
DIGITAL NOMADISM AS A GLOBAL PHENOMENON AFTER COVID-19: INSTITUTIONAL AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC DRIVERS INFLUENCING MIGRATION EXPERIENCE

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This article is devoted to the study of the phenomenon of digital nomadism in the period after the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has accelerated the trend on transformation of many aspects of life, including labor market, due to digitalization. The authors discuss the significance of this phenomenon in the context of the intensified reconfiguration of the World-System, as well as its transformation into a global phenomenon after changes in the structure of the labor market that were stimulated by the pandemic. The article examines the concept of digital nomadism and its relevance to the current state of the World-System, as well as the institutional and socio-economic factors stimulating digital nomadism, and analyzes the push and pull factors of Russian digital nomads. The authors conclude that among the pull factors in Russia the following can be distinguished: labor demand, plausible living cost, travel facilities, and a developed IT industry.

Keywords: *digital nomads, Covid-19, migration, socio-economic factors, World System.*

Introduction

In the 2010s, the world entered a qualitatively different state characterized by significant changes in the characteristics of socio-political and economic life in all regions of the world compared to previous periods (Korotayev *et al.* 2022). We can also mention the emergence of new phenomena and groups of factors of social life whose influence was previously not evident at all, or was manifested to an insignificant degree. And such states of the World-System as its accelerated reconfiguration in recent years (Grinin 2023) and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the global labor market and migration processes (Ehn *et al.* 2022) largely determined the actualization of such a phenomenon as digital nomadism.

The 21st century in general has witnessed a significant and ongoing transformation in almost all aspects of life, due to digitalization. Technology has played a critical role

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in enabling and facilitating this change, resulting in rapid innovation and transformation. The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated this trend, making remote work and virtual collaboration a global phenomenon and the '*new normal*' for many industries (Holteran and Notting 2023).

In light of these processes, the indicators of digital globalization have intensified (Bilqis 2023). This can be considered a new form of globalization in the modern world, one of its significant components, whose importance is still largely underestimated at present. The COVID-19 pandemic challenged the previous system of world economies and exacerbated the processes of their digital transformation (Schiliro 2020). Due to their all-encompassing nature, these processes affected almost all regions of the world and systematically influenced the general aspects of migration management and, in fact, gave a new life to the phenomenon of digital migration (Gamlen 2020; McAuliffe and Blower 2021).

However, the impact of digitalization on society is complex and multifaceted, creating both opportunities and challenges. As Friedman (2016) points out, it is critical for individuals, businesses, and governments to be adaptable and resilient in the face of these changes, as well as collaborate to create a sustainable future for everyone. To keep up with technological advancements, a shift in mindset and development of new skills are required. It is vital to consider the potential effects of digitalization on employment, work, and society. As firms expand their remote work policies beyond national borders, it is important to understand the consequences for workers and society, including issues related to job security, employee well-being, and social justice.

It is worth noting that the global trend of digital migration and, accordingly, the growth in the number of digital nomads flowing from one region to another has affected various countries, including the United States, Europe, Asian countries, *etc.* The trend towards digital nomadism is growing actively, and many countries around the world begin to open special visas for such candidates. The main requirements for obtaining a visa for digital nomads are the availability of a permanent income from foreign sources and the ability to work remotely. Among the most active countries in this area are the United States, Great Britain, Canada, and Germany.

Examining the broader social and economic implications of digitalization can help us better understand the changes that are occurring and develop strategies to manage them in a way that promotes beneficial and positive outcomes for everyone involved. This shift has resulted in the emergence of the digital nomad, which allows individuals to work from anywhere, which is closely connected to socio-economics and institutional factors, according to Hannonen (2020), O'Reilly and Benson (2009) and Orel (2019). Hence, the digital nomads are mobile professionals who use digital infrastructure to perform their daily work remotely from any part of the world. Their lifestyle, characterized by high mobility and freedom of decision-making on autonomous location, defines the concept of '*digital nomadism*'.

