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REMOVING THE BOUNDARIES OF FLEXIBILITY: A CRITICAL EVALUATION ON DIGITAL NOMADISM[1]

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Abstract– *Digital nomads describe a distinct group independent from the leisure-work dichotomy in accordance with the technological transformations in working life. As a group with unique characteristics, digital nomads present a lifestyle narrative based on freedoms. Furthermore, global mobility accompanies a working life independent of time and space. However, the presentation of digital nomadism through the phenomenon of freedom disconnects nomadism from the process of work and employment, and the impact of neoliberal transformation at the global level on the motivations of these actors disappears. Therefore, the study evaluates digital nomadism in the context of the global transformation of work life. Besides, it investigates both the connection between nomadism and the transformation of the production process, and the consequences of this change on digital nomads. When digital nomadism is analyzed from such a perspective, significant processes of precariousness can be seen to accompany the flexibilities associated with freedom, and digital nomads are transformed into entrepreneurial actors of the neoliberal regime in the digital environment. Thus, the professional life of digital nomads is gradually converging to traditional forms of work and individualizing risks without social protection.*

Keywords– *Digital Nomad, Digitalization, Global Mobility, Flexibility*

ESNEKLİĞİN SINIRLARINI KALDIRMAK: DİJİTAL GÖÇEBELER ÜZERİNE ELEŞTİREL BİR DEĞERLENDİRME

Öz – *Dijital göçebeler, çalışma hayatındaki teknolojik dönüşümlere paralel olarak boş zaman-çalışma dikotomisinden bağımsız, özgün bir grubu tanımlamaktadır. Farklı karakteristik özelliklere sahip bir grup olarak dijital göçebeler, özgürlüklere dayalı bir yaşam tarzı anlatısı sunmaktadır. Ayrıca küresel hareketliliğe, zaman ve mekândan bağımsız bir çalışma yaşamı eşlik etmektedir. Ancak dijital göçebeliğin özgürlük olgusu üzerinden sunulması, göçebeliği çalışma ve istihdam sürecinden koparmakta ve küresel düzeyde yaşanan neoliberal dönüşümün bu aktörlerin motivasyonları üzerindeki etkisi görünür olmaktan çıkmaktadır. Bu nedenle çalışma, dijital göçebeleri çalışma hayatının küresel ölçekte dönüşümü ile birlikte değerlendirmektedir. Ayrıca, göçebelik ile üretim sürecinin dönüşümü arasındaki bağlantı ve bu değişimin dijital göçebeler üzerindeki sonuçları da incelenmektedir. Dijital göçebelik böyle bir perspektiften analiz edildiğinde, özgürlük ile ilişkilendirilen esnekliğe önemli güvencesizlik süreçlerinin eşlik ettiği ve dijital göçebelerin neoliberal rejimin dijital alandaki girişimci aktörlerine dönüştüğü görülmektedir. Böylece, dijital göçebelerin profesyonel yaşamı giderek geleneksel çalışma biçimlerine yakınsamakta ve sosyal koruma olmaksızın riskleri bireyselleştirmektedir.*

Anahtar Kelimeler – *Dijital Göçebe, Dijitalleşme, Küresel Hareketlilik, Esneklik*

1.INTRODUCTION

Technological developments and digitalization lead to significant transformations in the economic, political and social spheres, and many areas are redesigned in accordance with these developments. The world of work cannot be considered independently from this process. With the digital transformation, both direct employment relations and individuals' perspectives on working life are differentiating (OECD, 2024; ILO, 2021; OECD, 2019). In addition to technological developments, large-scale social crisis moments such as pandemics have accelerated the transformation of given relations in a wide range from social relations to the production process. As a result, many new forms of organization have started to shape working relations as new norms. Moreover, not only technological developments but also the differentiation in the production process, policies regarding flexibility, the globalization process and neoliberal transformation have been effective in differentiating not only labor relations but also the phenomenon of work itself. As a result of the neoliberal development's association with individualization, actors are redefined through entrepreneurship. Thus, the labor relations of actors who are "individualized through corporatization" are also reformed depending on the change in this field (Harvey, 2005; Sennett, 2007; Dardot and Laval, 2014). This large-scale transformation process has made it possible to define new actors and categories in professional life.

Digital nomads exist as new actors with unique qualities in the evolving labor markets. Located at the intersection of globally diversifying mobility and transforming labor relations, digital nomads point to a new generation of the labor force that is constantly on the move. In addition, they are defined within the framework of broad "independencies". In this context, the most fundamental characteristic that distinguishes digital nomads as a new category is that they describe a group that is constantly mobile on a global level without any interruption in the working process. It is also expected that their number will increase in accordance with the organizational transformation of businesses (Johnson, 2022). In addition, the pandemic process has also been effective in the expansion of this category (Orel, 2023). Therefore, it is stated that digital nomads should be considered as a growing labor force and new management policies will be needed in line with the needs of this group defined as qualified labor force (Nichols, 2022).

