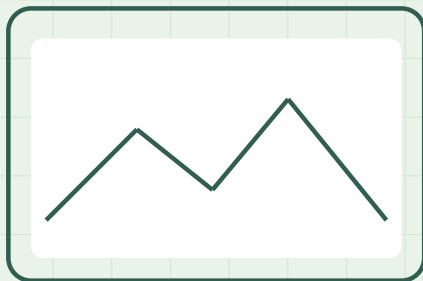


DIGITAL NOMADISM

Cultural Transformations,
Social Dynamics and Challenges
in Bansko



English Working Translation

This PDF is an automatic English working translation made directly from the Bulgarian first edition. Proper names, quotations, references and web addresses have been retained or translated as faithfully as possible. Tables and diagrams have been recreated in English, and the original photographs are preserved. Professional language review is recommended before publication or formal quotation.

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Contents

INTRODUCTION Relevance of the topic 7 Methodology, goals and objectives 11 Definitions of digital nomadism 18 Typology: digital nomads vs. tourists 26 Mapping digital nomadism 36 Introduction to the terrains 42

I. THE NOMADIC UTOPIA 66 1.1. Mobility and fluidity 68 1.2. Freedom and free choice 73 1.3. Conscious Consumption 82 1.4. Proximity to Nature 97 1.5. Personal Development and Spirituality 107 1.6. Location-Independent Work 123 1.7. Summary 147

II. INFRASTRUCTURE AND SERVICES FOR DIGITAL NOMADS 153 2.1. Coworking Spaces 156 2.2. Coliving Spaces 178 2.3. Renting and Buying and Selling Real Estate 230 2.4. Administration and Documentation 240 2.5. Summary 254

III. DIGITAL NOMAD COMMUNITIES 259 3.1. Maintaining a Digital Nomad Community 262 3.2. Eventfulness as a Tool for Unification 276 3.3. The local community and digital nomads 303 3.4. Dimensions of home and family 331 3.5. Summary 367

CONCLUSION 372 Sources used 388 Appendix 1: 400 Appendix 2 402 Appendix 3 404 Appendix 4 406 Appendix 5 408

The page references in this contents list follow the pagination of the Bulgarian source edition.



The nomadic-utopia motif in Bansko.

INTRODUCTION

Relevance of the topic

Laptop in the backpack and a new address – Bulgaria!

The new visa for digital nomads is a fact!

Remote workers can now stay for up to 2 years and live and work here, and the initiator of the concept is BESCO – “The Bulgarian

Entrepreneurial Association”.

Our country benefits from this – both in terms of image and economy.

With this Facebook post, the Bulgarian Association of Entrepreneurs notes the amendments adopted by Parliament in the Law on Foreigners in the Republic of Bulgaria in June 2025. Additional provision No. 36 of it defines three groups of people as “digital nomads”: (1) persons employed under an employment contract by an employer registered outside the European Union, the European Economic Area or Switzerland; (2) representatives, managers, shareholders, partners or owners of companies; (3) self-employed persons. The association emphasizes that with this amendment, the state recognizes “the potential of digital nomads as a catalyst for economic, social and cultural development”¹.

Bulgaria Wants You. 1.07.2025. Bulgaria opens its doors to digital nomads with a new “visa”. <https://bulgariawantsyou.com/bg/news/bulgariya-otvarya-vrati-za-digitalnite-nomadi-s-nova-viza-za-prodlzhitelno-prebivavane> (31.07.2025)

The innovation comes at a particularly opportune time, as Bulgaria joined the Schengen area on 1 January 2025 and adopted the euro on 1 January 2026. The issuance of such a visa offers a clear legal path for non-EU citizens to live and work in Bulgaria outside of short-term restrictions. ² It has been attractive to digital nomads for more than a decade, thanks to events such as the “Bansko Nomad Fest” in the town of Bansko, where between 200 and 1,000 nomads reside annually depending on the season, as well as numerous co-working and/or living spaces across the country specifically targeting this group of people.

A. Krasteva (2025: 99) identifies three stages in the development of digital nomadism, which has been strongly affected by the coronavirus pandemic. Before it, location independent work was not practiced by many people

and was rather an exception. During this period, between 2019 and 2022, the number of digital nomads in the United States increased by 131 percent. In the period after the control of COVID-19, digital nomadism transformed from a niche activity into a widespread phenomenon.

According to Cook 2023 and Rasnača 2023, there are 35 million digital nomads worldwide, 16.9 million of whom are in the

Stoyanova, M. 22.07.2025. Bulgaria Digital Nomad Visa – Everything You Need To Know. <https://sofiaexpats.com/blog/bulgaria-digital-nomad-visa-everything-you-need-to-know> (1.08.2025)

of the United States. However, the truth is that it is very difficult, if not impossible, to count nomads, as they often remain purposefully “off the radar” of national governments. Even in countries where a visa is available for digital nomads, they do not always take advantage of it, as they perceive it as a limitation and a contradiction to their fluid and mobile lifestyle. In addition, definitions of digital nomadism are vague and are often formulated in such a way that they also cover some forms of tourism. The phenomenon is studied through the prism of various sciences – anthropology, sociology, psychology, geography, economics, law, political science, etc. – and thus falls into the fields of migration studies, leisure and tourism studies, business and management studies, human resource management, etc.

Despite the highly dynamic nature of digital nomadism, compared to the rapid expansion of the concept and the new developments in which it occurs, there is a lack of sufficient data, as well as an analytical framework for studying it. In the Bulgarian context, theoretical and empirical research lags behind, with only a few researchers addressing the topic to date (Stoychev 2020; Prodanov 2021; Stancheva 2021; Krasteva 2023; Krasteva 2025; Ilieva, Dzhendova-Duneva 2025). In-depth articles with field ethnographic material are lacking.

Now more than ever, talented people who are disappointed with their work and life in their home country/city are leaving them behind, because they fear that they will not be able to realize their work and life goals through traditional employment. Nomadic life attracts them with the promise of traveling, being free to choose whether and how often to change their location, being able to balance work and personal life, including changing their career/profession; not to stifle curiosity and the spirit of discovery, their thirst to taste new cultures and new environments. They embark in search of new environments of their own choosing and in response to their need to reside in a community of

like-minded people with whom they share values such as autonomy, moderate consumption instead of overconsumption, personal development, cooperation instead of rivalry. The communities formed are fluid like their members themselves and it is a novelty and a challenge to be studied, and it is key to do this through in-depth research analysis of data collected with scientific methods.

The media presentation of digital nomadism is particularly rich (in social media, YouTube, blogs, etc.) in English and much less affected in Bulgarian. Although such materials contain curious facts and reveal diverse but similar life stories, they lack the depth that scientific (and in particular

ethnological) research can provide. The romantic, idyllic side of mobile life is shown, but not the challenges, problems, dark side (e.g. contradictions and conflicts, loneliness and psychological problems). The interaction between newcomers and locals is rarely examined in detail, as well as the effect of the deployment of infrastructure for digital nomads on the local environment – property prices, environmental sensitivity, community engagement, etc. These aspects need to be understood in order to develop and implement development policies.

Methodology, goals and objectives

While conducting their fieldwork among digital nomads on the island of Bali, Woldoff and Litchfield (2021) realize that for this type of people, telling one's own story is more than an exercise in personal branding or identity affirmation. In an environment where almost everyone is alone and needs support, telling a personal story builds closeness, a sense of openness. Inspired by their ethnographic research and adopting some of the techniques described there, I applied them in the field in the town of Bansko and the Semkovo resort – places that my preliminary research indicated were teeming with digital nomads.

When meeting with respondents, I introduced myself to them not only as a “partial digital nomad”, who has been combining the professions of “social anthropologist” and “freelance book editor” for a decade. I talked about my current and previous research, during which I lived and worked in Poland, Slovakia, and North Macedonia for periods of several weeks or months. As well as about my 15-year experience as a traveler, camper, and mountaineer, who visited Indonesia, Armenia, and Georgia (all destinations popular with digital nomads) and wrote and successfully sold my own travelogue about Mongolia, and subsequently helped numerous other authors publish their own books. As a result of this presentation and

the sharing of stories and personal experiences, I positioned myself among my interviewees not only as a researcher who is here to document their way of life, but also partly as an “insider”. As an anthropologist, I received many questions about various aspects of digital nomadism, and the participants compared my observations with their own experiences, which naturally led to in-depth discussions that went beyond the topics of my preliminary questionnaire.

In addition to the informal conversations I conducted, including with local people, I have 33 interviews with digital nomads and coworking space owners, selected using the snowball method (I responded to recommendations for places and people to include in the study, as well as reviewing the sources they provided me online). The demographic profile of the anonymized interviewees is presented in Appendix 1, which describes the gender ratio (15 women and 17 men), approximate age, nationality and profession in the sample. With one exception, all participants stay in Bansko for a long time, come and return here several times, and many of them also own property in the city. It is striking that there are no respondents in their early twenties, which is most likely due to the fact that Bansko and Semkovo are not particularly attractive to them.

The semi-structured interviews consist of 10 questions, each with several sub-questions, covering the following main topics: biographical history; work practices, values (freedom and mobility, personal development, connection with the environment, consumer practices); concept of home and community, need for specific services. The interviews were conducted between January and July 2025, mostly in person, and in 7 of the cases – via online video calls. Most participants are from countries with so-called “strong passports” – the strength of a passport is measured by how many countries they can enter without a visa. All interviews were transcribed and read several times again in order to analyze the content and distribute the quotes from respondents by themes and subthemes, so that they take their place in the content of this monograph even at the draft stage.

I also conducted a focus group discussion with 5 people as an official part of the Bansko Nomad Fest 2025 program. The event organizers assisted with online publicity. I prepared the following questions for the participants:

~ Do you work while traveling? Do you consider yourself a digital nomad?

~ Why did you choose to come to Bansko? What do you know about Bansko?

~ What is your experience with coliving and coworking spaces?

~ How important is nature when choosing a destination?

~ What motivated you to become a digital nomad?

~ Can anyone become a digital nomad?

~ What challenges and problems have you faced?

A spontaneous, informal 3-hour focus group discussion with 8 participants also took place in one of the coliving spaces where I lived. The digital nomads themselves discussed the exact topics of my questionnaire and reflected on them in depth, as well as being interested in my opinions and observations.

Online outreach – although my fieldwork ended at the end of June 2025, I maintained contact with some of my respondents online (Kozinets 2015) through social media throughout the writing of the book. I still follow the pages where they publish information and updates about their own entrepreneurial projects and

travels, I subscribe to their newsletters, I follow publications about Bansko and Semkovo in the media. I also follow online publications of scholars researching digital nomadism in the group “Researchers and Scholars of Digital Nomadism on LinkedIn” with nearly 200 members from all over the world, and I was able to meet two internationally recognized experts on the topic in person during the “Bansko Nomad Fest”. I also participated online in the discussions, part of the roundtable under the project “Digital nomadism – Lifestyle Mobilities, Nation-State and the Mobile Subject” of the University of Helsinki³.

When writing an ethnographic work, I find it extremely valuable to include not only quotes, but also biographical stories of specific individuals in order to present diverse interpretations of the same context. They are selected in such a way as to illustrate key topics in the monograph, such as the construction of infrastructure for digital nomads, the formation of nomadic communities, family trips of digital nomads, etc.

The main goal of my work consists in researching and analyzing, systematizing and popularizing my findings on digital nomadism. My work should contribute to the knowledge and understanding of sociocultural

Due to limitations in the volume and subject of the monograph, I focus mainly on publications by European scholars and do not touch on the volume of materials on digital nomadism by American colleagues. General data for America is available here:

<https://www.mbppartners.com/state-of-independence/digital-nomads>.

processes driven by the phenomenon. In this context, the target group of respondents are: (1) digital nomads with different social, professional and family profiles; (2) business owners who offer services for digital nomads (coworking and coliving spaces, event organization, etc.); (3) locals who grew up in Bansko or the region and reside there at the time of the study.

The monograph answers several research questions, which can be summarized as follows: “What are the opportunities and challenges facing digital nomads and locals?”

I ask the nomads questions about how they chose Bulgaria, how long they stay here and do they return? How do they balance work and free time, how do they deal with procrastination⁴ and the relative physical isolation from colleagues and clients? How does a mobile lifestyle affect work, relationships, children, social networks/community life and leisure? How do mobile subjects position themselves and what do they say about home, identity and belonging? What are their perceptions and experiences in Bansko/Semkovo and what is their vision for the future of these places? More generally, what are the attractive factors when choosing destinations and do nomads encounter administrative problems with visas, health insurance, taxes? (Here I am referring to

Procrastination is a tendency to constantly postpone important or urgent tasks, often caused by anxiety, perfectionism or lack of motivation.

(e.g. availability of comfortable and affordable housing, cost of living, suitable working environment, quality of infrastructure, entertainment and natural resources available, visa restrictions.)

I am also interested in what a digital nomad community looks like, how nomads create social connections and a sense of community in a place with such a high turnover of individuals. In this regard: how do knowledge, goods and skills spread in their (online) networks and how are different resources mobilized?

With coliving and coworking space owners I discuss: how do they finance their ventures in small towns/resorts, how do they attract their clients and how do they deal with problems and challenges.

I also do not underestimate the interaction with local people who share a common environment with digital nomads, even though such a lifestyle may be foreign and even incomprehensible to them. Through my conversations with local people, I document the sociocultural and economic effects of digital nomadism on the region, how the lives of local communities are changing under the influence of newcomers and how they are perceived by local residents. I focus on contacts, conflicts, marginalization.

In order to answer the research questions and fulfill the set goals, I set myself the tasks of:

(1) conducting field research and collecting up-to-date qualitative field ethnographic material

on digital nomadism, subsequently correlating my findings with those of other scholars and formulating observations and conclusions valid for the phenomenon not only in Bulgaria, but also globally;

(2) tracking various sociocultural and economic practices, including the dynamics between individuals practicing digital nomadism, the communities they fit into, and local people.

My tasks do not end with the publication of the monograph, but extend to the period after it. Then it is necessary to disseminate the results of my work by presenting and promoting the research at international scientific forums and in the media, in order to reach both a specialized and a wider audience.

Definitions of

digital nomadism

In 1997, one of the executives of Sony – Tsugio Makimoto – introduced the term “digital nomad” in a book co-authored with David Manners (Makimoto, Manners: 1997). The two predicted that thanks to the rising wave of technologically driven mobility, professionals in the creative industries would soon be able to reconsider an eternal human choice: to be sedentary or to become nomads (Woldoff and Litchfield, 2021: 79).
About

a decade later, digital nomadism has become increasingly popular in the Western world among those who value – and can afford – the freedom to be location independent. This lifestyle is based on the availability of a reliable internet connection, which allows individuals to work remotely and travel the world, simultaneously satisfying their passion for travel and

fulfilling their professional obligations – balancing work and leisure (Orel 2023: 142).

Researchers of the phenomenon emphasize that not every location-independent worker is a digital nomad. Here are some possible definitions.

“Individuals who use digital⁵ technologies to work remotely – have the ability to work and travel simultaneously, can choose the frequency of travel and their location, and visit at least three places per year that are not their own home or home

In the monograph, I use the following meaning of “digital” refracted through the prism of anthropology, inspired by the work of Daniel Miller: “anything that can ultimately be reduced to binary code, but which creates a further proliferation of particularities and differences”. Miller, D., Heather, H. *The Digital and the Human: A Prospectus for Digital Anthropology*. <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/anthropology/people/academic-and-teaching-staff/daniel-miller/digital-and-human-prospectus-digital-anthropology-1> (5.08.2025).

of a friend or family member” (Cook 2023: 259).

“Mostly young (millennials and Generation Z) individuals with a desire to explore the world and a mobile lifestyle that combines travel with virtual work and requires a specific set of skills and equipment” (Simova 2023: 176, 186).

“The work of these individuals is digitalized, multi-locational and flexible in terms of geographical location – their mobile lifestyle is their choice. They differ from remote workers, holiday workers and highly skilled migrants whose lifestyle choices do not include constant or continuous travel” (Toivanen 2025: 6).

In the definitions of “digital nomad” some scholars also interweave the terms “coworking space” (a space for shared work) and “coliving space” (a space for shared living). Voll et al. (2022) define digital nomadism as an extreme form of flexible work facilitated by technology and globalization, in which individuals work multi-locally and rely primarily on the internet and portable devices. Digital nomads often abandon a permanent place of residence, replacing it with a multi-local lifestyle, and choose their work environment based on personal interests rather than professional circumstances. This lifestyle blurs the lines between

work and leisure, emphasizing the balance between the two. Voll et al. (ibid.) note that remote work also brings challenges, including poor

work-life balance, loneliness, and constant expectations of the worker to be online. In response to these problems, digital nomads seek out “third places” such as coworking spaces that provide a professional work environment and infrastructure.

In an earlier article, Orel (2019) pointed out that coworking spaces represent not only a working environment for nomads, but also a living environment, and contribute to their full lives. According to Vogl and Micek (2023: 6), digital nomads and mobile intellectual workers have been concentrated mainly in coworking spaces in urban areas, but in recent years, such spaces have increasingly opened their doors in non-urban areas around the world, for example in touristic mountain (and I would add coastal) regions. That is why the scientific interest and scope of my fieldwork are focused precisely on a mountain resort town like Bansko (see the section “Introduction to the Fields”).

I also share the observation of Hensellek and Puchala (2021) that the following factors are present in all definitions of “digital nomad”: digital work, flexibility, mobility, identity and community. These terms occupy central to each of the chapters of this book.

Having examined the various definitions of digital nomads, let us build a schematic profile of them. The E-Wanderlust project brings together data collected by 104 researchers who studied the attitudes and life histories of 502 digital nomads. The scientific report states that these are predominantly people with a university education, who work an average of 38.3 hours a week and have an income typical of the upper middle class. Their most common professions are: software developers/programmers, cybersecurity and IT specialists, digital marketing specialists, consultants, content and/or digital product creators, online teachers and trainers, writers and authors, photographers and videographers, remote health service providers, translators, virtual assistants. To these typical professions I would add virtual assistant⁶ and coach/therapist⁷. Therefore, it is

Many entrepreneurs prefer to hire a virtual assistant to take on routine tasks such as conducting online research, preparing presentations, organizing schedules, and even more complex processes such as project management.

Woldoff and Litchfield (2021: 124) believe that coaching is such a popular profession among digital nomads because it aligns with their values. They encourage clients to prioritize themselves (individualism, freedom), help them increase their self-awareness through structured activities (personal

development), instill in them values beyond material possessions (minimalism), and view the transfer of their knowledge as a gift to the world (sharing, collaboration rather than competition). The problem with this seemingly positive doctrine

“a workforce that is both specialized and filled with entrepreneurial spirit and adaptability” (E-Wanderlust, 2025). Their most common choice is to work from their current home in their chosen destination (45.6%), followed by a coworking space (17.1%) and a coffee shop (16.3%). Another important finding is that “while some individuals perceive digital nomadism as a long-term lifestyle, others engage in it temporarily or during certain phases of their lives” (ibid.). The average duration of their nomadic lifestyle is 4.65 years, but some respondents indicate that they have been living this way for 30 years, while others – for only a few months.

At a presentation in a Sofia restaurant, my 30-year-old respondent Mira⁸ from Bulgaria, a digital marketing specialist and experienced traveler, tells the audience of about thirty foreigners, some of whom are expats⁹: “How do typical digital nomads live? Two or three months in a different country, you will usually see them, for example, in Bali or Vietnam. Beautiful photos from the beach – that is the stereotype, but it is greatly exaggerated. Their work is entirely remote, they only need a laptop. Women usually work will be discussed in detail in the section on personal development and emotional state in the first chapter of this monograph.

To preserve the anonymity of the participants in the study, all names have been changed.

This foreign word is increasingly used in the Bulgarian language with the meaning of “a foreign citizen who resides and works in a country other than their homeland”. It is usually used for highly qualified specialists, motivated by personal choice and opportunities. ²³

in marketing – I also work in marketing. Men usually work in IT. So we just need Wi-Fi, coffee and good food. Many of us digital nomads don’t have a home, an apartment or a place to live, but we have a home base – a specific place where you return or store your luggage”.

In a subsequent interview with me, Mira added that sometimes individuals with a similar lifestyle differentiate themselves from the definition of “digital nomad” and because they don’t want to be associated with it, they prefer “independent of their location”. Also, according to her, digital nomadism is often associated with influencerism – proclaiming specific services, destinations, products, etc. This “stigma” is also confirmed by

other respondents of mine, according to whom there are attitudes in society that digital nomads are not serious professionals, but are drifting along.

Ulrich (around 50, Austria, real estate entrepreneur) emphasizes: “Years ago, everyone wanted to be a digital nomad, but some nomads lost money or didn’t know how to earn enough and then ended up begging on the streets in Thailand, so the term has gotten a bad rap now. It depends on who you ask, what circles you’re in, but it can have a kind of bad connotation. I’m not a digital nomad because I like having a home, I like having a coffee machine and so on. But I also want to distance myself from that term.

So I wouldn’t call myself a digital nomad. I’m a location-independent person.”

During the interviews, I ask my interviewees to give me their definition of a “digital nomad” in order to then outline the common expressions and characteristics. My hypothesis that digital nomadism is associated with independence, not being tied to a place, traveling to explore new locations and cultures is confirmed:

Eddie (around 40, Bulgarian-Israeli origin, owner of coworking and coliving spaces): “This is a person who has no anchor, no home or job in a specific place, or something that ties them to that location. He distinguishes himself from that, he is free, he still has a job, he has some income, but they are not tied to the place”.

Mary (just over 50, Netherlands, translator): “This is someone who travels while working. Or someone who lives mainly to travel, and works a little in between”.

The following two definitions show that the key value for respondents is to have free choice and to be able to fit into various “boxes”.

Martin (around 50, Germany, entrepreneur and co-living space owner): “My definition is to have no definition. If you feel like a digital nomad, you are a digital nomad.”

Audrey (around 35, Norway, English and Spanish teacher): “I would say it’s a free

spirit who takes care of themselves and is able to travel freely whenever they want and connect whenever they want - free to make their own decisions.”

I'll end with a definition that oozes awareness: "Let's be honest – we overuse the term 'digital nomad.' We use it for marketing purposes to attract some people. They're not even nomads. They're not even location-independent. The term is often misused. And it is also misinterpreted" – Joel (around 30, Romanian-American, online English teacher, former coliving owner).

Typologization:

digital nomads vs. tourists

To avoid misuse of the term "digital nomadism", there is a growing need to build a careful classification – which mobile/multilocal working entity is considered a digital nomad and which falls outside this framework. This turns out to be the biggest challenge in writing this monograph. There is an impossibility of developing a single, comprehensive typology of digital nomads, which, however, should not be taken as a failure of the analysis, but as an essential characteristic of the studied group. The impossibility is due to the fact that people exercising digital

nomadism, are extremely individualistic and are not a homogeneous group.

Before presenting my own model, I will present several typologies that have gained the most popularity in scientific research on digital nomadism in the last few years. Koskela and Szabo (2024) propose a typology inspired by Brunce and Lee (2023) and adapted, based on the length of stay.

IN THE CASE OF A SHORT-TERM STAY in a given country, three types of individuals are distinguished.

(1) Tourists – their stay is from a few days to about a month (short-term), they only need tourist infrastructure and do not require intervention or services from the state.

(2) Workers during their holiday trip – if they work from a few weeks to a month (in English this is called *workation* and is a play on words: work + vacation, work + vacation).

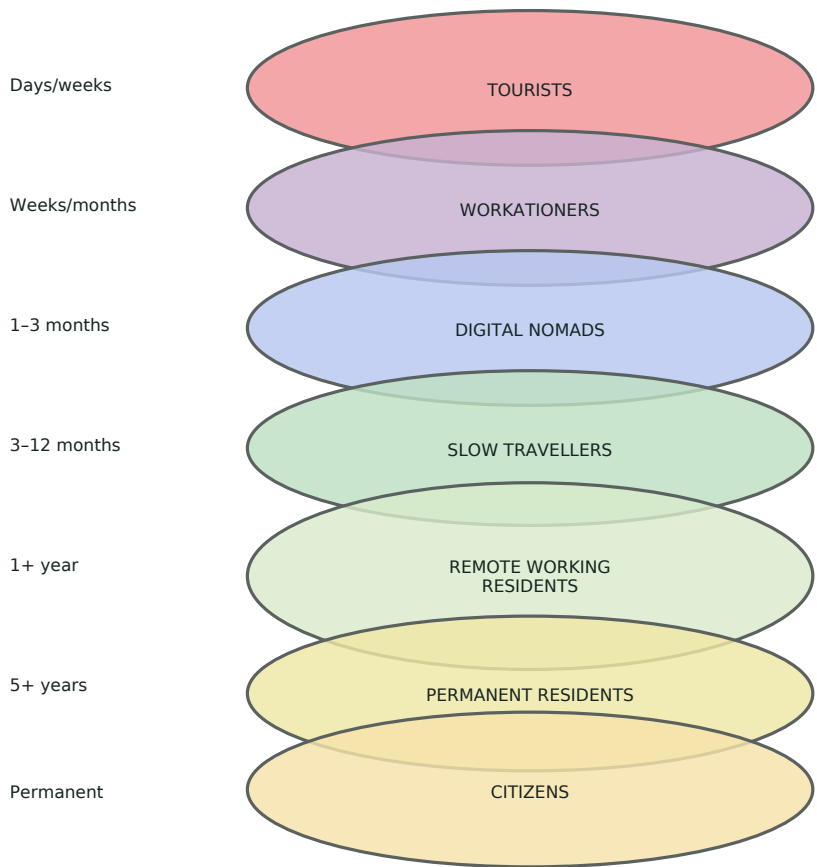
(3) If they work from 1 to 3 months, this makes them digital nomads.

FOR MEDIUM-TERM STAY – from 3 to 12 months – we are talking about slow-traveling digital nomads (*slowmads*, a play on words from slow + nomad). During this period, they benefit from services for finding housing, healthcare, banking, telecommunications. They are usually offered solutions in accordance with their globalized lifestyle.

FOR LONG-TERM STAY – more than a year – we are already talking about remote working

residents. And if it is more than 5 years – permanent residents/citizens participating in the state social security system and the state labor market.

Figure 1: Overlapping forms of mobility and residence (adapted from Koskela and Szabo 2024).



Digital nomads are often “accused” of being just long-term tourists. This problem is evident, for example, in the following definition: “telecommuters,

using the internet, who focus on connectivity and productivity even during their vacation” (Bozzi, 2020; *italics mine*, P. D.). The wording suggests that digital nomads are “on vacation” – but how can they be on vacation if they are constantly traveling?

As Hall et al. (2018) explain, digital nomads can be identified as tourists because they participate in tourism activities in a given destination. In addition: their behavior on the road resembles that of traditional tourists – both groups often choose similar destinations, visibly distinguish themselves from the local population and limit their social network to similar people.

Why is the statement that tourist = digital nomad not true and what is the difference? After all, in the age of mobility, it is not unheard of for tourists to work while traveling. As the definitions presented above make clear, digital nomads spend more time than the usual few days/week that a tourist would spend, and they also change countries frequently (usually several times a year). To address this theoretical problem, Bednorz (2024) proposes a typology somewhat similar to the one described above.

(1) “Tourism” is understood as temporary mobility to and from the individual’s home at his/her discretion, and is therefore a workation – tourists working digitally.

(2) Digital nomads, working on a computer and constantly traveling from one place to another, are most accurately described by the term “lifestyle mobility” (Cohen 2015: 160-161) in the sense of a kind of wandering – moving forward, not backward.

(3) It is possible that they can transform into “digital expats” – people who have left their home country to live or work in another country. In this case, the most accurate term is “lifestyle migration” (Benson, O’Reilly 2009: 625) – voluntary relocation in pursuit of a “good life”.

Here is the place to note why we cannot classify digital nomadism as labor migration. The key difference that distinguishes digital nomads from traditional migrants lies in the value system and the situation at the current moment in terms of mobility. While traditional migrants are driven by economic or political necessity, often even compulsion – they are in search of survival, a better standard of living or escape from hardship, the choice of nomads is dictated by the search for freedom on another, higher level. For them, freedom is not about working for long periods of time and in conditions that are not satisfactory because they were not created/modeled by you yourself. For them, work is a tool for achieving

mobility and autonomy, not the only goal or burden. This approach resonates with the values of millennials and

Generation Z – flexibility, authenticity, personal growth and work-life balance.

Even when digital nomads acquire residency in a given country, they still continue to travel between multiple destinations. Woldoff and Litchfield (2021: 171) give examples of their respondents living in Bali for 8-9 months a year, but traveling to their homeland or other countries the rest of the time. The two scholars point out that despite their long stay on the island, resident nomads remain strongly attached to their nomadic identity.

Here it is appropriate to touch on the duration of the journey and the fuzzy dimensions of the concepts of “fast” and “slow”, which turn out to be different for different individuals. Thompson (2019: 29) observes that “digital nomads try to differentiate themselves from tourists by claiming that their travel is not separate from their “normal” life, that they travel “slowly” or that they are more committed to the lifestyle associated with travel than a tourist.” In confirmation of this, many of my respondents classify themselves as slow travelers.

Judith (36, Germany, psychotherapist and hypnotherapist) tells me: “My friend, her partner, my partner and I did a trip around Bulgaria to see every part. Two months on the road. (...) Then we started going to Turkey, then to Greece. Back then we were very, very slow travelers. We always stayed in places for at least

two months and we didn’t plan in the strict sense of the word. Now we are here and we are deciding where the next trip will be. Because travel is tiring. So for us it works, if it’s slow.”

Betty (38, UK, coworking space owner) articulates a similar goal of nomadism: “A true digital nomad travels to immerse themselves in the community and culture of the place they’re going. That means traveling slower.”

Her statement is confirmed by Mira (around 30, Bulgaria, marketing specialist and entrepreneur): “I travel every year for a month, usually in February; I just got back from Guatemala and Belize. Then we don’t work, we just travel (she and her partner – b.m., P.D.). We don’t stay more than three nights in one place. We move every time and we’re on the go with something. Maybe I would like to stay in one place for longer. It’s different if you can take your work with you, because in a month you can

experience a little more and you're not under pressure. You're not constantly trying to catch the next train or do this and that. You kind of get into a rhythm, you find a team you like, and you also get a feel for the local life. In smaller destinations, after a month you're not quite a tourist anymore. In Jakarta, of course, it's not like that. But in Bansko you feel the spirit, you get to know the locals."

I will end this part with another aspect of the question "Are digital nomads tourists?" Protests are gaining popularity across Europe in 2024

of local people against the harm of overtourism, a result of cheap flights with low-cost airlines and the promotion of destinations and locations on social networks. On July 6, 2024, in the most visited Spanish city - Barcelona, 3,000 people took to the streets under the slogan "Tourists, go home" and "shoot" passing tourists with water pistols. The problems are also present in large cities in other countries such as France, Italy, Greece. In one of the bohemian neighborhoods of Athens, for example, business companies are converting buildings into co-working spaces to meet the needs of foreigners who travel and work remotely. The total number of short-term rentals in Athens is said to have increased by almost 500 percent in less than a decade.¹⁰

In October 2024, my respondent Damian (around 35, Bulgaria, IT professional and coworking founder) attended the largest short-term rental conference, held in Porto. Here's how he explains the looming problem to me: "For example, they launch a building with 100 apartments, I go and take 20, you go and take 20, four more people go and take the rest, everything is rented out (meaning for tourists - b.m., P.D.). And it's already becoming very difficult, there's nowhere for locals to live at these prices. It's becoming very difficult to find an apartment for long-term living. This raises prices even more, because there's a lot of demand. There are few of them and they're already becoming very expensive. And locals they roared very badly. Subsequently, it was forbidden to open companies in Porto that manage short-term rentals - you let your apartments through AirBnB and Booking, but these companies manage everything. Their turnover was limited, regulations were created and so on. Something else happened with people who go to a cafe to work. Imagine, you are a small business with 10 tables, a neat cafe, 7-10 people sit down for one coffee and don't get up for 6 hours. They started to chase them out of restaurants, from pubs, from everywhere. "Nomads" became a dirty word. This is happening in Spain, this is happening in Portugal, this is starting to happen in France now. And that's why I have said many times that coworking spaces have a very important role in such

communities, in such cities. Because if the infrastructure is built properly, if it is built well, you can handle the numbers, you can handle this whole influx.”

Experts in the field of tourism emphasize that the solution to the problem requires educating all groups involved – locals to realize how nomads can contribute to the development of the area and why they are different from typical tourists; and nomads to treat their practices and concerns with more attention and respect.

My respondent Casey (around 40, Finland, social anthropologist) comments on the connection between digital nomadism and tourism and touches on the current

a topic about overtourism, to which nomads also contribute: “As nomads, we compete for space with tourists because we want the same services, we need the same plane tickets and the same places to stay, we go to many of the same restaurants. And as tourism grows, it raises prices. It's getting harder and harder - for example, we spend more time finding accommodation now than before. Five or six years ago, you could even show up somewhere and talk to the first woman on the corner, say “Hi, are there any apartments available here?” and she would say “I'll show you 20 today”, and you could choose one of them. That's not the case anymore. Now they're on AirBnB and they're everywhere, and the price has tripled.” She adds that in the past, she and her boyfriend purposefully chose destinations where the tourist season had passed, but in many places there is no such thing as “off-season”. They usually stay in a country for about a month: “six weeks is great, but two weeks is fine.” They prefer to travel by land, not necessarily by plane: “If we're in Asia, in Thailand, and we want to get to Vietnam, ideally we'll take two weeks when we don't have to work as much, and we travel quickly by land.”

Mapping digital nomadism

The main reason I'm mapping the types of digital nomads, rather than classifying them, is that mapping allows me to capture the dynamics and heterogeneity of this highly individualistic group. A carefully crafted classification would be expected to offer rigid categories, meaning that each nomad would fall into just one of them – for example, slow traveler or expat. However, this is not always possible. Another major challenge to classification is that the characteristics of the group are not particularly stable and that it is subject to constant changes, innovations, trends.

Being a digital nomad is not a state, but a process – there is no fixed identity, but a set of strategies for adapting to deliberately sought moderate uncertainty – a consequence of the continuous pursuit of freedom. Digital nomadism is a dynamic process and some of its representatives change even in a relatively short period, such as 1-3 years. Also, in their evolution, they sometimes adopt several characteristics at the same time – for example, they may be slow travelers and obtain citizenship in a country other than their native one; a nomad traveling individually may start his own family and travel both with it and independently. It is also possible that some nomads

fall into a gray area outside the categories specified in the classification.

In this line of thought, we could try to classify nomads according to a generally valid characteristic, such as whether they travel alone, with a partner or with children.

Individual travelers often perceive the strategy of being alone as part of their absolute freedom. The ability to stay as long as they want, where they want, without regard for the needs of others, is key for them. Some fear that starting a family would interfere with the exercise of free choice and therefore postpone or avoid it (we will discuss this in detail in Chapter One in the section on emotional state).

On the other hand, travelers with their partner share the nomadic life, but they have to find a compromise between the very strong inclination towards freedom and independence of each of them. During my fieldwork, I met few such couples, which is probably due to the fact that they either break up or move on to the next step - to start a family.

For nomadic parents, family is a value, but it should be integrated into the nomadic way of life rather than suffocating it. This requires a fundamentally different strategy - more planning, looking for places suitable for children, and making a commitment to the education and needs of children.

This typology is generally valid, but does not cover everything that should be taken into account regarding the motives and choices of nomads. That is why I adopt the mapping method in my monograph. It is more flexible than classification – just like my respondents – and allows us to place them on a continuum and assess their attitudes along several parameters at the same time.

The main parameters that emerge in my observations of digital nomadism are:

~ Focus on the values of the individual – autonomy, freedom, conscious consumption, cooperation with like-minded people, active lifestyle, personal development. Focus on the search for meaning.

~ Pragmatic focus – practicality, efficiency and the pursuit of concrete benefits are key, for example, tax breaks, a high standard of living at lower prices than in the homeland, etc. Search for practical benefits. Considerations include budget, income level relative to expenses, as well as the threshold of tolerance for uncertainty (especially infrastructural).

These two parameters should be analyzed together with two others, measuring the length of stay and described in the previous part of the book:

~ Focus on slow travel – it seeks to fit into a community of like-minded people and achieve a relative routine.

~ Focus on constant movement – the goal is constant movement, as well as to achieve freedom from attachments to place, people, etc.

The four parameters are arranged in a system and are interdependent, therefore four types of nomads are outlined:

(1) Nomads with a focus on slow movement and values – for example, family travelers who are looking for a slower life, more conscious consumption, like my respondents Arnold and Judith, whose stories I describe in Chapter Three.