The COVID-19 pandemic, which began at the end of 2019, had a global impact resulting in widespread lockdowns, travel restrictions and remote work demands. This global crisis had a severe impact on digital nomads who rely on being able to move around and the work from different locations. The advent of digital nomadism is a new phenomenon that is not exclusive to any particular group, and it is especially relevant

for those of Russians, affected by the widespread impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, this study aims to address the current gap in the literature on Russian digital nomads by exploring the socio-economic and institutional factors that motivated Russian individuals to choose this phenomenon as their professional trajectories. Through a thorough analysis of primary data collection, this study seeks to provide an original and rigorous examination of the decision-making processes of Russian digital nomads during the period of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Brynjolfsson and McAfee (2014) argue that ‘those who could effectively adjust to and embrace digitalization would flourish in the gig economy.’ Although not all digital nomads are part of that economy, or what seems to be ‘*precariat*’ as defined by Guy Standing in his book *The Precariat* (Standing 2011). ‘Digital nomads, who represent kind of remote work in the globalized economy, have similarities with the precariat, particularly in their dependence on digital technologies and their experience of employment instability’ (*Ibid.*). Furthermore, according to Friedman (2016: 59), ‘it is imperative for individuals and governments to possess the ability to adjust and recover easily in response to these changes. They should collaborate to establish a sustainable future for everyone, particularly with regard to policy.’ This requires a change in thinking and the acquisition of new skills to keep up with technological advances. It is crucial to carefully evaluate the potential effects of digitalization on both the work of digital nomads and on societies around the world.

According to Hannonen (2020), the digital nomad is a phenomenon that emerges within the changing environment and is tightly linked to socio-economic and institutional variables digital nomads are those who use digital technologies to work remotely from any location in the world. Their lifestyle, which is characterized by frequent travel and the lack of geographical limitations, embodies the core concept of digital nomadism. Digital nomadism has been a catalyst during the COVID-19 pandemic, shifting perceptions towards a dominant ‘*new normal*’ which has effectively been responded to by some governments around the world, who attempted to create a specific framework to define remote work for professionals Digital nomadism has recently become more common in the modern labour market (Thompson 2018; Christoph 2021). This trend witnessed a noticeable surge and attracted global attention during the changes in the structure of the labor market that emerged during the pandemic. Despite the appeal of this emerging lifestyle, where individuals are not only able to work independently of *brick-and-mortar* offices but also choose their geolocation independently, comprehensive discourse on the nuances of socio-economic and institutional factors promoting digital nomadism trend is lacking.

Concept of Digital Nomads

The term ‘nomad’ gained prominence in the 1970s within the context of nomadology, a post-modernist concept of ‘new tribalism’ introduced by Deleuze and Guattari (Deleuze and Guattari 1987; Gosteva and Ovchinnikova 2021). They used the nomads metaphorically to challenge the dichotomy between state authority and individual autonomy, presenting nomadism as a powerful symbol capable of toppling even the mightiest empires. Attali (1993) broadened the scope of this term beyond philosophy, encompassing social, political, economic, and anthropological realms, as he introduced

the notion of nomadic goods, which are compact, functional tools designed for individuals in a hyper-mobile global society. Today, individuals identified as digital nomads use technology such as laptops, social media, and mobile phones to work remotely. They may choose to work from picturesque locations like Labuan Bajo or Bali, Indonesia, for a few months before moving on to shared workspaces in other destinations.

Kaplan (1996) and Müller (2016) provide diverse perspectives on travel and mobility, particularly in relation to digital nomadism. Kaplan explores the postmodern discourse of displacement, while Müller questions whether 'digital nomad' is a substantive research category or merely a trendy term. According to Liegl (2014: 163), a 'digital nomad is defined as a mobile knowledge worker equipped with digital technologies to work anytime, anywhere. Contemporary digital nomadism can be classified into two types: the work-life approach and the lifestyle perspective.' In the contrast to alternative countercultural views, Mancinelli (2020) argues that digital nomadism serves as a practical adaptation within the neoliberal context, where individuals utilize their national advantages to navigate global capitalist structures. This study employs ethnographic analysis to compare socio-cultural attitudes towards mobility with the economic tactics employed to sustain continuous movement.

