

# Green Marble 2023

ESTUDOS SOBRE O ANTROPOCENO E ECOCRÍTICA / STUDIES ON  
THE ANTHROPOCENE AND ECOCRITICISM

Editores

*João Ribeiro Mendes, Isabel Ponce de Leão,  
Maria do Carmo Mendes, Rui Paes Mendes*



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# DIGITAL NOMADISM IN THE ANTHROPOCENE: PHILOSOPHICAL-ANTHROPOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF THE CONTRADICTIONS AND LIMITS OF THIS PHENOMENON.

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## **Abstract**

The article focuses on the phenomenon of digital nomadism in the context of the Anthropocene. Digital nomadism is a phenomenon characterized by the ability of people to travel the world voluntarily and with the help of technology and to change their place of work on a regular basis. It is often referred to as either a new form of lifestyle or a working life. Despite this general description, digital nomadism is a phenomenon without a clear definition. Interest in digital nomadism has been sparked by its exponential growth, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic. The aim of this paper is to show that although studies estimate its future growth in the context of the Anthropocene epoch, its limits and boundaries are becoming apparent. Furthermore, the paper points out that from a philosophical anthropological perspective, the phenomenon exhibits several contradictions that should be explored. On the one hand, the phenomenon is a recognition of the technological advancement of information flows within the global infrastructure and the anthropological phenomenon of human adaptability. On the other hand, in addition to contradicting the requirements of sustainability in the Anthropocene, it also puts pressure on society and the environment both locally and globally.

**Keywords:** Anthropocene; Digital Nomadism; Digital Work; Climatic Change; Sustainability.

## **Resumo**

O artigo centra-se no fenómeno do nomadismo digital no contexto do Antropoceno. O nomadismo digital é um fenómeno caracterizado pela capacidade das pessoas de viajarem pelo mundo voluntariamente e com a ajuda da tecnologia e de mudarem regularmente de local de trabalho. É frequentemente referido como uma nova forma de estilo de vida ou de vida ativa. Apesar desta descrição geral, o nomadismo digital é um fenómeno sem uma definição clara. O interesse pelo nomadismo digital foi despertado pelo seu crescimento exponencial, especialmente após a pandemia de COVID 19. O objetivo deste artigo é mostrar que, embora os estudos estimem o seu crescimento futuro no contexto da época do Antropoceno, os seus limites e fronteiras estão a tornar-se evidentes. Além disso, o artigo salienta que, de uma perspectiva antropológica filosófica, o fenómeno apresenta várias contradições que devem ser exploradas. Por um lado, o fenómeno é um reconhecimento do avanço tecnológico dos fluxos de informação na infraestrutura global e do fenómeno antropológico da adaptabilidade humana. Por outro lado, para além de contradizer os requisitos de sustentabilidade no Antropoceno, também exerce pressão sobre a sociedade e o ambiente, tanto a nível local como global.

**Palavras-chave:** Antropoceno; Nomadismo Digital; Trabalho Digital; Alterações Climáticas; Sustentabilidade.



## Introduction

Digital nomadism is a phenomenon that combines different forms of nomadic life with adaptation to the information age. It is often presented as a form of independent living for individuals who freely choose how to organise their work, travel, and leisure. Cook states that «[d]igital nomads have become known as individuals who utilise digital technologies to blend work, leisure, and travel» (Cook, 2022, p. 305). While the former description emphasizes freedom, Cook's emphasizes technology. Comparing these two simple descriptions right at the outset shows that digital nomadism can be understood from different perspectives. In addition to the above, it can be analysed in terms of work, leisure, lifestyle, and more. At the same time, the fragmented view of this phenomenon makes it difficult to establish a single definition.

The increase in scholars' interest in this phenomenon has been caused by the recent surge in the number of digital nomads, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic when lock-in caused a push for remote working (Cook, 2023; Cottam, 2023). The MBO Partners State of Independence (SOI) research program that examines the impact of COVID-19 on the growth of digital nomadism in the U.S. states that:

In 2020, the number of traditional workers working as digital nomads grew 96 percent, from 3.2 million to 6.3 million» (MBO Partners, 2020, p. 2). Another report from 2022 already states that «16.9 million American workers currently describe themselves as digital nomads, increasing 9% from 2021 and a staggering 131% from the pre-pandemic year 2019 (MBO Partners, 2022: 3).