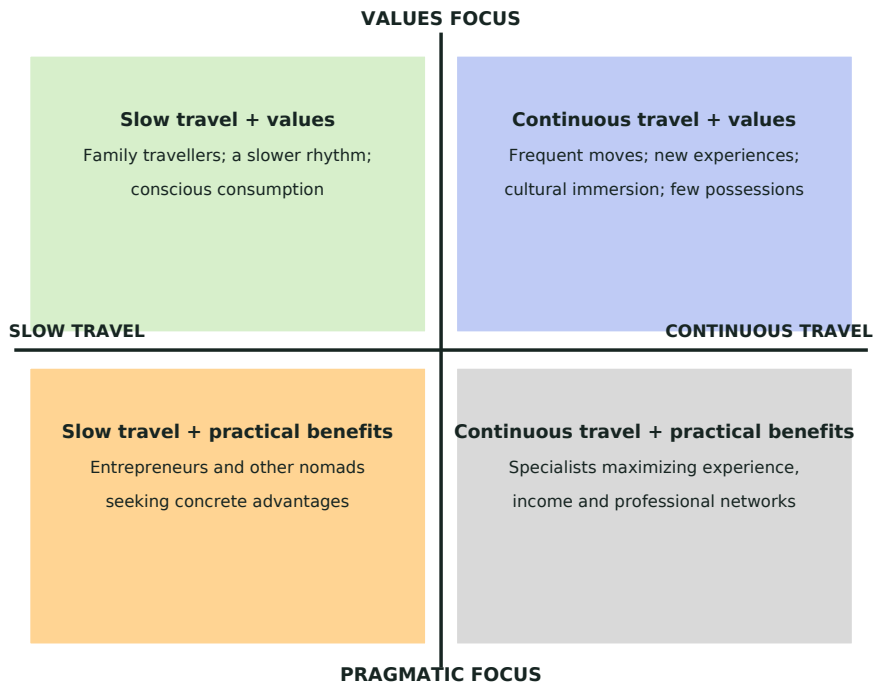
(2) Nomads with a focus on slow movement and specific benefits – for example, entrepreneurs and freelancers like my respondents Martin, Ulrich and Dean, whose life and professional stories I present in detail in Chapter Two.

(3) Nomads with a focus on constant movement and values – for example, respondents like Mira and Joel, who prefer to change countries frequently, seeking new emotions and cultural immersion and carrying a minimum amount of belongings. Another example is the many nomads who travel from festival to festival or from community to community, whom I met during the “Bansko Nomad Fest” described in Chapter Three, such as Janusz, who told me that he is a digital nomad because he “runs away from boredom”.

(4) Nomads with a focus on constant movement and specific benefits – I met very few of these. They are usually specialists who travel constantly to maximize both

their experiences, their income, and their network of contacts.

Figure 2: Mapping digital nomads by values and mobility pattern.



As is clear from the presented mapping, digital nomads should be considered in relation to what determines their (free – as they themselves would emphasize) choice. In order for their typology to be sufficiently in-depth, it needs to go beyond the analysis of trips (length, locations, etc.) and extend to psychology and their personal attitudes/worldview. Although digital nomads are exceptional individualists, driven by different philosophies, when analyzing their life strategies, several common patterns of behavior stand out. They form the core of the nomadic identity, going beyond simple travel for the purpose of adventure and exploring new places and cultures.

If I had to point out one trait that unites all the digital nomads I meet, it is the pursuit of an active and eventful life, of constant change and development. For my respondents, mobility and multi-locality provide an opportunity to maximize experiences. These are people who value physical activity, proximity to nature and immersion in foreign cultures, and they insist on including these elements in their daily lives – from

surfing/snowboarding before work to walking through local markets and neighborhoods afterwards.

In line with this, Bansko is particularly attractive. How exactly, I will analyze in the next part of the introduction.

Introduction to the terrain

The sociocultural consequences of digital nomadism and the creation of new jobs and opportunities in large cities in connection with the commodification (stockification) of this phenomenon are well studied, unlike those in small towns and villages. That is why I focus my research on two places distant from the capital of Bulgaria, but with geographical resources and established as attractive to tourists.

Bansko is a small town in southwestern Bulgaria with a population of about 10,000 people – 9459 people as of 31.12.2021 according to national statistics (NSI, 2023) and 9624 according to GRAO statistics from 15.09.2023 (GRAO, 2023). It is located 56 km/1 hour drive from the regional city of Blagoevgrad and 150 km/2 hours drive from the capital. At the foot of the Pirin Mountains, its altitude is 927 meters, which makes the climate cool compared to most Bulgarian cities in the summer and snowy in the winter. It is also close to hot mineral springs, the most famous of which are in the neighboring resorts of Banya and Dobrinishte. Bansko is one of the most popular tourist centers in the country (the highest point of its ski infrastructure is 2560 m), has gained the position of one of the most developing municipalities with its own income of 93 percent (Radonova 2018: 332) and is abundant in accommodation. According to data from real estate broker respondents, in 2025 there will be about 300 hotels available here - from 1- to 5-star or about 15,000 rooms. In addition to the predominantly ethnic Bulgarian population (97%), there are many foreign tourists and temporary or permanent resident foreign citizens throughout the year, some of whom are digital nomads. It is not possible to make accurate statistics on their number, but observations by local entrepreneurs and members of the foreign community¹¹ indicate that on average there are several hundred (200-300 according to various sources), and during peak periods such as the “Bansko Nomad Fest” – more than 1,000.¹²

A few years ago, Bansko was ranked in the top 10 of the best places for digital nomads on Nomads.com. Also known as Nomad List (probably its old name before its rebranding), this website helps its users choose potential destinations by ranking cities using filters. According to the site, Bansko’s advantages are that it is easily accessible and surrounded by

nature; that it has good co-working spaces, a strong community of digital nomads and lots of fun things to do; that it is suitable for skiing in the winter and for mountain

The predominant nationalities are British, Russians, Ukrainians, Israelis.

While I was collecting the numerical data mentioned in the first paragraph of this part of the book, I checked what sources for Bansko are mentioned in Wikipedia. I was struck by the fact that in the extensive article about the city the word "nomad" is not mentioned either in the main text, in the sources, or in the list of events, although the last change was recent - March 14, 2025.

year-round hiking; that it is very safe; that the internet is fast.

Disadvantages include: unfriendly locals, as well as the fact that most do not speak English well; limited quality of food and service and poor quality of hospital care; the presence of an exclusive coworking culture and cliques¹³; and that it is an overcrowded and poorly managed ski resort.

In 2020, Bansko was also included in the top 25 destinations for digital nomads by travel guide publisher Lonely Planet. Together with Sofia, it also appeared in ninth place in an article on the Lonely Planet website from early 2025 on the topic of the ten best countries for digital nomads. Reporting this fact, respondent Vanessa (around 40, Italy, (co)owner of a series of events and organizations for digital nomadism), who is part of the organizational team of "Bansko Nomad Fest", emphasizes that this is not a coincidence and the result of accumulated inertia, but the fruit of more than 5 years of purposeful work on building the image of the city as a destination for working people, independent of their location. The first ones started to appear in Bansko around 2015.

Another respected member of the expat community in Bansko warns: "It's very important to be aware that Bansko attracted them because of what it is. We shouldn't say that it has become a destination for digital nomads, thanks to those who have sold them goods and services - like myself. It seems like it's all because of me, for people like us, but it's not." Dean (around 50, UK, CFO in banking, coliving owner) has lived in Bansko since 2003 and is one of the first foreign hotel owners, with several decades of experience in tourism and hospitality. 15 years later he converted his hotel into a coliving space, which is constantly booked for months in advance. He defines himself as "financially independent" ("I made some very good investments when I was young") and emphasizes that he can live anywhere in the world he wants, but he chose Bansko: "I have been looking for five years for a place to build a second such hotel. I have the

finances, I have supporters, but it is very difficult to find a destination anywhere in Europe that offers the range of services that Bansko has. We are both a city and a resort. We have mountains and hot mineral water. There are activities 12 months a year. In the national park (Pirin – b.m., P.D.) you can ski in the winter or mountain bike in the summer, go camping, climb rocks, do hikes. Here is a destination where you can live all year round, have fun all year round, go to restaurants and bars all year round – this is a very, very rare combination. I have lived in ski resorts all over Europe, I have been traveling for 35 years and it is really difficult for me to find a similar all-year-round destination. Bansko is a fox, not a hedgehog that can only show one crown number”.

Another of my respondents – a 50-year-old Englishman with Romanian roots, Carol – arrived in Bansko in 2007 and subsequently married a local woman, as well as developing a real estate agency and coliving space. He lists the factors that attract digital nomads to Bansko, and like Dean points out that it is extremely rare for a settlement to combine all of them, namely: many sunny days throughout the year; low crime rates; a community that is constantly open to new members; maintained infrastructure – fast internet, deliveries (including food), gas supply, repaired streets; an urban atmosphere in a settlement with a rural appearance; low cost of living compared to developed countries – low taxes, rental prices, etc.; beautiful and wild nature; healthy environment – clean air, food, water.

In my interviews with Dean, Carol, and other Western Europeans who came to Bansko in the early years of the 21st century, they recall that the town then had radically different characteristics, far from those of a resort. They realize that here, as throughout the country, there was a transition from socialism to post-socialism, from a centralized economy to capitalism and neoliberalism.

The story of another Englishman, about 50 years old, who owns a real estate agency and is a handyman, is also indicative of the development of Bansko. Frank came to Bulgaria for the first time in 2005. In England, he works as an engineer and has 50,000 pounds in his bank account, but it is not enough for him to afford a large house in a rural environment in England. A friend of his is attending a conference on investments in foreign property in countries such as Cape Verde, Italy, France. A guest speaker from Bulgaria, which is not yet in the European Union, but is about to join soon, and has firmly pegged its currency, the lev, to the euro, was also invited. Frank remembers: “In the main halls in England, there were large-scale property exhibitions, not only of Bulgaria, but of many

countries. People went crazy. They would just go to the exhibition and buy property “on the green”, it was so cheap for them. And it’s still cheap.”

After the conference, Frank and his friend arrive in Bulgaria, but quickly become disillusioned with the “antediluvian 15-year-old Volkswagen for rent,” the potholes in the asphalt, and the socialist-style buildings of Sofia. They refrain from buying property in Sofia, and are also on the lookout, because there are still not many professional brokers and real estate sellers prey on foreigners.

In one week, the two visit first Borovets, Bansko, and Pamporovo, and then Veliko Tarnovo and some towns along the Black Sea coast. Frank decides to buy an apartment in the ski resort

Bansko and one by the sea, to make a website for them, and to expect clients through it. The year is 2005, and online marketing is still in its infancy.

Frank talks about Bansko in the early 20th century: “The boom started around 2006-2007, when they started digging the foundations. So most of the properties are 18 years old. I have pictures of the fields on one of my computers. It was very, very empty, it was me and a couple of Englishmen, they own the ski chalet “Devonshire Lodge”¹⁴ and now, 20 years later, they are selling it. The Glazne Hotel too – it used to be one of the few hotels on this side of the Glazne River. And those hotels looked out onto fields, they had a fantastic view. But since then they have just built so many properties... When I first arrived, they were not allowed to build outside the ring road, it was farmland. The mayor has apparently been pressured by big businessmen – people call them mafia, scum – to expand the construction area.”

In 2006, Frank arrived in Bulgaria again, this time with a plan for one year, during which he believes the property he purchased will be ready. He points out that this is achievable in England, but not in Bulgaria. In his home country, there is a tradition for students to travel around the world for a year after completing their education (the so-called gap year) and he says to himself: “I didn’t do it when I was younger, I’ll do it now. I’ll

This is a two-story house (247 sq m) and two guest houses (total 52 sq m), built on a 586 sq m plot 10-15 minutes from the Old Town and the lift. In July 2025, the price is 374,950 euros.

I’m taking a year off from work and I’m going to take care of my properties.” He grew up in a rural environment in England and emphasizes that it’s luxurious to live like that there, because it’s spacious.

“In England, most gardens are just green gardens. But if Bulgarians have a little land, they immediately plant something for food,” he shares his impressions approvingly.

I ask him when he started noticing digital nomads in Bansko and how it has changed. “When I first came, there were no modern restaurants – only traditional taverns. As expats, we went to a few bars that we liked. Many of us are developing ski businesses here. And nomads bring a surge of youth – it’s like we’re parents and have grandchildren. Suddenly we’re doing fun things in the park again, also new sports...”.

The overwhelming majority of my respondents point out to me that there is something to do in Bansko all year round. Despite its reputation as a winter resort, some say summer is their favorite season here. The program is packed with festivals and events (I discuss them in more detail in Chapter Three), with a lull only occurring in late autumn, before the snow falls and the ski and snowboard season opens. The same goes after it closes in April. Many nomads are here for a certain period of the year, then travel to other destinations and often return later. Some own their own properties in Bansko, others rent properties from acquaintances or through agencies –

whichever is the case, and even though they are not here year-round, Bansko has established itself as their home base.

How is it possible for such a small town to absorb the influx of tourists and digital nomads? The key lies in the buildings erected during the construction boom of the last two decades. Arnold, 50, who is a location-independent entrepreneur, communications specialist, and advocate for family digital nomadism and worldschooling, has chosen Bansko as his base, along with Malta. He explains that: “Whoever made the decision to build all these apartment structures and buildings on the outskirts of Bansko, from today’s perspective this is a unique opportunity for the city. Why? If we look at other places where people working remotely, families, nomads appear, very soon, within the first 36 months, there is resistance to them. You see this in Barcelona, in Lisbon, in Madeira. Why is this resistance? First, because rental prices are doubling or at least rising. Bansko has the capacity of these buildings with many apartments, many places that are not even finished yet. It can accept people who come without interfering with the local environment and making life difficult for the local community. So they can happily coexist and mix.” I discuss the present and near future of Bansko with him as we sit around a massive table in his old house in the city center: “In a building of

1800-something year we have 5G in every room. Such a thing is not possible in Berlin. Bansko combines a lifestyle based on simple traditional life with the communication power of 5G, available everywhere. The environment here and the local identity are delightful. Both in summer and in winter you can see the locals sitting in front of their houses, on the benches in front, and just talking to their neighbors or basking in the sun.”

Here is the place to reflect on my own experience during my first fieldwork in Bansko in early 2025. As a fan of mountain hikes, I have visited the town several times before, but always transiting along the Glazne River and the countless hotels or staying in someone’s apartment in the New Town. It is a positive impression that there and in general in Bansko as a whole, the buildings erected in recent decades are in the same style (see Appendix 2). This is not accidental – there is an Ordinance on specific requirements for the appearance of urban spaces, buildings and architectural ensembles on the territory of the town of Bansko, which aims to preserve its characteristic mountain appearance and protect it from the encroachment of modern buildings with glass facades. The regulations are formulated in Art. 15 – 27 and in Art. 16, para. 1 states that: “When preparing an investment project for a building, the color scheme of the facades and finishing materials should be consistent with the architectural features of the area, such as colors and materials. It is recommended

to use the following basic materials: 1. plasters - without intense primary colors; white, beige, gray range; accents of another color are permissible; 2. wooden elements - cladding, frames around window frames, decorative elements, front boards. 3. stone cladding, stone masonry. The use of other types of materials is permissible, showing an attitude to the context and local architecture” (Bansko Municipality, 2023).

In winter, the New Town is bustling with life - lights, music and appetizing smells attract guests to the city. Further down is the emblematic Pirin Street, teeming with shops and restaurants, again for tourists. Bansko also has a spiritual Old Town, whose sights are not limited to the cobblestone Pirin Street, nor even to the second largest church in Bulgaria, the Holy Trinity, built in 1833-1835 (the first is the capital's Alexander Nevsky). Aside from the central pedestrian zone and the several historical buildings along it, there are many streets filled with multi-storey houses of local people with a typical appearance from the second half of the 20th century (see Appendix 3), the city park, the two high schools (in unison with the development of the city, the former

forestry school is now a high school for tourism). As I walk along these "normal" streets, as well as the old, "traditional" ones, I realize that this is what distinguishes Bansko from other Bulgarian winter resorts such as Borovets and Pamporovo - the local spirit is clearly present here, this town is alive and well.

only thanks to tourists and digital nomads.

My desire to understand and analyze the attitude of the locals towards "aliens" (I examine the topic in detail in Chapter Three), as well as my desire to immerse myself in the atmosphere of the Bulgarian National Revival, leads me to two landmarks. The first is the house-museum of Neofit Rilski. There I find a quote from Dimitar Talev, who wrote about Bansko and the Bansko region in the newspaper "Macedonia" on November 16, 1933: "Love your Fatherland, nor desire any other Fatherland besides it, because such a desire is considered the beginning of a traitor." How much the paradigm has changed in almost a century, I tell myself. Reading Neofit's appeal several times, a parallel with Anna Krasteva's essay "Homo viator: Identities, representations and poetics" (Krasteva 2023) comes to mind, in which she defines the homo viator as "a contradictory figure, a product of globalization, politics and identity searches, democratic practices, imagination, poetics and utopia". The man of the 21st century is a man on the road - the tourist, the traveler, the digital nomad leaves his homeland behind to get to know and love other countries. What a contrast this current value is with that of a century ago. A century ago and even longer ago, when Bansko was a Bulgarian bastion during the Ottoman rule, and today it abounds with foreigners.

I find another parallel with the homo viator - this time in harmony, not in contrast - in the museum

"Velyanova Kashta". The building was built in the 18th century and was given to the representative of the Debar Art School, Velyan Ognenov, who painted it. In one of the rooms - the "blue room" - we see murals depicting magical worlds with palaces and bizarre, somewhat exotic animals (see Appendix 4) - images corresponding to the dreams, goals and searches of the modern homo viator.

After discussing Bansko's recent and more distant past, it is time to look at its current development and its near future. One of the participants in a discussion entitled "Bulgaria as a place for nomads to live" follows the development of the city. She is a Frenchwoman in her 40s who has traveled to over 60 countries, working as a freelancer and entrepreneur. On stage at Bansko Nomad Fest 2025, she tells how she and her partner

came to Bansko in 2019 and how they decided to extend their stay by another month. They returned a year later and found that “Bansko had grown in many different ways – both the nomadic community and the local life. There were more activities organized by the municipality, the town was more lively, you could see that it was really on the rise.” That is why they buy an apartment here and make it their base “just before COVID15 hit, and

Bansko was the first city in Bulgaria to be quarantined on March 17, 2020 for 14 days. According to Tsaneva et al. (2024), there were about 10,000 tourists there at the time. In my fieldwork 4 years later, the lockdown was mentioned as one of the factors for many digital nomads to spend longer than originally planned in Bansko. They overwhelmingly point out that they

then we spent three years here for the most part. Since the borders have reopened, we travel more and are only based here for three or four months a year. But I am still happy every time I come back to Bansko, I am happy to come back home to this amazing community. And I still can't find another place that is more suitable to move to. (...) But Bansko is not for everyone. If you are a big city person, this may not be your place. The pace of life in Bulgaria is a little slower, a little different. There are still a lot of traditions, a culture that is unique. (...) Every year, whether for the “Bansko Nomad Fest” or the rest of the time, a lot of people, new people, come to Bansko and a small part of them fall in love with it. And they decide to make it their base, by buying an apartment or renting it long-term. And so it has been growing for the last six or seven years, and now they are preparing to open more coworking spaces in the coming months, so it seems to be going up and up.”

This development is also confirmed by the assessment of Damian – a Bulgarian of about 35 years old, owner of a coworking space in Bansko since 2020: “I see that many buildings that were not completed are being completed. That is, apartments for permanent residence are being sought. I see that more and more people are living in Bansko, which is developing satisfied with this turn of events, as they have had the opportunity for relative freedom from the pandemic measures, as well as to be among nature and in a settlement close to nature.

the city, developing needs, developing new businesses or new services. I just hope that Bansko will remain more or less the same in size. It's just that everything that has not been completed in terms of bed capacity will be completed and not started to be built on the sidelines. And I hope that

it will be regulated in such a way a way for the city to retain this charm. With charm and more or less the same size". Damian is another respondent who emphasizes that "Bansko has no equivalent, it is a diamond" and gives an example of the city's strategic location, especially attractive to tourists and digital nomads: "You can be on a mountain, 2,000 meters above sea level, having a barbecue with your jacket on, and during the day you can be on the beach in Greece. I have done both in one day. At 7:00 I go to the beach, at 9:00 I am there until 16:00. At 18:30 I am back in Bansko. At 19:00 I was at 1100 meters above sea level".

Like other of my interlocutors, Damian also mentions the news that in March 2025 the municipal council approved the start of a procedure for the construction of a small airport on the city's land. In addition to promoting economic development and tourism, this project will also provide the possibility of medical evacuations by helicopter.

In relation to tourism, Dean (around 50, UK, CFO in the banking sector, owner of a coliving), whom I described at the beginning of this section, points out: "I would like to say that digital nomads have changed Bansko completely. Some say, 'Oh my God, it's so much more

it's good because of them", but that's complete nonsense. The digital nomad community in Bansko ranges from about 200 people at its lowest point to maybe 1,000 at the busiest times of the year. But in a normal week in winter there are 5,000 tourists here, and during the World Cup – 50,000. From an economic point of view, a tourist, a ski tourist, will spend between 100 and 300 euros per day on their holiday. A digital nomad will spend between 50 and possibly 70 euros per day. So the number of actual nomads is small, and their expenses are probably 5 times lower than those of a tourist. However, the social effect of the presence of digital nomads is clear. Ski tourism is present from 90 to 120 days in the winter. Summer tourism is also about 100 – 120 days. What nomads really change at the local level is the fact that some money comes in off-season".

As an experienced hotelier, Dean also gives importance to another significant group of people who contribute to making Bansko a year-round destination – mobile Bulgarians from other cities who own apartments here. My fieldwork brings me into contact with many such people, for example, a 40-year-old IT specialist whose hobbies are mountain biking and snowboarding. He told me how in previous years he had rented an apartment for the season, but the price in 2024 was high – 500 euros. So in November of that year he bought an apartment on a mortgage for 300 euros per month. He visits it regularly with his friends who share the same

hobbies. As Dean describes it: “If you live in Sofia, you come on Thursday evening, and you take Friday off or work from home. Thanks to this basic cash flow, the local community can maintain economic dynamics. This allows more and more people to come and use these services”.

Having discussed in detail the attractive aspects of Bansko, let’s also look at its disadvantages from the perspective of digital nomads. When I discuss the topic with them, they give examples of administrative difficulties and health problems (both are discussed in detail in Chapter Two), as well as the lack of a private kindergarten/daycare center. Beyond that, they point out smaller disadvantages such as the lack of restaurants offering a variety of foreign food (Thai, Indian, etc.), as well as the lack of a cinema. A more serious problem for young and not particularly solvent visitors is that Bansko is becoming too expensive for them.

What are the alternative destinations around the world? They should offer a mix of attractive nature and a travel-friendly environment; work and accommodation at a reasonable price; intriguing traditions and culture, as well as an open community of digital nomads. I ask all my interlocutors if they can think of a similar place both in Europe and beyond, and the answers repeat several specific destinations. The fact that the mentioned settlements,

similar to Bansko, lack a community of digital nomads, as well as a year-round presence, is also highlighted.

The Englishman Dean gives the example of the resort of Val d’Isère in the French Alps, where he lived. He says that at that time, outside the ski season, there were only a few locals there, and at peak times – over 150,000 people, respectively served by imported staff. Seasonal workers and tourists left in May and the resort literally deserted. Dean also mentions Briançon – the highest French town, located at 1,326 m in the Alps, where, however, there are only 2,000 inhabitants.

A 30-something-year-old man I’m chatting with casually tells me about the Romanian town of Sinaia in the Carpathian Mountains, where he went on a digital nomad retreat in 2024. According to him, the infrastructure there is better, it’s cleaner, and the locals are more positive, but there’s no digital nomad community.

Most of my respondents immediately think of Chiang Mai, the second largest city in Thailand, which combines a traditional and a globalized look and is well-established as a hub for entrepreneurs and digital nomads (Green 2020, Mancinelli 2020, de Loryn 2022, Cook and Hannonen 2026). One respondent spent several months with her family on the island of Koh

Phangan in southern Thailand, attracted by the nature and the community of digital nomads with families there.

Another favorite country is Vietnam. Hoi An on the east coast is a tourist town and a UNESCO World Heritage Site. It has been used for trade by the Chinese, Japanese, and French for centuries, leading to a mix of cultures and unique local foods. Da Nang is a city of 3 million in central Vietnam that is relatively inexpensive, has beautiful beaches, and has a thriving digital nomad community.

Among Asian destinations, the Indonesian island of Bali is also a favorite of nomads [see the monograph by Woldoff and Litchfield (2021) on the nomad community there, as well as MacRae (2016)].

Other scholarly works on digital nomadism cite Porto (Cruz et al., 2021), developing island states (Foley et al., 2022), and Estonia (Korjus et al., 2017) as favorite nomad destinations.

My fieldwork also extends to the neighboring resort of Semkovo, where a large-scale space for co-working and living for digital nomads and expats is being developed – “Coliving 6”, which I will explore in detail in Chapter Two. Semkovo is located in the heart of the Rila Mountains, a 45-minute drive from Bansko.

In mid-April 2025, I walk alone along the forest road through this deserted socialist resort with bungalows and a few guest houses and rest houses. Its charm lies in the fact that here you are

truly in the midst of nature. On the asphalt road up from “Coliving 6”, I walk in the company of a few running deer, ancient trees, houses with alpine roofs and meadows with purple crocuses in the midst of the last melting snow that fell last week. Although it is Saturday evening, I meet no one except the driver of a single car. The setting sun appears among the clouds. Two towering Rila peaks rise through the treetops and come into full view as I emerge from another bend in the road. It’s so quiet that, apart from the birdsong and the gurgling of water, I can hear my own footsteps. I reach a closed teahouse next to a small ski slope and sit in the clearing, contemplating what I’ve learned about Coliving 6 over the past few days.

Travelers like my respondents – especially those who enjoy spending time in nature – would easily fall in love with this mountain idyll. They would like to be able to enjoy it whenever they choose – for example, by buying an unrenovated apartment in Coliving 6 for around 25,000 euros.

Against the backdrop of the extreme remoteness and small area of this resort village, the grandiose and therefore controversial project "Coliving 6" stands out, developed by my respondent Martin (around 50, Germany, entrepreneur and owner of a coliving space), who has lived in Bansko for years and is one of the pillars of the nomadic community there. He sets himself the goal of

turning a huge abandoned holiday home with an area of 16,700 sq. m, built during late socialism, into a modern space for shared living and working, specially designed for a community of digital nomads/expats/travelers.

An article from the magazine "Architecture" from March 1990 introduces us to the history of the place: "This is a sunny and still quiet resort, located on the southern slopes of Rila. The construction of a large holiday home in such a place is connected with the prospects that are emerging for its development. (...) It is located on terrain that is far from the most attractive in this area - low, west of the road, at the foot of steep slopes from the east, open to the south towards Pirin. (...) From the reception and living room to the east a beautiful view opens, very accurately found in terms of composition and character".

The holiday home was designed in 1980 - 1983 and built between 1983 and 1989. The investor was the Central Council of the Bulgarian Trade Unions (predecessor of the Confederation of Bulgarian Trade Unions), and the purpose - a vacation for the members of these unions. It consists of 360 rooms with two beds, 240 rooms with three beds and 20 apartments; a restaurant with 240 seats; a canteen with 80 seats; a cinema hall with universal use with 180 seats; a café-pâtisserie with 80 seats; a day bar with 50 seats; a video hall with 60 seats; a bowling alley; a swimming pool and sauna; a tennis and general physical training hall; a ski wardrobe; living rooms with corners for

watching television; library with reading room; children's playground.

The article further describes how the challenge of finding an "optimal ratio between the public and sleeping areas in such buildings was resolved - not only in terms of volume and content, but also in terms of quality, richness, interpretation. The logical scenario of a stay in a holiday home envisages, above all, communication with nature and fellow human beings through sports, games, conversation, and not only in one's own room. One should stay in one's room only for rest in the narrow sense of the word. (...) The common part of the home is conceived as its node, core, heart. It is not just about functional richness, but also about its spatial

overload, about the ideological meaning of community, about aesthetic and everyday comfort" (ibid.).

Three decades later, German entrepreneur Matthias purchased the holiday home and renamed it with the intention of redeveloping the 16,700 sq m area into 225 apartments (about 30 sq m each, with the possibility of connecting two adjacent ones into one common one) and providing the owners and tenants with 8,000 sq m of common areas with a purpose similar to that described in the above quote. Values such as the aforementioned "communication with nature and one's own kind" and "community" are extremely relevant for the target group of buyers – entrepreneurs, digital nomads, travelers (predominantly foreigners).

At the end of 2022, 41 people showed interest and were in the process of purchasing¹⁶. Renovation works will run from 2023 to the end of 2025. In January 2024, the street on which "Coliving 6" is located will be renamed to include the word nomad (I won't write it out for the sake of anonymity) – according to the then Minister of Tourism, this is the first street in the world named after this phenomenon, which is a sign of the adaptation of Bulgarian tourism to global trends. The municipality is also undertaking comprehensive renovation works on the 15-kilometer road, which was previously in an extremely unmaintained state.

In August 2024, the holiday home was 60% renovated (including the common areas, the pool and the bar) and 152 apartments have already been sold. Almost a year later, 201 apartments have been sold for a total value of over 5 million euros, and the road to it is complete. Half of them have been completely renovated, as well as half of the commercial spaces – the community kitchen, the bar, the restaurant and the staff areas. There are 112 owners from 34 countries, with only 20% being Bulgarians – mostly entrepreneurs from the capital who plan to take their teams to corporate events in Semkovo. At this stage, the renovation of the huge former hotel is half-completed, two of the wings, as well as the common areas, are expected to be completely

Mehlelieva, G. 14.12.2022. Germanec is turning an old hotel in Semkovo into a coliving zone. <https://www.economic.bg/bg/a/view/germanec-e-napyt-da-prevyrne-star-hotel-v-semkovo-v-koliving-zona-za-pregled> (30.07.2025)

soon. The biggest challenge so far is the construction of a new substation that will double the electrical capacity. According to Martin, it should be ready by the end of 2025, when the coliving will also welcome its first guests who are not apartment owners.

Martin and his team are developing a crowdfunding campaign to find the first buyers, and are using the proceeds from the apartment sales to renovate the common areas. Each owner chooses whether to join a cooperative that manages “Coliving 6” based on discussions and shared decisions.

I will end this introduction with the ambitious and indicative logo of the project: “Welcome to the nomadic utopia”. In Chapter Two I will examine “Coliving 6” in detail, its advantages and disadvantages, but before that, in Chapter One, I will analyze whether it is realistic to talk about a “nomadic utopia”, what its aspects are and what are the pitfalls of this way of life.

I. THE NOMADIC UTOPIA

“It seems to me that there are hundreds of different paths we can take,” exclaims a 60-year-old American woman, part of a group of expats with whom we are walking in the lower part of the Pirin Mountains above Bansko. She refers to the tourist routes in the area, but the metaphor perfectly describes the trajectories and attitudes of digital nomads. My interlocutors constantly emphasize that they have the opportunity to travel whenever and wherever they decide, therefore their key values are mobility and the right to free choice. That is why in the first chapter of the monograph we will examine these two values in detail, and then we will focus on three more related to them – conscious consumption, proximity to nature and personal development. We need to clarify all this in order to analyze in sufficient depth what is behind the phenomenon of “location-independent work” as a value and priority.

Why are the work and professions of digital nomads addressed only at the end of the chapter, after seemingly more peripheral topics such as the psychological state and the individual’s relationship with nature? When discussing digital nomadism, the question inevitably arises of which comes first – work or freedom. If it fit into traditional models of migration studies, the answer

should be work. People move to work, work is the main goal and a determining factor for the place and duration of their stay. In the world of digital nomads, however, this hierarchy is reversed. They work so that they can travel and be free, and they do not travel in order to work.

Freedom is at the heart of this phenomenon (we will discuss in this chapter to what extent it is real or imagined), it is at the core of the nomadic value system. The nomadic lifestyle extends beyond the concept of working in a new way – for them, the first thing is the desire to live freely. Their travels, their hypermobility, are driven by the desire for autonomy, flexibility and control over both their professional and personal lives. From this initial need for freedom, the idea of how to work more balanced, more efficiently and, most importantly, how to prevent work from being a limiting factor arises.

In the context of digital nomadism, the concepts of “migration” and “mobility” acquire different dimensions and represent a new and poorly researched field. However, Everett Lee’s classic theory of migration (Lee 1966) remains effective for analysis, addressing: the factors attracting to new destinations; the factors repelling from a sedentary lifestyle;

individual factors; difficulties. In this chapter, we will examine precisely these and show how strong

individualism and the achievement of freedom lead to a variety of strategies to achieve relative stability in a world with blurred boundaries.

1.1. Mobility and Fluidity

According to (D'Andrea 2007), mobility empowers the subject, as it represents a project to create one's own life circumstances, which allows for self-realization, self-expression, and self-actualization. The words of my respondent Martin (around 50, Germany, entrepreneur and coliving space owner) are indicative when I discuss the importance of mobility with him: "Mobility allows me to go to a different place and be someone else. Like when you go to university after high school. Suddenly you are in a different place. You are surrounded by other people. You can be a completely different person. It's the same if you go to another country. You are essentially starting over. Nobody knows you. You can tell them whatever you want about yourself. You form the image of yourself. And I think that is what many nomads like. (...) Initially, when you start as a nomad, it is quite free to be whoever you want and you can experiment with yourself, and you don't always have to be the same person - you can be different."

The reasons for being mobile are not so much rooted in economic or political factors, but rather

soon in the search for meaning (Korpela 2014) and in choosing "the right, appropriate way of life" (Benson, O'Reilly 2009). In this regard, the term "lifestyle mobility" (Duncan et al. 2013; Cohen et al. 2015) is very appropriate in analyzing digital nomadism, as it describes voluntary, long-term travel that is halfway between tourism and migration. Šímová (2022) lists the key characteristics of digital nomadism, which include, in addition to mobility, flexibility, digital work, and self-definition as someone who works regardless of location and prioritizes connectivity and productivity in parallel with rest and entertainment during free time.

What makes my respondents choose a mobile lifestyle? However, the traditional reasons for moving related to work do not correspond to the motives of modern nomads. They typically choose to leave places with a high quality of life and many opportunities, such as urban centers of the creative industries (see a detailed analysis in Florida 2008). Waldo and Litchfield (2021:16-17) find that, according to digital nomads they interviewed in Bali, "while these centers have desirable amenities, attract

talented individuals, and are beneficial to work organizations, they also drain the people who work and live there, leaving many dissatisfied and unhappy. (...) Their relocations are fueled by a desperate

desire to break away from a life that feels like a failure. Many report feeling deprived of work-life balance, creativity, purpose, and a sense of control over their lives—factors known to interfere with health and well-being.”

My interlocutors often use the word “mobile,” so in my interviews with them we naturally come to discuss what “mobility” means. Here are some of their associations, from which it becomes clear that for them this is a fundamental characteristic of an individual.

“What do you do if you can’t walk? You get a wheelchair. Apparently mobility is an inherent trait that people apply willingly. We are all mobile. And if you stop your mobility, you literally fall apart. I know tons of people my age who don’t walk every day and drive everywhere, and they get physically worse” – Arnold (around 50, Germany, technology and social entrepreneur) combines the meaning of “movement” and “mobility” and, like other of my respondents, uses the two concepts interchangeably. From a scientific point of view, however, the two words do not overlap in meaning – mobility includes the sociocultural as well as the political dimensions of physical, objective movement.

In the focus group moderated by me during the “Bansko Nomad Fest” 2025, participants also highlighted another aspect of mobility - intensity and constant action as a counterbalance to boredom.

and the boring everyday life, but also the possibility of reaching oversaturation and even exhaustion. In his review of scientific research on boredom, Finkielstein (2023) emphasizes its ubiquity and the fact that it occurs among representatives of all social classes, although it is traditionally attributed to social elites, as well as to people experiencing crises of various natures (e.g., midlife crisis). The author describes “periods of boredom in which a person experiences feelings of failure and disappointment with his life, mixed with comfort, security, and relative well-being, which make it predictable, monotonous, and largely devoid of challenges.” However, boredom also has its positive dimensions – in a state of boredom, the individual is able to reflect on himself, understand what he likes or dislikes, what goal or future he is striving for. In addition to a cognitive function, this emotion can also have a motivational impact, including provoking creativity.

Janusz (around 25, Estonia, IT specialist) says that he travels all the time because he is bored otherwise, which puts him on the part of the continuum of frequent nomads with a focus on values described in Chapter 1. Casey (around 40, Finland, social anthropologist), who has been practicing this lifestyle for more than a decade, reveals the other side of the coin: “We spend so much time doing things, meeting people, and whatnot, that

sometimes I look forward to three days of boredom. Just watching TV, going shopping, being bored for three days. I need to stop for a while and digest everything that has happened to me.”

Mira (around 30, Bulgaria, marketing specialist and entrepreneur) can be attributed to the same type of continuum, due to her admission that it does not keep her from being permanently in her homeland, “I can’t stay in one place for too long because I get bored. I say to myself ‘Oh, I want something new, I want something different and interesting’. You get bored easily, so you are always looking for something new. An internal impulse. Now, when I come back to Bansko – and I really love Bansko – I stay there for a few weeks. But after a while I say to myself ‘okay, why am I bored’? (...) Last year I was in Bulgaria for about two months, between trips. But it was my most travel-filled year. Before that, I stayed, especially in Bansko, when I first moved. I really love this city. It’s very international, very creative, very motivating.”

My respondent Joel (around 30, Romanian-American, online English teacher, former coliving owner) shares similar thoughts about Bansko and the mobility-boredness relationship, whose focus on the continuum is slow travel and values: “We leave and keep coming back (with his wife – b.m., P.D.). I go to Bansko

because I miss it and I haven’t been there for a while. Then over time I get bored, so I have to go back to some other place. That’s the cycle. It’s repeated five or six times.”