To sum up the features prescribed to the phenomenon of digital nomadism in different research, let us combine them in the form of a typology presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Types of Digital Nomads

No.	Type	Description
1	The Entrepreneur	Digital nomad who works independently as a business owner and rather have centralized authority of business control. Typically, e-commerce business (Bilqis 2023)
2	The Worker	Digital nomad who works and is entitled to one or two companies. Typically have official working contract and tight to certain hours of working per day (9-to-5 corporate job employee) (Bilqis 2023)
3	The Freelancer	Digital nomad who works independently and provides the services as workforce. Typically, digital nomad who works on a project-based basis and is not formally strictly affiliated with any company. The digital nomads have similarities to the precariat and work in gig economy (Bilqis 2023)

As noted by Urry (2007), digital nomads purposely modify their personal and professional lives to conform to their preferred lifestyle, effortlessly integrating work and leisure and pleasure activities with travel. This practice has evolved into a new work-life balance marked by increased autonomy, freedom, and adaptability at work and in pursuits – an evolving trend that is reshaping conventional notions of employment and leisure. Posner's (2004) framework of *artefacts* and *mentifacts* provides insights into the relationship between digital nomads and their lifestyle. Artefacts, which are physical things that represent cultural values and beliefs, can be seen in the tools and technology used by digital nomads for remote work and communication. These artefacts reflect the important values of adaptability, portability, and interconnectedness that are crucial to the nomadic way of life. Mentifacts, which include intangible aspects such as values and beliefs, have a significant impact on the nomadic lifestyles and work methods,

highlighting ideals such as independence, autonomy, and balance between work and personal life for digital nomads. Posner's approach emphasizes the mutually influenced connection between artefacts and mental constructs, where digital technologies shape and strengthen the nomadic way of life and its values, while the lifestyle itself impacts the utilization and understanding of these digital tools.

Socio-Economics Factors Affecting Digital Nomads

Lee (1966) argues that the migration of people is impacted by a combination of positive, negative, and neutral forces within certain socio-economic and institutional environments. Positive factors attract individuals to specific locations, while negative factors deter them and neutral factors exert less influence. These factors have varying effects on individuals depending on their life stage and personal traits, such as consciousness, Intelligent Quotient (IQ), and cultural background. In addition, collective decisions which come from family and social influences play a significant role in migration choices. Therefore, migration decisions are rarely entirely rational and often involve non-economic motivations, such as seeking social advancement or escape from unfavourable living conditions.

Migration determinants can be categorized into four main groups:

- 1) Factors related to the place of origin;
- 2) Factors associated with the destination;
- 3) Barriers or obstacles encountered along the way;
- 4) Individual or personal factors.

At the same time, among the factors that in one way or another influence migration processes in the context of the discussion about the phenomenon of digital nomadism after the Covid-19 pandemic, we can distinguish push and pull factors. These are factors that, on the one hand, make people want to leave their home area and, on the other hand, attract them to move to other places and areas (Mathieson and Wall 1982; Peralta *et al.* 2024).

However, the decision to become a digital nomad is driven by the motivation, which is formulated by a formidable combination of push and pull factors. Push factors such as economic instability, limited job opportunities, or a desire for change may motivate individuals to leave their home countries and pursue a digital nomad lifestyle. Technology has made it easier to work remotely and seek out new opportunities in different parts of the world. At the same time, pull factors such as access to new experiences, vibrant communities, and natural beauty can also play a significant role in motivating digital nomads. Many individuals may be attracted to cities that offer a high quality of life, cultural diversity, or affordable living costs. Building a community of like-minded individuals and connecting with other digital nomads can also be an important motivator for those who choose this lifestyle. The theoretical framework explains the push and pull factors that motivate individuals to travel. This framework can also be applied to the study of digital nomadism. Table 2 represents push and pull factors that may affect digital nomads' migration, with the distinction between social, economic, and institutional factors.