Although precise data regarding the total number of digital nomads at a global level is not available, it is possible to conclude that digital nomads are having a significant impact on the economic, socio-political, and environmental conditions in the countries they visit or originate from.

The aim of the paper is to highlight that the phenomenon of digital nomadism contains certain contradictions and limits if the environmental aspect is highlighted and at the same time it is situated in the context of the Anthropocene epoch. In my opinion, many aspects of digital nomadism are mainstream and presented without a deeper understanding of the complexity of the current and predicted challenges that humanity faces on a global and, from an Anthropocene perspective, planetary scale.

The first part describes the basic issues involved in the analysis of digital nomadism. Although more and more authors are beginning to address this phenomenon it still raises more questions than it answers.

The second part of the thesis focuses on the analysis of the concepts of digital nomadism and digital nomad in order to point out their ambiguity and selected contradictions. From a philosophical-anthropological perspective,



digital nomadism is an interesting phenomenon and should receive more attention from academics.

The last third part of the thesis points out the basic contradictions and limits that become apparent when the phenomenon is analysed in the context of the Anthropocene. Although many statistics point to its increase the further development of this phenomenon is unclear. From my point of view, two scenarios can occur. The first scenario, which seems very likely, is that there will be a limitation of the growth of digital nomadism as it is understood today. The legislative measures of the host or home countries will play a major role here. In particular, taxation and measures relating to ensuring environmental sustainability and the response of localities to the disasters associated with climate change. The second scenario is that digital nomadism will persist as a hybrid life form of adaptation of individuals to the climate crisis and the associated socio-economic and political changes.

## **1. Problems in the analysis of digital nomadism**

Digital nomadism, despite the reported increase in individuals claiming it, is still under-researched academically. Several authors point to the lack of information and adequate or comprehensive literature, which makes it difficult to research. Equally, this lack of information and empirical research affects the analysis of this phenomenon from multiple perspectives (Hannonen 2020; Mancinelli, 2020; Hensellek & Puchala, 2021; Dreher & Triandafyllidou, 2023). A significant problem is that there is no underlying consensus from which academics can draw. Although there are already a number of articles on the topic I can say that they are so far characterized by significantly different interpretations, analyses, and perspectives on the phenomenon. The lack of consensus in the literature is partly compensated for by statistics on which researchers can rely. However, these statistics are also insufficient in some respects. Academics should take the following into account when working with them: the statistics contain only a limited number of respondents;<sup>1</sup> they focus on one country or continent; most of the time respondents self-identify subjectively as digital nomads. Apart from statistics, most information is contained in blogs and vlogs by digital nomads themselves or in various travel blogs, vlogs, and social networks. The researcher needs to be able to decipher the information from these platforms, for example, to separate advertising content from

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<sup>1</sup> The 2022 MBO Partners study states, «For the 2022 study, Emergent Research and Rockbridge Associates surveyed 6,488 residents of the U.S. (aged 18 and older) including 901 current digital nomads» (2022, p. 19). In an earlier study from 2020, the MBO Partners states: «This survey had responses from 3,457 U.S. citizens or those with U.S. residency status (aged 18 and older)» (2020: 10).



informative content. The research is also hampered by the fact that there are as yet no universally accepted criteria by which to clearly identify who is a digital nomad.

Authors who have begun to address this phenomenon have encountered the above problems and have therefore so far focused on systematizing the issues in order to allow for easier conceptual analysis and understanding, rather than a deeper analysis of the problems associated with it (Hannonen, 2020; Dreher & Triandafyllidou, 2023). The most common questions include: What is digital nomadism? By what criteria do we define a digital nomad? What implications does digital nomadism have on traditional understandings of work? What impact does it have on working relationships? What implications does digital nomadism have for the social contract between the nation-state and the citizen? What is the motivation to start living the life of a digital nomad? Does digital nomadism meet the conditions to be identified as a movement? If so, through which ideas will this movement be conceptualized? Is digital nomadism a consequence of a move away from materialism and nationalism? What is the interrelationship between digital nomads and local communities? Are there ways in which digital nomadism can be legitimized? Is digital nomadism just a particular phase of an individual's life? (Hannonen 2020, Cook, 2023; Dreher & Triandafyllidou, 2023).