“Mobility means the freedom to be able to get from point A to point B whenever I want,” says Judith (36, Germany, psychotherapist and hypnotherapist).

Vera (around 30, Russia, doctor) gives an example: “Every time I give my passport to get a visa, during this short period of a few weeks I have no chance to go anywhere. It’s not that I have to be somewhere, but I’m haunted by the feeling that I can’t (travel – b.m., P.D.).”

With these statements indicative of the need for free personal choice, I move on to the next part, where we will look at the other key value for digital nomads – freedom.

1.2. Freedom and free choice

Woldoff and Litchfield (2021: 179, 184) emphasize that for digital nomads, the whole point of leaving home is to build a life on their own terms, not to surrender to circumstances. They insist on their freedom because in the long run they expect to gain the chance to control their lives and daily routines and to achieve meaning and balance according to their own standards. Therefore, leaving the old

life is often as much a desperate attempt to escape from unsatisfactory conditions as it is a pursuit of the dream of freedom and the defeat of perceived limitations (ibid., 12).

Nixon, a Danish IT specialist and business coach in his 40s, explains with a personal example what “perceived limitations” means. “I have my own business and I miss getting paid every month. Sometimes I miss a certain stability. But none of these things outweigh the advantage of being on the road, of having the freedom that I believe in. I perceive it as freedom, but for other people it would be the opposite of freedom. Because for someone, for some of my friends for example, the fact that they have to plan where to go next, organize, make money, support themselves – also the uncertainty – is always stressful. Many of them would say: “This is the most terrifying, stressful, anxiety-filled experience ever.” Yes, it’s not utopian, but I wouldn’t trade it for the other option.”

Vera (around 30, Russia, doctor) explains what she thinks is the worst-case scenario if a person doesn’t take their life into their own hands. “I don’t think everyone should become a nomad, a hippie, or a freedom fighter, or whatever. But I think people should find happiness in their own lives. And society has established a way for you to be happy. You live in your social circle, you keep in good contact with your parents, you’re surrounded by your school friends, you grow in your career, you start as a junior employee, and then, if you’re good and productive, you’ll get promoted, and eventually you’ll live happily after retirement. You wait for retirement, as if you’re postponing life for after it. And then you’re already afraid to travel, you’re already stressed.”

Her much more experienced and older co-worker, with whom she lives in “Coliving 6” – Martin (around 50, Germany, entrepreneur and coliving space owner) presents a similar scenario, but with a different conclusion:

“For many nomads, the challenge is that they reject the idea of the mass lifestyle. You grow up, go to school, then to university, plant an apple tree, find the love of your life, have a few children, build a house, then you die. And many nomads say to themselves: “This can’t be everything”. So we look for something else. The problem is that maybe there is nothing else. Maybe the idea of living this mass life that has developed over thousands of years... maybe it’s not the most sensible thing to question. Maybe this is the thing you should do. So we know that we are looking for an alternative lifestyle, but we don’t know if it really exists. This is one of the challenges.”

According to Mancinelli (2020), the concept of freedom is expressed in the potential of the individual to be (or do) anything he wants. Freedom is fundamentally related to the restoration of one’s own will and the power to choose,

but can only be fully understood in relation to its opposite, since the full realization of freedom is based on liberation from perceived obstacles or constraints. In my discussions with digital nomads, the concept of “freedom” is often raised in relation to the so-called “System” that they claim to oppose. “Digital nomadism is a comparative project (as Korpela 2019 characterizes it), involving a narrative of escape from the social system and the specific work culture of the country of origin. These are presented in a negative light, while the project of transnational mobility is characterized as positive and liberating” (Mancinelli 2020).

This observation is supported by the following quote from my respondent Arnold (around 50, Germany, technology and social entrepreneur): “First, freedom is a choice of location. Second, freedom is financial.

Independence, as much as possible. To be able to open a laptop now, to make some money now, to give them another 6 months or a year of free travel. What is freedom for them? Not having to work from 9 to 5, to be free to do what they want. Today I want to be an entrepreneur, tomorrow I want to do marketing, the day after tomorrow – to do nothing. Freedom of profession, of time and of location – combining these three things.”

“In the case of most people, the System means having a 9 to 5 job and a family. I don’t like either of those. For me, freedom is not being a part of this System. I like being able to go my own way,” says Mary (a little over 50, Netherlands, translator).

Apart from the 9-to-5 job, another often-cited example of restriction is mortgages, which “oblige you to sit at work even though you hate it, because otherwise the bank will take your house” (Martin – around 50,

Germany, entrepreneur and co-living space owner). He emphasizes that digital nomads have realized this and that they have “pushed back the curtain and said, ‘No, no, no, this is not right’ – first you pay your social security contributions to get to a pension, then you may or may not get some pension. Everything keeps you within the framework of society, society itself does not allow you to look outside it.”

Digital nomads often rebel against what they perceive as the trap of their previous life and routine. Judith (36, Germany, psycho- and hypnotherapist) tells me with disappointment how she and her partner returned to his native Manchester to have support when their first child was born. As they prepared to welcome the new member of the family, they found themselves trapped back in the System from which they had purposefully distanced themselves. Judith was traumatized by the anxiety of the midwives and doctors at the hospital and took the warning “You’re 35, this is a risky pregnancy” as judgmental and negative. After years spent traveling

and exploring the world, she is once again confronted with the rules and fears typical of Western society, from which she distances herself. “The System is the result of a joint activity between the government and the people. The government provides the rules and order, and the people choose to follow them. It offers advantages, most of all security. When you follow the System, you are safe,” Judith explains to me, but she emphasizes that this security was never her goal and that she “trusts the moment, believes in the present, believes that everything will be fine, even if we are not stuck in one place” (this is inherent in the New Age and personal development discourse, which we will discuss later in the chapter). That is why, after the birth, she and her partner decided to return to their mobile lifestyle away from the System as soon as possible.

Arnold’s (c. 50, Germany, technology and social entrepreneur) definition of freedom reflects the individualism characteristic of digital nomads. “Freedom is the ability to live as you see fit. And how do you know what is best for you? It is up to you to figure it out.” This rather extreme attitude is reminiscent of Ulrich Beck’s classic theory, which describes three dimensions of individualization. (1) The dimension of liberation – uprooting or separating from social prescriptions and commitments; (2) deconstruction, characterized by the loss of traditional security stemming from established norms and knowledge;

(3) reintegration – embedding oneself in a new type of social commitment, which, however, involves the individual in a new set of responsibilities and is therefore the opposite of freedom (Beck 1992, 127-128).

My respondent Dean (around 50, UK, CFO in the banking sector, coliving owner) warns about the negative sides of excessive individuality and autonomy from society: “Digital nomads are very, very different from normal people. You get up in the morning, you’re at home, your tea is there, your coffee is there, your fridge is there. You live in a structured society where there are checks and balances and what’s going on in your life is taken care of. Your bus comes at X o’clock, you have to be at work at 9 am. But many digital nomads go about their lives without any obstacles. You want something, you order it from Uber Eats or Takeaway. You want to go shopping, eBag delivers it. You want a taxi, Uber comes and picks you up. Many of these people have never experienced friction in their lives. I would say the vast majority don’t even know what I mean by ‘friction’. So sometimes you have to be very clear that there are boundaries. If someone has lived in Southeast Asia for years, why would they clean? According to him, they have staff for that.”

The differences in restrictions for nomads and tourists in other parts of the world (e.g. Asia or Western Europe) and in the Balkans, and in Bulgaria in particular, are also the subject of my discussions with respondents. In the discussion “Bulgaria as a place

for nomads' residence" on the stage of the "Bansko Nomad Fest" 2025, in addition to important aspects such as the flat tax of 10 percent and delicious, natural food (attractive both for nomads focused on values and for those focused on specific benefits), the disregard for laws and regulations is also highlighted, which is perceived as "the freedom to do whatever you want, without centralized control. The Bulgarian way to be free is to comply with fewer regulations." Examples include riding a motorcycle without a helmet or in a car without a seat belt ("If you get into a taxi at the airport and put on your seat belt, they immediately ask you: "Are you coming from Germany?"), smoking in establishments where smoking is not allowed by law, heating with wood and coal; even the possibility of bribing a health professional so that he does not vaccinate your child (anti-vaccination sentiments are characteristic of some of my respondents, who have an extreme bias towards a “natural” and “close to nature” lifestyle).

Foreigners admit that they like to live in a place where everyday life is not burdened by the regulations typical of the Western world. Ulrich (around 50, Austria, real estate entrepreneur) for example tells me how, after returning from Zimbabwe, where he worked in 2006-2007 as a development assistant, he was never able to experience the feeling of

freedom in Europe again, the existence of which he had not even suspected before.

While working in London and elsewhere in Europe, he constantly longs to experience it again, but each time he encounters the restrictions and regulations typical of his native Austria and the Western world in general. He finds it only in the Balkans, and in particular in Bulgaria, which is still part of the European Union and has advantages because of this: “People are freer here, there are no strict restrictions and rules,” he summarizes.

This is especially evident during the coronavirus pandemic, when some nomads and tourists have to extend their stay in Bansko and other places around the country. They soon find that it is beneficial for them and in line with their values, precisely because the measures and restrictions are not strictly observed. Martin (around 50, Germany, entrepreneur and coliving space owner) recalls: “For example, during the COVID period, people here were not embarrassed. Some restaurant owners said: ‘We are not vaccinated. Whether you are vaccinated or not, we do not care’”.¹⁷

Arnold (around 50, Germany, technology and social entrepreneur) gives an example of

I refrain from assessing how much such disregard for measures is useful for society, but it is important to note that this is another expression of the individualism of my respondents. They believe that it is right to behave in a certain way, sympathize with others who behave similarly, and are not committed to supporting public welfare/do not believe that they would support it by observing pandemic restrictions. For a detailed analysis of the pandemic in Bansko, see Tsaneva et al., 2024.

his stay in Malta, where one of his home bases is. Police officers forced him to run along the coast wearing a mask, even though he was alone, and to put a mask on his children who were bathing on the shore. In contrast, he states with approval: “If you want people not to question the rules, if you want them to follow all kinds of rules without thinking, Bansko is the wrong place for you.” On the other hand, some Bulgarians would qualify this as “liberties” and even choose Western European countries precisely because of the compliance with various regulations.

And yet “You can’t escape the System” – warns Betty (38, UK, owner of a chain of coworking spaces), who has lived in Bansko for years. According to her, some nomads and expats flee the System imposed in the country of their origin (they do not pay taxes there, do not benefit from healthcare, etc.), but wherever they move, there is another System that they must comply with.

1.3. Conscious Consumption

Anthropologist Daniel Miller focuses on consumption/consumerism and the reasons why the term has a negative connotation – to assume that by consuming, we waste, destroy, reduce a given resource. He links it to materialism – the assumption that we are becoming

increasingly focused on things/commodities and therefore less and less concerned about other people and social relationships. I share Miller's view that such a black-and-white assumption, while increasingly prevalent, is not true and prevails because it creates a convenient general morality, provides a convenient critique of capitalism, the Western world, and almost anything else one might attack in order to demonstrate one's moral superiority. Miller's ethnographic study *The Comfort of Things* (2008), in which he studied the role of possessions in the lives of 100 people living on a street in South London over 18 months, found that: "People who develop strong and numerous relationships with things are the same people who develop strong and numerous relationships with other people. Whereas those who find it difficult to maintain relationships with goods are the same people who have trouble maintaining relationships with other people" (quoted in *What's Wrong with Consumption*).

His book *"The Good Enough Life"* continues the thread of reasoning about the relationship between materialism/consumerism and morality. According to Miller (Miller 2023: 93-4), the social movement against consumerism – anti-consumerism, which has been gaining strength for decades, has the enormous advantage of containing strong ethical associations. Its supporters acquire a moral superiority, present themselves as good examples for others and as promoters of their growth. Predominantly representatives of the wealthier social classes have the opportunity and the mental attitude to consciously practice anti-consumerism – this contrasts sharply with the past, when it was always difficult for rich people to demonstrate superior morality given their greater consumption. The key to digital technologies is that they make many things much easier to (re)produce and share. As a result, we now have an increasingly diverse range of cultural forms in the world and an increasingly insistent criticism, especially of young people who are associated mostly with the digital, that they are losing their humanity and almost replacing people with screens (Miller 2023: 110). The postmodern era also matures the invented belief that "our relationships at some supposed historical time were deep and authentic, and now have become

superficial and inauthentic because we live in a consumerist or digital society” (Miller 2023: 94).

In the publication “What’s Wrong with Consumption” he emphasizes that whether we are talking about our own consumption of goods in London or the desperate desire to escape poverty in much of the rest of the world, it is clear that for most people, goods are not a matter of waste but of love. Even if all advertising were removed, goods are not something we would easily give up unless absolutely necessary. That's right,

because “consumption is a long-term process through which we develop our human essence and create the external world, that is, material culture” (Miller 2023: 110).

Here I will draw a parallel with a comparison from Miller’s book. The T-shirt with the logo of the “Bansko Nomad Fest”, which I wore around Bansko, is now “my T-shirt”, saturated with experiences and memories, and has also served symbolically to include me in the community of nomads. Casey (around 40, Finland, social anthropologist) also recalls something similar when he came to the city years ago and there were digital nomads everywhere wearing orange T-shirts with the logo of the “Coworking 1” (the first coworking space in Bansko) described in Chapter Two: “And when you see a person with such a T-shirt, you greet each other, and you start talking.”

Having defined “consumption” from an anthropological perspective, and before moving on to a more specific analysis of the consumer attitudes of nomads, it is important to introduce the statement of other classic authors in the anthropology of consumption. In “The World of Goods”, Douglas and Isherwood (2002: xxvi) emphasize that consumption is a means of satisfying not only the need for communication and significance, but also other needs – for example, the need for control. “Why do people want what they want? It’s all about control. (...) There is a complex and basic set of things that people want in order to control other people (and to avoid control over themselves).”

In their study of digital nomadism in Bali, Waldo and Litchfield (2020: 89-90) discuss the consumer practices of their respondents and conclude that a large proportion of them are oriented towards some version of minimalism – a mix of ethical, aesthetic and practical considerations, according to which one should simplify one’s life, approach consumption more consciously and use one’s resources not on things, but on experiences that bring memories, happiness and satisfaction. 18 The authors realize that limiting possessions is practical for anyone who

travels so often, but they note that digital nomads are extreme in this. Among their motivations are alienation from materialism and mass consumption patterns, as well as the belief that one is more creative, inventive and free when one has a limited amount of belongings. “Like digital nomadism in general, minimalism is a countercultural value and aesthetic that separates individuals from the mainstream. However, we have observed that minimalism also involves consumption and materialism – a fact that many nomads seem unwilling to acknowledge. As Pierre Bourdieu argues, tastes

A telling example of the philosophy of minimalism is the title of one of its Bibles: “Love People, Use Things: The Reverse Doesn’t Work” by Joshua and Ryan Nicodemus (published in Bulgarian by Raketa Publishing, 2022).

A person’s tastes and consumption styles are influenced by family and personal educational experiences, as well as formative experiences throughout life. This includes an affinity for specific types of travel, a preference for certain types of art, and a pursuit of one aesthetic over another (...) We have observed, for example, that the consumer impulses of nomads manifest themselves in the form of fetishizing and purchasing high-quality goods and impressive experiences. In fact, the tendency and ability to consume relatively extravagant experiences and to buy a small number of expensive possessions is a sign of privilege and a more subtle form of conspicuous consumption. As I will show in Chapter Two, nomads are distinguished by the possession of many things, but not by the use of many services.

My respondent Martin (around 50, Germany, entrepreneur and owner of a coliving space) is aware of this “cognitive dissonance,” as he puts it. He tells me that nomads often travel with only hand luggage and without many belongings, because they have no permanent home and find it difficult to store them. However, he gives an example of a luxury service that many nomads take advantage of with enthusiasm: nomadic cruises. Often the trip is from Europe to South America or vice versa, in the spring or autumn, the idea being to stay on the given continent during the appropriate season. “On the cruise, since we are all conscious

and conscious, it is not tolerated to use plastic straws. When we go to have a drink, we have to tell the bartender not to put a straw in – it makes us more environmentally conscious. The problem is that traveling by cruise ship is one of the most environmentally unfriendly ways to travel. Also, many nomads fly to the place where the ship departs from. But at least we don’t use straws.”

Martin also touches on another contradiction – the travel of privileged individuals to countries where the local people suffer from serious restrictions on human rights. “For example, Egypt is a favorite diving destination, but there is a military junta in power there. Thailand is also a monarchy with a military junta, where you can go to prison if you criticize the king. Bali is in Indonesia – an Islamic country, Sharia laws, which from a Western perspective limit women’s rights. We all want to be so good, we want peace in the world, etc., and then we travel to these countries. We are supposedly aware, but we try to ignore the side effects of what we are doing” (meaning that they contribute to the economy of countries whose governance is at odds with nomadic values).

For my respondent Joel (around 30, Romanian-American, online English teacher, former coliving owner), mobility and minimalism are directly related. “Mobility means ‘being able to go somewhere else and the process is relatively easy. That is, being able to

work remotely, but also being minimalist to some extent. Because many people have a lot of stuff and it’s just hard for them to move here and there. Also, it’s not that expensive when you have a few things. You start to think differently about how to use your stuff and how to buy it.” His statement reflects both ends of the continuum: a focus on values, but above all a focus on concrete benefits and pragmatism.

Judith (36, Germany, psycho- and hypnotherapist) invites me to her apartment in Bansko, where she is renting for a few months with her partner and their 2-year-old son. Regarding the presence of quite a few things, she notes that most of them are second-hand gifts and subsequently emphasizes: “Consumption for us means buying things that we need to live well.” Recently, however, the challenge has arisen that the family likes a healthy lifestyle, and the goods and services associated with it have become noticeably more expensive. This is reminiscent of Miller’s (2023: 92) observation that sometimes consumerism and anti-consumerism are not opposites but mutually reinforcing when it comes to demonstrating status – for example, in buying organic food or investing in green energy, greater wealth can be used to demonstrate superiority in the area of anti-consumerism.

Betty (38, UK, owner of a chain of co-working spaces) also finds that

Digital nomads often discuss their consumption, are careful with their purchases (especially if they travel frequently) and try to teach other people to consume consciously. They try to repair things, recycle, and not buy things if they can borrow them. Coliving spaces often have items left

that can be borrowed or returned for a symbolic amount – from appliances to bicycles and ski equipment. In Bansko, there are also such shops for renting equipment that you can return at the end of the day.

However, being a minimalist does not mean depriving yourself of necessary items while you are on the road. An example of this is the story of Mira (about 30 years old, Bulgaria, marketing specialist and entrepreneur), who lived with other digital nomads for several months in a cheap apartment in Georgia, where there were only two high bar stools and a low table, absolutely unsuitable for working on a computer. They found a local guy selling chairs through Facebook Marketplace and went to his warehouse, where they bought two ergonomic office chairs for 20 euros each. And when it was time to leave Georgia, they simply left them in the apartment for future users.

Also, not all digital nomads are necessarily minimalists – some prefer to pay for themselves to be comfortable in the next place they settle. Mary (in her early 50s, Netherlands, translator) says: “I’m not a big consumer than most people, but I’m a maximalist, which is quite unusual for a digital nomad.”

She emphasizes that she needs her comforts and daily rituals, and that this gives her a sense of home – she brings books, running gear, skincare products, photography and hiking gear. “I need shoes for different situations. Usually, you buy a new pair and then you just put it away and never use it again. And then you buy new shoes. I said to myself, ‘This is a waste of my money, and it’s not good for the planet.’ So I decided early on that if I feel more comfortable with more stuff, I’ll wear more stuff.” Regarding her excessive consumption of flights, she emphasizes that she tries to spend a long time in the destination she arrived at by plane, and that this is different from her friend, who visits 15 countries a year and spends “5 – 10 – 12” days in different destinations.

Another of my respondents – Ray (around 35, Canada, IT specialist), who defines himself as a maximalist, talks about his consumer practices by his portable fire pit (part of a barbecue kit that even includes an apron) and with a glass of wine in his hand from his alcoholic drinks kit. He arrived with 120 kilograms of luggage in Bansko, where he will stay for two months, and the occasion is the “Bansko Nomad Fest” 2025, where he will present a topic about depressive states and how they are positively influenced by nomadic communities and lifestyle. His belongings also include a golf set, three different humidors for different types of cigars (“The humidity of some

I want it to be 69%, others – 72%)), as well as a virtual reality set, thanks to which he can work at any desk. “That way I see my five screens, and I also associate the virtual environment with a home”. He always carries a tablet, two laptops, as well as hard drives on which he keeps an archive – in case both laptops are stolen. He defines his way of traveling as the “5-star option” and tells us how he manages all his luggage. He paid 160 euros to the company Blacklane and as a result, a private driver in a Mercedes is waiting for him at the airport. Ray knows his family, and the driver knows his preferences.

“But how do you carry all this luggage through the airport? I am only traveling with a baby and one backpack, a total of about 30 kg, and it is still difficult for me?” asks Gustavo (around 40, Portugal, entrepreneur and volleyball player).

Ray explains that he has a Samsonite set – a large, medium and small suitcase, in addition to a golf bag: “You take the trolley, put the large suitcase flat, put the medium suitcase upright in front. You fit the rest. You put the golf bag in front and start pushing. You push and pray that nothing falls out.”

We laugh together that these are the challenges of every “nomadic bourgeois.”

Ray notes that he has reduced the volume of his possessions drastically compared to 10 years ago. In 2015, he flew to Africa with 80 kilograms of luggage, and in the meantime he was paying nearly 6,000

dollars a month in Canada for his rent, his car, his lease, insurance, etc. “And then I went to Africa and said to myself: these things don’t matter anymore.” When he returned to his homeland, he sold everything, put his belongings in storage and went to Bali for two months.

Yet such preferences are the exception among digital nomads. Most are unwilling or unable to afford to splurge. It is important to note that they are more deliberately frugal and by no means outright poor. Although they may not openly state it, many of them fall on the end of the continuum where the focus is at least half on pragmatism and practical benefits.

My respondent Eddie (around 40, Bulgarian-Israeli origin, owner of coworking and coliving spaces) believes that: “Digital nomads are not the best consumers. “First, because of financial freedom. Imagine many nomads who have saved some amount, this is their safety, and their goal is to have this amount last as long as possible. Which means that you either increase the amount or reduce expenses. Unfortunately, most choose to

reduce their expenses to the maximum, rather than work more and earn more. And contribute more. Which makes them very bad consumers.” Eddie outlines the problem from the perspective of a serial entrepreneur and business angel¹⁹ in

A type of private investor who provides financing for companies in the early stages of their development. Participates in the first few stages of raising capital for a given business and usually invests in exchange for a share of the company.

the field of coworking and coliving spaces: “Businesses around nomads, coliving, coliving, tourist tickets, all this has to endure. And at least from my experience, if only with nomads and coworking and coliving, I don’t see a way for the business to survive – maybe yes, but difficult. You have to automatically think about how to lower the price to the maximum and offer a high-quality service. On the other hand, they are very demanding of the service, because there are all kinds of countries already with a low cost of living that offer a very high-quality product and nomads are used to it.”

My respondent Mira (around 30, Bulgaria, marketing specialist and entrepreneur) organized a presentation in Sofia, during which she told how she lives nomadically without exhausting her budget. She accurately emphasizes Eddie’s observations – that digital nomads are always looking for ways to reduce their expenses so they can travel more and stay longer. Then she shows us websites of Bulgarian travel agencies, where a 12-day trip to Japan costs over 4,000 euros, and points out that in her opinion this is extremely expensive and with that money she could travel for three months. He assures us that “you can organize everything yourself and save money. For example, during his stay in the Japanese Olympic ski resort of Madarao, northwest of Tokyo, where he goes with other nomads to snowboard, they find a house with separate rooms and a common area for 220 euros per month per person. They shop at supermarkets in bulk to keep costs low and to avoid having to use cars often.

Another of my respondents, Joel (around 30, Romanian-American, online English teacher, former coliving owner) also points out that digital nomads are usually very frugal and go to a place because the cost of living is lower. They pay attention to goods and services that are reasonably priced and that they find meaningful, and therefore do not buy souvenirs, trinkets or random toys, such as those offered in many tourist destinations. Joel tells me that before embarking on the nomadic lifestyle of life, he took an analytical approach and calculated where he would have the most purchasing power, given his income as a freelance online English

teacher. He decided to move from his home state of Arizona and head to Europe, for example to his parents' home country of Romania, especially since he knew the language. "The best way to survive in the US is to have a full-time job," and he preferred to work as a freelancer. He also disliked the high costs of healthcare there, as well as the inability to walk long distances in cities.

Russian Ekaterina (a little over 30, a language teacher) talks about the Netherlands – her husband's home country, where "we will never be able to afford a house or an apartment, or we will be able to, but my husband will have to pay off the loans until he turns 50. And in Bansko we managed to pay it off in a few years and now we are free. That's why we say it's a place where dreams come true."

Digital nomads participating in the discussion "Bulgaria as a place for nomads to live", part of the "Bansko Nomad Fest" 2025, point out that "if you have some money and wealth, you don't want to live in a greedy country with a socialist government and high taxes", and give Portugal and Spain as examples. In contrast, according to them, in Bansko one saves not only money, but also time and energy – resources extremely valued by nomads. It is important to note, however, that each of the places discussed in this discussion, as well as the global hotspots for digital nomads in general, are "zones of exception" (Ong 1999), where relatively wealthy and privileged individuals are allowed to enjoy the benefits of being "flexible citizens." As Ong describes, their consumption serves a different, more tactical purpose – to keep themselves constantly open to new opportunities and to be mobile, as well as to distance themselves from the control of state governments.

In the next section, we will focus on another resource that makes Bulgaria extremely attractive to digital nomads – the environment and proximity to nature.

1.4. Closeness to nature

Kate Soper (2020) introduces the term “alternative hedonism” to describe the lack of resistance to the adoption of necessary changes in consumption. They are not seen as self-sacrifice and denial of pleasure, but as an opportunity to move beyond a lifestyle that is not only environmentally disastrous, but also in many ways unpleasant, self-denying and overly puritanically fixated on work and money-making at the expense of the pleasure that comes with having more time, doing more for yourself, traveling slower and consuming fewer things. In her opinion, we need to question the assumption that work-dominated, stressed, time-scarce and materially burdened everyday life contributes to human well-being, rather than harming it. This is precisely what many digital nomads believe.

What environment is associated with “work-dominated, stressful, time-scarce and materially burdened everyday life”? With cities, which are constantly criticized as places where materialism, superficial attitudes, consumerism, workaholism flourish. This discourse has gained particular popularity in the 21st century, but it has roots in the early 20th century and

even earlier.²⁰ Life in small settlements – i.e. closer to nature, or even in the wild, off the grid – has been romanticized to an extreme extent in the media, art and elsewhere (see more on the term “rural idyll” in the scientific works of Bunce 2003 and Bell 2006). As Woldoff and Litchfield (2021: 22) describe it, city dwellers are accused of being too rational, lacking spirituality and social connectedness, and too distant from nature to appreciate its wonders.

The attitudes of most of the digital nomads who choose Bansko as their destination can be aptly described by the term “ecologism”. I adhere to Manuel Castells’ (2006: 105) definition, according to which these are “all forms of collective action that, in their discourse and practice, aim to correct destructive forms of relations between human action and its natural environment, opposing the prevailing structural and institutional logic”. The fact that environmentalism is “the only global identity offered in the name of all human beings, regardless of their specific social, historical, or gender affiliation or religious beliefs” (Castells 2006: 118) corresponds perfectly with the globalized and cosmopolitan identity of digital nomads.

For example, in the essay “Nature” (1836), Ralph Waldo Emerson praises escape to the forest, where “eternal youth” is found and “selfishness is

lost,” and in “Walden or Life in the Woods” (1854), Henry David Thoreau recounts his experiences after retiring to live in a cabin on Walden Pond that he built himself.

It also corresponds with the prejudice that people with lower incomes or lower education do not care as much about the environment, and therefore environmentalism contributes to class distinctions (Miller 2023: 92).

The environmentalist and anti-consumerist bias of some middle-class members is fueled by criticism of the superficial thinking and actions and the gluttony attributed to consumer culture. Among environmentalists, how moral and decent someone is is measured by the degree of environmental commitment (Miller 2023: 93). At the same time, it is attractive to adopt environmentalism because practices that enhance personal health and sustainability (e.g., eating healthy foods or cycling) go hand in hand with contributing to the sustainability of the planet (ibid., 91).

The above is not to belittle or diminish the constructive contributions of environmentalism and its proponents to ensuring the sustainability of the Earth. I agree with Miller that “even without the imperative of climate change, environmentalism is unlikely to be a phase that will simply pass.” Why won’t it? Because there is something deeply human, healing and inspiring about being environmentally conscious. Like my respondents, I experience it regularly and share this value. According to the majority of them, proximity to

nature and connection with the environment is key to their well-being. In each interview, I ask them what they associate the word “nature” with, whether and if so, why it is important to them. Here are some indicative answers.

“To be happy, we need to create together with nature; we need to be in nature, to get to know even ourselves. I think that in order to ground ourselves and to be able to understand what is important to us, we need to ground ourselves in nature, to be with it. And to teach our children to do the same. If we are not connected to nature, we will destroy our minds and destroy this earth” – Audrey (about 35 years old, Norway, English and Spanish teacher).

Betty (38 years old, UK, owner of a chain of coworking spaces) observes that many of the visitors to her coworking space go outside for a short walk every few hours – it is part of their routine self-care. “It makes sense to be in nature and exercise, even if it’s not to run a marathon. Just a

simple walk in the sun – and everything becomes natural and normal. Just enough to ease the nervous system.”

Joel (around 30, Romanian-American, online English teacher, former coliving owner) is exactly the type of digital nomad described by Betty. He prefers to work at Coworking 2, which is next to the city park in Bansko, so that “between meetings I can go for a walk in the park and feel like I have some free time.” He expresses a consideration that many nature lovers share: that nature in an urban environment – even in a small, rural town like Bansko – doesn’t have the same feeling as the wild: “To get to nature, I have to go for a hike, but most of the time I don’t have three or four hours to do that.”

The owner of “Coliving 3” Mihail (around 60, Bulgaria, former diplomat in Lebanon) commented that nature is so important to his guests, “because they lived in a very regulated world. They even asked me why there are bushes in the fields. In their country, the bushes are removed and it becomes pasture, especially in England, in Ireland. (...) I take them mushroom picking, in the neighboring meadows. There was a Chinese woman who gave them activities – gymnastics, here on the green grass. They leave here and are immediately in nature. And they ask me, “Whose nut is this, can I pick from it, so that no one scolds me.” His wife, who with her attitude and actions has naturally established herself as a community manager, adds: “Australians, for example, didn’t know what it was like, where you go around with an envelope to collect something” – here is another example of the dimensions of freedom that foreigners experience in Bulgaria.

Mary (a little over 50, Netherlands, translator) points out that for her there are different types of nature. “My first definition is a place without people, just a wild place without any buildings. But I also like that kind of nature where civilization is not too far away. There I relax, I feel calm, unless there are dangerous animals. It’s a nice, old-fashioned feeling. I like going to places where I feel like we haven’t destroyed everything yet.” She finds it ironic that the more tourists visit a place, the more destruction they bring: “Nature is something powerful and at the same time fragile and gentle.” She tells me how two years ago she went hiking in Slovenia with a nomad friend she met in Bansko. “We were in the middle of nature – the nearest town wasn’t that far, but it was wild, with huge mountain passes, high peaks.” They met in the middle of a thunderstorm, and two days after they left, there were massive floods in the area and people died. “We tend to idealize nature, but it is dangerous,” Mary concludes.

Arnold (around 50, Germany, tech and social entrepreneur) describes his attitude towards nature as an opposition to consumerism. This is a typical view for many of the digital nomads in Bansko and in general for those who choose to travel and work predominantly outside of large urban centers. "People spend a lot of money. They put themselves under a lot of pressure to be in an extremely unhealthy environment. They consume a lot and create an unhealthy environment for their children and for themselves, and then they complain about their health. That's why there's such a health pandemic in children these days – they're going crazy mentally, there's a high rate of suicide or self-harm in teenagers, there's a high rate of

autism. It all comes from somewhere. And I believe that if you reset the consumerism and realize that it's good to have fresh air – my son loves going to the forest because it feels better, different energy, different vibrations... so if you focus your consumerism on consuming forest vibrations, that's great. I believe that people are increasingly thinking about this. You can buy a house in Bansko for the same money that you would get a relatively large garage in Malta for. It's a matter of perspective and how you want to manage your life. Being healthy and wealthy means different things to different people. I know people in New York who make a million a year and still don't have enough money to save. (...) I live in different parts of the world and I am very happy with the environment, which is simple and allows children to have a great time. I enjoy the winter there, I also enjoy the sun and greenery in Bansko in the summer. It is essential. It is not even about enjoyment. We need it. (...) Everything makes sense, everything exists for a reason and everything is renewed. This is nature. It is unnatural to block it."

Arnold's statement shows the opposition between "urban" and "natural", which is also formulated in the story of Julio (Spain, 35+ years old, social entrepreneur), who presented his organization for the revival of dying villages in Spain at the "Bansko Nomad Fest" 2025, in one of which he himself

he has lived for years. At the beginning of the presentation, he uses expressive means and messages typical of the spreaders of the "rural idyll" construct: "I will tell you a story about love and hate. Initially, humanity lived in small tribes. They were nomads, they were hunters – probably like you, but with different tools, not a computer. People moved around in small, very close-knit communities. This developed more and more. With the help of technology and agriculture, humanity began to settle in smaller cities. But then the cities grew. (...) This creates the

modern challenges of the city – food systems, mental health and well-being, social polarization, climate change. The vital contribution of rural areas is threatened, and the urban environment is becoming so saturated that we begin to envy those who make things with their hands, have this regularity in their relationship with nature, this depth, have nature at their doorstep.” Julio then shares his own story and how he grew up with the idea that “success is in urban areas,” which is why he lived in San Francisco, Lima, Mexico City, and Bangkok. At 22, he discovered that success for him was “working from wherever you want – being absolutely free, not tied to a place.” A typical young nomad with a focus on constant movement and new cultures, he changed countries sometimes every other week. Eventually, he didn’t even have room for stamps in his passport, and

that’s when he realized another thing – “that my branches are growing, but I don’t have the ground under my feet, my roots are not stable.” Julio is one of those people who claim to have found their roots in the countryside, in life close to nature. He develops his entrepreneurial spirit in several villages in Southern Spain, and the goal of his organization is to contribute to social change in dying villages by facilitating the arrival of travelers to live there in the medium term and exchange experiences and knowledge with local people. In addition to coworking space and accommodation, it offers a range of activities that connect the newcomer with the inhabitants of the rural environment.²¹

“This is Liz, she works in the US,” Julio continues. “She has traveled a lot, but she is looking for something and also wants to take a break from the city. And this is Benarraba – a depopulated village in the mountains of Malaga. Liz comes for a month and gets involved in the daily life of the village. She goes and paints with the grandmothers, cooks with them, walks, we have picnics, works from the coworking space, picks oranges in season. It all depends on when you come, we are tied to seasonality, as well as to life in the wild. And Liz feels how the village touches her – she lives more calmly, she is more clear-minded about herself, she feels that she has a village to return to.”

The description is reminiscent of another of my respondents – Judith (36, Germany, psycho- and hypnotherapist), whose statement about nature also covers the topic of

A Bulgarian example of such an initiative is the “Grandma Residence”, described in detail by Craycraft (2022).

New Age, which we will look at in the next part of the chapter. Judith and her husband return from the UK to Bansko in the summer after their son is born. They hire a Bulgarian nanny who “showed me a bit of the Bulgarian woman’s mindset when it comes to alternative medicine. And I said to myself, ‘This is amazing, this is what I was looking for’ – the herbs, the traditional knowledge of how to deal with fever, etc.” When I ask Judith what she associates the word “nature” with, she replies, “If we are angry or sad, we have a different, lower energy. And nature always has a high and stable energy, and we absorb that energy. I wear a device that measures my pulse and other indicators of how healthy I am at the moment. I realize that whenever I am in Bansko, my heart health improves. And I guess it is because I am surrounded by forests. These energy waves are very different than when you are in the center of Sofia.”

Arnold (around 50, Germany, technology and social entrepreneur) shares a similar feeling: “I was burned out and I didn’t feel like I was burned out. Just constant tension, fatigue. I was the entrepreneur who was constantly in business, 24/7. I would wake up tired, more tired than when I went to bed. And I couldn’t figure out why. To this day, I don’t know why. But I can say for a fact: in Bansko, in less than a week, my brain somehow opened up, unblocked itself. Of course, emotionally I feel better, I sleep less,

but I wake up with joy, I wake up with energy and I came up with a lot of good ideas here.”

Finally, here is the warning from Julio (around 40, Spain, social entrepreneur): “The concentration of the population in urban areas brings challenges related to well-being, to mental health. We are too densely populated, and – paradoxically – I would say that we are more isolated. This polarization also brings social challenges”. These are exactly what we will look at in the next part of the chapter.