Thus, we encounter a process in which digital nomadism is defined through many different elements such as the development of personal freedoms, the crossing of cultural borders and the development of tourism (Sánchez-Vergara et al., 2023; Prayana and Darma, 2023; Angiello, 2022; Hermann and Paris, 2020; Kocaman, 2021; Poulaki et al., 2023). However, although digital nomads represent a labor force that is discussed and positioned on the basis of freedoms, as actors defined on the principle of transformation of working life, they cannot be described as independent from the changes in global production and labor relations and the effects of these changes on labor.

This study aims to evaluate digital nomads not only as an actor of global mobility but also as a flexible labor category. As a matter of fact, digital nomads point to a new category of labor where many elements of flexibility are crystallized. This framework defines digital nomadism at the nexus of technological transformation, flexible work policies and the consequences of precarity as a labor category.

For this reason, within the framework of the study, first, different definitions of digital nomadism are evaluated, and the areas covered and excluded by the concept are examined. It then explains where digital nomadism is positioned globally in labor relations and policies. Finally, the study focuses on the effects of digital nomadism on individuals and analyzes these effects through global relations of production.

2.BETWEEN WORK AND GLOBAL MOBILITY: IDENTIFYING DIGITAL NOMADS

New technologies and digitalization transform social relations, which directly differentiates the processes of production, work and value creation (Loonam and O'Regan, 2022; ILO, 2021; Nambisan et al., 2019). In this context, digitalization in business life, in the simplest definition, refers to the use of digital technology and data in the structuring and transformation of business processes where digital information is central (Sezen and Eren Şenaras, 2022: 54; Ritter and Petersen, 2020). In addition, it is also pointed out that with the digitalization process, the dimension of communication that establishes a one-sided relationship has gained a two-way feature. Thus, it is emphasized that it has become possible to create new distribution channels, customer relations and organizations in business processes (Akın, 2021: 42). In this context, digital nomads define a new category of labor on the basis of digitalization.

The concept, which was first introduced by Makimoto and Manners (1997), defined groups having mobility in the context of work, leisure and travel in a globalized world where entrepreneurship is centered through new technologies and ways of working. The structure of globalization, which accelerates and diversifies the migration process (Castles and Miller, 1998), provides an important basis for characterizing digital nomads, who are positioned at a point where new forms of international mobility and the effects of the digitalization process on working life converge. Factors such as globalization, individualization, increased international mobility, the development of new communication technologies and the increasing flexibility of working life identify digital nomads as important actors in new mobilities (Hannonen, 2020).

Definitions of digital nomads generally focus on leisure, travel and work processes (Bozdoğan and Özuz Dağdelen, 2022; Andino-Frydman, 2023), and the concept generally revolves around the reshaping of working life with digital tools and the transformation of lifestyles based on mobility. In all cases, however, the most important component is the change in employment relationships. In this context, the

term refers to professionals who have the opportunity to work independently of time and space through the process of remote work, in which digital possibilities are maximized, and who experience working life and leisure practices in transition (Hermann and Paris, 2020; Müller, 2016). Moreover, the capabilities of digital nomads to manage their leisure time practices indicate more than simple flexible working styles to achieve work-life balance (Thompson, 2018: 4). Digital nomads maintain their mobility during the working process and travel frequently. Therefore, it is emphasized that these individuals have a perspective outside of the work/leisure dichotomy (Reichenberger, 2018), and it is stated that digital nomadism points to a holistic lifestyle beyond just a flexible and mobile working process (Cook, 2020).

Frequent mobility processes and the freedom associated with it indicate an important source of motivation for digital nomads (Akgiş İlhan, 2023: 17). In addition, factors such as independent work, working on digital platforms and gig work also contribute to this motivation. Especially the sharing economy and the development of digital platforms play an important role for digital nomads in terms of not only production processes but also meeting certain needs as groups in frequent mobility (WYSE, 2018). These elements are embodied through digital nomads' demand for "freedom" in different categories. According to Reichenberger (2018), the main motivation of the phenomenon develops through personal, professional and spatial freedoms. At the intersection of freedoms, creativity, personal development, control over working life, travel and personal experience processes holistically shape digital nomadism.

Within this framework, it is pointed out that digital nomadism has three dimensions, including temporal, spatial and field of activity. The temporal dimension focuses on the short-term, temporary nature of digital nomadism. Temporality does not only include short-term work activities but also points to the temporary nature of this process as a lifestyle. The spatial dimension characterizes practices of working and maintaining a lifestyle without being tied to a specific location. In addition, this definition does not only refer to telecommuting. It is stated that digital nomadism should have an international character as a result of its nature. Finally, the field of activity dimension focuses on the differentiation of working life for digital nomads from the practices of other mobile individuals (Dreher and Triandafyllidou, 2023: 8-9).

Similarly, Çömlekçi (2021: 82) defines three types of mobility for digital nomads as "managerial", "spatial" and "temporal" by using the phenomenon of mobility in a wide range. According to Çömlekçi (2021: 82), digital nomads have "managerial" mobility in terms of not being positioned within hierarchical company structures and working on different projects, "temporal" mobility in terms of creating their own work schedules flexibly, and "spatial" mobility in terms of the freedom to work in the country/region of their choice. Due to their given

characteristics, Kaya Deniz (2019) defines digital nomads as "hedonistic workers of the digital age" as a result of their lifestyles and their approaches to the duality of leisure and work life.