From my point of view, environmental issues are very under-represented in discussions about digital nomadism. What is missing is a greater emphasis on issues that reflect the current change in the Earth's climatic and geological conditions and the associated environmental crisis or climate emergency. The authors should also focus more on the questions: What is the relationship of digital nomadism to the environment? Or What is the impact of the growth of digital nomadism on the Earth System? The first question is mentioned only marginally in works that address this issue. More information on this topic as I mentioned above is on the blogs or vlogs of the digital nomads themselves. The second issue is so far completely absent in academic works.

## **2. The Ambiguities and Contradictions of Digital Nomadism**

The first contradictions in this phenomenon occur when its analysis, framing, or conceptualisation does not highlight from which perspective nomadism itself is viewed. From my perspective, it appears that in digital nomadism the reference to nomad/nomadism is closer to its metaphorical<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> For more on metaphorical thinking in relation to mobility and nomadism see: (Urry, 2000: 21-48).



representation than to traditional ethnological, anthropological, or sociological definitions.

General dictionary definitions state that a nomad is «a member of group of people who move from one place to another, rather than living in one place all of the time» (*Nomad*, 2023) and Nomadism is: «way of life of peoples who do not live continually in the same place but move cyclically or periodically. It is distinguished from migration, which is noncyclic and involves a total change of habitat» (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1998). The basic question is: Can digital nomadism be understood within the intentions of these definitions in the epoch of the Anthropocene? I suggest that, as with the Anthropocene, traditional forms of explanation are no longer sufficient for this phenomenon.

Further, there is no mention of threat or freedom in these definitions, which is often highlighted in the context of nomadism and even its digital form. Rather, these two aspects of meaning were brought in by poets, scholars, and philosophers who were fascinated by the striking incongruity of nomadism with sedentary life, since «the image of nomadic life has exercised the strong attraction of opposites» (Khazanov, 1994: 1). As a result, nomadism has become synonymous with freedom, whether real or imagined, and political independence (Khazanov, 1994). If from a historical and anthropological point of view, nomadism represented a threat to the sedentary way of life (Khazanov, 1994; Mancinelli, 2020) from a philosophical point of view it represents a metaphor of threat in the form of resistance to the state, a questioning of the system or the social order (Mancinelli, 2020). The paradox is that digital nomadism no longer constitutes an explicit threat in either sense. It oscillates at the border, it is and is not a threat. It depends on the perspective from which it is viewed. On the one hand, for many host countries, digital nomads are so far more a vision of economic benefit. On the other hand, from an environmental perspective, its carbon footprint poses a significant threat as digital nomads mainly use air transport to move around.

The theoretical generalization of nomadism may also lead to its stereotypical understanding (Khazanov, 1994). In addition to obscuring the complexity of the phenomenon of nomadism and its basic cultural, economic, social, and political parameters, or its interrelationships with the outside world (Khazanov, 1994), the stereotypical view also brings with it many contradictions (Khazanov, 1994). Added to this realization is the understanding of the Anthropocene, which is a new epoch in Earth's history that humanity has no experience with, and the same is true for digital nomadism. It is a new phenomenon that should be interpreted in a new context. It is important to recognize that the Anthropocene is a new epoch in the history of the Earth that humanity has no experience with, and the same is true for digital nomadism. It is a new phenomenon that should be interpreted in a new context. As Kazanov states, «That which is true of nomads today may not apply to the nomads of



ancient time or of the Middle Ages» (Kazanov 1994: 4). For this reason, it is always necessary to take into account the historical context when interpreting nomadism.

## 2.1 Digital nomad and digital nomadism

Digital nomadism in terms of the history of nomadism, which is primarily related to the domestication of animals between approximately 8000 and 2500 BCE, is a very recent phenomenon. In this case, domestication of flora and fauna (training, breeding to serve man) has been replaced by technology. The emergence of a new so-called digital form of nomadism (around the 1980s) was made possible by the development and democratization of digital technology, the digital revolution, globalization and individualization. To the above can be added other socio-political factors such as creased international experiences and mobility, ease of movement, wireless communication technologies and advancement in transportation systems, the digitalization of real estate, flexibility of working lives and increases in global relative wealth. These factors also have an impact on the growth of digital nomadism (Hannonen, 2020).