1.5. Personal development and spirituality

So far, we have discussed freedom in its physical dimension – to live and work (from) where you want, as well as in its financial dimension – to spend money on what you really need and to consume consciously. In this part, we will analyze mental freedom, as perceived by digital nomads – the freedom to think independently and to control yourself and your emotions, as well as the desire not to succumb to external influences. As an anthropologist, I realize how ambitious and impossible it is to fully achieve this. For many of my respondents, however, this goal is fueled by the content they consume on a daily basis, by their surroundings and loved ones, and most of all by their inner sense of inadequacy.

“I’ll tell you something interesting,” my respondent Irina (28, Serbia, marketing specialist) confided in me during our first meeting. “Everyone who travels constantly is mentally broken. We all have problems.” In her case, the problem is a relationship with an abusive man that ended nearly a decade ago, but proved impossible to overcome. Irina admits that she still finds it difficult to communicate with unknown men in the nomadic communities around the world, where she travels several times a year. She defines her constant travel as a form of escapism.

Martin (around 50, Germany, entrepreneur and coliving space owner) thinks the same, answering my question “What makes a person become a digital nomad” with the question “What does a person run away from” and adding: “The first reason is not to find something, but to run away from something. Or it can be both – you are somehow uncomfortable in your current state and you start traveling to find something, to find people”. Without claiming that every digital nomad starts traveling for this reason, I will still note that for the majority of my respondents the case is similar. However, my observation does not apply as strongly to those who travel between several home bases in different countries during different seasons.

The topic of the emotional state of digital nomads is not often addressed in scientific research. Zhong (2025) writes about

the well-being of digital nomads in China. Miguel et al. (2023) – on the loneliness of nomads and the phenomenon of “fear of missing out” (FOMO), in which a person constantly fears that others must be having satisfying experiences from which he/she is absent, and therefore wants to be connected to their activities (Przybylski et al., 2013: 1841). Miguel et al. (2024) also published an article on loneliness, the feeling of isolation

and unsuccessful attempts to overcome them through online communication.

One of the chapters in Thompson's ethnographic study (2021: 58) addresses the unhealthy relationship between the subdiscipline of "positive psychology" and digital nomadism. The author points out that positive psychology was founded in 1997 by former American Psychological Association director Martin Seligman, who aimed to move psychology away from being a science of mental illness and abnormal states and toward a science of positive emotions that lead to positive outcomes. This movement quickly gained popularity, reaching the corporate and entrepreneurial worlds, where companies are providing their employees with self-help books on positive thinking to boost productivity. Thompson observes that the publications that digital nomads adhere to are right in the field of

positive psychology and self-help, now rebranded as "personal development."

More than a decade earlier, Ehrenreich (2009: 9) described how in America the promotion of positive thinking had become an industry, producing an endless stream of books, DVDs, and other products and providing jobs for tens of thousands of life and business coaches and motivational speakers. He argues that the growing financial insecurity of the middle class is contributing to the demand for these products.

Cabanas and Illouz's (2018: 13) book also presents "the new coercive strategies, political decisions, management styles, consumption patterns, individual obsessions, and emotional hierarchies that have emerged in the era of happiness." It criticizes positive psychology for its lack of rigorous methodology and its tendency to impose short-term insights. The authors warn that it is "an eclectic mix of disparate sources, ranging from psychoanalysis and religion to behaviorism, medicine, the occult, neuroscience, conventional Eastern wisdom, and personal experience" (ibid., 24).

Based on my own experience as an editor and reader of many such works (e.g., by Peter Sage, David Hawkins, Stuart Wilde), here is a short list of the messages that are repeated there and that I have heard in various forms from my respondents. I refrain from commenting on how "right" or "wrong" they are, as such a definition applies to different

individuals to varying degrees and is conditioned by their personal history and present.

A person bears full responsibility for their thoughts, choices
and actions.

Our thoughts shape our reality and determine
how far we can go.

Success is not an accident, but the result of
consistency and habits.

Fear is not an enemy, but a signal that growth lies in
what we are afraid of.

There is no progress without a specific goal.

Personal development is a constant process that
requires daily efforts. Our environment plays a key role – the people
around us strongly influence our development or
decline.

Mistakes and failures should not stop us – they are
lessons that bring us closer to success.

Gratitude changes our focus from a mindset of scarcity to one of
abundance and brings inner peace.

The most important thing is to act – instead of waiting for
the perfect moment, it is better to start now.

In books and other types of publications for personal development,
messages and statements drawn from spiritual and philosophical
movements such as Stoicism, Neopaganism (neopaganism), Buddhism,

Hinduism, yoga, etc. are interwoven in language suitable for a modern audience.

Elements of these are combined and it is emphasized that the statements are not from the field of metaphysics and the inexplicable, but have purely scientific roots, most often from quantum physics. The problem with the affirmation of such principles, especially as universally valid, is that in addition to being hyper-individualistic, they are also accusatory towards various representatives of society who “fail” to meet these standards. The so-called “positive thinking” and “self-care” shift the responsibility onto the individual and his or her mental state solely and exclusively onto him or her, conveniently not touching on institutional constraints, social inequalities, poverty, neoliberalism, nor the inherent privileges of the upper classes, some races over others, or the established positions of both sexes in socio-behavioral models and networks (Thompson 2021: 48).

Kyurkchiev (2019: 112) presents an in-depth analysis of how the above-mentioned judgments and their derivatives have “a specific historical logic that follows the logic of restructuring capitalism and the stability of this economic and governance system that we designate as neoliberalism”. Central to them is the concept of experiencing oneself through the feeling of freedom – the individual is considered free to be whoever he wants, to do whatever he wants, to become whoever he wants. Kyurkchiev (*ibid.*, 216) describes not only how “self-care” enters Western business culture, but also how – paradoxically – it gives rise to pathologies, most often neurotic states. Our desire to be flexible, creative, adaptive (ever-popular words) can lead not only to positive results, but also to neuroses. According to the scholar (*ibid.*), another negative effect of making responsibility a purely personal burden is that the individual is deprived of the capacity to notice and address the responsibility of external forces. This is evident, for example, in the attitude of my respondent Judith (36, Germany, psycho- and hypnotherapist), which overlaps with that of many other digital nomads: “I think we cannot blame the government because the government is simply a reflection of the people.” The ultimate consequence is social inertia: a refusal to attempt social change and a weakening of the need for collective subjects as engines of public criticism.

Appendix 5 presents a detailed review of specific judgments from the field of personal development and their potential harms.

Rosenbaum and Talmor (2024: 200) see self-care as an antidote to the lack of collective care, but warn that entire industries reproduce the very conditions that this care is trying to alleviate. The question of who has

access to self-care, who can and cannot benefit from it, should not be underestimated. This is another aspect that confirms the privileging of digital nomads.

What makes many of them adopt such a philosophy?

In their ethnographic study of digital nomadism in Bali, Woldoff and Litchfield (2021: 34- 5) address the presence of stress, crisis, and trauma in the lives of their respondents. The authors use these clinical terms more generally to describe factors that may be insignificant for one individual, while another has a more traumatic reaction and experiences them as a crisis. Some of their interlocutors share their anxiety, depression, suicidal thoughts, and/or self-harming behavior, others focus on their work/business failures and personal traumatic events such as rape, illness, divorce, and the death of loved ones. Woldoff and Litchfield also describe the phenomenon of the “Quarter-Century Crisis,” in which people in their 20s and 30s worry about the direction their lives are taking, even though this part of life is often seen as a time of opportunity, career advancement, and freedom from the demands of family and school.

The authors draw attention to positivism as a value and trend, and emphasize that self-development publications and publications are dominated by an obsessive individualism. However, much of the messaging from well-known gurus (e.g., Tony Robbins) and business leaders (e.g., Richard Branson) blends entrepreneurship and sociality alongside health/self-care and spirituality. Based on established New Age classics

authors of the 20th century, in the 21st century an ethos of self-improvement flourished, absorbed by the mass audience through books, podcasts, TED presentations, etc.

My interviews with respondents revealed their beliefs, in which New Age, personal development and spirituality are intertwined. Although New Age is associated with new religious movements, it is much more determined by the cult of authenticity specific to modernity, the accelerated development of technological processes, mobility, changes in forms of connectivity and publicity, new options for building global communities, etc. (Manova 2019: 237). Since it is impossible to give a short, precise and clear definition of New Age – it is either too narrow or too broad – I will present the main characteristics formulated by the established researcher of the phenomenon Wouter Hanegraaff (Hanegraaff 1996: 365- 366) and summarized in Bulgarian in the text “Theories and Boundaries of New Age” (Kyurkchiev 2022). (1) a strong focus on the present moment, on

remaining in the world and searching for meaning in it – in contrast to religious movements that focus on some “beyond”. (2) holisticity – belief that everything is connected to everything else; (3) belief in development and growth – belief that everything happens to teach us something and thus to move forward; (4) personal responsibility and evolution of human consciousness towards the divine – consciousness creates its reality, therefore we are responsible for our growth; (5) belief that the New Age is coming and that a spiritual transformation of humanity is imminent.

How are these characteristics present in the attitudes of my respondents?

Judith (36, Germany, psychotherapist and hypnotherapist) talks about the power of affirmations – a practice that is considered a psychological tool and uses the principle of neuroplasticity, i.e. the ability of the brain to create new neural pathways. The goal is that by constantly repeating positive statements, a person consciously replaces their old beliefs that they find limiting. In my conversation with her, she also outlines another opposition characteristic of personal development – that between the ego (a mask formed by our thoughts, beliefs, social roles, attachments, etc.) and the “authentic/higher self” (the part of us that is not bound by thoughts, emotions and external circumstances). Judith says: “My biggest fear is that at some point I won’t make any money and I’ll end up living on the streets. And that I’ll feel lonely. But that’s a kind of ego fear, the ego talking. In reality, it’s the opposite. When you dive deep inside yourself, there’s always a wave.”

Martin (around 50, Germany, entrepreneur and coliving space owner) says we live in virtual reality – a view that has been popular in recent decades, according to which our reality, including the universe and our consciousness, is an extremely

an advanced computer simulation, probably created by a more advanced civilization: “The easiest thing would be to just believe that there is a God. Here now is the Orthodox God. In Salzburg it is the Catholic God. In Munich it is more of the Protestant God. Just believe in this guy. But I think a lot of people are questioning whether we should really believe in him. What has he ever done for us? And then you travel and you find out that, well, in Thailand there are no such gods. I go there, people say, ‘Oh, can I rub Buddha’s belly?’ and I say, ‘Okay, let’s rub it, why not? It brings good luck.’”

Mira (around 30, Bulgaria, marketing specialist and entrepreneur) points out that she is not familiar with this topic, but having been to Bali: “If you go and ask the people who have chosen to stay on this island, everyone

there is quite spiritual and dedicated” – East Asia is a hotbed for digital nomads from the Western world who are interested in spiritual practices.

Joel (around 30, Romanian-American, online English teacher, former coliving owner) believes that “if you are independent of location, if you travel, etc., you are more likely to be interested in personal development – the two go hand in hand. He talks about “self-improvement, a growth mindset, having this energy to improve, the desire to improve” and is surprised that when he travels, he meets so many such people, because his personal experience

indicates that there are not many of them on social media, for example.

In relation to the expression “growth mindset”, this is also a term from the field of personal development, used together with “abundance mindset”, both of which are opposed to “scarcity mindset”. Supporters of modern personal development theories, among which my respondents, do not believe in the existence of a limited amount of work and ideas, therefore they are happy to share potential opportunities with each other and focus on cooperation rather than competition. They are often oriented towards the accumulation of so-called social capital – a concept according to which the favor of others towards us can be beneficial for our growth both professionally and personally (Woldoff, Litchfield 2021: 87).

My interviewee Casey talks about her native Finland: “I feel like I’m wasting my life if I’m there all year round. I come back in the summer when everyone is happy, tanned and on holiday, enjoying their drinks outside, the weather is nice for a bit. It’s great, but I know it’s not like that the other 90% of the year, it’s cold there and people are just hibernating, and it’s like they’re not doing much. And when I look back on the past year, I say to myself, I’ve done all of that. All these new experiences, meeting people with weird hobbies, saying, ‘Yeah, I’ll go rock climbing with you.’” In Finland

This would never happen because either none of my friends climb or people don’t offer things to other people.” Casey also gives an example of how in the shared space where she and her boyfriend worked and lived in Spain, one of the residents is a sailor and has a mobile home – a van – so he can make unusual knots and organize a workshop on the topic. “Where else are you going to go to a knot workshop? It’s so strange and so fascinating and so useful.” People who live normal, sedentary lives don’t organize knot workshops for their friends on Thursday nights, do they?” Casey realizes that by attending such events, unrelated to work or her other passions, she broadens her own perspectives, puts herself in

unexpected situations and among people with different opinions and worldviews than hers. “It’s about experiencing the whole world in practice. There’s so much of it, and I’ve been on the road since 1996. I’m already approaching my 30th anniversary on the road.”

Woldoff and Litchfield (2021: 191) note a contradiction between the proactive approach to the rest of nomads’ lives and fatalistic attitudes towards long-term relationships (statements such as “If it’s meant to be, it will happen”). Nomads’ pursuit of individual freedom often comes at the expense of long-term romantic relationships. This is confirmed by my own observations – when I discuss the challenges of a mobile lifestyle with my interlocutors, the topic of loneliness often comes up. (The exception is traveling families, which I will analyze in Chapter Three.)

“Friendships are easy, but romantic relationships are very difficult. That’s probably the number one problem, the number one challenge. Because people are very open, free, somewhat spiritual. They wouldn’t settle for something that... I don’t know... I met my boyfriend in Japan, we were in the same house together. It was only a year ago. It’s still new, let’s see. But now we travel together all the time.” (Mira – around 30, Bulgaria, marketing specialist and entrepreneur)

“We all love freedom and happiness, but the problem with it is that sometimes it can be quite lonely. It’s hard to build deep relationships if you’re always free. You see the smallest problem, instead of working on it, you say to yourself: “Let’s go somewhere else.” That’s a challenge – how to build deep relationships and how to find a meaningful life? The question is how do you do something meaningful, many nomads struggle with it” – Martin (around 50, Germany, entrepreneur and coliving space owner).

This is also confirmed by Arnold (around 50, Germany, tech and social entrepreneur): A significant percentage, probably the majority, are lost people who travel because then they don’t have to research the answers to some basic questions. If you keep traveling, you are always

facing a new environment and not having to deal with the questions.”

“You can be a nomad and your happiness is fueled by the fact that you change places. In a way, you simulate happiness. You can be very unhappy inside, but you behave because of the external stimulation that comes from changing places and meeting new people, or people you haven’t seen in a long time.” (Gustavo – around 40, Portugal, entrepreneur and volleyball player).

“As an adult, you have to put in a lot more effort to make friends – my childhood friends are in different cities, and they’re getting older, getting married, and they have less time for social activities. From a social point of view, I feel like... what am I doing?!” – Janusz (around 25, Estonia, IT specialist).

In a discussion on stage at the Bansko Nomad Fest 2025, digital nomads who prefer to travel slowly by land discussed their experiences with networking and, respectively, fighting loneliness. One of them shared: “There are times when you are lonely, but one of the skills you learn, especially if you are a little more introverted, is that you just have to start talking to people or speak a little louder. And they will come and start a conversation. A simple example from this morning: I ordered a banitsa. I chose to order it in Bulgarian at one of my favorite little restaurants and the lady next to me smiled. I asked her: “Oh, did I say that wrong?” – “No, no, your Bulgarian is very good.”

Sometimes such a conversation leads to invitations to weddings and festivals, and visits to someone’s home, and it just opens up a whole world that you didn’t know about. It’s wonderful that there are such coincidences.”

My respondent Karol (around 50, born in Romania and raised in the UK, a real estate agent in Bansko) – a digital nomad settled with his family in Bansko – sums up: “The younger ones, the 30-somethings, are very mature in their experience, in doing business and in socializing, in how to present themselves, how to make a presentation²². But they are not as mature emotionally. They never have time to go through the adjustment period. They keep going to the next one, and the next one. As soon as they get to a problem, they get upset: “Fuck it, I’ll find someone else, better”. And they never have the experience or the desire or the persistence to work in depth. They need more maturity and that comes maybe around their 40s.”

How exactly they “do business” and how they present themselves – this is what we are going to look at in the last part of the chapter.

This is especially evident in the presentations on the stages of the “Bansko Nomad Fest” 2025. The selected speakers realize that in order to engage the audience, it is important to include a sense of humor, personal stories and examples. In most of the presentations, I observe, if not captivating acting, at least serious and practiced oratory skills.

1.6. Work, independent

of location

As we clarified in the introduction to this chapter, work is a tool for financing and maintaining the desired nomadic lifestyle. However, this does not mean that digital nomads are indifferent to it or that they work whatever online that will bring them the necessary income. In fact, the values discussed are also permeated into career development – freedom of personal choice and autonomy of the individual depend on achieving at least relative freedom from the constraints of traditional work. Digital nomads have found a way to combine the opportunity to travel with the opportunity to work. They are often entrepreneurs, freelancers, or remote workers, which gives them control over their workflow and schedule. This is not just a convenient work schedule, but a strategic value choice. The freedom of being an independent worker and the freedom to travel are intertwined, creating a new lifestyle.

Freelancers in the gig economy

One of the most controversial questions about digital nomads is: does the narrative that they work “from wherever they want” (judging by the photos on the Internet, mostly from a beach chair or the edge of a window with a view) correspond to reality?

and is this phenomenon really the opposite of traditional corporate and office jobs, disparagingly referred to as “9-to-5”?

Toivanen (2025: 7) describes how the “narrative of freedom” is so vivid that all the nomads interviewed mentioned it, whether they are corporate workers, freelancers or entrepreneurs. For them, engaging in location-dependent work means depriving themselves of free choice.

Woldoff and Litchfield (2021: 3) also begin the introduction to their ethnographic work on Balinese nomads with the caveat that these people are not there to avoid work, but to transform it from a depersonalizing experience to one that builds and sustains their sense of freedom and purpose. Even if they have the financial means, most of them are unwilling to simply stop working for a while while they travel the world. The two scholars give the example of their respondent, who found it particularly challenging to break free from the “cult of work.” After being laid off from her position in New York, she wanted to take advantage of her unexpected freedom to take a break. However, she did not like the idea of staying in one place, no matter how beautiful it was, and doing nothing. Therefore, she chose a more flexible type of travel to several destinations and found a job as a freelancer only a few days after being laid off (ibid., 158).

Before delving into how and where digital nomads work, it is necessary to introduce a few terms and theories to clarify the context and era in which their professional lives develop.

In 2019, anthropologist David Graeber published his provocatively titled book “Bullshit Jobs,” in which he argues that among many employees in financial services, legal/academic/healthcare administration, human resources, public relations, and more, there is a widespread but tacit agreement that their work is meaningless; that a large proportion of people, especially in Europe and North America, perform tasks that they believe to be useless.

The millennial generation is plagued by such “meaningless jobs” because they do not correspond to their values, aspirations, and capabilities. They are distinguished not only by their desire for meaningful work, but also by their insistence and willingness to “pay” for this pleasure with the uncertainty that comes with freelance work. Woldoff and Litchfield (2021) observe that this is one of the most common sources of income in the digital nomad community in Bali, defining it as “selling professional skills on an hourly or contract basis.” With the rise of the digital world, numerous online platforms have emerged that connect clients/employers with freelance professionals. This is called the “gig economy” or “gig economy,” as work is expressed in short-term tasks (gigs). According to Ravenelle (2019: 269), the gig economy promotes entrepreneurship by ensuring that contractors have flexible schedules, a work environment with freedom of action, and unlimited incomes are easily achievable through work performed using applications. The individual works for a company, but is not legally considered an employee, but rather an independent contractor, a service provider. The problem is that this allows companies to avoid paying employee insurance, save on premiums and benefits, and avoid disputes related to work-related accidents and disabilities.

Service providers can be divided into 4 types: transportation (e.g. Uber, Takeaway), asset sharing (AirBnB), handmade products and/or home services (Etsy), and business project implementation of any nature (Upwork, Fiverr). Work in the creative industries is extremely susceptible to such “fragmentation” and digital nomads take advantage of this. By comparison, in the corporate world, where employment contracts rule, “creative positions” are often disappointing – nomads find them too boring, too dependent on their immediate supervisor, or burdened with too many requirements that limit/erase the enjoyment of

the creative process (e.g., excessively short deadlines).

Heeks (2017: 13–15) lists the problems caused by the digital gig economy. There may be insufficient pay, which does not take into account the energy and time needed for job searching and self-training, as well as the role of competition and the instability of the workflow. Also – the lack of sufficient information about tasks and clients, which can lead to inefficient performance. Furthermore – difficult career development, as profiles and ratings are platform-specific and cannot be transferred. All these problems are exacerbated by the lack of mechanisms for appeal and independent dispute resolution.

Pei (2025) summarizes that the intermediation of digital platforms in the gig economy leads to increased insecurity for workers globally and is already provoking organized resistance against indecent working conditions. Activists in this sector are fighting not only for the fundamental rights and protection of their colleagues, but also for the introduction of an alternative global vision, in which the economic model is not entirely subordinated to the pursuit of corporate profit.

It is important to note that not every work venture and not every position is chosen by the individual, necessarily because he finds them particularly meaningful or because they inspire him.

It is often a question of the need for money, entering a given professional experience into his CV, working in conditions that suit the individual, etc. Whatever the reason for someone to work as a freelancer for a long time, most often it is about reaching a certain level of free choice and comfort, not necessarily financial - he may prefer to have more free time, to have to combine professional and personal tasks on a daily basis, that is, his working time is limited or at unusual intervals, etc.

In connection with the limited working time, here is the place to mention one of the Bibles of many digital nomads – a book titled “The 4-Hour Workweek”. I learned about it from my respondent Margo (around 35, Czech Republic, marketing specialist) – she lives in Bansko and organizes horse riding when she is not busy with her usual marketing work, which she tells me with a frown that it is demotivating. The author Tim Ferriss specifies that the “4-hour week” is the total time that one spends on work that one would not do if he could choose. The presented philosophy aims to minimize the time that a person spends on unwanted work or work that can be outsourced. This frees up time for other tasks perceived as more meaningful or those that one is passionate about. Ferriss claims that maximizing free time by putting in a certain set of efforts is the way in which the “new rich” achieve a “luxurious life”. Traditionally, the rich have been associated with a fast-paced and dynamic life, signaling

prestige and wealth. But in Western culture, dominated by burnout and time constraints, the ability to slow down is being promoted as an innovative privilege. The new privileged are those who can limit their activities, use technology, and achieve a slowdown in their daily lives. However, this validates existing inequality, since not everyone can afford this control. Having time and control over how you use it is a privilege that displaces traditional measures of success (Atanasova et al., 2022).

Kesküla (2023) concludes that through their participation in the gig economy, digital nomads seek to create a new way of life, however temporary and individualistic it may be – not just to criticize the old way, but to act. However, this is largely due to their privileged status compared to other workers (such as the Kazakh miners that Kesküla has previously studied). Nomads are overwhelmingly highly educated, often with higher education and a range of qualifications, and a variety of skills.

Kate Soper (2020) approaches the issue of privilege from a different angle. She warns that even privileged and highly paid freelancers in the new economy feel the imbalance between work and leisure time.

and the pressure of the almost universal expectation in the Western world, if not to be always online, then to respond as quickly as possible to incoming messages. Soper describes the problem with the “technological utopian” type, who relies on digital technology and automation to get rid of the hard, monotonous work of caring and meeting needs. Such a future remains consumerist, because it is determined by machines and high-tech gadgets, although it is conceived as “greener” thanks to intelligent energy. It may also turn out to be emptier, as robots and drones take over human functions that socialize individuals naturally and do not allow them to live in a social bubble with thick walls. Soper believes that even in a society dedicated to making work more fulfilling and less burdensome, there will still be a need for work to meet social and community needs, organized in ways that may not offer the worker control over the work process or provide intrinsic satisfaction.

Mira’s story (around 30, Bulgaria, marketing specialist and entrepreneur) illustrates the theories described so far – how the gig economy is put into practice and how several diverse ventures are combined. Mira first came to Bansko 7-8 years ago at the invitation of Martin (around 50, Germany, entrepreneur and coliving space owner) to organize

an event for travel bloggers from all over the world together. It’s her hobby, she’s one of the active Bulgarian bloggers in this field, and Martin found her online. They’ve organized the event for three years in a row,

with her away from Bansko the rest of the time. When the Covid pandemic hit, Mira was in Sofia, watching online how the community in Bansko continued to gather and be active. She joined them because she missed the international environment – due to the pandemic measures, traveling abroad was very difficult.

Mira started taking notes on “all the things that are strange or difficult to explain to a foreigner”. She wrote down what was characteristic of Bulgarian culture, but was hidden and did not appear in the content of the next guide – for example, who Bai Ganyo was, why Bulgarians seem “stuck” at first and how to make your way into their hearts. She made presentations for foreigners, explaining to them how to behave and express themselves in order to connect with the radically different worldview of Bulgarians. He also created a website where he also tries to explain in an easy and fun way to English speakers in Bulgaria what specific expressions mean, what superstitions there are, and touches on topics of administration and documentation – in general, everything about Bulgarian culture that would be useful to a foreigner and what makes Bulgaria unique, but also bizarre. Such a goal is not idealistic, nor is it just a hobby, but has its marketing and influencer roots – for a few months Peace

manages to attract 1,000 subscribers to her newsletter, the content of which shows her collaboration with various businesses aimed at digital nomads (for example, she unobtrusively advertises “Coliving 6”).

This is not Mira’s only venture, she is a freelancer with serious experience in marketing and content creation. She has been organizing events, volunteering, and maintaining a travel blog for 10 years. At first, she did it for free, it was her passion, which is why Mira is very proactive. Over time, she builds contacts and people start assigning her various tasks. She gradually finds stability and increases her prices. Her clients are always abroad – American, Australian, and Canadian companies: “They value you a little more – not just your skills, they just respect you a little more. I have worked with Bulgarian companies before and it was more challenging, especially to be creative, to be proactive, to have the freedom to do things. I didn’t find my place here.” She is registered in Bulgaria and pays all her taxes and social security contributions here. She charges hourly, but does not strictly adhere to the hours. Instead, she builds a relationship with the company/client and together they decide how much she will be paid per month for an approximate number of working hours.

My respondent Mary (in her early 50s, Netherlands, translator) outlines the challenges facing every freelancer. According to her, it is difficult to

practice a freelance profession if you have problems with discipline: “You have to meet deadlines, and you don’t have a boss.” Another problem is that it is possible for your income to decrease or stop altogether for a while because there are no orders. “Even if you have regular clients, sometimes there are weak periods when you don’t earn much. At times I have said to myself: “If next month is like this, I will have to go home and spend some time with my father.” This worries me, and I’ve heard it from several other freelance nomads who are not always quite sure where their next income will come from.” Mary has seen translation work gradually decline with the advent of artificial intelligence, and fears that she will run out of work in a few years. The measures she is taking are to buy an apartment in Coliving 6 and pay it off in full, with the intention of using it as a home base and finding work alongside other digital nomads in the community there. She also makes the same point discussed earlier in the chapter, which is typical of freelancers – that their employer’s protections are not as great as if they had a permanent employment contract.

Given the challenges mentioned, some nomads decide, after refraining from working on a permanent contract anyway, to build their own business instead, rather than relying on their freelance profession forever.

Entrepreneurship

One classification of digital nomads divides them into several categories: (1) freelancers; (2) business owners who run their company remotely; (3) salaried digital nomads who are employees but work remotely; (4) experimental digital nomads who are in the process of exploring this lifestyle; (5) couch digital nomads who are only interested in the phenomenon but do not actively practice it (Cook 2023: 267). I did not mention this in the introduction because it focuses more on the types of working people who travel than on the types of traveling people who work. Also, (4) and (5) do not fit neatly into the definitions of a digital nomad. That is why I only touch on the first three categories in this book.

In addition to working full-time or part-time remotely for an organization, or practicing freely through long-term contracts or short-term “gig” projects, many digital nomads also turn to entrepreneurship. It is not impossible that they combine two of the three options.

Ravenelle (2019: 270) describes how the term “entrepreneurship” is used inconsistently – it refers to both owning a small business and being self-employed, resorting to innovative approaches to meet market opportunities, and also creating

a new organization. Given the root of the French word “entreprendre” (literally “to undertake”), an entrepreneur is an individual who is self-employed and takes the risk of starting a business venture.

What exactly is the difference between a freelancer and an entrepreneur? According to Woldoff and Litchfield (2021: 119-121), entrepreneurship means actively participating in starting or managing a business that does not involve selling one’s professional skills on an hourly or other contractual basis. Instead, one sells experiences, products, or services. The two authors note that entrepreneurship is often driven by personal interests that drive inspiration, and that the focus is usually on personal goals, uniqueness, and control—all individualistic values. Most digital nomads start small businesses and purposefully avoid over-expansion, which would lead to hiring a lot of staff and increasing daily responsibilities. They are often self-financed through their own income, savings, and investment dividends. In order to maintain their freedom and not be tied to just one specific career path, they may combine several activities to generate income. Despite the criticisms of the gig economy outlined in the previous section that it commercializes labor, leads to unhealthy competition, and deprives workers of the protections of a permanent employment contract,

nomads sympathize with it. In this way, they diversify their ventures and income, and are able to cope with increases or decreases in the work flow.

The concept of “passive income” is popular among entrepreneurs – current income from sources that do not require their full commitment, such as renting out property; investing in someone else’s business; creating applications, e-books, and courses that generate income without constant updating; benefiting from financial investments on the stock market; dropshipping²³. They often emphasize that if a person is a freelancer or works for only one organization, they can only earn a limited amount of money with their labor, since their time resources are limited. This brings us back to the concept introduced above of having time as a privilege and a new type of wealth.

Woldoff and Litchfield (2021: 144) observe a phenomenon that my entrepreneurial respondents in Bansko also describe. Some nomads develop entrepreneurial ambitions only after they immerse themselves in the intense exchange of ideas in the community. Their thinking “evolves” under the influence of entrepreneurial activity and support. Even employees who are supporters of the company they work for under an employment contract are not immune from this.

A form of trade in products without physical presence. After receiving an order, the dropshipper passes on the information to the supplier, who sends the goods directly to the customer. A commission is earned from each sale made.

My respondent Ulrich (around 50, Austria, real estate entrepreneur) says that when he and Martin (around 50, Germany, entrepreneur and coliving space owner) founded the first coworking space in Bansko, they initially thought the venture wasn't that complicated. "You need office chairs and Wi-Fi – and that's it!" However, it turns out that this isn't enough, so the two hire space managers and other specialists. These employees usually work for a year, after which they tell Ulrich that they're leaving and that it was great working for him. "At first I didn't understand why, but then I realized that those who worked for us soon started their own businesses. And I thought: 'Ah, this is how it works.'" This shows how important the environment is." He himself has not been an entrepreneur all his life, but now has several businesses, some of which are related to consulting. This experience of his corresponds with the observation of Woldoff and Litchfield (2021: 126) that digital nomad spaces have several functions related to work: providing a diverse work environment and a micro-market for labor, community support, and encouraging entrepreneurship.

Another coliving and coworking space owner and serial entrepreneur warns, however, that entrepreneurship is not suitable for everyone and that "as an entrepreneur you have to be an expert in everything. Everything! And fixing the heating, and doing marketing, and doing customer service. Otherwise, as a background, by education, I am a mechanical engineer" (Eddie – around 40 years old, Bulgarian-Israeli origin). It's not about the lack of a team/colleagues, but about the fact that the entrepreneur has to lead them, be on-line to communicate with them and specialize in solving the most diverse and unexpected problems.

"This is the evolution of the nomad – first corporate worker, then remote worker, then nomad, then expat. The two end points are corporate worker and expat" – confirms Damian (around 35, Bulgaria, IT specialist and coworking founder), describing the trajectory of many of my respondents.

Here is the point of view of Gustavo (around 40, Portugal, entrepreneur and volleyball player) – a digital nomad with many years of experience, owner of a remote work consultancy that advises governments on how to attract digital nomads and an internationally recognized expert on nomadism. Gustavo says that before the COVID pandemic, he himself was

an employee: “I had to work seven or eight hours a day and everyone made fun of me” – referring to the attitude of most freelancers and some entrepreneurs that those employed on a fixed-hour contract work unnecessarily long hours, and their position can often be classified as one of the “meaningless jobs” described by David Graber. Gustavo believes that most of the employees he knows want to

be entrepreneurs or freelancers, that they “want to break free”, to move to the “bright side of life”. As for freelancers, in his opinion they can be free if they organize their work process properly. “Freelancing is the next step after being an employee, many people have experienced it. All freelancers are entrepreneurs, they just exchange time for money, and entrepreneurs exchange product for money”. In his opinion, most of the nomads should become entrepreneurs. “Many employees dream of being entrepreneurs or freelancers, but almost none of them take this step until they are forced, for example if they are fired. They are “chained” and refuse to jump into the deep end on their own. It’s almost impossible to be both an entrepreneur and an employee.”

He only realized that his independent career had blossomed after he left his job. “Sometimes the golden handcuffs are too tight,” Gustavo says of his time as an IT employee in the German gambling industry with a high and secure salary. He worked for a sports data company that provided data to betting companies. But around his 30th birthday, he told himself that this was not what he imagined would be the rest of his life. He had heard about digital nomadism for about five years and decided to take the path. He reorganized his entire life to master it. He learned new skills to become an entrepreneur.

One of Gustavo’s many initiatives was the organization of a conference for digital nomads in the Portuguese city of Albufeira. Unlike other festivals and events aimed at digital nomads, his conference was entirely dedicated to entrepreneurship. He created it because DNX and the business-focused Nomad Summit are no longer taking place, and Bansko Nomad Fest covers too wide a range of topics – “from how the stars aligned for a nomad on stage to artificial intelligence.” According to Gustavo, it’s “everything and nothing at the same time,” which is acceptable, but he misses the more specific conversations that were held at the Nomad Summit in Bali – for example, how a nomad can organize his tax payments wisely and how to develop as an entrepreneur. Since no one else offers such a format, he decided to organize a regular event to help more people become entrepreneurs: “I believe that this works to some extent, although I realize that one conference cannot change everything.”

Another of my respondents, Judith (36, Germany, psycho- and hypnotherapist), says that it is at conferences and festivals that she gets a new perspective and ideas for increasing her income. In 2020, an acquaintance told her about a festival called “Bansko Nomad Fest” that she was going to in two weeks. Judith was surprised that there was a festival during the pandemic, got excited and booked her flight to Bulgaria, where she stayed afterwards. In

During this time, she had a hypnotherapy practice in Hamburg, having started to switch from offline to online work even before the pandemic because she wanted to travel. When the pandemic hit, Judith took it as “a sign from the universe that I had to do it.” Many people asked her if she offered online sessions, since they couldn’t meet in person because of the measures. She and her partner, whom she met in Bansko, work part-time – he does machine learning and programming, she does online therapy. “Although this gives us stability, it doesn’t give us the freedom we crave,” Judith admits. “That’s why we look for ways to generate passive income. That’s why I like events like the Bansko Nomad Fest, where I get ideas for investments – for example, in cryptocurrencies or real estate.”

In 2025, these two and artificial intelligence will be among the key themes of the festival. The opening presentation on Monday will begin with the topic of artificial intelligence. The speaker, who has 212,000 followers on his YouTube channel, emphasizes that it will become increasingly difficult to find someone to pay you \$20 an hour to perform a specific task (i.e., the typical dynamics in the gig economy), but it will become increasingly easier to create and work for yourself. This should lead to the interweaving of pleasure and inspiration with work and distance the individual from the feeling of obligation and coercion.

Organization of the work process

Aroles et al. (2023) pay attention to metawork in the everyday lives of digital nomads. It is about putting in the work so that it is possible to perform your work tasks. The authors observe that the nomadic lifestyle requires a large amount of invisible metawork – for example, harnessing different resources and materials to make it possible to complete professional tasks (a comical example is moving an umbrella on the beach so that the shadow falls on the laptop screen). This is also evident in my own live and online interactions with digital nomads. Some of them explicitly ask me to send them an invitation to our upcoming Google Meet interview, others give me a link to Calendly, where it states which days and times in the coming weeks they are free and I can request a meeting. In the app for booking English lessons, Joel (around 30,

Romanian-American, online English teacher, former coliving owner) warns in a sharp tone: “I plan my schedule around these meetings! I wake up early for them and prepare myself so that I am in the right frame of mind. I EXPECT THE SAME FROM YOU. If you want to reschedule the appointment, please, PLEASE, do it with at least 24 hours’ notice!”

As Toivanen (2025: 17) writes, digital nomads fear appearing unprofessional and unreliable. One might perceive

combining work and leisure as undermining their professionalism. In reality, however, this is more due to media representation than to the actual work process, which is not that different from that of a sedentary professional.