As a new category in working life, the number of digital nomads is increasing. In the report prepared by MBO Partners (2022), it is stated that 16.9 million workers in the United States define themselves as "digital nomads" in 2022, indicating an increase of 131% compared to the number of 7.6 million in 2019. In the same report, the number of people who define themselves as digital nomads for 2020 and 2021 is calculated as 10.9 and 15.5 million. However, the report also makes a distinction between independent workers and dependent workers and states a significant divide has occurred in terms of dependent workers, especially among those who define themselves as digital nomads during the pandemic. As a matter of fact, while 4.1 million of the 7.6 million workers in 2019 were independent workers, only 5.8 million of the 16.9 million workers calculated for 2022 were independent workers, while 11.1 million workers were employed by an organization. The pandemic period is cited as the reason for the low increase in the number of independent workers compared to dependent workers. It is emphasized that the pandemic has transformed working life, especially for dependent workers, and accelerated the process of remote working, whereas independent workers had relative autonomy before the pandemic and, therefore, did not experience large increases in the relevant category (MBO Partners, 2022: 5).

Although digital nomadism is a phenomenon that is on the rise globally, it is also emphasized that the quantitative evidence of the field should be critically evaluated due to the complex relations and definitions of digital nomadism (Hannonen, 2020). As mentioned above, the meaning and organization of work for digital nomads as a unique category differs from traditional approaches. Therefore, it is necessary to provide further details on the areas related to both work and mobility for those engaged in the practice of digital nomadism. The effectiveness of digital technologies in the production of goods and services has led to significant transformations in the working and income-earning practices of individuals. Being in constant mobility undoubtedly requires significant financial competence for individuals. Akın (2021: 47) states that digital nomads focus on four areas for the financial continuity of their current lifestyles: earning passive income, living savings-oriented, working in digital jobs and seeking investment opportunities. However, this study is positioned to critically examine digital nomads as a category of labor. It defines a unique group in terms of their position in labor relations. It is, therefore, necessary to provide further detail on the nature of their labor relations and processes.

The professional life of digital nomads is heterogeneous. While their geographically independent, remote work processes intersect with traditional working groups, their labor organization and working styles have unique

characteristics. They can also be clustered in certain sectors. The activities of digital nomads include a wide range of work areas such as software programming, web design, graphic design, content production in new media communication fields, and digital marketing (Bozdoğan and Özuz Dağdelen, 2022: 281; Cook, 2022: 309; Salihoğlu, 2021: 28). However, although digital nomads operate in various sectors with different qualifications, they generally work in information jobs, where the creative sectors are situated in a central position (Çömlekçi, 2021: 82). The MBO Partners (2022: 8) report has similar results, noting that the top three occupational categories are technology, creative services and education.

In addition to the diversification of the employment relations of digital nomads in terms of flexibility, the organization of work is also changing significantly. Digital nomads have to organize their work individually, whether they work for an organization or independently. Therefore, compared to traditional workers, they have a preliminary preparation phase that includes many different elements before starting work. These activities, which are defined as "meta-work" by Aroles et al. (2023) and refer to the invisible labor process before work, are examined in four main categories for digital nomads. First, due to their frequent mobility, digital nomads have to constantly provide the space and infrastructure requirements for work in their new work environment. Second, digital nomads have to establish their visibility and accessibility. To achieve this, they must regularly integrate their pre-existing connections into new processes. Thirdly, as a result of temporal and spatial differences, digital nomads have to constantly synchronize their working life individually. Finally, it is necessary to ensure the organization of migration processes and to eliminate bureaucratic problems related to migration (Aroles et al., 2023).

The unique nature of digital nomadism in the organization of work requires the development of different practices regarding the problems experienced. First of all, the definition of mobility as a way of life leads to the development of different approaches to property ownership. In this context, it is argued that property relations have been replaced by commodity exchange relations and practices involving the use of common space (Akın, 2021: 43). Especially the Covid-19 pandemic has a direct impact on the development of related practices, and coworking spaces developed due to remote working are both increasing and diversifying (Gerosa and Manzini Ceinar, 2023; Leducq et al., 2023). Moreover, coworking spaces indicate a diverse practice of space consumption by digital nomads, and coworking spaces can be categorized as practical, social or exploratory (Chevtaeva and Denizci-Guillet, 2021). Within this context, von Zumbusch and Lalicic (2020) refer to co-living spaces as hypothetical camping sites that are vital for the sustainability of digital nomadism.

Secondly, digital nomads develop solidarity mechanisms through different social networks to overcome the problems they encounter (Çömlekçi, 2021). This is also a consequence of the negative impact of relation forms defined within the framework of independence, freedom and mobility on the creation of permanent social relation sets. Digital nomads rarely stay in a region long enough to establish connections with their communities, which leads to the transfer of solidarity practices to digital social platforms (Aroles et al., 2023). In this context, it is stated that digital nomads require network capital unlike social capital relations that require relative geographical proximity in the traditional sense (Mancinelli, 2020: 433). Thus, the development of information and communication technologies not only provides new opportunities for digital nomads in labor relations, but also offers solutions for the sustainability of the existing structure. Therefore, the identity of "nomad" cannot be considered independently from the new working and solidarity practices developed as a result of technological transformation and digitalization.