The origin of the term digital nomadism is associated with the book *Digital Nomad* (1997) by Tsugio Makimoto and David Manners. However, digital nomadism itself is a phenomenon without a clear definition. According to Hannonen, many definitions are even often contradictory (Hannonen, 2020). The ambiguity is caused on the one hand by the understanding of the term nomad/nomadism itself<sup>3</sup>, and on the other hand by the plurality in the theoretical framing of the phenomenon. As an example, digital nomadism can then be understood as: creative tourism, a type of leisure activity, a novel type of location independent work force, a new economic activity, a cultural phenomenon, a new technology-enabled form of working and organising, a new economic model (Wang, 2018; Hannonen, 2020). These determinations depend on what the authors emphasize in their conceptualization. Emphasis may be placed on location-independent work, technology, lifestyle, freedom, responsibility, socio-economic conditions, individuals` psychological motives and values, and more.

According to Hannonen, two perspectives are most commonly used in conceptualization: work life and lifestyle. In this sense, he sees a difference in the terms digital nomad and digital nomadism. As he states:

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<sup>3</sup> The terms nomad/nomadism have a long history. In the etymology of the term nomad we find a reference to Ancient Greek and the term νομάς (nomás) – roaming, roving, wandering (from place to place to find pasture for their flocks or herds) (Nomad, n.d.). From a philosophical-anthropological point of view, the long history of the term is also pointed out by Khazanov, according to whom: «The myth of the nomad may be even older than the myth of the “noble savage”» (Khazanov, 1994: 1).



Thus, the term “digital nomad” describes a category of mobile professionals, who perform their work remotely from anywhere in the world, utilizing digital technologies, while “digital nomadism” refers to the lifestyle that is developed by these highly mobile location independent professionals (Hannonen 2020: 336).

From her perspective, then, digital nomadism can be understood as lifestyle mobilities and as a social phenomenon (Hannonen, 2020). In Hannonen’s definition, the focus is on the individual’s motivations, preferences and adherence to the conditions that enable them to lead a mobile lifestyle.

Like Hannonen, Mancinelli also leans towards a lifestyle approach in defining digital nomadism, with an emphasis on individualisation and motivation. Among the motivational aspects he includes: flexibility of online work, cultural and personal travel experience, a deeper sense of self, resistance to the social system, work-life balance, self-actualization, and freedom (Mancinelli, 2020). In her view, the self-actualisation of digital nomads coupled with economic purpose makes digital nomadism more of an adaptive strategy to the global inequalities of the capitalist system and neoliberalism (Mancinelli, 2020). Mancinelli sees adaptation mainly in terms of socio-economic adaptation.

A different way of defining digital nomadism is presented by Cook, who proposes a taxonomy of the phenomenon as follows: “autonomy over mobility; homebase practices; domestic vs. transnational travel; legal legitimacy; work-life balance and coworking space use” (Cook, 2023: 1). Cook’s taxonomy is developed with an emphasis on work, asking the question «should “crossborder” remote work be classified as “remote working” or as “digital nomadism”?» (Cook, 2023: 2). The basic definition that Cook draws on is:

Digital nomads use digital technologies to work remotely, they have the ability to work and travel simultaneously, have autonomy over frequency and choice of location, and visit at least three locations a year that are not their own or a friend’s or family home (Cook, 2023: 4).

From his point of view, the academic literature is mostly only interested in independent digital nomads. Although, according to him, there are at least five types of digital nomads: digital nomad freelancers; digital nomad business owners; salaried digital nomads; experimental digital nomads and armchair digital nomads (Cook 2023: 12). Cook’s proposed taxonomy of digital nomadism and identification of types of digital nomads above demonstrates the complexity of this phenomenon.

## **2.2 Contradiction in term labour/work in digital nomadism**



In formulating the definition, Cook emphasized the term digital. As he states: «The “digital” in digital nomadism is also central to any definition of the term» (Cook 2023: 5). This brings me to the first contradiction inherent in digital nomadism, where, like Cook, I assume that the term digital in this connection conveys a focus on work as digital labour/work associated with the use of digital technology and communication networks.