Table 2

Push and Pull Factors for Digital Nomads

Push-factors (Countries of origin)	Digital Nomads	Pull-factors (Countries of destination)
Conventional lifestyle, low living standard	Social factors	Geolocation, trends, lifestyle, better living standard
Low wages, lack of career opportunities, low consumption	Economic factors	Labour demands, plausible living cost, higher wages
Political upheaval, special military operation, family's decision	Institutional factors	Travel facilities, stable political situation, present diaspora and ethnic community

Digital Nomadism in Russia

The phenomenon of digital nomadism among Russians has gained momentum in recent years (Taisheva 2022), with individuals embracing a lifestyle characterized by location independence and remote work as a part of a global trend that intensified in the early 2020s. While existing research has explored various aspects of digital nomadism, there remains a gap in understanding why some Russian digital nomads choose to stay abroad for extended periods. This article aims to analyze the institutional and socio-economic drivers behind this decision-making process, aiming to uncover the complex interaction between institutional frameworks, socio-economic conditions, and personal motivations for moving to another location during the period of pandemic.

The rise of Russian digital nomadism is propelled by a number of socio-economic and institutional factors. One of them is the growing demand for remote work and flexible lifestyles, especially among younger generations. Digital technologies have made it possible to work from anywhere, and many people are taking advantage of this opportunity to travel and work at the same time. In addition, the high cost of living and low salaries in some parts of Russia push some individuals to look for work opportunities abroad, and digital nomadism offers a way to work from anywhere in the world.

Push and Pull Factors of Russian Digital Nomadism

In preparation for this article, the authors conducted a series of expert interviews with representatives from the academic community and professionals working in the IT field, who chose the principle of anonymity for the interviews. Based on the analysis of research literature, theoretical concepts related to digital nomadism, as well as the results obtained during the interviews, the following findings were obtained regarding the factors that can trigger moving to another place and those that contribute to maintaining current geographic locations.

In terms of *push factors* related to the motivation of high-skilled Russian specialists to move to another area, the following factors can be identified:

- Psychological motives: These include the desire for new experiences, adventure, and personal growth. For digital nomads, the desire for a more flexible lifestyle and the opportunity to travel and work simultaneously may be motivating factors.

- Social motives: These include the desire to meet new people and experience different cultures. The ability to connect with other professionals from around the world may be a factor stimulating the willingness to move to another area or region.

– Economic motives: These include the desire to earn higher wages or access new job opportunities. For digital nomads, the ability to work remotely and earn in a stronger currency than their home country may be a motivating factor.

On the other hand, *pull factors* related to motivation may include the following:

– Destination-specific motives: These include the attractions and amenities of a particular location, such as the climate, natural beauty, and cultural attractions. For digital nomads, the availability of affordable housing, co-working spaces, and reliable Internet are important factors that may stimulate the willingness to stay at home.

– Travel facilitators: ease of travel, such as availability of flights, visas, and transportation. For digital nomads, the ability to easily access and travel to different destinations may be a motivating factor.

– Institutional factors: These include political and economic stability of the destination area, as well as presence of supportive institutions such as co-working spaces and networking groups. For digital nomads, the presence of a supportive community and infrastructure may serve as one of the important motives for moving to another place.

Alternatives. Among other factors that may affect the desire to move or stay in home areas could be the following.

– Economic stability: seeking for more economically stable conditions and higher wages in Russia may push high-skilled employees to seek better-paying opportunities elsewhere.

– Career opportunities: limited career opportunities, particularly in fields such as technology, may encourage people to work as digital nomads.

– Family conditions: seeking better life and new opportunities may be directly related to family composition and may also have been affected by the Covid-19 pandemic.

– Desire for freedom and flexibility in general: a desire for freedom and flexibility may motivate people to pursue digital nomadism as a lifestyle choice. For some, the allure of an adventurous lifestyle that allows them to travel and work simultaneously is a major pull factor.

We may also highlight some social and institutional factors that can also influence migration decisions. Such factors are connected with global trends rather than local specifics.

– Global demand for tech skills: The global demand for technology skills provides Russian digital nomads with a wide range of job opportunities.

– Remote work is becoming more common: The growing trend of remote work means that more employers are open to hiring digital nomads from anywhere in the world, and there is support from the ethnic community diaspora. And this trend, which appeared quite a long time ago, has become significantly stronger during and after the pandemic.

– Access to global networks: The internet provides Russian digital nomads with access to global networks of like-minded professionals and potential clients.

– Affordable cost of living in certain locations: Digital nomads can take advantage of the low cost of living in some locations to stretch their budgets further.