Besides the unique characteristics of the work, another important area of investigation for digital nomads is their mobility processes. The central role of mobility in digital nomadism places this phenomenon prominently within the field of tourism and digital nomads can be considered as a new tourist profile for countries (Kocaman, 2021: 801; Düzgün and Akın, 2022). However, digital nomadism points to a whole set of activities that develop beyond mere touristic mobility, where work is at least as central as the travel process. It is pointed out that the mobility of digital nomads at the global level is shaped on a large extent where tourism, personal experience and work-related mobility are combined, and for this reason, it should be characterized as a lifestyle mobility (Bozdoğan and Özuz Dağdelen, 2022: 283-284). Therefore, the elements related to mobility should be evaluated and the aspects that differ from other mobility activities should be clarified.

The mobility of digital nomads is located in a grey area, outside of the dichotomy of work-oriented mobility and lifestyle-oriented mobility (Hannonen, 2020: 339). Similarly, Cook (2020; 2022) emphasises that both the travel and work focus of digital nomads are extremely high. However, the level of mobility among tourists varies considerably, with no focus on work. On the other hand, among professionals who are permanently travelling the situation is the opposite, with a central focus on work.

Based on these differences, Nash et al. (2018) make a distinction between "nomadic workers" and digital nomads. They state that the main focus of the nomadic workers' mobility is work activities, whereas the main focus of digital nomads is mobility, and work is integrated into this process. The fact that mobility is at the center of the lifestyle of digital nomads causes the destinations of nomads to be situated in an essential position for both individuals and countries. The fact that digital nomads are highly mobile, spatially independent individuals who are also obliged to maintain a working life causes the destination countries and cities to be determined on the basis of certain characteristics. For example, "Nomad List", which is an important digital platform for digital nomads, evaluates and scores cities globally on factors such as security, cost of living, internet infrastructure, recreation, education and income level, access to free

wireless internet, and acceptance of foreigners. In this context, the highest-rated destinations include places such as Bangkok / Thailand, Lisbon / Portugal, Zagreb / Croatia, Canggu-Bali / Indonesia, Berlin / Germany, Chiang Mai / Thailand (Nomad List, 2024). Considering the crucial importance of maintaining a remote work life for digital nomads, technological infrastructure facilities constitute an extremely significant preference factor, and it is also noted that the costs related to accommodation are also decisive (Sztuk, 2023; Demirel İli, 2023). Technical infrastructure requirements are an important, but not the only factor in destination preferences. Therefore, the need for a holistic policy-making process involving social partners to influence the destination choices of digital nomads is emphasized (Angiello, 2022; Sanul, 2022; Prayana and Darma, 2023).

As mentioned above, travel destinations can exhibit highly diverse features and are globally distributed. Based on the 2020 data from the Nomad List platform, Kocaman (2021) examined the 20 most preferred destinations of digital nomads and classified these destinations in three groups as "High Tolerance - Luxury", "Low Tolerance - Economic" and "High Tolerance - Economic" from the digital nomads' point of view. The first category includes London, Berlin, New York, Paris, Singapore, Amsterdam, San Francisco, Los Angeles, while Bangkok, Chiang Mai, Kuala Lumpur, Istanbul, Ho Chi Minh are clustered in the second category. Within the destinations defined as high tolerance and economic, Canggu-Bali, Mexico City, Playe Del Carmen, Barcelona, Buenos Aires, Budapest and Lisbon are mentioned (Kocaman, 2021: 809).

The fact that digital nomads define a unique group, constantly on the move on a global scale, requires countries to regulate their activities, from mobility processes to working life. In addition, the specific features of digital nomads lead to the creation of new services. These service areas vary from the production of common spaces, especially co-working spaces, to educational and financial services specific to their activities (Akgiş İlhan, 2023: 23-26). The most important pillar of states' regulations on digital nomadism is undoubtedly visa policies. Countries have started to introduce "digital nomad visas" to regulate their activities. Visa statuses related to digital nomadism define both a control and a marketing tool for countries (Sánchez-Vergara et al., 2023), and the digital nomads' potential to create value as a qualified labor turns digital nomads into desirable actors for countries (Hooper and Benton, 2022: 2; MBO Partners, 2022: 17; Hermann and Paris, 2020: 330).

However, the visa statuses directly related to digital nomadism cannot be monitored clearly due to the complexity of the work and travel processes. In this context, while some countries directly grant visa statuses for digital nomads, others have visa statuses for remote and independent work, although they do not directly qualify as digital nomads. These statuses may be compatible with digital nomads' own fields of activity. Yet, the most general features of digital nomad visa statuses are that they provide residence and work permits within the country while working for an employer outside the country and prevent working in local businesses or creating local businesses. These statuses may also include family members for some countries and countries may also have a minimum income requirement for granting this visa status (Hooper and Benton, 2022: 20-21).