My respondent Nixon (around 40, Denmark, IT specialist and business coach) admits that he does not always find it easy to discipline himself and that he sometimes procrastinates: “If I have to send an email, it is quite difficult for me to just take out my computer and send it. So I am not very efficient. It took me a long time to realize, and I still do not always find the right balance, but I have realized that in order to be able to do this, I need focused time. And then to have other time for fun. Constant movement is also a challenge.” His partner Casey (around 40, Finland, social anthropologist) feels similarly, and her statement outlines the contribution of coworking spaces to productivity: “It took me a while to accept that maybe I really need an office environment. First I run away from the office, then I say to myself, ‘Fuck, I just need to be at a desk.’ To have self-discipline, I need to be surrounded by other people who are also working. I don’t have to work with them. In fact, it’s better not to work with them, because there won’t be any ‘la-la-la, blah-blah’ that will take up my entire workday. I look at them and say to myself, ‘Okay, these people are working too. Now we’re working.’” And

so my brain is tuned for action”. As Toivanen (2025) also finds: “Paradoxically, despite the strong anti-office sentiment, some digital nomads end up recreating and imitating the office environment, following set working hours, “commuting”, etc.

My respondent Mira (around 30, Bulgaria, marketing specialist and entrepreneur) explains in detail how she organizes her work process when she is in more exotic places where infrastructure difficulties may arise. In a new country, she and her partner always buy several SIM cards, as different operators provide internet coverage of different quality. Also, while booking the accommodation, they ask the host to send them a screenshot showing the upload and download speed of data – this is a

must for conducting online meetings with clients. Mira notes that this problem is solved with the advent of satellites such as Starlink, which will provide internet for the entire planet. This makes it possible to get access to extremely fast internet anywhere for just one fee worldwide. Mira also has to have a backup plan in case the electricity goes out. She usually chooses locations with coworking spaces, as they have devices that provide backup power.

At the presentation “The World is My Office: How to Live as Digital Nomads” in Sofia, Mira told us

gives two examples of how she has worked in faraway places. She recently visited Japan to snowboard with a dozen other nomads, and she describes herself as a “big sports enthusiast.” They all snowboard from 8 a.m. to noon and work from 2 p.m. to 1 a.m. She asks the audience not to imagine grand parties and emphasizes that she does not drink alcohol. Neither she nor the others go out to eat all the time, nor do they sit on the beach with laptops. Their workdays last until late because the clients are in Europe or the United States and the time difference has to be taken into account. “That’s the sacrifice I’m willing to make. It’s perfectly acceptable for me not to go to bed at 10 p.m.”

His schedule in Indonesia is similar: “Our main activity was surfing, again in the morning from 8 am to 12 pm. Or we would surf for an hour and then go travel in the area. Then from 2 pm to midnight we would work. I am a freelancer, I have a few clients in Canada and Europe and I can afford flexible working hours, so I don’t have to be consistent all the time, I can work earlier. But my boyfriend is Austrian and works a very strict Austrian schedule. He manages a team in his own company. So he has online meetings all the time, from 8 am to 5 or 6 pm Austrian time. So we really have to be on the laptops and work. During those eight or nine hours, nothing else happens.”

In addition to the organization of work, Mira’s statement also outlines the concept of “serious leisure” (active rest), introduced by Stebbins (2001, 2018). He distinguishes leisure activities that are part of everyday life (watching television, sports, cooking for pleasure, knitting) from other types of more intensive activities that require a greater investment of time, money, dedication, etc. These activities are characterized by the persistence of the individual, possibly the growth of the hobby into additional work, putting in effort, tangible reward, building an identity. Digital nomads often define themselves based on such activities/hobbies – surfers, snowboarders, skiers, mountaineers, etc.

1.7. Summary

Digital nomads leave their home to build a life according to their own rules instead of surrendering to circumstances – personal and/or conditioned by the “System”. Their location is a matter of choice, as is the work they decide to take. They are deeply committed to creating a fulfilling life for themselves and do not consider returning home – they are more likely to settle in several home bases at different times.

My respondent Julio (around 40, Spain, social entrepreneur)’s statement is a kind of prompt: “The key is that we are living in a special period in human history when we can be extremely creative and unique in creating a lifestyle that suits us.”

In this chapter, we analyzed the values of digital nomads and their search for well-being and fulfillment – “a deeper sense of meaning, the result not just of autonomy, but of the meaning of doing something that is in line with your values,” as my respondent Gustavo (around 40, Portugal, entrepreneur and volleyball player) puts it. We also clarified that many nomads engage in a typically Western process of perceiving their self as a project in progress and seeking enlightenment through consumption.

of experiences, combining pseudo-spirituality with entrepreneurship (Thompson 2018: 38).

What do digital nomads value? In this chapter, we have discussed a set of principles and conditions for a quality life that often contrast with the traditional, static work culture characteristic of developed societies.

Freedom and free choice – nomads try to build a life on their own terms, to stay away from “The System”, which they associate with “working from 9 to 5” and waiting for a pension. For them, freedom is associated with the ability to control their daily lives and development. They are satisfied with their lives, they feel that they have achieved their dreams – they can afford to live this way, whatever it costs them, they are proud, even elitism is observed.

This freedom is often expressed in a desire for at least relative financial independence, which is achieved through a tendency towards minimalism and budget travel.

Mobility – for them, it is not just a journey, but an opportunity for self-realization, self-expression and self-actualization. It gives them the freedom to “start over” and experiment. This way of life is often motivated

by the search for meaning and the “good life”, rather than by economic or political factors.

Freelance and entrepreneurship – these work practices are the basis of digital nomadism. My respondents are

mostly freelancers or entrepreneurs and less often work for only one organization under an employment contract. This independence allows them to work remotely and have a flexible schedule. For them, freedom is related to the ability to choose not only the place, but also the nature of their work.

Conscious consumption – many nomads practice minimalism, which is due to both practical reasons (it makes travel easier) and countercultural beliefs. They believe that with fewer things they are more creative and free. However, their relative minimalism is often combined with the consumption of expensive experiences and high-quality goods, which can be seen as a more subtle form of ostentatiousness. From the perspective of entrepreneurs developing coworking and coliving spaces, digital nomads are not the best consumers, as they strive to reduce their expenses in order to increase their travel opportunities.

Connection with nature – nature is perceived as a counterbalance to stressful city life and as a way to restore physical and mental health. The “consumption” of nature is closely linked to environmentalism and anti-consumerism, with the belief that returning to it is a path to a conscious existence.

Personal development is asserted as a means to achieve mental freedom – the ambitious task of the individual to think independently, to control himself and his emotions, and not to succumb to external influences. For some nomads, constant travel is a form of escapism, a way to escape past traumas, stress, or unsatisfactory conditions. As a result, they are strongly influenced by controversial currents such as positive psychology and the self-help industry, now rebranded as “personal development.” These teachings emphasize individual responsibility for one’s own life, the belief that thoughts shape reality, and the importance of constant growth and self-improvement. However, hyper-individualistic currents are overly accusatory toward people who “fail” to meet high standards. All responsibility is shifted to the individual, without taking into account institutional constraints and social inequalities.

A growth mindset is both a strategy for achieving professional results and a key part of a life philosophy. The desire for continuous (self)improvement and personal development is the driving force behind

the choice of nomadic life – my respondents see every new place, culture and challenge as an opportunity for personal growth, turning nomadism into a constant experiment with themselves and the world.

Nomadic life offers freedom, but after my respondents have lived it for a while, they realize that it is not by chance that previous generations have built the concept of sedentarism and environments like the office. They provide structure, community

and predictability, which are lacking on the road. Therefore, nomads need to develop new mechanisms for building social connections, routine and psychological stability, adapting them to the constantly changing environment.

“Can everyone become a digital nomad?” – I ask my respondents, not only to hear their opinion, but also to sow in them the thought that both I and they are privileged and we should not expect everyone else to be like that.

“Knowledge is accessible to everyone, now whether a person would be active in being interested and getting out of their comfort zone, seeing that there are other topics and other different ways – that is different now. I do not think it is a technical incapacity. Nomadism is a privilege, it is for people who are completely able, do not have disabilities, I do not even know if there are coworkings and colivings that address this part of people. Travelers are quite privileged” (Mira – around 30 years old, Bulgaria, marketing specialist and entrepreneur).

“You have to have a certain level of education that puts you in a position where you can work remotely. It could be something in the technology field, it could be a virtual assistant, it could be a graphic designer. At first it was just people in the technology field, right? They knew how to connect, how to access the things they needed, but more and more people are becoming nomads and practicing crafts. For example, there is a hairdresser in Bansko in the summer, she travels

all over the world and cuts people’s hair. There is also a tattoo artist. It shows that more and more people can do it now” – Betty (38, UK, owner of a chain of coworking spaces).

“Not everyone knows that such a lifestyle exists and is possible. It’s a matter of attitude. But how do you acquire this attitude? By traveling. Or by going to places, by meeting people. By coming to Bansko. If you are in Bulgaria or anywhere in the Balkans, come to Bansko. Gain first-hand knowledge about remote work” – Arnold (around 50, Germany, technology and social entrepreneur).

We will follow the invitation of my respondent and in Chapter Two we will look at the infrastructure of digital nomadism and its commodification, giving a series of examples with coliving and coworking spaces in the city, as well as other services for digital nomads.

II. INFRASTRUCTURE AND SERVICES FOR DIGITAL NOMADS

The beginning of my fieldwork in Bansko begins with accommodation in a hotel branded as a shared living space called “Coliving 4”.²⁴ While waiting for the elevator, I am struck by the monitor in the hallway, where an advertising video is repeated. Looking deeper, it promotes not just a certain chain of coworking spaces, of which my hotel is a part, but an entire lifestyle. The footage shows a DJ party on the roof of a coworking space in the center of Sofia – young people having fun against the backdrop of Vitosha Mountain and the gilded domes of the Alexander Nevsky Cathedral. And amidst all this, again and again, laptops opened in the middle of the party.

“No one can work well in such a madhouse” – I sigh like an experienced freelancer.

The names of the coliving and coworking spaces have been changed to preserve the anonymity of my respondents. This is an extreme challenge, given how active they are online with their names and sharing their personal stories and everyday lives. I choose to write them in English because the original names of all the spaces mentioned are in that language.

Already in the elevator, I type another search related to digital nomadism into my smartphone’s browser, and one of the first images I come across on Google is similar to the video from a while ago. A young man with a hat and a laptop on his lap sits on the edge of a roof covered with something soft, swinging his legs in the air and looking at the mountain peaks in front of him.

“No one can work in such a ridiculous position, while the sun shines in his eyes and his screen, and the nature around him entices him, if not to get up and walk around it, then at least to contemplate it. If a person thinks critically and rationally, he will immediately see the contradiction” – I note to myself again.

The image is part of an article titled “Luggage Storage for Digital Nomads”. After throwing out general advice written in typical marketing language, it suggests that we store our belongings in a specific storage space – thus confirming my expectation that its functions are solely advertising. Judging by the image and the low semantic level of the text, it is likely that all this was generated by artificial intelligence.

The romanticization of digital nomadism is ubiquitous, and although academic circles have long addressed the issue, the mass audience, including those just entering this lifestyle, are not aware of this fact. Therefore, in this chapter, I set myself the goal of comparing romantic

imaginations with reality, to show and analyze how certain objects, goods, services and networks determine the trajectory of digital nomads. At the outset, it is important to note Toivanen's (2023) observation that digital nomads use: (1) already existing services related to tourism infrastructure or government services – for example, visa programs/citizenship/insurance; (2) newly created services specifically aimed at them. In addition to the purely technological side of the infrastructure, coworking and coliving spaces also offer them social infrastructure. Toivanen (2025) coined the term “digital nomad infrastructure” – existing and emerging services and infrastructures offered by both the public and private sectors that digital nomads use to lead a mobile lifestyle. According to her data (ibid.), in 2005 there were only three coworking spaces worldwide, while in 2022 there were between 18,700 and 19,400.

Vogl et al. (2023) note that despite the growing evidence of the growth of the number of digital nomads and models combining work and leisure, it is still poorly understood to what extent small settlements and those with a rural appearance are experiencing the rise of this infrastructure. Since Bansko is a worthy and established example on the world map of digital nomadism, in this chapter I will document and analyze the infrastructure and services for digital nomads there.

2.1. Coworking spaces

“Participants in the creative industries and the knowledge economy – both individuals and entire companies – cluster together because of the powerful productivity advantages, lower costs of scale and knowledge diffusion that come with clustering (...) When we find a place that inspires us, we energize. Such places encourage people to do more than they would normally do – for example, to engage in more creative activities, to invent, to found innovative companies – all things that are both personally satisfying and economically productive. The visual and cultural stimulation (...) creates more energy, which in turn attracts even more energetic people from other places. This leads to higher levels of innovation, greater economic prosperity, a higher standard of living – and even more stimulation” (Florida 2008: 30, cited in Woldoff, Litschfield: 2021)

The author writes this about cosmopolitan, globalized cities, but – paradoxically – it also applies to a less populated (yet globalized) place like Bansko. Nomads here flee the overcrowded and overstimulating centers of the creative industry and the knowledge economy, but this does not mean that they avoid the opportunity to be surrounded by “inspiring places that can

activate”. In their typical style, they combine the best of both worlds and borrow only some features. In this sense, coworking spaces are a desirable environment for them.

My own observations confirm Toivanen’s (2025: 3) opinion that, however unexpected, digital nomads end up imitating certain aspects of office work. Despite their apparent negative attitude towards the office environment, they need an office-like environment at least sometimes.

Yet coworking spaces differ from the regular office by reconciling the professional to some extent with the personal; the notion of a working environment with the notion of coziness (generally contradictory). In coworking spaces, owners, community managers and members consciously encourage the creation of new relationships. This distinguishes them from the traditional office, where communication is only with colleagues and is often predominantly formal, or from working in a café²⁵, where one is alone with oneself, albeit among others.

One of my interviews took place in a local pastry shop, selected and recommended by my Czech respondent living in Bansko. The place is run by a woman from Bansko, who is about 50 years old and has extensive experience in the industry and is aware of the presence of digital nomads in the city. She tells me how a client of hers asked her if she would give her a discount if she brought a group. “How are you different from my other clients?” the woman from Bansko replied. Other nomads have also asked her if they could work from the pastry shop, but she believes that this is only suitable in the morning, as there are a lot of children and it gets noisy after that.

Nomads are fluid in their decisions about where to work, as well as in their decisions about where to travel/live (Woldoff, Litchfield 2021: 127), and this is how they express their independence. As a result, coworking spaces should offer a variety of possible choices – quiet work areas, online chat areas, a common space, a cafe/bar area, a garden with a view of the mountain/sea/Old Town and at the same time a desk with the comfort of ergonomic chairs and air conditioning. It is key that the environment is

conducive to balancing social contacts, discipline and achieving goals, because productivity sometimes contradicts socializing.

Coworking spaces offer flexible subscription plans, again with the aim of attracting clients with diverse needs and preferences. Table 1 presents the price lists of the coworking spaces I visited in Bansko.

Table 1: Price list of coworking spaces in Bansko.

Place	Price
Coworking 1	€89/week €149/month
Coworking 2	€147/month (hot desk) €163/month (dedicated desk) €179 / 30 visits over 3 months
Coworking 3	€149/month €179 / 30 days €390 / 3 months €70/week €20/day
Coworking area in Coliving 2	€130/month
Coworking area in Coliving 3	€30/week €110/month

When discussing with my respondents, some of whom have previous or current experience with running coworking spaces, whether this is a profitable business, it turns out that it brings a number of challenges and problems, including economic ones. My respondent Gustavo (around 40, Portugal, entrepreneur and volleyball player) believes that: “Coworking is a difficult business because the perception of value is usually low. Coworking is about renting desks – except you can only have X desks per square meter. So that’s your profit, and there are costs for staff, internet, maintenance. A lot of things can go wrong. A coworking space either becomes something like a corporation, where 80% are private offices and desks and 20% are open space, or it becomes a community center. These are the two working models, I prefer the second one to the fucking corporations.” He gives a positive example with the American chain “SwitchYards”.

Another of my respondents, Karol (around 50, born in Romania and raised in the UK, real estate agent in Bansko) describes exactly these two types of coworking spaces in Bansko: “Coworking 2” is corporate, with a huge investment and several floors. It’s a hard-working space, with a focus of 90% on work and only 10% on community. In “Coworking 3” the ratio is 70% to 30%. In “Coworking 1” the focus is 50% work, 50% party. People

aged 40+ prefer to focus on work, while younger people are looking for more parties.”

My respondent Mira (around 30, Bulgaria, marketing specialist and entrepreneur), who has experience in promoting coworking and coliving spaces, emphasizes: “The reality is that all coworking spaces in Sofia are profitable for companies, not for digital nomads who are single workers.” That is why some of these places are branded as “coworking & event spaces.”

The long-term experience of my respondent Dean (around 50, UK, CFO in the banking sector, coliving owner) also shows that such a business is not particularly profitable due to the main characteristics of the target group – “they want to travel, but they are not rich, they do it on a limited budget and they work remotely a few days a week.” He shares his observation that most people who found/manage such spaces, including himself, have other jobs. “I’m the CFO of a multinational company. It’s how I support myself. Betty from Coworking 3 also has another job. Martin is a real estate entrepreneur – he sells properties, that’s how he makes his money. I think when he was running Coworking 1 he was earning under €10,000 a year. You can make more money working at McDonald’s. So most of us do it because it’s fun and the people are interesting, and otherwise we have a second job. You just can’t do it without a second job.

But my second job is three days a week, let’s say ten days a month.”

In terms of expenses, my respondent Martin (around 50, Germany, entrepreneur and coworking space owner) said that Coworking 1’s monthly expenses in mid-2020 averaged around €6,000 a month, with around €4,350 fixed. Coworking becomes profitable at around 50 members/month, with the number actually doubling in strong months and just over 50 in weak months. Long-term members also pay less per month than short-term members, and membership is often granted in exchange for volunteering or service.

As a gap in my fieldwork and an opportunity for future research, I note that because I had focused on how nomads live and what services are offered to them, I was unable to study in sufficient depth how they work – what their work habits and daily lives are. I assumed that this was a time of solitude in which the researcher has no place, and I did not conduct long enough included observation in a coworking space. However, I did discuss in depth and with multiple respondents – both digital nomads and owners – the three coworking spaces in Bansko, some of which are chains. Coworking 1 is a place that is entirely event- and community-oriented, but

it is increasingly less frequented and receives more and more negative comments. Coworking 2, in contrast, is focused primarily on the work process, comfort, and corporate interior design. Coworking 3 combines a thriving community with an interior design that deliberately feels like something between an office and a café, between formal and informal.

Coworking 1 As a sailor and licensed captain, Austrian Ulrich (around 50, Austria, real estate entrepreneur) joined the crew on a sailing trip to the Bay of Bengal in the Indian Ocean in 2014. There he met digital nomads from Germany for the first time. He remembers searching Google for the term “digital nomads” before the trip and seeing a description on Wikipedia. He read it and told himself that this was a temporary fad, a fad that would die down and in a few years no one would know about digital nomads anymore. But then he met these people and, after spending a few days together on board, “I understood what they were and what they really were.” Intrigued, he decided that he had found “my tribe,” that “these are incredible people and I need to be around them to understand what and how they do it.” He started traveling to all the places that were attractive to digital nomads – Bali, Chiang Mai, etc., but he soon realized that although he loved traveling and communities, “constant travel was not for me, this lifestyle was not to my taste.”

It occurred to him that to overcome the problem, he could set up a place to invite digital nomads – “so that they travel to me, and not the other way around”. So he and his friend Martin (around 50, Germany, entrepreneur and coliving space owner), with whom they had been on the sailing trip, started looking for different places in Europe or Asia”. At that time, they both lived in Austria and were looking at some places in the country. They wanted to include one of the other sailors who was on board with them and also lives in Vienna, but their plans did not materialize.

Eventually, another friend of theirs invited them to Bulgaria and “Martin and I shrugged our shoulders because we had no idea about Bulgaria”. They looked at different places and discovered the ski resort of Bansko, which attracted them, since they were both skiers). They formed a group of six people and traveled there in the summer of 2016 to see how populated and “alive” it was outside the ski season. “We immediately fell in love with the place and said, ‘Let’s do a coworking here.’ It was the easiest and quickest decision of my life. Within a week of getting there, we had a community manager – our first employee.’ Then they set about the process of attracting people, which was helped by the fact that both he and Martin have a serious network of contacts with digital nomads and travelers, as well as a passion for traveling and constantly promoting Bansko and the new coworking space.

Martin, who has lived in cosmopolitan places like Munich, London, St. Petersburg, Salzburg and Silicon Valley and has traveled to dozens of other countries, also tells me how he decided to settle in Bansko and found “Coworking 1”: “I checked where Bulgaria is on the map – aha, okay, it’s in the European Union, Mediterranean climate, lots of mountains. Oh, 10% flat tax! Let’s try it. (...) The idea was to create a coworking space so that we would have a reason for our friends to come. Before that, I was involved in an event called “Coworking Camp”. The concept was to rent a five-star hotel in the Mediterranean out of season for six weeks and set up a temporary coworking space. I did it twice in Turkey, once in Tunisia and once in Egypt. Then I realized that maybe it was time to do something permanent.”

They are aware that they are competing with Southeast Asia, with the low prices in Chiang Mai, Bali, etc., but they also assess Bansko as “very affordable, great for tourism, with beautiful nature.”

The official opening of “Coworking 1” is on December 15, 2016, in the presence of the mayor of the city and about 30 other people. The two entrepreneurs prefer the beginning of the ski season, because in their opinion it would be easiest to sell subscriptions to the space then. Ulrich remembers that during the first few winters the number of members of the coworking was modest, but nevertheless a community of digital nomads was successfully formed, including lasting friendships between some of the

them. During the summer periods, more members come, especially for the “Bansko Nomad Fest” in June, organized for the first time in 2020. “We were showing the online coworking space, the events and activities, and people just started showing up on its doorstep. It was new for us, and for everyone else. We quickly realized that Bulgaria is very easy and affordable to start a business. The taxes are low and the process is very easy. In Austria, it is very difficult and expensive to start a company.” Thanks to all this, they attract more people, and those attracted are also interested in Bulgaria itself.

To ensure the presence of enough digital nomads in the first days after the opening, as well as to ensure publications about Bansko and “Coworking 1” on social networks and various websites, the owners invite the “GoWonder” group, which consists of female travelers, as well as a few people from “Coworking Camp”, to a workation.

“Actually, it wasn’t exactly coworking. When you think of coworking, the focus is often on the work (working), and my focus is more on the

community, on the joint (co)” – Martin emphasizes in a conversation with me. This attitude of his is evident in the events of 2018-2019, when he proposes the possibility of transforming “Coworking 1” into a cooperative, in which regular members have the right to discuss and make decisions about the development and the future. The idea is for the co-founders to retain

small shares in the management of the business, and also to include people who do not use it in essence, but benefit from the existence of a community of digital nomads in the city. For example, more and more members of the community are buying properties and want to rent them out when they are not in Bansko. Martin suggests that the cooperative manage these properties through a rental scheme or that a larger property be purchased to create a shared living space (coliving). He also points out that the cooperative will be able to initiate joint projects where many members can contribute their skills and experience – for example, an academy that teaches nomads about business models, or a marketing agency that offers services to large companies.

A weekend was organized in November 2018 to establish a cooperative, during which 25 people discussed how to make this happen. As a result of the discussions, 16 of the 25 decided to join the cooperative and committed to dedicating around 100 hours of work per year, finding a total of 35 members and raising the necessary capital to purchase the business “Coworking 1” before taking over operations on July 1, 2019. A financial contribution of 1,000 to 2,000 euros is expected from each potential member, as well as an entry fee of 150 euros.

Although over 20 people volunteered and paid membership fees for the new cooperative structure, it soon became clear that the space would not be able to function properly.

This way. The members of the cooperative fail to take consistent responsibility for key business tasks because they are too busy with their own affairs. The first signs of trouble appear only a few months into the transition period, when many tasks remain unfulfilled, even though some of the participants have shared activities such as documenting processes and have been extremely active in discussions. “Even simple business activities such as a 5-day marketing campaign, where each member has to spend thirty minutes on extremely easy tasks to help fill the coworking spaces in April, did not produce satisfactory results,” Martin gives an example. It is important to note here how skilled he himself is in marketing the infrastructure for digital nomads. In addition to following a plan, he constantly shares honest-sounding posts online about the

progress of each of his projects, often intertwining the personal and professional. Such authenticity has proven to touch the audience and earn him respect among them.

After the failure of the co-op, Ulrich and Martin's options were: (1) one of them buys out the other's stake, (2) bring in a small number of additional shareholders, and (3) the space is acquired by a larger co-working brand. The challenge is how and whether the new management will preserve the established culture and community. A few years later, (3) is reached, but in August 2019, the decision is (1). This

summer has been among the busiest ever, with over 100 members in the co-working space, many of whom are staying for the long haul. According to Martin, "Coworking 1" "is finally starting to generate a few thousand leva of free cash flow each month." However, the two co-owners often disagreed with each other, and according to Martin, "one of them would spend personal money to buy something for the space or work extra hours to complete a task. Over time, this created unnecessary personal tension between us and took attention away from the business, which was completely contrary to the original plan." At the end of June, Martin made Ulrich an offer to acquire the business, so that one of the owners would buy out the other's share.

At its peak, Coworking 1 was no longer limited to just one location – the well-known "orange co-working" for digital nomads in Bansko, called "The Lounge" for short – but four, one of which was in the upper part of the city, near the lift. In October 2021, there are an average of about 100 members per month, over 40 of whom have chosen Bansko as their home, and it is recognized as one of the largest nomadic hubs in Europe according to data on a number of digital nomad websites.

In 2023/4, Martin retires from Bansko and directs all his business skills and personal contacts to developing Semkovo as a future attraction point for digital nomads. He sells his business in Bansko to the Bulgarian-Israeli

entrepreneur Eddie (around 40, Bulgarian-Israeli origin), whose chain of coworking spaces is expanding from Sofia and Plovdiv to Bansko. He decides to keep only the orange "The Lounge" and close the others. At the same time, he buys the "Hermes" hotel and establishes a large coliving space ("Coliving 4") and an improvised coworking space in its lobby. Customers are also given a pass to access "The Lounge", but the focus is predominantly on advertising and emphasizing the infrastructure of the new coworking + coliving space. "The Lounge" is losing its appeal and the comments about the level of service there are sharply deteriorating. In

a review of “Coworking 1” from the summer of 2025, a user on Google Maps wrote: “The community is gone from here, the coworking is almost empty”. This is confirmed by other similar reviews, as well as several of my respondents. I myself am convinced during my brief included observation in “The Lounge”. On a Thursday afternoon, it is quiet inside and there are only two people.

Where have the visitors gone? To the other two highly recommended coworking spaces – “Coworking 2” and “Coworking 3”.

“Coworking 2”

Damian’s future business partner (around 35, Bulgaria, IT specialist and coworking founder) is also a former colleague of his, with whom they worked in the same IT department of the same company, as well as his wife’s first cousin. Damian lived in the UK for 12 years, then moved to Sofia with his wife, where she became pregnant. After giving birth, they came to Bansko during the worst wave of the pandemic in April 2020 – a typical example of lifestyle migration, as we discussed in the first chapter.

In Bansko, Damian and his future business partner rented a small office. Soon, however, “we got bored of being just the two of us and the idea of a coworking space came to us.” Damian had no experience with such places until then, as he had always worked in corporate offices. At that time, there was only “Coworking 1” in Bansko – but according to them, its infrastructure was not entirely suitable, as it was one large room with several cubicles. Their goal was to create a space that offered both quiet rooms and rooms for meetings and informal conversations in a working environment.

Meanwhile, a friend of theirs, who had also returned from Sofia to Bansko due to the pandemic, started renovating a building from the socialist period near the city park. Damian and his partner bought one of the floors and transformed it.

After the opening of “Coworking 2”, the space, which has an area of 300 square meters, was completely filled within the first month. Visitors came despite the lack of advertising. According to Damian, the reason is that there was a “great need for a more personal space” – a counterpoint to the vision and execution of Martin and Ulrich, whose project is “more co-, than working”, as Martin himself puts it. Thanks to the positive word-of-mouth feedback from users and the corresponding rapid exhaustion of vacancies, the space has been self-sustaining since the first month. According to Damian, the best marketing is like that. “This network of people came about super unintentionally, without any

intervention from us. It just spread throughout the city in one month, literally like a virus.”

They subsequently purchased the building and renovated it in stages – the first floor was completed in 2023, and the second – in 2024. “And during that period, our brand had already spread all the way to Asia. We have people who came – an American and a British man who have lived in New Zealand for 20 years, and they shouted “We have been hearing about Bansko, Bansko, Bansko, “Coworking 2”, Bansko, Bansko for several months. And finally we decided to just come”. They came supposedly for a week, but they stayed for two months. They even started talking about buying an apartment.”

The capacity of the building is about 220-230 people, with an average of 100-110 people visiting it daily. For those with a pass, the space is open

24/7, as foreigners are working in different time zones. “We know that the most important things are access to fast internet and coffee. If the coffee is not good...” – he shakes his head as he offers me a craft coffee from an established Bulgarian brand. They also organize a weekly Pilates class and a community event with pizza and beer.

When I ask him where the visitors to “Coworking 2” stay, he explains that “there are hotels that have become colivings to some extent, but not quite. People have built trust with the owners and just stay there. In Bansko, many people already have habits – they know where they will work, where they will meet, where they will sleep and where they will eat. It’s like a reflex that gives them the feeling of a familiar environment. That way you feel at home. Not at home, but at least in a familiar environment.” Damyan quotes a popular joke that “home is where the phone automatically connects to Wi-Fi.”

Over 87% of Coworking 2 customers return. Monthly access to the coworking space ranges from €147 to €161, depending on whether the user wants to keep their own desk for the period. “It’s very rare that someone who comes once doesn’t come back again.”

Damian cites statistics that show the number of monthly visits has increased every year. For example, in 2022, there were about 500 unique visits per month, and the following year they grew to 3,500, then to 3,000 or so, and then to 4,000. While it’s difficult to keep accurate statistics on digital nomads, who are extremely mobile, data from an internal calculation of the monthly number of orders shows “great and consistent growth. The increase from month to month is not constant, but in the

strong summer and winter seasons there is a significant increase. We are still far from reaching a plateau.”

The success of “Coworking 2” has been noticed internationally not only by nomads, but also by the state administration of neighboring countries, including Bosnia, Albania and Kosovo. Damian tells me how “an agent, I think he was from Kosovo, arrived in Bansko and said, ‘We have been given an 8-figure sum in euros to keep young people in the country because they are fleeing.’ And he said to me straight in the eye: ‘In two years you can open ten such buildings, and we will give you both money and buildings.’” Bulgaria is currently one step ahead of all Balkan countries.” This is particularly indicative of the relevance of digital nomadism and the future development of infrastructure for nomads in the Balkans.

In terms of innovation, Damian and his partner are in the process of developing a concept for temporary coworking (pop-up coworking).

“Coworking 3”

18 years ago, Betty’s partner (38, UK, owner of a chain of coworking spaces) bought an apartment in Bansko during the construction boom with the aim of using it as a holiday base. They later sold it because the two of them had three children from previous relationships and needed a bigger house in England. However, it wasn’t long before they realized that they really missed Bansko and the connections they had made here. Betty says: “We preferred the lifestyle here. We come from the IT sector in the UK and it’s very stressful there. The salaries are very good, but the lifestyle is stressful. Yes, you have a good salary, but the cost of living is so high that in the end you have nothing left, or you don’t have any time and you can’t spend it with the children. At the time I was on a course in Birmingham for work and I felt terrible there. I called my partner and just said: ‘Let’s go to Bulgaria’. That’s what we did.”

They moved here permanently with Betty’s daughter, who was then in elementary school, realizing that the solution might not work very well. They already had established connections with locals and foreigners, which helped them settle in quickly.

Betty realized that she needed a place to work, to concentrate during the day, as opposed to evenings and weekends, when she wanted to have fun. She shared the idea with her friends and noticed that they were

feel the same way: “I asked them, ‘If I find a small space, would you join me? I’ll rent the office and organize everything, and you just come and we

can work together.’ That’s why I started it – because I wanted a place that felt both homey and professional.”

Just as they were signing the lease, the COVID-19 pandemic began. Instead of panicking, she and her partner used the lockdown to furnish and prepare the space. Their success was not long in coming. The first location was fully booked the first winter, leading them to open a second space downtown, and then a third: “With the nomadic festival, it got so busy in the summer that we were constantly booked and had no space. So we rented a second space near the lift in New Town.”

Betty believes that the business’s success is due to the personal approach. “People say I’m quite sociable. When they arrive, I greet them and make sure they’re okay. I immediately add them to our community group and make sure they feel welcome. I obviously do a little more work than others would – I help with accommodation, language and local features, which is important. A lot of people who come to us say that Coworking 3 is more community-oriented than other places. You can go to some great city – Mexico, for example, but the coworking there will just be a square room with a table, a chair and internet and

no one inspires you to feel like part of a family. I didn’t realize it at first, but I think that’s why things took off so quickly for us. When I ask people for feedback, they say they immediately felt like they were part of something.” On Google, 103 people have rated the central space with 4.9 out of 5 stars, and the other two locations have 5 out of 5 stars, but only with the votes of a few people.

Betty targets her clients not only through word of mouth, but also through Instagram, because other coworking spaces in Bansko are not very active there. The posts show the frequent walks and jogging routes in the mountains, outings to dinner and to the bar, organized barbecues. The events are free or with a donation, and exactly one of them – a Friday beer drinking after work – turns out to be my entrance to the nomadic community in Bansko. Thirty or so people are present, including an Englishman with a 2-year-old child, the partner of Judith (36, Germany, psycho- and hypnotherapist) described in the previous chapter.

As Betty emphasizes: “It’s all networking. If you ask nomads in Bansko, they’re usually not new here. They’ve been there before and they come back because networking is what attracts them. They came once, they found this amazing place, but then they went to the next one – and they realized that there are no such relationships there. So they come back

again. Not necessarily permanently, but they use Bansko as a base. It's not unusual for someone

to buy a one-month membership and end up staying for half a year – simply because they don't want to leave." Once they've overcome the isolation, nomads are drawn back to the place where they felt they belonged.

2.2. Coliving spaces

What distinguishes coliving spaces from other accommodation options, and hotels in particular? Isn't "coliving" a more modern and attractive formulation of "hotel"? Isn't it enough for hotel owners to provide a few specific features: reliable internet, office chairs, high tables or desks, a shared cooking/eating space – and that's it?!

Yes, coliving spaces offer their users furnished rooms, as well as numerous common areas, including appropriately equipped coworking spaces. However, they have a longer minimum rental period (usually a month or a few weeks), due not only to the convenience of the hosts and staff, but also to the main function of the coliving space – to provide digital nomads with access to a group of like-minded people so that they can overcome the challenge of social isolation. That is why a key figure in every coliving space is the community manager, who is responsible not only for

administrative tasks and handling requests and complaints from guests, but also for the constant organization of events aimed at the so-called networking and socialization. This could be the owner himself, someone who lives in the coliving and performs the activity as a volunteer in exchange for free stay, or a specially hired employee (community manager).

My respondent Virginia provides a definition that encompasses all of this and emphasizes the role of infrastructure and the targeting of a given user group: "'Coliving' is not just a space, but a package service that includes accommodation, activities and community, and specifically targets digital nomads."

Zumbusch and Lalicic (2020: 442) believe that coliving spaces contribute to the well-being of digital nomads and propose a typology of the most important resources thanks to which nomads achieve well-being while inhabiting a given coliving space. The three categories complement each other and influence each other to form the overall feeling.

Social resources are related to the relationships between individuals. The goal in coliving is to have a community that inspires a sense of belonging and support. As a result: (1) new opportunities for professional development/business are opened up; (2) the emotional state of the individual is improved; (3) new

perspectives are revealed to the individual and the group, personal development is stimulated; (4) personal responsibility is encouraged, commitment is increased, good habits are more easily developed due to the supportive social environment.

Material resources include specific elements of the surrounding environment and the organization of space, directly influencing everyday life: (1) the presence of a community manager who is active in the organization and functioning of the community; (2) a common space that encourages interaction; (3) physical separation of work and leisure spaces; (4) basic household amenities such as dishes, towels, cables for equipment, etc.; (5) a predominantly minimalist lifestyle.

Psychological resources refer to the internal state and attitudes of the individual: (1) a sense of belonging, which positively affects security and acceptance; (2) self-awareness - understanding one's own emotions, thoughts and behavior; (3) the presence of a support system in dealing with challenges; (4) self-actualization - the individual's desire to develop their potential. In my opinion, these four aspects can also be a result of the created conditions.

Pacheco and Azevedo (2020) approach the analysis of coliving spaces from the perspective of tourism and marketing sciences. According to the authors, coliving is “a tourism product oriented

to the digital nomad segment (people who work online)” (ibid., p. 193) and addresses three types of consumer needs – those related to work, accommodation and socialization. Using the theoretical tools of tourism sciences and conducting participatory observation in a coliving space in Porto, Pacheco and Azevedo (ibid., 205-206) highlight the role of the consumer experience²⁶ and why coliving space owners should be aware of it. Their approach should be constantly customer-oriented – what they are trying to achieve with their stay and how their goals change as the process progresses. Employees, and especially the community manager, should communicate with their customers and “capture” their goals and needs. The article emphasizes that each segment of customers has a different consumer experience in the same coliving space. This is

particularly evident in my own field observations of coliving spaces in Bansko, which I am about to describe here.

