection criteria and measure the importance of such criteria. For example, as digital nomads relocate to countries coming from origins with different levels of development and living standards, the study of digital nomads' needs and aspirations in the context of countries involved (e.g., Africa vs. Europe, archipelagos of the Macaronesia, etc.) deserves special attention. Such an approach can create a measurement tool for destinations' digital nomad friendliness.

There is a need to explore the development of digital nomadism and its relationship with technology and emerging workplace transformations to understand the future of digital nomads. Although flexible employment patterns and individualization of labor have long been studied (e.g., Wright 1997), digital nomads not only represent a breakthrough in the changing world of work but also make a significant part of global tourism volume particularly considering their length of stay. Those transformations and impacts created by digital nomadism require particular attention from stakeholders, including organizations, destinations, and legislative bodies.

To conclude, this conceptual paper is an initial attempt to reposition digital nomads in the center of tourism and travel discourse. Despite its limitations (e.g., building on fragmented and maturing discussion), this paper will hopefully encourage more sophisticated discussions and empirical investigations toward a deeper understanding of digital nomads' travel behavior, destination selection process, and mobility patterns and provides a deeper understanding of this phenomenon and its implications for tourism industry. Several questions still need to be answered, though, warranting further research from both a demand (i.e., digital nomads as a growing market) and supply (e.g., destinations appealing to digital nomads, hospitality organizations targeting digital nomads) perspectives.

#### Data Availability Statement

Data sharing not applicable to this article as no datasets were generated or analysed during the current study.

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