Digital nomads are also positioned in a relatively challenging area in terms of the capacity of nation-states. Different types of definitions of freedom are directly addressed in the lifestyle narrative of digital nomadism. This makes it possible for digital nomads in search of a "borderless" life to consider themselves on the basis of "world citizenship", although this means an authority gap for nation-states (Cook, 2022). Digital nomads maintain a form of mobility characterized by the prominent position of work while remaining subject to different border regulations. As a result of the blurred distinction between work and travel, individuals are placed outside various social protection mechanisms, and processes such as auditing and taxation (İnneci, 2023) are not possible for governments (Cook, 2022; Hooper and Benton, 2022). The emergence of digital nomadism has led to an expansion of research in related fields, including the impact of new technologies on the transformation of working life, global mobility analysis, tourism and leisure studies. However, an approach that only accepts digital nomadism as a given practice is not sufficient to evaluate the relevant literature; new forms of work should be evaluated in relation to the dynamics of the systemic transformation of the capitalist organization of production. Thus, it becomes possible to make a multifaceted, holistic analysis of the field, which is often presented as a new lifestyle discourse.

3. EMBRACING FLEXIBILITY: A SYSTEMIC VIEW FROM PRODUCTION ORGANISATION TO INDIVIDUAL IMPACTS

Digital nomads' view of working life differs from traditional and dependent working relations significantly. For digital nomads, work processes are accompanied by frequent degrees of mobility, regardless of a fixed work organization. Digital nomadism creates an ecosystem where working life is transformed in line with technological developments for individuals. Thus, digital nomadism is positioned at the intersection of this lifestyle approach and digital entrepreneurship (Stumpf et al., 2022). However, these processes cannot be described as independent of the transformation of production and labor relations and the effects of this transformation on labor. In this regard, digital nomadism refers to a category of workers that covers many different sub-layers in social, individual and technological dimensions. The technological dimension, which enables flexible organization of working life, includes infrastructure services related to nomadism and "platform" infrastructure. Platforms include elements such as the creation of markets and payment systems that enable remote and independent

work (de Almeida et al., 2022). Therefore, within the scope of this sub-heading, first, the effects of technological transformation on working life are emphasized and the impact of this transformation on the institutionalization of digital nomadism as a new practice is discussed. Second, it analyzes the impact of this transformation on digital nomads as a global form of labor.

3.1. Digital Nomadism in The Context of Digitalization, Flexibility and Changing Forms of Work

The global use of information and communication technologies has gradually increased in every aspect since the 2000s, and the forms of production of goods/services and, accordingly, working processes have directly differentiated. As previously stated, digital nomads are individuals who are constantly mobile on a global scale and new technologies fulfill numerous functions related to production and consumption relations (Thompson, 2018; Dreher and Triandafyllidou, 2023). Therefore, the phenomena such as the platform economy, gig economy and sharing economy, which describe new forms of producing goods and services, are extremely important for digital nomads to continue their activities.

Digital platforms transform the ways of producing goods and services and become a tool for coordinating supply and demand for goods and services in an online market (Eurofound, 2021: 4). In this framework, digital platforms enable a way of working that develops based on "decentralization" on a global scale and contribute to the development of new business models (Vallas and Schor 2020: 274). Thus, digital platforms have come to define a workspace in which an increasing number of workers are involved at the global level (OECD, 2019). The working process on digital platforms is generally demand-oriented and focuses on the completion of certain "tasks" (Çiğdem 2019: 177). The demand and assignment-oriented structure of digital platforms leads to the convergence of working relations transformed by technological developments into project-oriented forms of work (Başaran, 2021). In this framework, new forms of employment developed based on digital platforms constitute significant work fields for digital nomads (Nash et al., 2018; Thompson, 2018).

Although working on digital platforms represents an autonomous working process for digital nomads in many dimensions, it also raises important issues in terms of labor relations. First, the position of labor operating on platforms is shaped differently from traditional employee-employer relations. Digital platforms, where individuals are mostly independent entrepreneurs, positions the status of labor in a controversial position (De Stefano, 2016; Eurofound, 2021). Thus, in a non-standard employment process shaped around short-term, project/task-based agreements (Arısoy and Parlak, 2022; ILO, 2016), the risks related to work are becoming increasingly individualized (Webster, 2016; Shanahan and Smith, 2021). The mechanisms that protect workers in the labor market in the context of dependent employment do not apply to platform workers, where each individual is an "independent entrepreneur".

This situation refers to the transformation of production relations by technology and digitalization in the context of flexibility and globalization. The historical need for flexibility for capital accumulation (Güler-Müftüoğlu, 2014) has been accompanied by the practices of de-spatialization with digitalization. In a process where labor in global production relations becomes operationalized through different forms of flexibility (Harvey 1990: 151), digital platforms have created the conditions for the maximum flexibility of labor with their demand-oriented structure. These developments cannot be isolated from the impact of neoliberal transformation on different social spheres. Neoliberal development removes the constraints of capital at the socio-economic and political levels, drastically limits the regulatory role of states and restructures the actors of capital accumulation on the basis of flexibility (Harvey, 2005; Jessop, 1994).