Before moving on to them, however, I will propose a typology of coliving spaces. For this purpose, I was helped by one of the presentations at the “Bansko Nomad Fest” 2025 entitled “Misconceptions about coliving spaces”. The lecturer Haz Memon has many years of experience in tourism and is the founder

The consumer experience is a multidimensional construct, including the cognitive, emotional, behavioral, sensory and social reactions of the individual to the offerings of a given business during the customer journey from the brand recognition phase to the finalization of the purchase (Lemon, Verhoef 2016: 71).

of coliving spaces in Switzerland and Greece, has been involved in this for almost a decade. He is also the founder of a non-governmental association of coliving owners, as well as a consultant who helps people who want to start or expand their own coliving space. According to his data, in 2016 there were only 5 colivings in Europe, while in June 2025 there were already 250 permanent and countless temporary ones. He defines three types – residential, destination and hybrid coliving spaces.

Residential coliving spaces are usually located in cities, are long-term and have at least a few dozen rooms. They are aimed at students, foreigners who do not live in their homeland, people who have moved to a city for study or work – i.e. those whose stay is flexible and who are looking for a community. Residential coliving spaces attract a lot of large-scale investments. An example of such a space in Bulgaria is “WorkNomad Coliving”²⁷ in Studentski grad in Sofia. The “full coliving package” includes room rental, utilities, cleaning, linen change, high-speed Wi-Fi, access to a laundry room, coworking space, parking, gym, water dispenser and weekly yoga classes, starting at €1,095 (as of July 2025).

Destination colivings are located in unique, sometimes remote, but desirable locations. They are designed for stays of several months or weeks and are suitable for individuals attracted

<https://www.worknomadshotel.com/coliving>

to a specific lifestyle and to living in a community. The most important thing is the user experience – both in the home environment and in the chosen area. Selecting a suitable building for a destination coliving is more time-consuming and difficult and often requires the future owner to live there himself in order to properly assess the advantages and

disadvantages of the building and the surrounding area (unexpected problems with sewage, air conditioning, local community, etc.). An example is “Our Escape”²⁸ on the island of Crete.

Hybrid colivings allow for both short-term (several days) and long-term stays. Often, a hotel part is combined with another part designated for coliving space in one building. An example is the chain of business hotels “Zoku”²⁹ in Amsterdam, Copenhagen, Paris and Vienna, as well as the chain “The Social Hub”³⁰ in Austria, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal, Scotland, Spain.

Many more examples of coliving spaces around the world are available at <https://www.mapmelon.com>.

In his presentation, the lecturer presents a series of myths about life in a coliving space.

<https://www.ourescape.co/about>

<https://livezoku.com/amsterdam>

<https://www.thesocialhub.co>

Table 2: Myths about coliving spaces (inspired by a presentation by Haz Memon at Bansko Nomad Fest 2025).

No.	Myth	Reality
1	You have to be an extrovert to join a coliving space.	No. Introverts thrive there.
2	People do not really work in coliving spaces.	No. They work a lot. Sometimes it is hard to pull them away from work, especially when the chairs are ergonomic and the view is pleasant.
3	Community managers are merely glorified party hosts.	No. Community managers are part therapist, part event host and part washing-machine helper—although visitors should not confuse them with their mothers.
4	Every coliving space has the same infrastructure.	No. No two coliving spaces are alike.
5	You have no personal privacy in a coliving space.	No. They offer many different places where you can retreat or begin a one-to-one conversation.
6	Your flatmate may become your business partner—or your ex.	Yes. Some couples return to celebrate their anniversary every year. You may also arrive with a partner and leave without one.

No.	Myth	Reality
7	It is just a base for adults who refuse to settle down.	It is a globalized village, not a hostel for adults.
8	Coliving is only for unattached people.	No, but people with pets or special preferences should check whether the coliving space can meet their expectations.
9	You instantly become best friends with everyone.	You get along with some people and not with others.
10	Coliving is only for nomads with iPads.	No. It is also for those who have not yet escaped corporations and are only beginning the path toward nomadism.
11	In coliving you become part of a reality show.	It is a show, but there is no finale.
12	It is merely a hobby for the founders.	No. It is a 16-hour working day, sometimes extending through the night. It is not simply a way to meet new people.

“But why would anyone want to live in a shared space if they have the money to rent their own?” asks speaker Haz Memon, summarizing: “The key is in the community and personal connection. AirBnB is a place to stay, and coliving is a place to belong.” This thesis is confirmed by my observation of several coliving spaces, as well as my ethnographic interviews with respondents who are both digital nomads and former/current coliving owners in Bulgaria, Romania, and Portugal, respectively. This fact is in line with Mancinelli’s (2020) claim that coliving spaces are also a way for digital nomads to develop their entrepreneurial drive.

“In the big city you are surrounded by people, but you don’t know any of them and it’s very oppressive, isolating. Sometimes it’s hard and challenging to make a connection with someone. In a coliving space you have a lot of people who come there specifically for the connections, and it’s super easy. If you’re new, you can always find someone who wants to do something with you, who will be friendly, who will want to cook together or just hang out. So coliving really helps to connect people. And that’s why they come. I’ve been to a lot of coliving spaces and they’re all a little different from each other, but they all have this in common.” – Martin (around 50, Germany, entrepreneur and coliving space owner).

“I have a coliving space in Madeira that I don’t usually need to promote. It’s just seven rooms – just to test some things. And it works. You can only

check in on the first day of the month, you can only stay for a whole month. And the community building process is much stronger because everyone arrives on the same day and leaves on the same day. Check-in and check-out are also much easier. It really works. You move with your tribe.” – Gustavo (around 40, Portugal, entrepreneur and volleyball player).

“What makes a coliving space good is having a sense of community. It should attract people to spend time and connect with each other, for example, instead of the living room facing the TV, it’s nice to have the sofas facing each other – so people can talk.” Joel (around 30, Romanian-American, online English teacher) speaks from experience, as he is a former community manager at Coliving 2 in Bansko and a former owner of a 15-person coliving space in the Romanian city of Sibiu. He opened it in late 2018 and closed it in April 2024, saying of the closure, “I felt trapped, now I feel free,” referring to his need to travel instead of staying in one place and his identity as a slow traveler with a focus on values.

Joel contacted me a few months after we met in Bansko to tell me that is developing an online course called “Coliving Education,” aimed at aspiring and current coliving owners/managers, event coordinators, social entrepreneurs, and those transforming hotels or hostels into community centers. Since one of the lectures is dedicated to the dynamics between the occupants of these spaces, Joel asked me to incorporate my observations and findings as an anthropologist researching the topic into the course. This is one of the practical contributions of my work.

As I indicated earlier in this chapter, my respondents, some of whom are former or current coworking and/or coliving space owners, believe that coliving is a more profitable form of business, as clients can be offered more variety than just a desk with an ergonomic chair, internet, and drinks. According to Gustavo (around 40, Portugal, entrepreneur and volleyball player): “It’s much easier to pay for accommodation than for a workplace.”

However, practice shows that it is difficult for a coliving to sustain itself, which is why hybrid forms prevail. My respondent Karol (around 50, born in Romania and raised in the UK, a real estate broker in Bansko) explains in detail and specifically the reason for this: “Unlike the real estate business, where you can earn several tens of thousands of euros

in one day, a coliving with 20 rooms earns that much per month, but requires cleaning, repairs, paying bills and taxes. It is not easy to manage

and does not bring much profit. Buying a hotel in Bansko costs about half a million euros and given this, the investment in rebranding it into a coliving is extremely risky. A logical solution is the hybrid form (half hotel-half coliving), but with the accommodation of tourists and long-term tenants at the same time, there is a clash in the needs and daily practices of the two groups.”

Table 3 shows the prices for stays in coliving spaces in Bansko in the first half of 2025. What is the difference between them, what is included in the price and what kind of people rent them, I will describe in detail in the next part of the chapter. There I analyze in more depth the role of different types of coliving spaces and how they affect digital nomads – how they contribute to their well-being, how the community is built in them, what problems are brewing.

Table 3: Prices for stays in different coliving spaces in Bansko

Place	Price
Coliving 1	Single room: €499/month Mini apartment: €699/month
Coliving 2	Studio: from €650/month One-room apartment: €750/month One-bedroom apartment: €750/month
Coliving 3	Studio: €280 Studio+: €330 Luxury studio: €600 One-bedroom attic apartment: €360 One-bedroom apartment: €400 Maisonette: €420 Electricity not included Short stay: €40-100/day
Coliving 4	Double room: €90/night, including breakfast and dinner

“Coliving 1”

I start the review of colivings in Bansko with “Coliving 1”, as it is the only non-hybrid coliving in Bansko, as well as the one for which all the reviews from my respondents (including other expats who have known the owner for years) and online are entirely positive.

Owner Dean (around 50, UK, CFO in banking, owner of a coliving), whose vocation and one of his two professions has always been in the hospitality and restaurant industry, sees travel as a natural part of his life – he left the UK three decades ago: “Before digital nomadism, we were called travellers. You travel the world and find work everywhere. I’ve worked all over Europe – in Greece, France, Italy and Spain. I’ve also worked in Pakistan and Nepal.” In 2003, he moved to Bansko and shortly after opened a hotel with the same name as “Coliving 1”, which has long been

considered one of the best in the city, ranking first in the TripAdvisor ranking for Bansko and fourth in the whole country. The clients are mainly foreigners – British, Israelis, Danes and Russians.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, Dean noticed a new trend – while traditional ski tourists would typically book for a week and return every year, more and more people were coming for longer stays.

long period. “The usual formula in ski tourism and hospitality is that people come for a week. A group would book the entire hotel for a week and come back year after year – about 85% repeat guests. Bansko started to become a destination for digital nomads before Martin came here. It’s very important to note this difference. We as a hotel were seeing nomads in Bansko long before coworking or coliving spaces appeared. Back then, we had a restaurant where people would come to eat once a year. But a new trend emerged: people coming once a month, once every two weeks, even once a week. We noticed how nomads started to settle in Bansko. They were buying properties because they were super cheap after the crisis. They liked Bansko the way it was.”

By the end of the pandemic, in 2022, the hotel had already been rebranded as a coliving space. The building has 14 rooms, with Dean himself living in one of them. He found that it was most comfortable when 17 people stayed there, with a maximum of 20. Dean believes that a coliving with more than 25 people becomes a business, not a community, because the residents split up into small groups and stop communicating. One of the distinguishing features of “Coliving 1” is the high rate of returning guests and the length of their stay. Some stay for more than 18 months, others return every year. According to Dean, this proves that his approach as a hotelier is correct – “Coliving 1” is not just a business, but a home for the guests, their space. He emphasizes that their selection is the most important aspect in maintaining a high level of coliving. Together with his colleague, they have developed a system of “red flags”. Their years of experience in the hotel business allow them to assess whether a person will fit into the community after exchanging a few emails – for example, by aggressive or self-centered expressions. If the two sense that something is wrong, they talk to the potential guest further. Dean gives the example of a client who wanted to know how many women and how many men there were in the coliving, and defines this as “messaging with the business” and a potential threat to the comfort of others.

Typically, the gender ratio in the hotel is 75% to 25% in favor of women, which is a “healthy ratio” according to the owner, since, according to his observations, women are more often looking for community. The age of

the guests varies from 25 to 55, but Dean does not think that it matters. The most important thing, according to him, is whether they are well-intentioned people ready to contribute to the community. He is aware that such a strict selection is possible because the business is financially stable and it is not necessary to accept every reservation. For the summer season in 2025, he turned down 4-5 applications for reservations because he felt that potential guests would not fit into the community. He tries to be kind, courteous and friendly, but at the same time

to be assertive, to set boundaries and to enforce the rules. According to him, when the owner or manager of the community does not live in the coliving space, it is a “recipe for disaster”.

Dean also highlights the seemingly small details that contribute to the coliving’s success and the 4.7 out of 5 stars rating given by 115 users. For example, he invested €7,500 in infrastructure for 200 megabit fiber optic wireless internet so that everyone can have a fast and reliable online connection, regardless of the number of users in the building. This took six months and a series of visits by specialists to take precise measurements. Also, all the common areas, including the garden, are abundant with electrical outlets.

As we tour the common areas of the building, Dean shows me the industrial kitchen and emphasizes that it is also very important so that everyone can have a place to cook. Dean himself is an excellent chef and the community of nomads and expats in Bansko remembers him for the Indian cuisine evenings he previously organized at “Coliving 1”. “Functioning people live in our coliving” – he is proud, considering that they perform household tasks and do not individualize excessively, constantly relying on services such as food delivery. Regarding eating, it is also key that it takes place mostly in the spacious living room. In winter, a fireplace burns there, which is connected to the central heating of the building: “It is a great place where everyone returns from skiing, relaxes, works and eats. This creates forced interaction. Although there are a few quieter places, they are not used as often as you might think, because most people prefer to be among others”.

In addition to the technical aspects, the aesthetic ones are also impressive. The walls are full of paintings and decorations, half of which were selected by Dean: “Instead of using standard hotel decorations, I put in my own things, collected over the years. Guests feel this individuality, even if they are not consciously aware of it” – he explains to me another part of the theory and practice of hospitality and consumer experience. The perfectly stocked bar works on a self-service and self-payment basis.

Guests pour their own drinks, write down what they have consumed and pay for it. Dean's calculations indicate that the level of honesty reaches 98%. "Of course, there are security cameras, but when you tell people, 'I trust you' and welcome them into your home, they respond with the same kind of attitude."

I realize that the host is probably painting his project in overly positive terms and saving me the hassle and problems, and that the place is entirely dependent on his tastes and judgments. However, I did not have the opportunity to observe the dynamics of "Coliving 1" myself. Despite my desire, I was not able to stay there, as it is booked

for months in advance and only long-term reservations are possible. That is why during the different periods when I visit Bansko, I have to turn to hybrid alternatives. In the next part of this chapter, I will look at the second most recommended coliving space by my respondents.

Coliving 2

My expectation that a place like Coliving 2, which was liked and recommended by respondents, would be fully booked a few months before Bansko Nomad Fest 2025, turned out to be not exactly true. I was surprised to find that Booking.com offered a "stylish and cozy studio in the boutique hotel Coliving 2," and I did not hesitate to book it. When the time for my onward journey approached, I was contacted by the creator of the listing. Rather than being an employee of the coliving itself, it was an Israeli investor who owns an apartment in the same building (a former hotel) and rents it out on a short-term basis. Although initially contradictory (I wondered if I was going to a coliving or a hotel after all), my decision to stay at Coliving 2 during Bansko Nomad Fest 2025 was extremely fruitful for my ethnographic fieldwork.

Immediately after checking in, I came across an open community of digital nomads spending a peaceful Friday evening in the garden of

coliving. The peculiar community manager, Carol (around 50, born in Romania and raised in the UK, a real estate agent in Bansko), who is also one of the organizers of the "Bansko Nomad Fest" 2025, was welcoming, introduced me to the other attendees, some of whom live in the coliving long-term, and took care of my insertion into this fluid community (examples of which I will look at in Chapter Three).

Over the next few days, Carol told me about the history and concept of "Coliving 2", which was a hotel until 2020. "During the pandemic, we had limitations – the hotel is very small, with only twenty rooms, and we could

not manage it as before. We were only allowed to rent out a third of the rooms and the restaurant. So in 2021 we started renting out rooms on a monthly basis and became a residence for digital nomads.” My interviewee emphasizes that this is a natural development, occurring in parallel with other coliving spaces in Bansko that emerged at the same time. He defines coliving as “a place where you have a room upstairs, a workspace downstairs, and a community with which you organize events, and the shared kitchen is a key element. The idea is to help people feel less lonely and create deeper connections than they might if they were only staying for a short time.”

Since each room in “Coliving 2” is owned by a different owner, one of Karol’s companies contracts with them to rent out 20 of the rooms,

having a license for long-term rentals only. Another five rent out through their own channels, both long-term and short-term (Booking, AirBnB, etc.), and the rest do not work with guests. The studios and apartments are one-bedroom and have their own kitchenette. The price includes utilities, access to the coworking space on the ground floor, the courtyard with barbecue and self-service bar, the possibility of booking meeting rooms, participation in community events and cleaning the room every 14 days.

Carol shares her experience: “Because each apartment has a different owner, it happens that the owners come – for example, a Romanian with children came here, I also had an elderly couple. And, of course, the nomads. And then you have different groups of people. The problem is that different lifestyles are mixed in the same place and this leads to peculiar situations. If you have only nomads, you know they are nomads. If you have families with children, you know they are families with children. If you have older people, it is different. So the perfect option would be for these groups to be separated – one building for one group, another for another.”

A similar management model, albeit in a much larger complex, is present in the next hybrid coliving space that we will look at.

“Coliving 3”

According to my respondent Dean (around 50, UK, CFO in banking, owner of a coliving) this is not a coliving, but simply a hotel block consisting of 4 separate buildings in a common courtyard with a swimming pool. He emphasizes that “they welcome everyone there, even people who have come on a ski holiday. Since the concept of coliving is still new, anyone can call themselves one.” Without mentioning his opinion to my

respondents Thea (around 60, Bulgaria, condominium and coliving manager) and Mihail (around 60, Bulgaria, former diplomat in Lebanon), who are husband and wife and manage “Coliving 3”, they themselves point out: “Coliving 3” is a home for different types of people, but we like to think of ourselves as a community”.

Thea and Mihail have been in the holiday real estate business since the beginning of the 20th century. They have observed the construction boom and overdevelopment both on the Black Sea coast and later in Bansko, and when they found a suitable plot of land here, they decided that investing in a winter resort was more profitable. They opened a complex of four identical buildings in 2008-2009, when there was still no asphalt road in front of it. They financed the project from “greenfield” sales, after which “it was rented for a while, but from 2012 to 2018 we tried to make tourism. When COVID hit, everything came to a standstill. We literally had to find a way very quickly.

how to sell what we do – the service of renting an apartment or studio. We came to the conclusion that we had to completely change the target group we were targeting. So COVID was in many ways an opportunity for us, not just a problem,” recalls Mikhail.

Thea and Mikhail learned about digital nomads when French travelers from Georgia arrived at Coliving 3. The first digital nomads stayed with them throughout the lockdown. This gave them the idea to target them. They did not use consultants, but trusted their own observations. They concluded contracts with some of the apartment owners in the complex, who were predominantly English, to maintain and rent them out through their company. “We only own a few apartments ourselves. But Thea is the chairman of the condominium,” Mikhail explains to me of the hybrid model, adding: “Coliving 3 is designed to provide its guests with a sense of freedom. Each apartment has a kitchen and a washing machine, which gives tenants independence from the common areas and events – they can work from the apartment or in some of the other coworking spaces in Bansko.” Mihail and Thea notice that some of the long-term guests prefer to diversify their daily lives in this way, although a coworking space has also been set up on the territory of the complex in place of the former restaurant. “Independence is very important. We know that it is a core value for them. We are not exactly a coliving space, and that is why we do not advertise ourselves as such. Coliving implies a shared kitchen, we have a bar here, because the Ministry of Tourism obliged us to give us the second category. And in this bar, there is communal cooking, we even have a cauldron. They do international cuisine very often, they gather very

often, 50 people. On Sundays, the tradition is to have a barbecue and so on – they have the right to invite guests. It becomes a big party.”

Like many other coliving and coworking space owners, Mihail and Thea also believe that the best advertising is “word of mouth.” “When we started selling Coliving 3 to digital nomads, we didn’t know exactly how to run an advertising campaign. That’s why we decided to offer the best service. It requires attention and a unique approach to each individual client, so that we can meet his or her specific requirements. In some ways, the requirements are ridiculous and silly, but they are always important, because if you don’t achieve this, if you don’t give exactly what the client is looking for, they will go somewhere else,” explains Thea, adding: “Things took off in Coliving 3, when we already had a community.”

It takes them more than two years to build a community. Long-term tenants meet in the dedicated coworking space and common areas of the hotel complex, exchange ideas and make friends. “And so this community is created to such an extent that those who

who are absent, wish to stay in the “WhatsApp” group and write to me from Chile, from Ecuador, from I-don’t-know-where,” says Thea. She also gives me an example of the activities of a student from the American University in Blagoevgrad, who interned at “Coliving 3” – lived in the complex for free and performed the function of “community manager”: “She was very strict in notifying everyone, reminding everyone when the event was, when it started – the pure organizational side, but this way more people really participated. Because they still get a personal approach.”

What events are organized for the community? An example is a walk to the nearby “Paligoden” monastery at the foot of Pirin, where a local elderly man who keeps the key to the monastery tells the nomads the history of the holy place. In another case, they visit the cowshed next to “Coliving 3” to see how cows are milked, get some milk, and then learn how to ferment it with Thea’s help. She recalls: “After we got milk and took it to the bar, boiled it, fermented it and let it curdle, we decided to go to a grandmother’s for eggs, but her street was completely destroyed. Moving through the mud, one of the digital nomads, a Japanese guy... we have a lot of Japanese people with us, it all started with a Japanese woman we became friends with, and she published something about “Coliving 3” in a travel guide and now they come to us every year. This particular Japanese guy was a very quiet, very reserved, introverted guy. At one point I mentioned the yogurt and

he suddenly stopped on the street, as were the whole group, and started singing. And we wonder what this Japanese song is, and it was from a yogurt commercial in Japan.”

The nomads are very interested in homemade food products and are regular customers of local merchants displaying goods at the traditional Sunday market. It has happened that Tea and Mihail have helped with the shopping of larger quantities for more people by providing transportation.

“The nomads are extremely intelligent people, extremely hardworking. They are very passionate about their work, this is how they earn their living. They are independent, they do not want anything to be imposed on them. On the other hand, what impressed me a lot is that they are very curious. They are looking to learn something new, they are looking to know more about the country they are in. They are looking to learn Bulgarian. They are looking to know a little more about the customs,” Tea summarizes.

During the “Bansko Nomad Fest” 2025, the coliving part of “Coliving 3” is occupied by about 80 people, which is the maximum capacity. Guests stay for varying periods of time – one or several months – and according to Thea, almost all of them return later. Some of the regular customers even buy apartments in Bansko. “Banskali bugaati are becoming” – jokes Thea in the local dialect (“Banskali have become rich”). Lately, many traveling families with children have also come here, enjoying the spacious yard space, as well as the pool. One of the regular customers, a couple who

have chosen Bansko as their home base, expressed interest in organizing a board game weekend at “Coliving 3”, but the organization subsequently fell through. In recent years, another unsuccessful attempt at collaboration between businesses, part of the infrastructure for digital nomads, was with “Coworking 1”.

In the next part of the chapter, we will look at another hybrid space, which, unlike “Coliving 3”, explicitly brands itself as a coliving, although it is not exactly that.

“Coliving 4”

In early 2024, one of my respondent Eddie’s companies (around 40, Bulgarian-Israeli origin, owner of coworking and coliving spaces) announced its expansion with a new location, acquiring “Coworking 1” – until then owned by my respondent Martin (around 50, Germany, entrepreneur and coliving space owner), who remained with a few percent stake and in the role of consultant and withdrew to Semkovo to develop

his new project there. After Sofia and Plovdiv, Bansko is the third city to which the company is expanding, which has 8 locations at that time. The new owner decides to add an element that has been missing from “Coworking 1” users for years – a coliving space. To this end, he also buys a 6-story hotel with a total area of 5,600 sq m and rebrands it as

“coliving”. He restructured its lobby into a common space with desks and chairs for shared work, a small kitchenette and a few sofas, as well as a self-service shop (with video surveillance and contactless payment), initiated by the startup “Chill&Bite”. On the basement floor there are several spaces for events, a restaurant and a small SPA area with outdated equipment. There is also a courtyard with a garden.

A year after stepping into Bansko as an entrepreneur, Eddie tells me about the business strategy that led to success: “We have been developing coworking infrastructure in Sofia and Plovdiv since 2018. Bansko has always interested us, but we did not feel that we deserved to enter the market, which was developed by another, competing company – “Coworking 1”. Martin and Ulrich have been active in Bansko for 9 years and the business development strategy of “Coworking 1” was to develop Bansko. There was almost no focus on the business itself, but there was a focus “Come to Bansko”. This was the secret of this business – that the business did not promote the business. It is much easier to promote a city, because you give advice and do not promote your own bread, your business. And then you will get some bread. Also, the market is smaller, here they respect their work more and do it very well. There is no abundance of clients and anonymity here, so you have to invest in each client.”

When asked if he cooperates with influencers, Eddie replies that in his opinion

this is not particularly effective and that he resorts to short-term partnerships with them mainly during the “Bansko Nomad Fest”. “The most effective are the nomads, since they are a more or less closed society and you see each other everywhere, and it is by word of mouth. With the purchase of “Coworking 1” we got this word of mouth marketing. They meet in the same places around the world, Thailand and so on, and talk to each other. (...) What do these nomads want? They want bikes to ride in the mountains in the summer. More trails. These are easy things. These are things that an entrepreneur sees and starts working on. They want us to hold festivals later in the summer in the park, where we don’t get in the way. They want action. And we need to deliver that action to them. And we need to work even harder with the municipality, even more events,

because this is a large audience. The Nomad Festival brings together a thousand people. All the coworking spaces, all the colivings and hotels that are open are full.”

“Coliving 4” was the first place I stayed during my field research in Bansko. I was attracted by the professional presentation online and the skillfully taken photos of the interior, which left me with the impression that the place was furnished in a more modern and contemporary way than it actually was. In the common areas, the effort to create an atmosphere that inspires coziness and a feeling of home and closeness to nature is evident - warm light, parquet and massive desks, designer sofas, monitors showing footage of a burning fire, offering freshly cooked food and service.

at large communal tables in the restaurant instead of the standard four-person tables, to initiate communication between strangers. Eddie himself loves to cook and play various musical instruments, so he appears among the guests of “Coliving 4” and tries to contribute to the experience. However, the furnishings in the rooms are from the first decade of the 21st century and it is obvious that the flooring and bathrooms have not been renovated for a long time. The situation is similar in all other places in Bansko where I have stayed. The modern prints on the walls and the new textiles (curtains, tablecloths, etc.) do not manage to hide this problem.

As for the guests at “Coliving 4”, they are not only digital nomads. As Eddie finds out, the 6-story building is too big and cannot support itself with the presence of digital nomads alone, “and they are not the kind of people who pay a lot”. That is why the place targets and is open to conventional tourists as well. In early 2025, Coliving 4 became the subject of numerous criticisms from digital nomads who inhabited it. Among the problems highlighted were the spontaneous and undisputed increase in heating costs during the winter, “the communal kitchen was reduced by 80% overnight without any compensation or price reduction”, “before it was closed, the communal kitchen was rarely cleaned”, “the coworking area is very busy/noisy, there is always someone passing by”, etc. I agree with one user’s summary that “The atmosphere is more

like a hotel, with little sense of community or interaction between guests” (the quotes are from reviews on Google Maps). I remember how while I was having dinner at a table with several unknown tourists in a restaurant, one of them described the atmosphere as “very intimate”. The same woman did not know what a digital nomad meant, nor that such people came to Coliving 4. The example is indicative of how different the

needs and perceptions of the two different types of customers are – digital nomads and tourists (especially if they are on holiday with children).

“Coliving 4” faces a challenge typical of any hybrid coliving: how to address the needs of both long-term residents and short-term guests. In addition, is it possible to combine the stay of adults with children, or is it imperative to introduce a “no children” rule, even though this will limit many of the customers and even though the owner himself has two small children.

Another conflict, brewing periodically, is due to the accusation of the management that it does not provide adequate and decent conditions for workers. In the community chat on “WhatsApp” (before the administrators deleted the heated discussion and removed some of the criticizing members), a former respected community manager pleaded that not only was she fired inappropriately, but also that 3 months later she still had not received her full salary. Many members are threatening that if the case does not reach a positive conclusion,

will share their own negative impressions in Google Maps reviews – and they eventually do. The owner writes a long, corporate-official reply to the group with the message “We refrain from engaging in discussions with a negative tone,” which only provokes more criticism. As one user replies: “But what you call ‘negativity’ is vital feedback for the business.”

During my stay at Coliving 4, two colleagues in their 20s, who previously worked at other locations in the Eddie coworking space chain, take turns at the reception desk. The young man tells me that he is studying Business Administration in Blagoevgrad and has to pay 40,000 euros for four years, and that he plans to go on a summer internship abroad “to earn money.” He emphasizes how busy his schedule is: from Monday to Friday he is in Blagoevgrad, and from Friday to Monday early morning – in Bansko. His colleague points out that the work at “Coliving 4” is also busy and includes diverse activities – for example, how she has to drive tourists in the company bus from the coliving space to the lift 10 times a day during the weekend. However, she is pleased to tell me that the management has provided her with a room in the basement where she can practice her hobby – drawing tattoos.

In the next part of this chapter, we will look at the place on which my respondent Martin is focusing his efforts after selling almost his entire business in Bansko.

“Coliving 5”

After selling the developed network “Coworking 1”, my respondent Martin (around 50 years old, Germany, entrepreneur and owner of a coliving space) is focusing entirely on the development of a new and completely unknown destination for digital nomads and other foreign travelers just 37 km from Bansko – the Semkovo resort. Already in late 2019, he was looking for a property in the countryside to be used by the Coworking 1 community and financed through crowdfunding. Initially, he focused on locations within walking distance of Bansko, but eventually purchased at a bargain price and renovated with the funds of a cooperative of owners the abandoned 6-story socialist hotel “Rila” with several wings, described in detail in the introduction to this book.

When I discuss his decision to leave Bansko after almost a decade of developing his professional and personal life there, he admits: “Maybe I was too much of a s*** to live in Bansko. (...) The city is too touristy and that drives up prices too much. Bansko is a great place and for me it’s super cheap because I come from Salzburg. But when you try to develop a real estate business, you’re competing with the tourism industry. I can’t compete with it for a building like this (referring to Semkovo – b.m., P.D.). For that to happen,

the building would have to be like the Kempinski in Bansko and the project would cost not 10 million euros, but 50 million, which is prohibitive. So I was looking for a place that wasn’t so touristy – I found it and now I’m here.” Martin moved to his apartment in Semkovo in the fall of 2024 and has been in Bansko on average once a week since then. He still maintains a small office in Bansko, where his assistant and one of the project managers, who are from the city, work.

Based on his long-standing experience as a digital nomad and traveler, Martin defines his current project as unique on a global scale. He is aware that there are both larger colivings (he gives me the example of “The Commons” in London with 600 rooms) and those further away from civilization (some of the “SocialTel” properties in Central America), but he emphasizes that “Coliving 5” is a unique combination of scale, location and ownership. Martin sees the seclusion and lack of neighboring properties in Semkovo as “a great opportunity to build whatever we want here” and emphasizes that Coliving 5 brings together certain types of people: “To buy an apartment in a place where there is no one, it requires a special way of thinking.”

What exactly is Coliving 5, who develops and manages it and how? The project has two aspects: (1) The purchased apartments in blocks A and B

are the personal property of the buyer – under certain conditions, he/she can use it, rent it, sell it and

etc. (2) All apartment owners together form a cooperative that owns the coliving space (block B) and “everyone benefits from its success”, as the advertising brochure of “Coliving 5” emphasizes. The coliving space includes an industrial kitchen, a large coworking space with various types of rooms, a dining room, an event hall, a swimming pool, a self-shopping store from the same chain as in “Coliving 4”, etc. Block B is accessible only to adults in order to “eliminate the distractions and disturbances that can arise when children are present” (quote from the brochure).

The purchase process takes about a month. The deal is concluded before a notary in the city of Razlog, and the initial down payment of 500 euros is extremely facilitated by an automated website.

The rental of apartments is done through an online platform, and it is expected to be possible from the beginning of 2026 with planned initial prices of around 500 euros/month (for small apartments³¹ with an area between 20 and 30 sq m). The goal is, after gaining popularity, “to increase rents to European coliving price levels, which would be at least double. The owners receive approximately half of the rent, while the cooperative uses the other half to cover the costs

It is worth noting that these are more precisely rooms with a bathroom.

(coliving, marketing, cleaning, utilities, etc.) (quote from the brochure). The average price per sq m is 1,250 euros, including renovations. The cooperative has voted that the owners can use the coliving space without additional payment at all times, but can bring their relatives and friends (including their family) for free for only 20 days a year. A complete renovation of an apartment of 25 sq m (leveling the floor and laying the flooring, new plumbing and electrical installations, plastering and painting, a new bathroom with a shower cabin and new tiles, a new window) is estimated at an average of 12,500 euros. IKEA furniture costs another 3,000 euros plus another 2,000 for air conditioning, electricity meter, etc. There is also an annual fee for maintenance and repair of the common areas. Martin explains that this is decided by the cooperative, which can postpone or delay some repairs if there is no funding. For example, this year they are focusing on the facade and elevators, and next year on the carpets in the hallway and hiding the pipes, because there is no financial opportunity for everything at once.

Table 4: Costs of buying, repairing and maintaining an apartment in Block B. Adapted from a photo taken on site during the Open Day in April 2025.

Apartment B202	
Price	€41,811
Description	Large apartment
Net floor area	46 m ²
Total area	57 m ² (including walls, corridors, stairs, etc.)
Price per m²	€733.53
Expected renovation cost	€16,034.36
Expected annual fee	€1,190
Reservation fee	€500 (non-refundable)

When I ask Martin how he imagines the development of the project in 3 years, he describes an idyllic picture, including various workshops, yoga, stand-up comedy, communal cooking, games and gatherings by the pool and in the sauna, mountain hikes and cycling: “Life there will be great because people will be surrounded by others who are looking for a similar experience. With 10 people you might get lucky and get along with everyone, but there might be two you don’t like. If there are 100 people, you’ll always find people who are like you.”

When we discuss marketing approaches (and from my observations Martin is particularly skilled in this area), he explains something that is also evident from the approach in his previous project “Coworking 1”: “If we were building a large business company, we wouldn’t define the site as a coworking space and we would set a specific target group. For example, we would advertise on Google AdWords to representatives of the target group “female, software designer, who earns over 15,000 euros per year, has no children and likes “Prada”. In this case, this is the wrong way, I approach it from a different angle. I say to myself: “I have a group of friends, I like them. What can I build for them, how can I provide them with a good place?” That’s how it all started. Now we build this place and tell other people, and they themselves join the community.” He gives me the example of a 50+ year old lady who bought two apartments in “Coliving 5” who “works at some botanical institute in Sofia and would never

I met her in my life, but it’s very nice that I became an owner here.” She is not a digital nomad, nor a location-independent worker, but she was

attracted by the location, the relatively low price (about 30,000 euros for an apartment) and the opportunity to spend her holidays here, hiking in the Rila Mountains.

What characterizes those who have bought or shown interest in “Coliving 5”? As is clear from the project website, these are not only digital nomads, but entrepreneurs and various business companies, as well as people who are simply looking for a vacation property (sometimes as an investment option). I met with various representatives, with whom we attended open days at “Coliving 5”. Tours are organized monthly from December 2022 to now (August 2025), with free transportation provided from Sofia and Bansko. It is important to note that this is part of the marketing strategy and attendance is free, as the ultimate goal is for visitors to decide to buy an apartment or contribute to the publicity of the project.

My first visit took place in February 2025, together with a dozen other interested people. After a 4-hour journey from Sofia, via Bansko, the last part of which – on a snowy, freshly asphalted mountain road from Belitsa to Semkovo, we find ourselves in front of the huge hotel, where intensive renovation works are underway. At the entrance, we are greeted by Martin, dressed in a white blouse with Bulgarian embroidery (I will later find out that this is his preferred style of dressing for all events), who introduces us to Block B and more precisely to a small kitchen with a dining room, where boiled sausages, various pastries, tea and other non-alcoholic drinks await us. Over the next hour or so, Martin introduces us to the aspects of the project I described above, then takes us on a tour of the three blocks. We meet several apartment owners, one of whom is a German IT specialist. He tells me that he used to live in Bansko, but because he’s an introvert, he lost his focus there too much. He now lives in one of the three apartments he bought in Coliving 5 with the intention of starting a family, although children will not be allowed in the common areas. They have been almost completely renovated, and as we walk around them, those present express various concerns. A Ukrainian woman looks at the concrete roofs covered with an innovative type of red foam, as well as the ceilings of the balconies, clad in wood that is crumbling due to the lack of gutters. Another couple, who are considering buying an investment property and using it as a vacation home for a month or two a year, wonder what would happen if something happened to Martin before the finishing touches were finished on the huge and still-unrenovated hotel. This shows how influential his charisma, leadership, and activities are, despite the existence of a cooperative. A third guest asks who owns the land on which the building is built. It turns out,

that the cooperative is in the process of acquiring it, but this is difficult and for now the land is state-owned. Martin emphasizes that he has arranged for the renaming of the street to Nomad Place with the help of the Belitsa municipality, so deliveries can now be made here and addresses can be registered. The guests discuss how far-sighted this is in attracting people. Semkovo is a resort complex and, accordingly, there is a problem with the postal code (it is the same as Belitsa), as well as with deliveries from Bulgarian Post, other courier services and especially shipments from abroad. However, it has already been agreed that the e-grocery store eBAG will deliver purchases to Coliving 5 on certain days, as well as IKEA, etc.