The contradiction here arises from a lack of clarity in the meaning and use of the term work. The English language makes it possible to emphasise more clearly the multiple meanings at this level by understanding work as work or labour. The philosophical approach to work and labour has its origins in ancient Greece in connection with necessity or freedom. This issue has been developed later in history by many thinkers, among whom Marx (Wang, 2018) or Arendt are still accentuated in this topic. Given the vastness of the work/labor issue, I will highlight only one contradictory aspect. This is the contradiction of whether digital labour is generally understood as a necessity or as a free choice. According to definitions of digital nomadism, the digital nomad is on the one hand autonomous (Cook, 2023) i.e. freely choosing whether to work at all, and on the other hand a mobile professional (Hannonen, 2020), which in turn refers to being employed and thus having to work. This contradiction could be clarified by identifying the difference between digital labourer and digital worker.

According to the dictionary definition, a laborer is «a person who labors; esp., a wage-earning worker whose work is largely hard physical labor» or «an unskilled or semiskilled worker who brings materials to, and does preparatory work for, skilled workers in a trade» (*Laborer*, n.d.). Does this dictionary definition also describe a digital laborer? What attributes then define digital labor? Does this term characterize the part of digital nomads who are not so independent and work as employees of multinational corporations? Is such a nomad just the animal laborer that Arendt describes?

In a sense, Wang focuses on this aspect. He understands digital nomadism as an economic, cultural and technological phenomenon. According to him, «digital nomadism is emerging as a growing segment of the digital workforce» (Wang, 2018: 2). In considering digital nomadism as an economic phenomenon, he argues that it is important to first «establish a clear definition of digital labour» (Wang, 2018: 4). In line with Smith and Marx, he defines labour through the factors or means of production as:

(...) labour (the human effort expended on work); the object (the material to which labour is applied, alternatively known as 'land' or simply “objects”); and the tools (the reusable means that aid human labour on the object) (Wang, 2018: 4).

In this sense, in my view, the digital nomad as digital labourer is locked in a production process «in which digital technology has transformed factors of



production» (Wang, 2018: 4) and in a dichotomy of production and consumption (Wang, 2018: 5). The question is whether such an understanding of the concept of labour as labour is still sufficient to explain digital labour and digital labourer.

If I have indicated that the clarification of the contradiction could be achieved by determining the meaning of laborer/worker, this task will not be easy with the term worker. The meaning of digital worker may no longer be related to human labour at all. In this case, there has been a significant change in the understanding of who or what is being identified here in conjunction with work. The digital worker ceases to be personified by a physical human being and is gradually being fully replaced by AI:

In the past, the term “digital worker” described a human employee with digital skills, but more recently, the market has defined it as a category of software robots, which are trained to perform specific tasks or processes in partnership with their human colleagues (IMB, 2023: para 2).

In addition to the above, on this plane it will be difficult to clarify that there has been a «blurring of the boundaries between personal and professional life» (Mancinelli, 2020: 421) and «blurs the borders of old dichotomies such as production-or-consumption and customer-or-citizen» (Wang, 2018: 3). I suggest that a more in-depth analysis of the labour/work distinction of meaning could lead to further substantive findings on the issue of digital nomadism in the future.

### **3. Digital nomadism in the context of the Anthropocene**

Digital nomadism can be considered a phenomenon of the Anthropocene epoch. It is the accumulation of many factors that have influenced the emergence of digital nomadism that are also considered to be aspects present in the emergence of the Anthropocene epoch. In the context of the knowledge contained in the concepts of the Anthropocene<sup>4</sup>, digital nomadism is characterized by several contradictions and limits.

Anthropocene concepts<sup>5</sup> describe an altered state of geological and climatic conditions on Earth that are closely related to humanity and the marked

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<sup>4</sup> The notion of the Anthropocene is polysemic, which is also reflected in its conceptualisation. In the natural sciences, there are two main concepts of the Anthropocene. Their basic distinction is that they describe the ways in which humankind impacts planet Earth on two levels. Either is the human influence on the Earth's climate feedback system where humans/humanity are seen as a factor that accelerates and amplifies positive feedback processes (Steffen et al., 2005; Ehlers & Krafft, 2006; Lenton, 2016; Steffen et al., 2020 and others). Here we discuss the concept of the Anthropocene in Earth System Science. In the second concept, the so-called geological concept, humans/humanity are seen as the main agent of change in key processes in the Earth's various systems (Zalasiewicz et al., 2008; Williams et al., 2015; Waters et al., 2016 and others).