As a matter of fact, the institutionalization of non-standard work intersects the neoliberal state, which has limited regulatory power, and digitalization (Lanamäki and Tuvikene, 2022). Thus, digitalization has a strengthening and accelerating effect on neoliberal accumulation (Murillo et al., 2017; Kovács et al., 2017). Rather than characterizing flexibility as a periodic change, evaluating it in the context of a historical continuum also raises the question of what is "new" about digital nomadism.

The characterization of each individual as an independent entrepreneur in a system where digital nomads operate as independent workers is consistent with the neoliberal ideology that emphasizes the primacy of individual entrepreneurship. Under the neoliberal idea, individuals are transformed from being governed subjects to self-governing subjects, and all activities of individuals are seen as a process of value creation and entrepreneurship (Dardot and Laval, 2014). The institutionalization of independent working relations on the neoliberal discourse of freedom causes the dependency contained in production relations to become invisible, and all responsibilities related to the employment process are individualized in this regard (İlyas, 2022: 42). Furthermore, the activities in which digital nomads are employed, especially in the creative industries, structurally refer to a work organization where informal relations are the norm (Alacovska, 2018; Alacovska and Gill, 2019; Merkel, 2019), and precariousness in employment is embedded in the working life of digital nomads by indicating a sectoral reality.

In fact, this situation refers to a similar feature of digital nomads' positioning themselves in the professional world. This process, which is characterized as an escape from traditional work and market relations for digital nomads, gains a contradictory appearance, and the symbolic appearance provided through the lifestyle narrative itself becomes commodified and begins to express a brand and market value. Mancinelli (2020: 429) defines digital nomadism as an adaptation on the neoliberal entrepreneurial ideology, rather than an approach against the dichotomy of work and leisure with a focus on self-realization. Noting that digital nomadism is shaped through "geographical arbitrage" that enables the mobility of citizens of countries with certain advantages, especially in

the direction of global inequalities, digital nomadism is characterized as an individual exit strategy for the increasing inequalities in the core countries.

This approach allows the process to be interpreted directly alongside the transformations of the welfare state, with strong passports serving as a means of escape from the transformation of the welfare state brought by neoliberal policies. In this sense, the observed systematic increase in digital nomadism can be considered as a flexible response to global economic problems shaped on the Western economic and political context (Hong, 2023). Thus, in a framework where globalization is described as a response to the crisis of capital accumulation (Ercan, 2000), digital nomads are seen as flexible labor process actors in the globalization narrative. The fact that digital nomads are mostly citizens of the global north with strong passports supports such an approach (Cook, 2020; Thompson, 2018). The mobility of digital nomads also indicates a unique labor mobility on a global scale. Especially in a process where the boundaries of international mobility have increased since the 1990s (Akalın, 2012: 101), countries have increasingly developed visa policies to attract and regulate the mobility of digital nomads, opening a space for debates on which labor mobility is "acceptable" at the global level in terms of international labor mobility. Visa policies related to digital nomadism not only set the conditions for managing mobility, but also serve as a tool that causes individuals to discipline themselves in line with these requirements and qualifications (Mancinelli and Germann Molz, 2024). Furthermore, in order to compensate for the economic losses during the pandemic, states are trying to shape their border policies to encourage digital nomads, which is defined as the reproduction of neoliberal border policies (Mancinelli and Germann Molz, 2024).

Thus, the governance of mobility in the global context also provides a meaningful framework for the governance of the necessary qualifications. Moreover, this situation does not only indicate regulatory debates on border policies, but the country preferences of digital nomads can also be evaluated as a problem of "international gentrification" (Holleran, 2022). Therefore, it is not possible to evaluate the activities of digital nomads formed based on freedoms independently from the features of the production process and labor markets at the global level.

In this context, the development of digital nomadism progresses simultaneously with the institutionalization of policies regarding flexibility and deregulation. A dual analysis where individual preferences are evaluated together with the functioning of labor markets at the global level provides insight regarding the relationality among the details of the elements that are given on digital nomads. Moreover, such an approach provides an opportunity to directly characterize digital nomads as a labor category and to evaluate the problems in their working lives in a holistic manner.

3.2. Digital Nomads and Precarity: Individual Impacts of the Transformation

The deregulation and flexibility of global employment relations have a differentiated impact on workers, transforming and diversifying employment practices. Digitalization, on the other hand, can deepen the relations formed as a result of this diversity and bring about different consequences for labor. In the case of digital nomads, these effects can be traced through several different sub-headings.

3.2.1. Digital Nomads in the Context of Diversified Labor Relations

The technological transformation and the diversification of working life have created unique and new organizational practices and potentials for digital nomads. The term "digital nomad" does not refer to a homogenous group with fixed characteristics. Social transformations are creating differences in lifestyle, labor relations, and the significance of being a digital nomad.