On my next visit in April 2025, about 15 more people come, and this time with a diverse profile. A neurologist and her boyfriend, who is in the military (about 30+ years old). A musician who also deals with finance (Italian-Bulgarian origin, 35+ years old). A 40+ year old financial independence consultant who is tired of city life and plans to move to live “forever in nature”. He asks if the community here will require him to be involved in events and what are the chances that Semkovo will become overpopulated and start a construction boom, since the Belitsa Municipality has already repaired the road up here. A man in his 30s who is developing a startup company and because he doesn’t like weekends in Sofia decided to take a walk to check how far the reconstruction has progressed. He hasn’t been here since the fall, when the road wasn’t yet asphalted. Judith (36, Germany, psycho- and hypnotherapist), whom I know from the digital nomad community in Bansko and who is interested, even though she knows that her 2-year-old son will not be allowed in the common areas. Three foreigners and the Bulgarian Mira (around 30, Bulgaria, marketing specialist and entrepreneur), who arrive by narrow-gauge train from Bansko to Belitsa and then by bicycle despite the rainy weather. An over 50-year-old IT specialist and businessman who has worked for decades in London and Africa. Lately, he has devoted himself to family and travel and is currently staying at “Coliving 4” with his son, who is coming with him on the tour. The most colorful and unexpected representative is a 95-year-old man from Belitsa, accompanied by his son and grandson. He tells me about a fellow citizen who rose to the position of chairman of the trade unions in Bulgaria and was one of the initiators of the construction of the “Rila” holiday home: “so that it would remain for the people of Belitsa.” Looking at the modernization of the rest home and the faces of the many foreigners, the elderly man sighs: “Now I feel sorry for this place, because it used to be for the people, and now it’s for the rich” – another sign of the privilege of digital nomads.

It has recently become clear that it is not possible to fulfill the intention of “Coliving 5” to be officially opened as part of the program of “Bansko Nomad Fest” 2025, respectively, the apartment rental platform will not be open yet.

This is due to the time-consuming challenge of building a new substation to double the electrical capacity of the huge building. Meanwhile, Block B is still being renovated so that it will be ready by the end of the summer.

Martin welcomes me to stay at Coliving 5 after the Open Day as a volunteer for a few days. This allows me to have in-depth conversations with him and two other respondents who own apartments and currently live here.

Vera (around 30, Russia, doctor) was born in St. Petersburg. Her mother, who had been in business with Martin for 20 years, saw his current project on Facebook and showed it to her daughter. “At first I just thought it was interesting, nothing more, but then I said, ‘Why not go,’” Vera recalls. She arrived here in August 2024 and “I instantly fell in love with both the building and the project.” Martin takes her around the former holiday home and the surrounding area, and the guest finds it a “very personal tour” – and soon decides to become part of the project. Vera works remotely and thinks that Coliving 5 would fit perfectly into her lifestyle. Unlike most other interested parties, she only learned about the existence of a digital nomad community in Bansko after she had already heard about the coliving in Semkovo.

To get a feel for the atmosphere in the different seasons, Vera visits it in all four. She admits that winter and early spring are challenging here, but she finds them perfect for focusing on her studies, research and work. She is currently preparing an application for an additional online specialization in the field of health management.

The other respondent living in Coliving 5 is Mary (in her early 50s, Netherlands, translator), whom I described in Chapter One in the section on minimalism and anti-consumerism. For the past few years, she has spent about six months a year in Bansko and in the community that has formed around “Coworking 1”.

When she heard about “Coliving 5”, she was first tempted by the opportunity to stop paying rent, as she had always done. Compared to the prices in Bansko and Sofia, the apartment in Semkovo seemed like an affordable option. But then, “a friend of mine bought an apartment in Bansko last year and it cost her less than what I pay here, so I said, ‘Hmm’. But her walls are thinner and I’m not sure I would be completely

happy if I were in her apartment. And these kind of socialist buildings are really massive, with all this concrete and so on. (...) Martin showed me pictures of the building and I fell in love with it, I just saw the potential. He kept saying, 'We're going to have a pool, we're going to have a gym, we're going to have this, we're going to have that', and I was like, 'Oh, yeah, I want that'. I love the big atrium with the lights. I fell in love with them, and also with the marble. Marble and wood – a wonderful combination." Her statement reveals the need to be close to nature and to "bring" it into her home.

Mary buys two spaces and combines them (some owners prefer this option, because otherwise they get too small a studio). She invites me into her apartment, which is full of freshly painted abstract paintings, art materials, and also artistic clutter, because there is no furniture yet. She tells me that she is currently in the process of buying a bookcase, where she can organize her 900 books, which will arrive here by truck from the Netherlands. She also confides in me that Martin is not well-disposed towards owners who decide to renovate their apartments independently/with their own hired craftsmen. She does not like the secrecy, nor the fact that she is not allowed to work in the common office areas (although for now there is only a stable Wi-Fi connection there), because she does not have to hear what the team members are saying. "Martin is not thrilled about having his own handyman. He likes me as a person, but he doesn't always like what I do, my decisions. And he doesn't like the fact that I'm currently a kind of intermediary between the owners and the cooperative, since I'm on site here. The owners write to me in the WhatsApp group and ask me to go and check if a repair has been done properly before they pay for it. Accordingly, problems arise when I tell them that the work has not been done properly."

Mary also encounters difficulties with transportation and remoteness. According to the original agreement, while "Coliving 5" is still closed to visitors, Martin will organize a weekly market trip,

but once he has to go away for a longer period of time outside the coliving and the people there are left without a car and provisions, so they have to ask the visiting owners to do the shopping. Mary admits that she feels a little lonely and that she misses the shops. I also remember how when I first arrived, it was very cold outside – minus 15-16 degrees and the convector heater in the room was constantly running at 27-28 degrees, but it couldn't reach that temperature.

When I retired to my room, which is intended for staff, on Saturday evening, I heard chalgá rhythms next door. I realized that they were from

the room of the craftsmen, whom I had seen earlier in the day on the floors. Despite Martin's bad attitude towards visitors interacting with the craftsmen, I took the liberty of talking to them, asking where they were from, what brought them to work in Semkovo, and who they thought lived in the modernized rest home. Since it was a weekend, I only met a brigade of four people who come from the town of Rila, work in Semkovo for several weeks without leaving, and receive 50 euros a day. On weekdays, there are over 40 craftsmen here, led by a member of Martin's team.

When I discuss Coliving 5 with my Bansko-based respondents, some of them are reserved or not interested at all, mainly because the space is not open to children, there are restrictions for families (as I described above: only 20 days of free stay in the common areas for anyone other than the owner, including his partner), and that it is too remote and eccentric. Some emphasize that Martin is too much of an individualist and needs to control. Yet his project is almost complete. In February 2025, 176 apartments have been sold, with 49 left. One of the owners buys 30 apartments in Block A and another 10 in Block B, thus saving the investment at a time of crisis. By comparison, at the end of May 2025, 182 apartments have been sold, 43 remain vacant, and the cooperative has 102 members.

After sharing my observations about "Coliving 5", I will conclude the section on coliving spaces with a far less ambitious project of a different, again hybrid type – temporary coliving (pop-up coliving).

"Coliving 6"

In her presentation at a Sofia establishment, my respondent Mira (around 30, Bulgaria, marketing specialist and entrepreneur) mentions a model for travel, medium-term stays and work that is gaining immense popularity – the "workations" discussed in the introduction, also known as "work retreats": "Gatherings are organized for about a month in one place, a space is rented and anyone can join. Such initiatives are sprouting like mushrooms all over the world. It often happens that

meet people you really like. This is a large-scale organization created for digital nomads, but it is quite expensive – about €1000 per month. The price is significantly higher than that of a self-organized trip to most of the attractive places for digital nomads around the world, but this is typical of similar services in the field of alternative and adventure tourism. The client pays for the convenience of having everything already selected and organized – all he has to do is enjoy the several-week experience. During one of my fieldwork in Bansko, I had the opportunity to observe as a

visiting guest the dynamics between the users of exactly such an experience.

“Coliving 6” is branded as a “temporary coliving for digital nomads”, and its motto is “We spread love by cooking together and creating community”. Such an advertising slogan evokes associations with coziness, a sense of home, and the satisfaction of natural and fundamental human needs such as access to cooked food and communication with others. Also, “When we cook, people naturally come together,” Massimo, one of the two initiators (around 30, Italy, IT manager in the banking sector and co-owner of a temporary coliving space) assures me.

He and Joanna (around 30, Poland, marketing specialist and co-owner of a temporary coliving space) are close friends and define themselves not only as digital nomads, but also as “community managers”. They met in September 2022 on the Portuguese island of Madeira, which is a gathering point for digital nomads from all over the world. The concept of the co-founded nomadic retreat company is to rent suitable sites in different countries around the world in the medium term (for a month or two), purposefully choosing smaller but still globalized settlements where there is an opportunity for adventures in nature and buying local food. The two are amateur chefs and take care of both the supply of food and the preparation of hearty dinners, one of which I attended.

“We were nomads before,” Massimo tells me. “We often try to find an existing coliving and fill it for a while outside the tourist season.” So far, they have visited with groups: Sardinia (April to June 2023); the Brazilian coastline (June to March 2024); the island of La Palma, part of the Canary Islands in Spain (May to June 2024); the Spanish city of Tarifa (March and April 2025); Bansko (June 2025). They are about to travel again to Madeira (August 2025), Tamraght in Morocco (September 2025) and again to Pipa (January to March 2026). Prices are around 1000 euros for accommodation and access to a coworking space, not including food and travel costs, as well as additional events (for example, a surprise weekend in the middle of the retreat).

The idea to organize a temporary coliving in Bansko was born when Massimo and Joanna met

in Madeira, the owner of another similar project, one of whose bases is Bansko. They explain to me that the place where we are is actually rented by other tenants. On a warm June evening, the twenty or so people present (from Canada, Germany, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Spain and Italy) have settled around a long table in a courtyard that in winter is part

of a busy and tourist-filled tavern with a “traditional” Bulgarian-style interior, and above the tavern there is a multi-storey building with 13 rooms. The owners of this site practice a flexible scheme, in which in the summer season (considered to be weaker), they rent it out to similar temporary co-livings. As mentioned on the website of one of them: “We partner with local businesses, often outside the active season, to help them turn their unused spaces into lively co-livings.”

I talk to the two co-owners of Coliving 6 about the challenges they face in working with digital nomads and organizing such retreats. “Our biggest challenge is finding the right people. We talk to potential guests to get to know them. We look for people who are on the same wavelength. After all, we are here together and we don’t want anyone to be unhappy,” Joanna explains. Another challenge she cites is dealing with the unique rules and culture of each country. There are inevitably logistical hurdles to overcome, and sometimes it can be difficult to make contact with the locals. There can even be conflicts, as the retreats involve a lot of music and daily events, which means a lot of noise. Joanna and Massimo identify creating a sense of community as a positive challenge. In the application stage, all those wishing to participate first fill out an online survey that reveals whether they have the strictly required attitude of sharing and cooperation in different dimensions (financial, social, value), and subsequently an online interview is conducted with Massimo and Joanna. Already on site, at first, the people do not know each other and therefore the two initiate the process of getting to know each other by sharing stories from their lives: “It is easier to share your problems with people you do not know. If you travel constantly, then you have some problems. For me, it was a separation, I still can not get over it” – admits Massimo.

I was invited to this dinner by Irina (28 years old, Serbia, marketing specialist), whom I met a few days earlier in “Coliving 2”, where I was staying, and whom I described at the beginning of the part about the mental state of digital nomads. She determines that she is in the initial phase of her nomadism. It was her first time in Bansko, together with the group from “Coliving 6” – she learned about the city while on another of their retreats (there is a discount for participants in more than one retreat). The Englishman Andy, with whom they became friends and who now lives in “Coliving 2”, was also there, as well as their friend – who initially decided to sign up

at the retreat in Bansko, inviting Andy and Irina, but in the end she herself did not come. This short story is an illustrative example of how digital nomads “jump” from community to community and from country to

country, prompted by specific proposals and advertising offers, and above all by (recommendations from) other digital nomads.

From Monday to Friday, Irina devotes herself to her work as an SEO marketing specialist in her room in the building rented by “Coliving 6” or in “Coworking 2”, which is a 15-minute walk away and whose fee for one month’s 24-hour use is included in the retreat price. She tells me that she has been working on the same project for five years, so the volume of tasks is limited and her working hours are flexible. This brings her comfort, but the pay is average for the industry and does not satisfy her.

During the few days we spend together, Irina constantly repeats how much she likes Bansko. The retreat is coming to an end and she will soon return to her hometown in Serbia, on the border with Hungary, which she feels is “a restriction on her ability to travel and earn more money.” She is considering renting out her apartment there and returning to Bansko, financing her stay with the rent she receives. She is attracted by the nature here – she has always loved nature, but she has never lived in a place with a rural feel. She asks me if I know anyone in the area who can organize a walk in the forest to pick mushrooms and confides in me that she has tried hallucinogenic mushrooms. While we are talking, especially in the evenings, she is often under the influence of marijuana.

She is also impressed by the state-of-the-art SPA complex in the neighboring village of Banya with its hot mineral water. She shows me a series of videos on her phone, showing the pools there, the “rain” of mineral water, professional lighting and a light show, an aromatic ceremony in the sauna, etc. “Coliving 6” has negotiated a 30% discount for retreat participants, so the daily pass costs only 25 euros.

Here I should also mention the existence of another “temporary coliving” project, which I was not able to visit in person. It is organized for about a month in the middle of summer and during the “Bansko Nomad Fest”. The French organizer offers “working vacations” (workations) all over the world (Bansko, Morocco, Chiang Mai, Turkey), but when she arrives in Bansko, she likes the city and the atmosphere so much that she buys an apartment, which she uses as a home base with her boyfriend. The working vacations/retreats are held in a hotel with 19 rooms that she rents.

I will conclude this part of the chapter with the opinion of my respondent Dean (around 50, UK, CFO in the banking sector, owner of a coliving), according to whom such projects, and more precisely their organizers, have a very loyal following and many people like such a hybrid concept

because it is based on the rule of “encourage, not force” and because it is short/medium term.

Having examined the options for a stay “without long-term commitment”, in the next part we will focus on the longer-term options – renting or buying a property.

2.3. Renting and Buying and Selling

Properties

Behind many “communities” is nothing but loneliness, supported by a marketing campaign. It sounds crude—especially when everyone is desperately trying to “find their tribe,” but here’s what I’ve learned after watching countless people pay membership fees to join coliving spaces and “life-changing communities.”

The harsh truth: you’re not building relationships, you’re renting proximity to strangers. Real connection can’t be created through shared social media channels and monthly get-togethers. People worth knowing don’t need to have access to each other.

The alternative? Stop chasing community and start creating conditions where the right people are naturally attracted. At <https://---.com> we don’t sell memberships – we create engaging circumstances where aspiring creators choose to live, work and collaborate.

True connection comes from proximity + purpose, not proximity + membership. Some people will continue to pay membership fees to feel less alone. Few will realize that authentic tribes

are formed around a shared vision, not around shared expenses. “True freedom is not the absence of all

limitations, but the conscious choice to be guided by

principles that you have arrived at through reflection.” –

inspired by Obron Herbert

This cleverly conceived and written marketing copy, playing on the emotions and needs of the typical digital nomad, is an advertisement for a 4-story block of 67 yet-to-be-built apartments in Bansko. Early investors are being sought for an unfinished building purchased by a company of my respondents Ulrich (around 50, Austria, real estate entrepreneur) and Carol (around 50, born in Romania and raised in the UK, real estate agent in Bansko) in the summer of 2025. According to their investment plan, the building should be renovated and finished from the outside by the end of the year, the apartments should be ready by 2026, and the common areas by mid-May 2027.

The Bansko real estate market is particularly attractive to investors and brokers, and for me as an anthropologist, it is an important part of the infrastructure for digital nomads. That is why I am initiating in-depth interviews with several respondents who participate in it.

Carol has experience with the Bulgarian real estate market since the early years of the 21st century, and in addition to Bansko, he has sold apartments in Sozopol and Sunny Beach. For over 15 years, he has owned a real estate agency and, until recently, managed two apartment complexes in the city. He observes that after spending about a decade traveling the world, meeting diverse people, exchanging experiences and knowledge, and going crazy – usually around their 30th or 35th birthday, digital nomads now have enough opportunities to buy a property in Bansko. Prices range from €35,000 upwards, which is cheap for highly qualified professionals earning a few thousand euros a month. A one-bedroom apartment costs an average of €55,000 to €75,000, and a two-bedroom apartment costs between €85,000 and €100,000, with “you can find them for €75,000 to €79,000, but they disappear quickly.”

Karol believes that among property buyers in Bansko, the share of digital nomads and remote workers has increased from 3-5% two years ago to 7% today. Some of them apply for citizenship, open Bulgarian companies and pay taxes, which helps the local economy. The authorities also now realize that many nomads are entrepreneurs and would contribute knowledge and capital if they decide to settle in Bulgaria for the long term. According

to Karol, Bansko no longer attracts only nomads looking for cheap locations: “Now people are arriving from Spain, Portugal, America and Canada with more money, who previously would not come to a place they considered too cheap.”

Highly qualified Bulgarians working for foreign corporations are also starting to buy properties in the city: “A few years ago, when many English people were selling apartments, Bulgarians were number one among the buyers. They acquired 70% of the properties sold recently. In 2024, about 50% of the buyers were Bulgarians, and in the first half of 2025 – 30%. So

that Bulgarians are buying their apartments back. They used to own about 30% of the apartments in Bansko, and now maybe 40-45%. In the past, according to my observations, the ownership was distributed like this: 30% British, 30% Bulgarian and 40% others (Russians, Greeks, etc.). But last year so many Bulgarians bought up the properties sold by the British that they became the number one buyers. You see a lot of them on weekends, with lots of cars”. An example of this trend is the decision of a couple of pensioners from Wales, who have a lot of experience of living in Spain, as well as a business with mobile homes (motor homes). They recently sold their apartment in “Coliving 2”, which they had used as a holiday property for two decades – coming to Bansko every year. The buyer is a Bulgarian who is returning to his homeland with his family after living abroad for a long time.

As he tells me about his profession and personal life, Karol touches on a concept that is often encountered in my fieldwork – home base. In 2010, he returned to Bansko, where he met his girlfriend (a local woman), and in 2012 the two got married: “We decided that this would be our base, I stopped traveling.”

The tendency of digital nomads to have a “home base” falls into the broader theme of multilocality. What exactly is the difference between mobility and multilocality? In mobility, the focus is on the process of changing destinations, the trajectory itself and

what conditions it – for example, the journey of a digital nomad from Bansko to Lisbon. By comparison, multilocality is a state in which an individual/group is tied to several locations simultaneously and is present there in one form or another. This does not necessarily mean travel/mobility, but can be a conceptual and social presence with home bases – for example, a digital nomad who has such a base in Bansko and in Malta, and meanwhile maintains strong ties with a community in a third

country in Asia. It is about living actively in several places. As Schier et al. (2015: 441) argue, multilocality is “a specific spatiotemporal strategy for organizing everyday life”, which has various social, economic and ecological consequences.

My respondent Arnold (around 50, Germany, technology and social entrepreneur) posts many photos online and tells me about his family base in Malta, which he acquired 29 years ago. Three decades ago, Malta was quite different from now, when it is already an attractive hub for digital nomads and remote work, as well as a globalized country mixing Arab and European culture. Arnold became part of the change by initiating the development of telecommunications, because he is a specialist in the field: “Back then, there was no fiber-optic internet, and the telephone lines had echo, so you could hear your own voice.” He purposefully created conditions for remote

work and entrepreneurship, so that companies can operate from Malta without their clients ever visiting the country. “Today, over 30% of babies born in Maltese hospitals are from foreign families. Malta has always been part of a movement where people come, stay and leave,” he shares his impressions.

Arnold talks about the “evolution of the digital nomad”: “At first you’re in a different country every month, you’re in a different place every weekend, but then, as digital nomads themselves learn, you’re really looking for a place to drop anchor back. They want to have somewhere to be for three months, to start getting to know the place, where to eat, where to buy, the same people to see. They’re looking for a home again, but for a short time, in the medium term.”

The plans of my respondent Mary (a little over 50, Netherlands, translator) are also a telling example of multilocality: “I will probably spend the next few years in Semkovo in the summer and autumn. I love autumn and I want to go hiking with a few other people from the community. (...) I also really want to spend time with some friends who go to Asia every European winter. Some of my best friends, whom I met in Bali and who I still keep in touch with, go to Vietnam and Thailand, and I want to be with them. I will probably also spend a lot of time in Portugal in the next few years. One of my best friends lives there. She is a nomad from America and has bought a house in Lisbon,

so I am looking forward to spending some time with her too.” In this case, it is not about maintaining a home base outside Semkovo, but about

strong and ongoing multilocal relationships with people in other countries.

One of the participants in the discussion “Bulgaria as a place for nomads to live” tells how she realized she needed a home base after five years of intensive travel around the world, the last two of which she felt increasingly exhausted. “As much as I love Canada and have friends and family there, the numbers are clear: the price of owning your own home, especially in my hometown of Toronto, is prohibitively high.” Together with her partner, she first bought an apartment in Sofia and then a second one in Bansko. When they are not at the specific address, they rent out the property and thus finance their travels: “In Bansko, the peak season is in the winter. If you want, you can spend the summer here with the nomads, and then you have a high income from the rent in the winter.”

Renting out a base is a common practice. Judith (36, Germany, psycho- and hypnotherapist), her partner and their 2-year-old son are now living in an apartment in the New Town, rented to them by their friends – a Frenchwoman and a Dutchman, who are in Asia in the winter of 2025 and are offering them this deal.

My respondent Mira (around 30, Bulgaria, marketing specialist and entrepreneur) also commented on the exhaustion of constant travel: “If I don’t like something or a situation,

I can always go home somewhere. Without the security of a home base, I would feel like a headless fly – it gives me some kind of security. Besides, since I travel all the time, I have to point out that I am based somewhere.”

My respondent Damian (around 35, Bulgaria, IT specialist and coworking founder) shares his expectations that after Bulgaria joins Schengen, even more nomads will want to acquire their base here: “They will go to Spain or those places where everyone takes pictures for Instagram. This will be their base. They will come here on base and can already stay.”

Buying an apartment and maintaining it also requires renovation work. I discuss the topic with Frank (about 50 years old, UK), who has lived in Bansko for 18 years and, in addition to being a real estate broker for rent, offers handyman services. Frank refuses to deal with property sales because, according to him, he is honest and cannot look someone in the eye and lie to them that the construction is of high quality. He also believes that investing in a holiday property is not worth it: “Since the active season is only four months a year (three in winter and one in summer), it is wise to buy here only for storage or as a base, so that you only pay 10% tax.”

I meet him in the courtyard of “Coliving 2” and watch how he skillfully establishes contacts with the other dozen or so nomads present and how he shows them photos and provides information about sizes and

prices. He invites them to give him their numbers because they are interested in renting properties in Bansko. After I give him my number, the next day I receive a message on WhatsApp from him that he is renting 21 apartments in various residential buildings/complexes in Bansko for a period of at least 3 months in the winter (from December to April). He also sends me a Facebook page where I can look at them.³² An apartment with furniture from the early 2000s and with 2 bedrooms costs 510 euros in the summer and 434 euros in the winter, because then it can only be rented long-term. Another two-bedroom apartment – 575 euros regardless of the season. A one-bedroom apartment next to the lift in the summer is rented for 413 euros, in the winter – for 513 euros.

I also come across another apartment rental platform, indicatively titled Bansko Nomad Apartments, where the prices are similar. They vary from 270 to 800 euros depending on the size of the apartment, the furnishings and the features of the building (whether it is a coliving, whether there is a pool, a view, etc.).

Both Frank and my other foreign respondents express their dissatisfaction with the majority of local craftsmen - mainly because, according to them, they are lazy, lack initiative, do not complete their tasks completely/in detail and everyone thinks, without reason, that it is better to

From “Facebook” I learn that Frank also rents out bicycles for between 30 and 60 euros per month (for city and mountain models, respectively).

better than the other. In Frank’s words: “They always say, ‘You’re not doing it right!’ even though they themselves don’t do anything.”

Ekaterina (in her early 30s, Russia, language teacher), who recently bought a house in a nearby village with her husband and previously lived in Bansko for years, says: “If you have to do renovations, it’s very difficult in Bulgaria because you have to micromanage everyone. It’s very difficult to find someone who is really reliable, because the work ethic is such that they want to get their money right away and they don’t care about the future. They just want to do the job badly right now and they don’t care. For example, we’re doing renovations now and the workers had to clean the ceiling, where there was a lot of glass – they just threw it on the grass. The whole yard is covered in glass, and in a week we’re going to celebrate my child’s birthday there and a lot of children will be running around barefoot. Tomorrow I have to go and collect all this garbage for hours.

That kind of mentality is very hard to overcome and it makes you to back away from these people. But the problem is that they are all like that. Some friends of ours replaced ten workers by the time they finish the renovation. Either you accept the fact that everything will be done lousy, not the way you would like, or you just waste your mental energy watching them and telling them what to do”.

As an option to deal with this (and other challenges), members of the “Coworking 1” team developed in 2019 a website with detailed and

various information that has been scattered so far. The content includes the following sections: transport to and from Bansko and moving around the city; virtual tour of “Coworking 1” – membership, prices, working holiday offers; places to stay in the city; recommended restaurants; outdoor activities, sports and fitness; Bulgarian language and culture; telecommunications; food shopping; access to services; map with useful places; long-term stay in Bansko – properties, visas, starting a company; important contacts for home renovation projects; buying a car in Bulgaria.

Digital nomads and location-independent workers often encounter difficulties at the administrative level as well. This is why we will discuss the topic in the last part of this chapter.

2.4. Administration and documentation

Visas and taxation

Krasteva (2025: 100) identifies digital nomad visas as one of the latest innovations in labor migration policies and reviews the introduction of this type of document in a number of European countries.³³ Estonia – 2020, Greece – end of 2021, Hungary – 2022 (the “White

Card” program is a one-year residence permit that allows digital nomads to live in the country while working for a foreign employer or foreign clients); Latvia – 2022 (visa valid for up to one year, renewable for another year), Italy – 2024. Other EU countries such as Croatia, the Czech Republic, Germany, Malta, Portugal, Romania and Spain also offer some form of visa for digital nomads, although the approaches vary considerably.

According to Koskela and Beckers (2024), depending on the definition, there are between 30 and 50 visas and permits worldwide specifically aimed at remote workers. Their duration ranges from 6 months to 2 years, and the applicant is required not only to prove that he works remotely, but

also that his income is sufficiently high. In return, he receives temporary residence rights, as well as tax exemptions or preferential taxation.

Orel et al. (2023) examine the creation of policies to attract digital nomads – how governments support business development and position/brand themselves as suitable for this group of highly skilled workers. The authors emphasize that digital nomads do not choose their destinations solely for technological, economic and lifestyle reasons, but also take into account the political framework that provides them with the legal opportunity to work from

distance: “A clear and user-friendly legal framework facilitates the emigration of a worker and helps him/her to enjoy the advantages of the destination, while at the same time informing him/her about his/her obligations, especially fiscal ones” (Orel 2023: 13). The visa is another aspect of the digital nomad infrastructure that requires flexibility and an understanding of the nature and profile of this group.

The scientific findings of Koskela and Beckers (2024: 2) confirm this: the characteristics of most digital nomad visas correspond to the needs of individuals who are less (hyper)mobile than the typical digital nomad. “Despite their name, questions arise whether these visas are aimed at true digital nomads” (ibid.). They are designed for a wide range of people with varying degrees of mobility who can work remotely and want to move to another country for a certain period of time (or even permanently). The fieldwork of the two scholars in three countries that have established themselves as attractive to digital nomads shows the different goals of the governments: in Croatia – stimulating tourism, in Spain – attracting and permanently retaining skilled migrants, in Thailand – accumulating wealth. Generally speaking, however, the main goals of digital nomad visas are similar to those of tourism – direct injection of foreign income into the local economy, i.e. potential economic benefit for the issuing country. The fact that these visas contribute to the accumulation of human capital, thanks to which there is an exchange of skills and culture, the introduction of innovations, as well as the development of infrastructure, should not be underestimated

and. According to Koskela and Beckers (2024), digital nomad visas are also seen by governments as a legal framework regulating the flow of the growing number of remote workers who enter the countries as tourists, although they intend to work.

The challenge is difficult to solve and lies in the fact that digital nomadism, by its very nature, both submits to and resists state regulations

on mobility, because it is multi-local. Mancinelli and German Molz (2023) introduce the term “border artistry” – a set of methods by which digital nomads live “in the shadow of the state” – and emphasize that states also try to respond appropriately and maneuver by introducing special visa programs. There is an effort to manage mobility, as well as an interrelationship between the individual strategies of digital nomads to remain mobile and the institutional strategies of governments to codify and benefit from these individuals.

What are the requirements for the visa of the individuals in question: online application; minimal set of documents – passport, proof of income and health insurance; possibility of multiple

entry and stay of 6 months, but without a minimum period; easy payment of taxes or no taxation; right to apply regardless of nationality and type of employment – freelancer, employee or entrepreneur³⁴ (Bruns et al. 2023: 45). Regarding the latter, Toivanen (2025: 14) notes: “The spatial discrepancy between the physical location of the worker, the place where the work is performed and the location of the employer is a major problem. It affects not only legal issues and jurisdiction, but also worker protection, taxation and other aspects that are built primarily for the nation-state and the settled way of life.”

My field observations indicate that my respondents’ choices are often conditioned by two general government rules. (1) In most host countries, digital nomads (like any other foreign citizen) are taxed after a stay of 183 days. (2) Citizens of countries outside the European Union have the right to stay for 90 days within a 180-day period in the Schengen area. That is, they can stay for three months, after which they must leave for the same period. Before Bulgaria became part of this zone (until the end of 2024), digital nomads used it as a destination when their days in Schengen expired.

In some companies, employees are not allowed to work outside a previously agreed location, often with a requirement not to reside in another country.

Mira (around 30, Bulgaria, marketing specialist and entrepreneur) gives me an example of how the so-called visa run – a short trip with the aim of resetting the period in which an individual can stay in a country: “Since you can only stay in Bali for 30 days with a tourist visa, we just booked a flight for a week to get out of the country, and then we would come back. Some people do even crazier things. They catch a flight in the morning

somewhere and return on another flight. Because each entry counts as a new one, which gives you another 30 days. You can do this three times.”

The ways to acquire a temporary or permanent residence permit are a topic that excites nomads. One of the presentations at the “Bansko Nomad Fest” 2025 touches on this very issue. At the beginning, the host emphasizes that the majority of nomads do not want to live permanently in one particular country. He then presents the basics of Flag Theory – ways for mobile/multilocal individuals to structure their lives and protect their assets by diversifying them across multiple countries to achieve greater freedom, lower taxes, and reduce their dependence on a single jurisdiction.

Another speaker presents the service [denationalize. me/staatenlos](https://denationalize.me/) and makes bold promises that the company helps nomads: (1) open all kinds of bank accounts in legal tax havens and international financial centers; (2) register a company in countries that suit their needs; (3) live legally without paying taxes; (4) implement the principles of denationalization and the Flag Strategy through consultations, e-books and video courses; (5) obtain a residence permit or citizenship. It’s about global diversification.

Taxation is one of the most detailed topics covered during the festival. A series of presentations and more informal discussions focus on which countries exempt digital nomads from taxes and where the tax is flat (10-15%). This is how I learn that: in Paraguay there is no tax on income from abroad, and in Bulgaria it is 10%; some countries like the Netherlands require proof that the citizen pays taxes elsewhere in order to write it off from their tax system; citizenship in the US and Eritrea is not recommended, because these are the only countries that tax their citizens regardless of where in the world they live.

Investment strategies are also discussed, as well as the need for a personal and business bank account. Nomads prefer fintech solutions such as Wise and Revolut. Traditional banks, however, have strict KYC (Know Your Customer) policies and require that they know who the citizen is, where they live and what their income is.

Karol (around 50, born in Romania and raised in the UK, real estate agent in Bansko) tells me with disappointment that: “Bulgarian

banks do not want to open accounts for foreigners. Even for me, who has four company accounts, three banks refused to open another one. The problem is that when foreigners need to transfer an amount of over

€9,000, the banks require documents to be filled out, including those for money laundering – for the European Central Bank. They do not want to fill out these documents, they do not want to do this work. That is why they say that you cannot open an account. It does not matter that you are in Europe and you are a European citizen and that the banks are within the framework of EU regulations.” He is also outraged that the tax office does not accept payment with a foreign card, such as the widely used Revolut in our country. He also gives the example of Martin (around 50, Germany, entrepreneur and owner of a coliving space), who “took UniCredit to court for unfair treatment, a kind of discriminatory practice, and won the case in Bulgaria, but the bank has not yet opened an account for him. He is a German citizen, permanently residing here, has a business, sold it for several million”.

Karol lists other examples of administrative problems: “The tax authorities send you a letter signed by them online. But when you sign it back with an electronic signature, they do not accept it. They say: “No, you can’t. You have to come in person”. All these little things drive people crazy. They tell you that you cannot do business online, you cannot sign online, you cannot open a bank account. They ask for so many documents. In addition, some of the employees do not speak English. It’s the same at the immigration office – one or two women speak English, the others don’t, and they’re very angry, even though that’s their job. You go to change your ID card and they make you come back three times on purpose, just because they can. The photo couldn’t be taken right away and they say, “Come in the afternoon, come after 2:00 p.m.” And so you have to sit in Blagoevgrad for four hours just for one stupid photo.” She notes that only when registering cars for foreigners has the procedure improved and is now very easy.

One of the participants in the discussion “Bulgaria as a place for nomads to live” – a blogger from Canada who has also lived in Ukraine – warns that the procedure for obtaining documents in the EU is complicated, so it is advisable to hire a reliable person to ease the burden on the applicant. According to her, there are too many documents, they take too much time, and the employees at the immigration offices are often not motivated to help.

My respondent Arnold (around 50, Germany, technology and social entrepreneur) also notes that it is good to seek local help, given the fact that foreigners do not speak Bulgarian and are not familiar with local laws. “Whenever I have had problems, I look for a competent local lawyer or other specialist. But my family and I do not encounter difficulties, as

we have German, Danish and Maltese passports and we do not reside permanently in one place". This is the advertised denationalization in action.

My respondent Judith (36, Germany, psycho- and hypnotherapist) says that she used the help of my respondent Ulrich (around 50, Austria, real estate entrepreneur), one of whose businesses helps foreigners register companies and tax residency in Bulgaria, as well as obtain a residence permit. She emphasizes the importance of using expert help, as she knows nomads who have tried to do it on their own and were very disappointed. The description on the company's website states that as a serial entrepreneur Ulrich "has registered several companies in Bulgaria and knows firsthand how painful the procedure is", has gained experience and is familiar with Bulgarian administrative peculiarities in detail. In typical marketing discourse, the promise to the consumer is that the entire process will be "seamless from start to finish, so you can focus on what you love and on developing your company." The services offered are: obtaining a residence permit in Bulgaria: €467; freelancer registration: €419; company formation: €459; issuing a tax residence certificate: €298; online consultation: €59.

Another service in the same industry is Sofia-based NomadTax Bulgaria, which offers specialized

legal and accounting services tailored to the needs of digital nomads and foreigners around the world.

One of the requirements for issuing a visa in Bulgaria is the availability of health insurance. Healthcare is a topic that worries many digital nomads, which is why we will touch on it in the next part.

Healthcare

There are specialized insurances aimed at digital nomads, tailored to their mobile and often more extreme lifestyles than sedentary people. Ulrich (around 50, Austria, real estate entrepreneur) shares his observation that "Many digital nomads have private insurance, but others don't care or are not aware of these issues. They just don't think that far ahead."

The Bansko Nomad Fest 2025 program strongly encourages them to think about this too - probably because one of the sponsors is the insurance company Safety Wing, which aggressively advertises several of its products.

The First Necessity plan is "a travel medical emergency insurance valid in over 180 countries," as the advertising brochure says. Covers medical

treatment and hospitalization, evacuation to a better-equipped hospital, motor vehicle accidents, lost checked baggage,

and injuries from recreational sports and activities. Also provides coverage for trip delays or interruptions.

The Comprehensive plan is valid in 175 countries and includes all the coverage of the First Necessity plan, as well as preventive check-ups and consultations with specialists, maternity care, testing and treatment for serious illnesses such as cancer, alternative therapies (such as chiropractic), mental health support, and additional travel protections, including burglary and trip cancellation. My respondent Judith (36, Germany, psychotherapist and hypnotherapist) chose this plan for herself: "Because Bulgaria is part of the European Union, the European Health Insurance Card is valid here. If you have one, you don't have to pay much. But now I have changed my insurance. I wanted to have more coverage for alternative medicine, so I took out another insurance that is specifically for digital nomads."

Part of the festival program is also a presentation by a representative of "Safety Wing", in which he advertises the insurance product "Nomad Citizenship Membership" – a title that aims to inspire not only a sense of security, but also of belonging to a "global community". It begins with a description of "an unsettling feeling that every global worker experiences – the feeling that something is not quite right. Since social security systems are national, but the future of work

is global, traditional safety nets can no longer answer basic questions. What happens if you lose your job, get sick or injured, and which hospital should you go to?" He also points out that freelancers often do not have the same rights as those with an employment contract, such as paternity leave. One of the leitmotifs of the presentation is in line with the values of nomads: "We are committed to free choice."

What do my respondents say about healthcare and insurance?