<sup>5</sup> In this thesis, the concept of the Anthropocene is understood in terms of the humanities and social sciences, using insights from concepts of the Anthropocene in the natural sciences. The



acceleration of its evolution, development, and population explosion. The speed with which humanity has progressed over the last 300 years is unprecedented in the evolution of the species. In a very short time, it has literally become a geobiophysical force comparable to the forces of nature (Steffen et al., 2020), while at the same time becoming more vulnerable to itself and the forces of nature. Humanity is suddenly faced with many paradoxes, contradictions and conflicts to deal with, many of which it has not experienced in its history so far. From climate change, scarcity of natural resources, social unrest and wars to the paradox of the coexistence of enormous obesity and malnutrition or food insecurity<sup>6</sup>. All of the above points to one important aspect, which is the threat not only to the survival of the species *Homo sapiens*, but above all to the preservation of its civilised form of existence.

From an anthropological perspective, the Anthropocene epoch challenges humanity to rethink its basic survival strategies, from adaptation to a changed natural environment, to ways of acquiring resources to meet needs, to mobility, to humane retreat to areas that will remain habitable. In other words, the human species must now adapt<sup>7</sup> to the conditions of the Anthropocene epoch, which expresses the collision of the human and non-human worlds.

To bring digital nomadism more into the context of the Anthropocene epoch requires a few more brief remarks. The definition of the Anthropocene epoch is based, among other factors, on a comparison of current parameters of, for example, carbon dioxide with its parameters in the Holocene epoch (the preceding geochronological time period in the Earth's history).

The focus on CO<sub>2</sub> concentration in relation to global warming is also important in terms of digital nomadism. As Steffen states:

The increase in atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> concentration provides a useful measure with which to evaluate the rate and magnitude of human-

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conceptualization of the concept of the Anthropocene in the humanities and social sciences is oriented more towards humans (but not in an anthropocentric way), the systems created by them (economic, political, social, cultural and others) and the analysis of the interrelations and interactions within these systems, between them and the Earth System.

<sup>6</sup> According to the WHO report: «More than 1 billion people worldwide are obese – 650 million adults, 340 million adolescents and 39 million children. This number is still increasing. WHO estimates that by 2025, approximately 167 million people – adults and children - will become less healthy because they are overweight or obese» (WHO, 2022: para 1). Further, the World Obesity Federation report states «that over 4 billion people may be affected by 2035, compared with over 2.6 billion in 2020. This reflects an increase from 38% of the world's population in 2020 to over 50% by 2035» (World Obesity Federation: Global Obesity Observatory: 10). According to a report by The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) states, «It is estimated that between 691 and 783 million people in the world faced hunger in 2022. Considering the midrange (about 735 million), 122 million more people faced hunger in 2022 than in 2019, before that global pandemic» (Hmoumen, 2023: 4). The above statistics show a significant disparity between circumcision and famine. The paradox is that the above does not refer to the ratio between well-being and poverty, but to poverty, the unequal distribution of resources, and the failure to balance human energy intake and expenditure.

<sup>7</sup> Adaptation means not only the evolutionary adaptation process of a living organism to its environment, but also cultural adaptation and man-made adaptation to the environment.



driven change compared to natural variability. The human imprint on CO<sub>2</sub> is unmistakable (2004: 18).

According to the Paris Agreement, it is important to maintain: «the increase in the global average temperature to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels» and «to limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels» (UNFCCC, 2016, p. 4). As Bruckner et al. state: «To limit global warming to 1.5°C or 2.0°C, per capita carbon footprints need to be in a global target range of about 1.6-2.8 t CO<sub>2</sub>» (Bruckner et al., 2022: 312). There is as yet no statistic that provides an average carbon footprint per digital nomad. It is estimated that the average carbon footprint is 8 tons of CO<sub>2</sub> per year (Bender, 2019; Gaynor, 2022). From this perspective, digital nomadism should be included among the factors influencing climate change. However, the focus should not be on just this one aspect of the overall environmental impact of digital nomadism.