In this context, Cook (2023) makes a difference between the definitions of digital nomadism before and after the pandemic. Pointing out that digital nomadism has gained a more complex and diverse structure after the pandemic, digital nomadism can be evaluated through five different typologies. According to this classification, digital nomads are categorized as "self-employed digital nomads (traditional model)", "business-owning digital nomads" with a more complex organizational structure, "waged digital nomads", "experimental digital nomads" who are experiencing the lifestyle but not yet earning income, and individuals who are not yet digital nomads but aim to become nomads in the next three years. Such a classification extends digital nomadism beyond defining digital nomads as marginal/small groups, but more importantly, the classification structures the visibility of digital nomads directly in terms of work and labor control. In a structure where individuals are described as independent entrepreneurs in the employment process, the work organization portrayed by digital nomads within the framework of freedoms gradually begins to converge with traditional working processes (Cook, 2020). Analyzing digital nomadism through a standard narrative causes different layers in this field to be invisible, and the existence of different layers in both individual and professional life is not included in the dialogue.

In addition, the fact that digital nomadism includes an increasing and diversifying range of categories also calls into question assessments of the temporality of nomadism. As a matter of fact, the implementation of different regulations by states regarding digital nomads constitutes an important example in terms of the institutionalization of nomadism as a widespread and permanent practice.

Digital nomads also operate as independent workers within the platform ecosystem, and their autonomy and flexibility are accompanied by practices of precarization (Dreher and

Triandafyllidou, 2023: 8). Within this context, it is argued that digital nomadism can be defined as forced mobility involving precarious labor relations on the basis of socio-economic changes due to neoliberal policies (Thompson, 2018; Mancinelli, 2020). Thus, it is pointed out that digital nomads are a category that adapts to neoliberal changes depending on entrepreneurship and technological skills (Hermann and Paris, 2020: 332).

Globally, the labor process is being reorganized in a framework where employment relations are disappearing, organized on the basis of flexibility and aimed at reducing the costs by individualizing risks, while the supervision and control of employers in labor relations continues through digitalization, especially through platforms (Omidi et al., 2023). The position of digital nomads in labor relations proceeds in line with this process.

Although digital nomads are positioned against the traditional work processes, the connection of digitalization with the stages of qualification and de-qualification in terms of the labor process (Thompson and Smith, 2009; Thompson and Newsome, 2004) creates a risk area for digital nomads as well (Wang et al., 2020: 1393). This situation is crucial in terms of observing the transitivity and transformations between different levels and modes of flexibility.

Moreover, as mentioned above, the relation of production processes with digitalization and automation creates a different risk area for digital nomads operating on the basis of technological developments and may lead to the formation of a structure that is critical for sustaining working life and ensuring the continuity of employment (Verma, 2023). Thus, although professional life is defined through independence, this is only achieved through the establishment of new dependencies.

3.2.2.In Search for Sustainability: The Commodification of the Lifestyle

The precariousness of digital nomads' working lives necessitates the development of new financial practices that commodify the experience of nomadism itself. The structure shaped through the lifestyle narrative gradually leads to the formation of a process where the symbolic appearances of nomads are commodified.

For digital nomads, the transformation of professional life ceases to be an objective, and professional life and personal life are merged through the narrative of nomadism itself. The presentation of lifestyle creates new income opportunities for digital nomads, and the financialization of lifestyle becomes possible through elements such as coaching/mentoring, organizing/networking, being a community manager, making sponsorship agreements and being an inspirational/influencer (Bonneau et al., 2023).

New communication technologies and social media platforms are found in a central position at the intersection of digitalization and self-branding processes, and new social capital creation processes for self-employed workers may operate through these platforms and play a role in employment security (Gandini, 2016). As the presentation of lifestyle is described as the pursuit of individual freedom, the imperatives of financialization become invisible. It is also stated that the creation of new financial instruments in certain aspects of lifestyle runs parallel to the commodification of a counter-culture narrative, nevertheless, this phenomenon is observed to be limited in practice (Toivanen, 2023). In addition to the construction of new services in individual spheres, the organization of services related to digital nomadism constitutes a similar set of new services as well.

The working lives of digital nomads are not isolated from the precariousness of traditional forms of work. In a certain sense, the practices of sustaining working life point to the reflection of the search for security in different domains on the practices of everyday life. Moreover, the existence of multiple uncertainties in working life leads to the inclusion of precariousness specific to digital nomadism in the general deregulation of working life.

3.2.3.From Legal Uncertainties to Inequalities: Risks Related to Social Protection

The global transformation of production organization and policies in search of flexibility makes precarious working practices a norm for labor. The digitalization of working life also largely embodies the features of non-standard employment and leads to the formation of a precarious employment process (Arısoy and Parlak, 2022). This also is the case for the labor relations of digital nomads, and the protective mechanisms related to employment cease to exist. In an economic structure where each individual is an "entrepreneur" in the context of specific projects/tasks, precarity is inevitable (Mancinelli, 2020: 428). Furthermore, the position of digital nomads in labor relations is defined as "extreme" compared to other forms of remote work based on legal status issues, spatial problems and the structure of digital nomadism that prioritizes individualization (Rasnača, 2023: 202).

Thus, in a working process where risks and costs related to protection mechanisms are individualized, flexibility gains a legitimate ground through the narrative of freedom. As a result, digital nomads face risks such as precarity, uncertainty and loneliness in working life (Hensellek and Puchala, 2021; Hermann and Paris, 2020: 332; Miguel et al., 2023).