– Economic conditions that may include high inflation rates, currency fluctuations, and other factors affecting the country's economy. They can be challenging for highly skilled specialists to maintain their standard of living.

Conclusion

In recent years, we have seen significant changes in global trends regarding the choice of place of work for highly qualified specialists. The Covid-19 pandemic has played an important role in motivating the choice of remote work or a change in work location. We can also say that digital nomadism may become a more attractive lifestyle in the future as remote work becomes more accepted, retaining its characteristics as a global trend that accompanies globalization processes. This may be especially relevant in the context of the Global South, which, as some researchers have put it, is already experiencing 'transnational gentrification' (Holleran 2022).

And if we can observe how, in recent years, global political processes such as the mass imposition of sanctions by some countries on others contribute to deglobalization processes, then the digital migration processes triggered during the COVID-19 pandemic consolidate digital migration trends.

In this article, we have analyzed the factors that stimulate the desire to move or, on the contrary, contribute to maintaining the current location.

The migration of the people from one place to another place is influenced by a combination of positive, negative, and neutral factors in a specific location within the realm of socio-economic and institutional factors. Positive factors attract people to a certain location, negative factors repel them, and neutral ones are indifferent to them. These factors affect individuals differently depending on their stage in the life cycle and personal factors such as awareness, intelligence, and cultural background. Thus, the decision to migrate is not based solely on the balance of positive and negative factors, but also on motivation to overcome obstacles and inertia. These obstacles can vary throughout an individual's life, and personal factors can affect an individual's perception of these factors. Additionally, family decisions and social factors can also influence migration decisions. Thus, the decision to migrate is rarely completely rational and involves non-economic motivations such as improving one's social status or escaping adverse living conditions.

By examining these factors in detail, this article contributes to the broader discussion on digital nomadism and the changing nature of work and migration in the twenty-first century. The factors that affect migration decisions can broadly be classified into four categories:

- 1) Place of origin factors;
- 2) Place of destination factors;
- 3) Intervening obstacles;
- 4) Personal factors.

By addressing a research gap identified in this article, we aim to contribute to a deeper understanding of the factors that shape the transnational lives of Russian digital

nomads and to offer insights that can inform policy interventions and support mechanisms for this growing demographic group.

Thus, one of the essential characteristics of the Russian IT sphere is that it boasts a highly educated workforce with a significant number of individuals with advanced degrees. This has resulted in a skilled workforce that is well-suited for remote work and digital nomadism. Another important feature is that IT industry is a strong point in Russia, with a large number of software developers and technology start-ups. This fosters a culture of entrepreneurship and innovation, making digital nomadism an attractive option for individuals in the industry. Next, the Russian government has implemented policies that support remote work, such as allowing employees to work from home and providing tax breaks for the companies that offer remote work options. These policies have made it easier for Russians to transition to digital nomadism. And despite the fact that there are a number of factors that have stimulated the outflow of specialists in this field from Russia, which has worsened since the period of the Covid-19 pandemic, there is reason to believe that the foundation has now been laid for levelling the impact of push factors and stimulating the possible return of such specialists to Russia.

In conclusion, we would like to note that the study of digital nomadism has emerged as a critical topic in the realm of work and migration studies. As digital technologies continue to advance and transform the way people work and live, more individuals are seeking remote work arrangements that offer increased flexibility and autonomy. This growing trend of digital nomadism has significant implications for policymakers, employers, and individuals who are navigating the holistic mode of working. In this context, understanding the socio-economic and institutional factors that contribute to the rise of digital nomads in a specific cultural and political context, such as Russia, is of particular importance. By understanding the factors driving the growth of Russian digital nomads, policymakers can develop policies and programs to support remote work and entrepreneurship. Employers can use this knowledge to attract and retain talent in a competitive global market, while individuals can make more informed decisions about their careers and lifestyles. Consequently, the study of the socio-economic and institutional factors behind the rise of Russian digital nomadism is significant because it contributes to broader discourse on digital nomadism and the changing nature of work and migration for Russians. It provides insights into unique experiences and challenges facing Russian digital nomads and has practical implications for various stakeholders. Therefore, conducting further research in this area is essential for advancing our understanding of this global trend and developing strategies to address the opportunities and challenges it presents for Russian digital nomadism.

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