Humanity today is still using adaptation strategies that originated in the relatively stable Holocene period. Humanity's adaptation to climatic conditions has been so successful that humanity has been able to globalise the world and expand its population from 600 million in 1700 to 8 billion in 2023. At the same time, the complexity of global society has necessitated adaptation to the artificial world in addition to adaptation to the natural world. The geological and climatic conditions of the Anthropocene are disrupting and breaking down the adaptation strategies that worked in the Holocene. The manifestations of climate change are intensifying and becoming less predictable. Humanity and its systems (social, cultural, economic, political, and others) are becoming vulnerable or dysfunctional, for example, this is most evident in agricultural and food production systems. Droughts, floods, temperature fluctuations, hailstorms, frosts, and overall severe weather changes threaten food production worldwide. The collapse of this system affects all other systems of the human world. This undermines the freedom of the digital nomad, because its autonomy is dependent on natural and human systems, albeit in different ways. According to Khazanov:

Most importantly, nomads could never exist on their own without the outside world and its non-nomadic societies, with their different economic systems. Indeed, a nomadic society could only function while the outside world not only existed but also allowed for those reactions from it – reactions which were economic, social, political, cultural, in a word, a multi-faceted response - which ensured that the nomads remained nomads (1994: 3).

In a different way, Khazanov's statement is corroborated by the IPCC report, which states:

Almost all the world's non-urban population and its provisioning ecosystems are impacted by urban systems through connecting



infrastructure and family and kinship ties, remittances and trade arrangements that influence flows of water, food, fibre, energy, waste and people (...) Many rural places are so deeply connected to urban systems that risks are observed to cascade from one to the other (Dodman et al., 2022: 912).

Whatever location digital nomads prefer, whether rural or urban, these locations are interconnected and dependent on the overall condition of the natural and artificial world.

Although as reported by Schools and Schlee, «However, according to current ethnoarchaeological and sociogeographical research nomadism should be considered a rather sophisticated, economically successful, and sustainable way of life» (2015: 838). The question arises: To what extent does digital nomadism fit into a sustainable way of life? In definitions of the phenomenon, there is not yet a clause stating that the digital nomad acts with future generations in mind in relation to the environment. From this perspective, I would lean towards Mancinelli's claim that digital nomadism is rather an «opportunistic adaptation to the conditions created by the impacts of the neoliberal ideology of entrepreneurial freedom» (Mancinelli, 2020: 418). In other words, the digital nomad is so far adapting to the socio-economic system rather than to the changing climatic conditions. However, such a view of the problem would be an oversimplification. There is a reciprocal relationship between changed climatic-geological conditions and socio-economic or political problems (Šťáhel, 2021). From this perspective, digital nomadism is not only an economic, cultural, and technological phenomenon but also an environmental phenomenon.

### 3.1 The limits of digital nomadism

As I have noted, recent studies of digital nomadism point to its explosive growth and agree in their assumption that the number of digital nomads will continue to increase (Lopez, 2022; Cook, 2023). In this context, the question should be asked: Can changes in the Earth`s climatic and geological conditions reverse the increase in digital nomadism? In light of this question, I argue that the rise of the digital nomadism phenomenon is temporary and limited. The limitations will stem from changes in the Earth`s geological-climatic conditions, for example, which will force humanity to transform its systems to adapt to unstable and less predictable climatic phenomena. For digital nomads, this will mean that their favourite destinations<sup>8</sup> will change, adapt and be characterised

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<sup>8</sup> Thailand (Bangkok, Chiang Mai), Thai Isles (Koh Samui, Koh Tao, and Koh Phangan), Vietnam (Hanoi, Da Nang), Indonesia (Bali), Portugal (Lisbon, Peniche, Madeira, and Porto), New Zealand, India, Estonia and many others.



by efforts to mitigate the impact of climate change (changing infrastructure, spatial policies and more). Changing geological and climatic conditions on Earth are further affecting air transport<sup>9</sup>, which is the most common mode of transport used by digital nomads. Other conditions that have a limiting influence on digital nomadism include access to education, socio-economic conditions or the geopolitical position of the nomad's home country (strong passport)<sup>10</sup> and the demand for digital nomad services (the growing influence of AI). Furthermore, the ontogenesis of the digital nomad as a human individual and the impact of frequent travel on their physical and mental health (e.g. burnout) is also a limitation.

In my view, once the conditions that make digital nomadism possible disappear or change, the phenomenon will either stagnate, transform into another form of nomadism, or disappear.

### **3.2.1 Education as a limiting aspect of digital nomadism in the context of the Anthropocene**

All of these factors that point to limits to the growth of digital nomadism are challenging to process in scope and content. For this reason, I have selected one that has received almost no attention from my perspective. Rather, I focus here on the anthropological perspective of nomadism and draw on Hannonen's definition of the digital nomad as a professional. According to this, a person who wants to become a digital nomad or is a digital nomad should undergo or has undergone a certain educational process (not necessarily institutional). Also for such a person there must be sufficient cultural, social and economic conditions that allow access to education or access to technology.