Furthermore, access to protection mechanisms related to labor markets for digital nomads is not only a cost-oriented problem but also points to a bureaucratic problem area, and uncertainty regarding legal regulations may constitute a barrier to accessing protection mechanisms. As mentioned in the previous sections, the working life of digital nomads focuses on remote working processes with a globally mobile nature. This situation causes visa statuses to be shaped on the basis of travel (Cook, 2022), and the uncertainties caused by the need to constantly renew tourist visas or stay permits place digital nomads in a vulnerable position (Mancinelli, 2020: 430).

Mobility defined in terms of short-term travels without a special visa status for digital nomadism renders work-related activities invisible and accordingly, certain social protection mechanisms cannot be applied to digital

nomads. Thus, a contradictory process appears where the phenomenon of work becomes invisible for digital nomads who are located in grey areas in the traditional bureaucratic scheme in terms of both work and mobility. The processes related to remote work involve challenges for employers in terms of taxation, payrolling, compliance with local laws on employment, licensing and data security, and for employees in terms of positioning outside labor protection mechanisms, double taxation, and transfer of vested rights (Hooper and Benton, 2022: 10-11). This situation causes the existing difficulties observed in remote working to become more complex for digital nomads due to the uncertainty of their status during the working and travelling phases. Therefore, the set of flexibilities regarding the work and mobility of digital nomads refers to a system where advantages and disadvantages coexist (Cook, 2020; Hensellek and Puchala, 2021). However, to the extent that the advantages of flexibility are defined through the individual preferences of digital nomads, the connection of the transformation in global production policies through flexibility and the negative consequences of this transformation on workers are excluded from the discussions and gain an individual dimension.

Although digital nomadism has a definition shaped by freedoms, this does not exclude inequalities that can be followed at different levels, and inequalities can be observed in a wide framework from mobility stages to the nature of digital nomadism. As a matter of fact, Linao (2022) draws attention to the structure of nomadism that differentiates the digital nomadism experience on the basis of features such as race, ethnicity and gender, and emphasizes that such features create limitations in terms of nomadism. Firstly, digital nomads define actors with strong passports and directly digital nomadism itself benefits from this geographical segregation. Thus, the relations of digital nomads established with the local is directly driven by social inequalities (Thompson, 2019: 34).

It is also noted that digital nomads may encounter discriminatory practices based on gender or ethnic status (Aroles et al., 2023). This situation demonstrates the diverse characteristics of the nomadic groups, which are unified through a discourse of freedom (Linao et al., 2024). This provides insight into the differentiation of practices within this social context.

The dual structure regarding social risks becomes much more visible, especially in times of social crises such as pandemics, and the flexibility of digital nomads may also allow them to develop adaptation strategies against such risks (Ehn et al., 2022; Holleran and Notting, 2023). This indicates an important security mechanism, especially in a functioning where social protection is highly problematic. In this context, Holleran (2022) draws attention to two different approaches; firstly, digital nomads make short-term returns during the pandemic period, especially due to the need for social protection mechanisms of their own countries, whereas those with a more liberal approach have an emphasis on flexibility. Consequently, digital nomadism, as both a process and an outcome, is situated at the nexus of diverse dimensions of flexibility and deregulation policies.

4. CONCLUSION

Social, economic and technological changes lead to large-scale changes in the spheres of work life and mobility, and de-spatialized working relations and diversified mobilities make it possible to define new actors at the global level. In this context, digital nomads, who have become the subjects of global mobility as a group defined independently from the dilemma of work and leisure time, are positioned outside traditional labor relations and present global mobility in accordance with a lifestyle narrative. Moreover, the mobility of digital nomads indicates an international migration process that is encouraged and increasingly regulated by countries based on their unique characteristics.

However, analyzing digital nomadism only in terms of individual preferences and lifestyle mobility reveals a significant area of criticism. The precarious nature of activities in the digital spheres in which digital nomads operate, as well as the relation of this field to neoliberal ideology, presents a controversial point in regard to the symbolic values of digital nomadism. Digital nomads are also present at a point where the corporatizing approach of neoliberal entrepreneurship is digitalized. To the extent that they organize their mobility in order to take part outside traditional work systems, the neoliberal market relations in which digital nomads are embedded deepen. The fact that digital activities are organized on a freelance basis and mostly on a fixed-term contract causes those working in this area to face uncertainties ranging from income to the sustainability of their employment, and the risks are defined under individuals' responsibility. International status uncertainties make it impossible to access labor market protection mechanisms.

In a framework where risks are imposed on individuals, the problems experienced by digital nomads are disconnected from the existing production policies and carry the risk of being drawn to the focus of personal preferences. However, many countries are trying to regulate the activities of digital nomads by defining special visa statuses. As these regulations are still developing, their impact is not yet clearly known.

Within the scope of these features, the evaluation of digital nomads in a framework where individual motivations and socio-economic transformation at the global level are analyzed together provides a holistic perspective. In addition, as a growing category, digital nomads constitute an important example of the need to redefine many aspects of both work life and migration.

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