Despite the efforts of global organisations<sup>11</sup> to increase education, the impact of climate change is having the opposite effect. In the past, institutional education was predominantly determined by social, political and economic conditions. These conditions are now being compounded by climate change. According to the UNESCO report: «The catastrophic effects of climate change

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<sup>9</sup> In discussions about digital nomadism, we are often mainly confronted with the argument that frequent flying and the associated increase in CO<sub>2</sub> emissions have a major impact on climate change. What is no longer being said is that climate change is also having a huge impact on air travel. As Williams states «Climate change may have important consequences for aviation, because the meteorological characteristics of the atmosphere influence airport operations, flight routes, journey times, and the safety and comfort of passengers and crew» (2017: 576). Williams points to the increase in the many risks to aviation that arise from changing climate conditions. For example, rising sea levels and storm surges threaten coastal airports, hot air affects aircraft take-off, flights are threatened by an increase in turbulence, and more (Williams, 2017).

<sup>10</sup> On the problem of strong passports, see: (Thomson, 2018).

<sup>11</sup> The Association for Childhood Education International (ACEI); The Global Partnership for Education (GPE); Plan International; Save the Children; The United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).



are no longer isolated emergencies but have become the new global norm – a reality that is only intensifying each year» (2022a: 3). Access to education is made impossible by disasters that force people to leave their homes. UNESCO further states that: «Climate-displaced people face similar barriers to education as do refugees. Yet, unlike refugees, they have no specific right under international law to residency and the explicit right to education» (2022b: para 3). These reports rely on data from the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC). According to the GRID 2023 Report:<sup>12</sup>

(...) 71.1 million people were living in internal displacement worldwide at the end of 2022, a 20 percent increase in a year and the highest number ever recorded. 60.9 million internal displacements, or movements, were recorded during the year, 60 percent more than in 2021 and also the highest figure ever (2023: 6).

Displacement is caused by conflict, violence, war and disasters. This report further states that up to 32.6 million people were internally displaced by disasters in 2022 (GRID, 2023: 14). I want to bring another paradox or contrast to attention by presenting these figures. The UNESCO and GRID reports point to forced displacement, which means that people are forced by external circumstances to move and leave their homes. Digital nomadism, as a phenomenon of voluntary and arbitrary movement, comes into conflict with forced movement. It would be appropriate to ask the following questions in relation to the need to leave one's place of residence: Could research on digital nomadism help with mitigating the problem of forced displacement? Could some of the insights of digital nomads about life on the move be used to help such people? For example, according to IPCC reports, we already know where displacement will occur. Would it be possible to create learning and co-working spaces for at least some of these people in advance?

Statista states that «According to a March 2022 analysis, nine in ten surveyed digital nomads worldwide had a higher education, with around 54 percent holding a bachelor's degree» (Statista, 2023). It is worth considering whether the high educational attainment of digital nomads does not rather suggest limits to the growth of this form of nomadism when placed in the context of increasing levels of educational inaccessibility.

## Conclusion

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<sup>12</sup> IDMC's Global Report on Internal Displacement (GRID) «is the world's leading source of data and analysis on internal displacement. This year's edition includes a special focus on the complex relationships between disasters, conflict and violence, food security and internal displacement» (IDMC, 2023: para 1).



In my paper I pointed out that digital nomadism as a phenomenon of the Anthropocene epoch contains a number of ambiguities, contradictions and limits. I highlighted the problems that make it difficult to analyze, conceptualize and systematically research. I consider the most fundamental ones to be that there is as yet no single definition of it, and academics disagree on what exactly should be emphasized in this phenomenon.

Further, digital nomadism is characterized by ambivalence in the context of the Anthropocene in that, on the one hand, it is a phenomenon that has a significant impact on the environment, socio-economic and cultural conditions of host localities, but at the same time, it contains the potential to address some of the problems of migration and forced mobility. For this reason, the phenomenon should also be more fully explored from a philosophical-anthropological perspective due to the absence of a demarcation of the boundaries between its metaphorical interpretation and the anthropological level of meaning.

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