Arnold (around 50, Germany, tech and social entrepreneur), who is a parent of several children of different ages, warns: "No one can stay in one place with their children for two or three months without some health problem arising. That's why it's very important to know which pediatrician speaks at least basic English. All my younger children have been to the hospital in Razlog for something – one with a broken leg, another needed an X-ray, and the third had a shoulder problem after falling out of a tree."

Karol (around 50, born in Romania and raised in the UK, a real estate agent in Bansko) tells me how he took an American to the emergency room in Razlog at night, “because the ambulance is so slow that it’s faster to go alone. There was a woman in the emergency room in Razlog who didn’t seem to know what she was doing. She had to call a doctor who was at home. I understand that maybe

the hospital is small and there’s no point in having a doctor on duty, but there weren’t even basic medicines there. The woman asked me to go to the pharmacy to buy something that cost 2-3 euros.” She also remembers how “another person had their broken finger set incorrectly and had to go to Sofia to a big hospital like Pirogov to have it re-broken and set properly.”

My respondent Mary (a little over 50, Netherlands, translator) found that “Once I turned 50, it suddenly became much more expensive. Why? You’re riskier. They expect you to get diabetes and all that. Insurance companies like Safety Wing and World Nomads can cover you almost anywhere, and for example if you do dangerous sports. From personal experience, I’ve found that this also includes hiking off-piste in the mountains. (...) I’ve heard good and bad stories about both insurance companies, but they’re still crucial. Otherwise, what do you do if you have to go to hospital now? I joined a Dutch tourism organization. They have their own special tourism insurance, which also covers off-piste tourism. The problem is that if you stay in the country for more than two months, you are no longer covered. So I just took out a “Safety Wing” insurance the other day – it wouldn’t cover all the damage, but it would at least cover my treatment if I fell into a ravine with my car again. So yes, I currently have three insurance policies and that is quite

common. I am over-insured and I pay a lot. Health insurance in the Netherlands is around €200 per month, and “Safety Wing” currently costs me €145 per month.”

2.5. Summary

After discussing the motives and values of digital nomads more theoretically in Chapter One, in this one I problematize the concept of “freedom” analytically and empirically. I present the limits of freedom, which requires constant planning, decision-making (including refusal) and building relationships between individuals. I examine the specific social, spatial, and institutional conditions within which the pursuit of freedom is realized. Rather than being conceived as a boundless autonomy, its maintenance is revealed as a structured and mediated practice dependent on the presence of specific infrastructure and regulatory regimes. The infrastructure follows certain trajectories that include recurring destinations, standardized services, and clearly identifiable “nomadic hubs.” These trajectories are the result of both the nomads’ own social and domestic needs and of targeted market and institutional efforts to attract this specific group.

I share Sánchez-Vergara et al.’s (2023) observation that the physical environment – specifically the destinations and their associated infrastructure (e.g. the availability of coworking and coliving spaces) – plays a crucial role in nomads’ choices. Coworking spaces combine the professional with the personal, and their managers develop flexible subscription plans to meet the needs of diverse clients, emphasizing socialization and a sense of belonging. Such a hybrid form between housing and social service is particularly attractive to individuals who seek to minimize the feeling of loneliness inherent in intensive mobility. Although they offer a cozy working environment and encourage social contacts, as a business venture, colivings are difficult to manage and not always profitable, because clients have limited budgets. Successful coworkings inevitably rely on a personal approach, but even they are not immune to failure in their attempts to expand and the disintegration of the community. Access to a given “community” is not universal, but regulated and conditional. Resourceful coliving management requires at least a relative selection of guests to ensure that they fit in.

The infrastructure for digital nomads also has institutional constraints related to safety, visa regimes, residence permits, and national policies for attracting

highly skilled labor. Many countries, including Bulgaria, offer visas for digital nomads that provide temporary residence and tax breaks. The legal provision of visas for digital nomads is linked to global megatrends such as digitalization, aging, and increased population mobility. However,

administrative difficulties are an obstacle and a disincentive for nomads to register as such rather than as tourists.

Another problem is how they can access quality healthcare while on the road, given that they live more extreme lives than sedentary individuals. It can be limited and sometimes unexpectedly expensive. As a solution, several companies offer specialized insurance products for digital nomads that are valid worldwide.

My respondent Betty (38, UK, owner of a chain of coworking spaces) gives a specific but general example of how the nomadic lifestyle is associated with stress, with the need for and willingness to engage in new communities: “We have people like that in coworking – they stay here for 180 days and get so stressed out while planning their next destination that they just give up, they just go home. One person from the UK said: ‘I’m not cut out for this.’ He had a spreadsheet of potential locations, visas and budgets, but in the end he admitted: ‘I can’t make a decision, it’s too stressful.’ So he moved back to Manchester

and doesn’t travel anymore. Traveling is an effort and you have to be willing to put in the effort. You have to really research before you go somewhere. Planning with friends also helps. It’s all about planning and connecting with communities before you arrive. That’s pretty important and key. Don’t wait until you arrive to start connecting with people.”

The availability of services such as access to coworking and coliving spaces, tax advice, insurance, etc. conditions the choice of digital nomads where in the world to travel, moving them away from the complete autonomy and independence that they emphasize as their values. For every consumer need of the digital nomad, there is a business offering a solution, and content creation is one of the key approaches through which the digital nomad infrastructure attracts its users. Many nomad visitors are experienced in this and this often leads to professional partnerships. Hedonistic images are created that turn the destination into a consumer commodity. Thus, the pursuit of freedom is transformed into a mediated and commodified practice.

As Appadurai (1986: 3) emphasizes, every commodity represents an object with economic value, but this value is not an inherent property of the object (for example, of the coliving or coworking space), but is judgment made about it by different subjects. The object must be highly valued, provoke longing in the user,

who can be satisfied here and now. In the case of digital nomads, a distorted and modernized version of the concept of “community” is used

for this. In order to attract them and make them pay a subscription, many companies that run coworking and coliving spaces actively and purposefully build a community in them (Busuttil 2022). It itself becomes a commodity and an object of market exchange (Toivanen, 2023: 72).

III. DIGITAL NOMAD COMMUNITIES

On Saturday evening, less than a day before the opening of the “Bansko Nomad Fest” 2025, the fire crackles in the portable barbecue brought by my respondent Ray (about 35 years old, Canada, IT specialist) – the bourgeois nomad I told about in Chapter One. In the courtyard of “Coliving 2”, 8 digital nomads have gathered, without playing music and with only one bottle of wine, which is emptying surprisingly slowly. It is quiet – cool, green, June. In an hour Gustavo (around 40, Portugal, entrepreneur and volleyball player) has a birthday, but that is not the reason for the gathering. It happened spontaneously and exactly like yesterday – without events on social networks, without invitations or prompts. Just digital nomads who have settled in the coliving, and a few of their acquaintances. “This is a quality way to spend your evenings – by talking to people and looking at the fire, not the display. As humanity has done for thousands of years,” concludes Gustavo.

I nod my head approvingly and admit to them that I am currently living the dream of every anthropologist fieldworker. The subjects I research not only welcome me with open arms into the micro-community, but also discuss all sorts of aspects of their lifestyle that appear in my questionnaire. But instead of me asking the questions, they arise naturally

in the emerging discussion. We are all part of a focus group, formed without prior arrangement, because as professionals working regardless of our location, we are all interested in and have encountered many opportunities and challenges:

- ~ what it is like to be a digital nomad in Europe - and in Asia;
- ~ how to maintain romantic relationships and is there any point in speed dating and dating apps;
- ~ who has been on which nomad cruises;
- ~ which digital nomad centers are similar to Bansko;
- ~ are digital nomads happy or just chasing happiness;
- ~ and as a leitmotif in connection with the listed topics - how important is community.

Gustavo sums it up: “What I really want to know as a nomad is where my people are. I travel where they are.” Others agree unanimously, stressing

that in this sense, rankings on sites like the former Nomad List are not relevant and do not meet user needs. “The problem with Nomad List is that they never really paid attention to the community. It was just a website, making money. You sign up for a one-time fee and you have access to the content. Then the owner moved the community to Telegram, so even fewer people are there. The algorithm on the site has changed. If only 10 nomads go to

a destination and 10 like it and write a review, it will rise above Lisbon, for example, where hundreds of thousands of nomads go every year and therefore not all leave a positive review”.

It is also important to bear in mind that sometimes governments fund campaigns to position a country so that it attracts digital nomads. One of the men by the fire gives the example of Cape Town, which occupies top positions in various rankings of good cities for digital nomads to live in, despite being very weak on the indicator of “safety”, which is one of the key considerations when choosing a destination.

In this chapter, I focus precisely on the key importance of community for both the elections and the well-being of digital nomads.³⁵ After introducing the necessary theories describing the forms of community in modernity/postmodernity, and supporting this theoretical framework with quotes from my respondents, in the remaining three parts I analyze several dimensions of the community spirit: the events during which it is strengthened; the connection (or lack thereof) between the local community and the nomad community; the emergence of a community of digital nomads with children in Banskó.

The term “well-being” is multifaceted, but for the purposes of this book, I, like Zumbusch and Lalicic (2020), adopt the definition of Dodge et al. (2012): “Stable well-being is achieved when individuals have the psychological, social, and material resources they need to meet a specific psychological, social, and/or physical challenge.”

3.1. Maintaining Community

by Digital Nomads

A Theoretical Perspective

I delve into the theories and typologies of communities not with the aim of providing an exhaustive overview, which is not possible due to limitations in the volume and subject matter of the monograph, but to make it possible to make sense of the relationships between nomads, as well as

the rules that govern the commodification of their (micro)communities. As we have already clarified in Chapter Two, my hypothesis is confirmed that one of the ways in which some nomads resolve the conflict between the search for freedom and autonomy and the resulting loneliness and even social isolation is by “buying a ticket” to community by purchasing membership in a coworking and coliving space. In practice, community becomes something that can be bought and sold on the market – a commodity (Busuttil 2022). It is precisely the presence of a community in a coliving/coworking space that causes prices to rise significantly compared to other places to live or work.

Gusfield (1975) points out that the term “community” can refer to a group of people living in the same geographical area, as well as to individuals connected by a common interest or profession. These two types can also overlap.

Community members feel a sense of belonging, influence and are influenced by it, have a common history and experiences together, and some of their needs are satisfied by being part of the group (McMillan 1986). My observations of digital nomads indicate that they form communities, albeit more fluid than usual, based mainly on the similar values described in detail in Chapter One and on the similar (hyper)mobile/multilocal lifestyle. In the statement of Eddie (around 40, Bulgarian-Israeli origin, owner of coworking and coliving spaces), the overlap between the geographical principle and the principle of common interest is evident: “You create some connections. Whether you are from different countries, whether you are from different cultures, whether you are from different families – it matters, but ultimately you share the same way of thinking, the same priorities, the same needs to go somewhere together. And this thing brings you together. There must be something that is common. All the nomads coming to Bansko have some traits that unite them and which makes it very easy to unite. I tell you as someone who is developing a similar model in Sofia – it is much more difficult to unite in a big city like Sofia.” It is a kind of neo-tribe (Maffesoli 1996), in which members are united by common attitudes, tastes, hobbies and lifestyle, but are not fixed, but rather come together and separate relatively quickly and belong to several tribes simultaneously.

Another of my respondents with a lot of experience in building communities – Martin (around 50, Germany, entrepreneur and owner of a coliving space) warns, however, that as the number of people in one place increases: “there is always a chance of a clash of personalities. The problem in a coliving environment is that if you have a problem with

someone in Sofia, you will never see them again. If you have a problem with someone here (in Semkovo – b.m., P.D.), you have to somehow find a way to deal with it. But for some people it is a challenge to compromise and say: “Okay, let’s put it behind us”. My experience shows that then you often lose both people. It’s not like one leaves, usually both leave. So you have to somehow deal with different personalities, different cultures, different expectations. The other thing that scares me about coliving is unwanted sexual attention. Some of the people in the nomadic community somehow don’t understand the word “No” and that also leads to problems. If he is a guest, fine, he can go somewhere else. If he is an owner, it is a different story.”

The lifestyle of my respondents also corresponds to the dispersed communities described by Popcheva (2023: 303), in which, due to the high degree of dispersion and expansion, members communicate rarely or are not in contact, but although dispersed, they bear many common features (Dzhonev 2013: 42). An important characteristic is social dynamics – “the activities, processes, actions and

changes that arise in groups, which makes them powerful and influential, with the ability to influence their members” (Forsyth 2010: 18, cited by Popcheva, *ibid.*, 304).

The concept of “subgroup” is also applicable, reflecting “the dynamic interaction between the constantly increasing number of new, small and dispersed, diversely-originated” groups, including interconnected individuals united around a social or cultural element or view “foundational to their identity” (Maeva 2017: 14 – 15, cited by Popcheva 2023: 305). In the case of digital nomads in Bansko, subgroups are formed around the coliving and coworking spaces where individuals choose to work/stay and whose events they are part of.

Popcheva (*ibid.*, 307) also emphasizes the emotional load of the concept of “community” and that it is associated with “concepts such as solidarity, closeness, sense of belonging, interests and identity (Rabinowitz 2001: 2389)”. Betty (38, UK, coworking space owner) shares her long-standing observations about Bansko and belonging in the nomadic community: “There is a core group of people, a core community, and we are here because we love the city, we are supportive and we want to be there for each other. But the community is constantly changing – it just depends on who is in it. It doesn’t matter if someone is here for just a month – they put in a lot of effort, the community

grows and takes on parts of their character. Someone else can be here for a month and not contribute anything. The community is fluid, it grows and is constantly changing. You have to work for it, you have to put in something and then you get it. You can't just show up and not put in any effort. The community is only as strong as the people in it. And luckily for us, we (at "Coworking 3" – b.m., P.D.) have a very strong community and people who put in the effort. It's about belonging. I might have someone who comes to the coworking space for just one day and in the first ten minutes has already introduced themselves to people or made coffee with someone. This is someone who wants to belong, even if it's just for one day. Or someone who buys a three-month subscription and doesn't talk to anyone, doesn't get involved in anything. Okay, but they won't get much out of the community if they don't put anything in. And they don't do it because they don't want to belong."

The experience of another pillar of the digital nomad community in Bansko – Dean (around 50, UK, CFO in the banking sector, owner of a coliving space) – shows that it is very difficult to build and unite a community if a lot of strangers come and go in and out of it almost daily, as would be the case in a hybrid model combining a hotel and a coliving space: "That's why we build a community, and the first step is to say 'minimum stay of one or two months'. Now we are getting closer and closer to saying

"two months". That's how the same people interact every day. You should try to find those who are less focused on themselves and more on the community. And if you can, fill the place with those who just want to have fun and have a good time, who have good jobs and work – then it becomes super easy. The egocentric type, for whom everything is "me", will not help you build a community. The needy person, who constantly wants something but doesn't want to pay for it – is also not what you want. There are times when we all go out to dinner and split the bill. Do you really want to discuss the fact that Fred didn't pay a single euro? Or is it better to sit at a table where someone says: "My bill is 45 euros, here's 50". Generous, kind, loving, community-focused people – great! Self-centered, financially inadequate, people who can barely pay their bills – hard!"

Online nomad communities

When it comes to the different forms of nomad communities, one type is an online community, which most often develops into face-to-face communication between members. As Thompson (2021: 90) observes, nomads rely heavily on social media and online groups to discuss issues

related to their lifestyle and find other travelers to meet. This impression is also confirmed by Woldoff and Litchfield (2021: 94),

according to them, online spaces for digital nomads often include messages from users announcing their arrival in Bali, as well as their interests, skills, and desire to make friends and meet.

Here are some sample messages posted in August–September 2025 in the Facebook group “Bansko Social – Digital Nomads, Coworkers & Friends” with 4.5 thousand member:

Hello, friends! I'm arriving in Bansko at the end of September for two months and I'm looking to stay in a coliving that also accepts digital nomads over 40 and has a large coworking space.

Could you recommend a coliving that you personally liked, from your own experience? Thanks in advance for the suggestions! I'm sharing a photo from my latest amazing destination – Vietnam. Feel

free to ask me anything about it.

What's going on tonight? Is anyone going out?

Hello, friends! I'm planning to climb Vihren next week (we'll discuss which day is suitable). Would anyone like to climb with me? (followed by a long explanation of the route and the person who will climb it)

Hello! Where in Bansko would you go for breakfast and where for dinner? Do you have any recommendations for good places?

Another example of online communication is one of the public chat channels that brings together those interested in “Coliving 6”, which receives dozens of messages every day. Mary (in her early 50s, Netherlands, translator) notes this in an interview with me: “We are very active on WhatsApp. A few people joined the group for two days and then left because they said, ‘I can’t handle so many messages.’ There is a lot of inside jokes and sharing – we share a project, we share a future, so that somehow connects us.” The team of each coliving and coworking space

maintains a similar online group, where daily life is discussed and new/returning members are introduced.

Gustavo (in his 40s, Portugal, entrepreneur and volleyball player) emphasizes that thanks to online communication and all the nomadic groups, chat channels and communities, it is easier than ever to find where “your people” are traveling. “A lot of nomads haven’t discovered that the secret to this lifestyle isn’t the travel, it’s the people. I was lucky because when I became a nomad, there were already all these blogs and materials that helped me understand that you should only travel to places where there are other coworking spaces, other people. And I was like, ‘That’s right!’ I don’t want to go to Bali because Bali is beautiful. I want to go there because the people I want to meet are there. A lot of nomads don’t understand that and go to random places by themselves. And this lifestyle, when you’re alone, is

a complete mess. Living alone, traveling, being alone in the city. Once you start traveling between communities, it’s much easier to meet people. Now, wherever you go, we’re probably going to meet somewhere. I’ve met X about four times in the last year. And when Carol went to Malta, we all went to meet him. It’s just like, “Oh, who’s in Buenos Aires?” It’s much easier to be happy when you can choose who you surround yourself with. I’ve been abroad many times and I’ve been rather alone, and I feel very lonely. But then I come to a place like “Coliving 2” and it’s much nicer.”

Even on the day I’m writing this, I see a revealing post from Ulrich (around 50, Austria, real estate entrepreneur) on his personal Facebook profile:

Hi! I’m planning my trip this year, starting at the end of October 2025. My approximate route is from Europe to Asia

(Thailand, Vietnam, Taiwan, Japan...) → Singapore →

New Zealand??? → America (Canada???, Paraguay,

Martinica, Central and South America...) → back

to Europe. Can you tell me if, when and for how long you’ll be in or near any of these places?

Or when is the best time to meet at your place? Any

quick notes will help me plan

my trip properly. I’m excited and can’t wait

to see you on the road! Thanks! P.S.: I'm thinking of buying a plane ticket for a trip around the world. Is anyone interested in joining?

With their typical entrepreneurial spirit, many digital nomads realize how profitable it can be to create an app that meets the needs of their fellow workers, regardless of their location. However, my respondents during the impromptu focus group described at the beginning of the chapter are unanimous: “the problem is that everyone makes apps without building communities” and point out that they need a site or app that lists only places with communities and regularly updates information about them. However, this is difficult due to the subjectivity of the evaluators and their diverse positions and roles (users, coworking/coliving owners, influencers for a particular brand/region, etc.).

I would not spare my observation that “online community” is a new, updated way of calling what was until recently called “general chat” or “group”. This is another confirmation that the word itself carries emotional power, even when it denotes different forms and types of social life (Gold 2005: 2). The target is the sense of belonging and closeness that is so desired by nomads, and by all online users. The latest in marketing techniques is to maintain online communities in various chat applications such as “Viber”, “WhatsApp” and “Telegram”. Communication with the customer is shifting beyond the more dry and formal sending of emails, which often end up in the spam folder. These groups are deliberately called with the inspiring and inclusive “community” and aim to sell various goods and services through more alternative approaches.

The focus is on building trust and loyalty. Such online “communities” are part of Castels’ (2001: 132) concept of networked individualism – a fundamental shift in the way we organize our social relationships, no longer relying on closed groups such as the traditional family or local work team, but using technology to expand our network of contacts and form social “nodes” that are part of a vast network.

Global nomadic community

When I ask my survey participants how they decide where to go next and why they should go there, many of them use the term “global community” and point out that their social contacts extend all over the world. As Dean (around 50, UK, CFO in banking, coliving owner) describes it: “people you lived with in Bansko for four months could now be in China and in September in Chiang Mai. You might be in a bubble here, but your nomadic community is huge. You show up in Medellin, Colombia, and you’ll meet people you lived with in Bansko. This global network is very,

very, very impressive. I'm always shocked at how deep some of these relationships are, even though people only interact for a few months a year."

Carol (around 50, born in Romania and raised in the UK, real estate agent in Bansko) puts it similarly: "Bansko, Chiang Mai, Barcelona – wherever you go, you look for a coworking or coliving space and you find it. You go there, book accommodation, meet people and immediately make friends. Then you're no longer a tourist, you're in the community. For example, last autumn we were in Fukuoka in southern Japan and because there were about 30% Europeans there, about 100 Japanese and about 100 Asians, I immediately knew about 30 people from Bansko – Europeans and Japanese. So I immediately had friends. Plus, you're in, you go with the community: 'Let's see this castle, let's go to this place for sake, let's go to this restaurant.'" You are actually with friends in a new place, and some of your friends are local."

When I ask him what he thinks a nomad community is, Martin (around 50, Germany, entrepreneur and coworking space owner) remembers how "just yesterday I was talking to someone from my team about how cool it is when you travel around the world and arrive, say, at a coworking space in Asia, and you meet your friends from Bansko. You are very, very, very free in your travels, but you can also feel this community and see familiar faces. You can communicate, do something together – be in a community, not just any community, but a community that shares the same values. You can call it a "bubble," but at least the bubble will be very nice."

It strikes me that the respondents are generalizing – that you can "go anywhere," be "very, very, very free" – while in reality they travel on certain "tracks," part of the infrastructure in every sense of the word. – social, physical, etc.

Another question we discuss is when and why a community breaks up. Several respondents share that in their opinion it is not about breaking up, but about evolving.

Mira (around 30 years old, Bulgaria, marketing specialist and entrepreneur): "In my opinion, this is a completely normal development of a community. When such a community is created, for example, 5-10 people are together all the time. And when it starts to grow with hundreds of people, it is normal – different interests, different personalities, to divide into different groups, there is nothing wrong with that. In La Palma, this is exactly how things happened. Before, there was only one coworking space. Everyone gathered in one place, and then, when other offices

started to be created, more and more events, more and more people, etc., naturally different centers of the community were formed, but it still looks like a whole.”

In Bansko, a similar situation was observed in July 2019, right after the festival, when the “Coworking 1” team stated its position that this was an “exclusive community with a participation fee” and that in order to ensure that all participants of any event in or outside the coworking space

share the same values and abide by these rules, strangers are not welcome at the events. “But of course, bring your friends into the space to become part of our community,” the team urges in a post on its online channel.

In destinations such as Bansko, the Canary Islands, Bali, nomadic networks often function on the principle of “carnival communities” – a term with which Bauman (2000, 2001) foreshadows the temporary and fragmented social structures of our time. They are intense, event-oriented and short-lived, offering support on demand and a sense of belonging, but without the heavy commitments of traditional groups. They are therefore the social equivalent of carnival – a space where, for a certain period of time, the individual immerses himself in shared euphoria and common interests, after which the “masks” are taken off and everyone continues to the next node in his global network.³⁶

This “carnivalness” is closely related to networked individualism. The digital nomad often does not seek permanent integration, but rather engages in relatively superficial, albeit stimulating, “offline-online” interactions. Physical distance is overcome thanks to technology, but

For a detailed review of how Bauman’s concepts of “liquid modernity” and “carnival community” relate to digital nomadism, see Višić 2025. I agree with him that “Bauman’s metaphorical framework, developed before the emergence of this contemporary phenomenon, still provides an analytically powerful tool for understanding it” (ibid., 373).

Social proximity is replaced by fluid, “liquid” connections that are both easy to establish and easy to break.

Festivals and diverse events are part of the “funnel” through which new members of the digital nomad community flow. Gustavo (around 40, Portugal, entrepreneur and volleyball player) tells me: “I was a nomad for a long time, but I didn’t have a community, so I decided: ‘Okay, so I have to start going to these events because I’m sure I’ll meet people there’. And that’s exactly what happened – from the first event until now I’ve been

meeting some of the same people, we're planning together and it's just... wow!" We will explore the dimensions of eventfulness in the next part of the chapter.

3.2. Eventfulness as a tool for cohesion

Here I focus on the role of several periodically organized events in Bansko in consolidating a community of digital nomads. I analyze them through the prism of two terms – eventfulness and festivalization.

Eventfulness

According to Spracklen and Lamond (2016: 9) an event could be seen as “a lingua franca through which a certain set of people try to communicate, shape and define the world around them”. Here, the focus is on identity and the common values/goals that the participants share. This is also confirmed in the work of Nehl and Landau-Donnelly (2025), who studied the periodically held events of the European network of cultural centers “Trans Europe Halles” and concluded that these events focus mainly on community building, provide the necessary space for joint actions and are characterized by cohesion and particular intensity. The meetings provide an opportunity for the growth of the network and the implementation of future events.

Eventuality is the process of turning the ordinary into the special, of organizing and emphasizing events in order to attract attention, to strengthen the building of (micro) communities/subgroups, to carry out marketing and/or to create an experience. This often involves planning, presenting and creating high points of engagement. In her dissertation on the construction of micro-communities in the early 21st century, Popcheva (2023: 296) concludes that eventfulness plays a significant role in intra-group life and that intra-group relationships are primarily influenced by it, not by location (*ibid.*, 309). My observations of digital nomads who came to Bansko confirm this, as well as two other related conclusions made by Popcheva:

- (1) that eventfulness is a mechanism for overcoming crises, as well as concomitant mental states such as loneliness and fear (*ibid.*, 352);
- (2) that the desire for intense and direct contact forms a social environment saturated with eventfulness (*ibid.*, 356).

Festivalization

Eventfulness goes hand in hand with festivalization – the tendency to use festivals with diverse themes (music, dedicated to a certain culture,

gastronomic, etc.) as tools for marketing settlements and their adjacent businesses and for attracting tourists. McClinchey (2008) points out that one of their functions, among other attractions attractive to tourists, is to contribute to the restoration and/or development of places. Destination marketing is a result of neoliberal political movements and festivals are often part of a destination branding strategy, with the aim of creating/establishing a unique environment associated by the consumer with creative and dynamic images (Waite, 2008). The contradiction is that many festivals aimed at a mass audience, including foreign audiences, are characterized by not being specifically connected to the given place and with an authentic cultural experience (McClinchey: 252-253 cites MacLeod (2006), who defines them as placeless), respectively

leading to standardization and homogenization. "Festivalization – the exploitation of festivals for the purpose of marketing destinations and attracting tourists – is a cause for concern for many who fear the commodification of culture and the loss of cultural authenticity," warns McClinchey, *ibid*.

An interesting parallel is that just as digital nomads insist on being independent of their location, the same applies to the content of the festivals they attend. Although visitors are attracted to and enjoy the specific destination (in this case, the relatively cool summer Bansko with its Renaissance spirit combined with globalization and cosmopolitanism), the thematic content and accompanying activities are similar to those of many other digital nomad festivals around the world (see the list in the section on "Bansko Nomad Fest"). The events in its program are clearly focused on the global, not the local.

Globalization vs. authenticity

MacLeod (2006: 223) links the term "authenticity"³⁷ with "community" and "place" and outlines the widely accepted view that postmodernism

In the social sciences and the mass media, the discussion about authenticity has been particularly relevant in recent decades. However, its detailed consideration remains beyond the scope of this monograph due to space limitations. For a more in-depth review, see Petrova (2022) and Dimitrova (2025).

and more precisely one of its fundamental characteristics – physical and social mobility – has led to a rupture between people and their connection with places, to a distancing from the places and communities in which they grew up. However, the author points out that these people, peculiar wanderers, participate in new forms of social life and enjoy places in a

new way, finding a sense of community among their companions – other wanderers.

MacLeod (2006) cites a work by Relph from the distant 1976, which, however, is still relevant today, especially for digital nomads. Relph explores the strong connection between people and places – how places are saturated by their inhabitants with meaning and identity. Individuals have strong associations with the places of their childhood and the settings in which they have had significant life experiences. The sense of place is largely determined by whether one is an insider or an outsider, by one's belonging (Relph 1976: 49). In this line of thought, global communication as we know it in the 21st century is transforming the individual's sense of place. "If postmodern society is characterized by the dislocation of people from their temporal and spatial identities, then it can be argued that the postmodern condition is one of 'placelessness'. This dislocation in turn gives rise to an emphasis on consumption and the need to construct a way of life. (...) The wider choice

of consumer goods and services and their accumulation can be seen as creating meaning because the consumer identifies with a desired way of life or community. (...) The connection to place is increasingly based not on knowledge but on consumption. Tourists therefore increasingly inhabit landscapes inhabited not by 'real' communities but by temporary collectives" (MacLeod 2006: 226).

However, rather than being alienating and artificial, this phenomenon can be a source of comfort for tourists. As Relph (1976: 33) suggests, "in contemporary Western society we feel at home when we are with people of similar interests, regardless of the specific place we are in." Rather than being disorientated, travelers may experience an increasing sense of familiarity during their travels. The standardized, Westernized festivals they attend may be deliberately attracting a certain type of visitor, actively seeking the company of like-minded people rather than that of local communities, and may deliberately exclude local people. The promotional materials for such festivals are designed and distributed in such a way that they reach "only those who are already tuned in to the right wave", and the pricing ensures that the desired audience will prevail (MacLeod 2006: 231). Another way to screen out the desired audience is through the language in which digital nomad events are advertised and held – most often English, as it is widely spoken by the target audience and is one of the unifying factors. The "experience" is accessible and can be "bought", so it should bring the visitor out of his bubble. At the same time, however: "If you only go to digital nomad events and festivals, it's as

if someone else has decided for you what your lifestyle should be. You lose the opportunity to choose what you like. (...) I want to be in Bansko and relax, to enjoy the area in an authentic, normal and spontaneous way. It's important to connect with the city and the locals, and not just be there for the other nomads," warns my respondent Casey (around 40, Finland, social anthropologist).

Bennett and Woodward (2014) describe the festival environment as a space for articulation, performance and reinvention of identity. Visitors are attracted by the opportunities there to access experiences that resonate with their established tastes, as well as to acquire new competencies in this environment, which is comfortable, safe and where risk is low. This is largely due to the fact that they are surrounded by like-minded people with similar interests. There is a consumption of experiences described as "unique" and "unforgettable". But are they really so?

In relation to the value of digital nomads' "personal development" described in Chapter One, it is important

to note that they perceive the festivals they attend as alternatives to mass culture. As Sala (2015: 8, cited in Stoilova 2021: 75) writes, this type of festival focuses on giving something more, something beyond the commercial entertainment that big events offer - it can be transformation, a message to the world or a message of personal growth, something that requires more than crowd management and ticket sales. It requires a special focus, an intention that goes beyond the materialistic and consumerist. This "something" is expressed in the opportunity for attendees to communicate with others, to participate and to affirm their identity as digital nomads. An example is the "unconference" sessions scheduled in the afternoons of the festival - meetings/discussions initiated by the participants, covering a variety of topics.

"Bansko Nomad Fest"

The first edition of the digital nomad festival "Bansko Nomad Fest" is organized by the team described in Chapter Two "Coworking 1" with the aim of further promoting Bansko as a destination for digital nomads. Although the coronavirus pandemic is in full swing, the measures in Bulgaria are not so strict in the summer and allow the festival to be held from June 29 to July 5, 2020, predominantly outdoors, and for

presentations in the community center - the capacity of the hall is several times larger and empty seats are expected between the attendees. At that

time, festivals in the Western world were almost non-existent, which made the one in Bansko attractive.

As my respondent Judith (36, Germany, psycho- and hypnotherapist), part of whose story I described in the first chapter, tells: “I lived in Hamburg a year and a half ago and worked in a coworking space. It was the beginning of the pandemic and a friend told me about the festival in Bulgaria: “We have to go!”. I was surprised: “Wait, there’s an event in Europe? Public?! During the pandemic?!” In Germany there was a very strict lockdown, and I am more of the people who believe in nature. What they were doing in Germany was against my values. And when she said: “Let’s go”, I said: “I will!”. (...) This is the most intercultural event I have ever been to. There were people from Japan, Canada, South America, Europe. And also different ages, from 20 to 70. The diversity was huge, so Bansko is definitely a place for the whole world.”

His impressions are confirmed by Damian (about 35, Bulgaria, IT specialist and coworking founder), who tells me that: “Other countries, developed countries with colleagues from coworking spaces, send people to this summer festival to do interviews and find out how Bansko has developed, so that they can offer the same program in their cities. I have talked to

people from Japan and Korea who ask specifically to learn this thing.”

In 2021, the festival attracts three times more visitors – over 300, compared to 100 in 2020. According to the organizers, in 2022, 500 people will come, in 2023 – 700, and in 2024 and 2025 – about 1,000. In all years, the program combines presentations by dozens of speakers on topics such as remote work, entrepreneurship, productivity and nomadic lifestyle, as well as activities such as tourism, rafting, mountain biking and hiking, campfires in the forest and various evening performances with the participation of ticket buyers.

After a change of ownership, in 2024, the company of the same name, which is responsible for the festival, is divided between 7 partners. One main co-owner is actively involved with the team and its management, while the others are involved in specific topics. Karol (around 50, born in Romania and raised in the UK, a real estate agent in Bansko) tells how he decided to become part of the co-owners. “Since I was a sponsor even before the festival was sold out, I started to get involved in this philosophy. At the first festival, I sponsored them because I wanted to advertise my real estate company. I was looking for unconventional ways to do more marketing. At that time, we didn’t have that many sales and I

thought to myself, “These foreigners are coming to Bansko, maybe they’ll want to buy a property.” His guess is correct.

and is also confirmed by the participants in the discussion “Bulgaria as a place for digital nomads to live”, according to one of whom “after every “Nomad Fest” I hear stories about a few more nomads who bought apartments in Bansko”. Carol continues: “When Martin decided to sell the festival, we decided to buy it. Ulrich told us that he wanted to buy it and then invited some friends. Each of these friends has their own business – they are also in the field of marketing, entrepreneurship, they know their stuff. So we bought it to keep it alive because we think that it gives really great value to the city in economic terms, but it also gives value to the community – because you meet nomads everywhere (during the festival – b.m., P.D.), so if I go somewhere in the world in these communities, I already know 20-30 people, so I am not a tourist when I travel around the world. (...) Ulrich invited people who are already in this business, have their own business and are in this community. I have only been in the community for about 7-8 years, and there are those who have been for 10-20 years.”

As part of my fieldwork, I attend and participate in the “Bansko Nomad Fest” 2025. In addition to numerous respondents, I have the opportunity to communicate in-depth and informally with several anthropologists from Western Europe and the USA, who present their work in a discussion on digital nomadism on the last day of the week-long program. I meet them at the opening of the

festival in the city park in Bansko, where there are several hundred attendees. The organization of entering the fenced festival area and the online registration of each ticket holder takes several hours and is quite stressful, with typical disruptions for such an event. And then, as on the following days, the security guards do not monitor for those passing by without a ticket in any of the three locations – the park, the community center hall, and the hall in the tourist information center.

The festival area is full of representatives of various countries, cultures and organizations. Tents are planned for each of the sponsors and collaborators, including coliving and coworking spaces, insurance and accounting companies, real estate companies, etc. representatives of the infrastructure for digital nomads, analyzed in Chapter Two.

The opening Sunday concert at 8:00 PM develops into a party after sunset. The city park is charming - with lots of water, greenery, including ancient trees, and in addition to nomads, it houses many locals, most of whom,

however, do not know what exactly the festival is taking place, nor show any interest in it. This is a clear confirmation of the theories of MacLeod (2006) and Bennett and Woodward (2014) described in the previous part of the chapter. The presented theory about globalization and the lack of uniqueness is also confirmed.

My respondent Damian (about 35 years old, Bulgaria, IT specialist and founder of a coworking space) is not

the only one who says “it’s been watered down a lot and there’s no exclusivity anymore.” The criticism is that the topics are too diverse, and most of the speakers are not established and recognizable names in their industry. If you haven’t been to Bansko Nomad Fest, you can find the same content and similar speakers at another festival for digital nomads – for example, the festivals of the same name in Bosnia, Athens, Switzerland. Damian also tells me about the dissatisfaction of people who bought tickets a few years ago when they learned that some of the presentations were published on Bansko Nomad Fest’s video channels on social networks and YouTube.

Gustavo (around 40, Portugal, entrepreneur and volleyball player) also outlines the problem of “dilution”: “I decided to organize a conference in Portugal because DNX and Nomad Summit no longer existed and only Bansko Nomad Fest remained, which is everything and nothing at the same time. It covers a whole range of topics – from how the stars aligned for me to become a nomad, all the way to artificial intelligence. But I really missed the conversations we had at the Bali conference. I really missed this: how to do your taxes right, how to grow as an entrepreneur.”

Here I will present the thematic areas covered at the nearly 270 events during the Bansko Nomad Fest 2025 – both by the official speakers and by the participants in the afternoon “non-conferences”, where participants themselves lead sessions to discuss

issues, share experiences and learn from each other. On the first day of the festival, a pitching session³⁸ is held, where over 100 people from Bulgaria, Korea, Japan, Italy, Brazil, the Philippines, Hungary, Guatemala, Romania, Spain, Georgia, South Africa and the United States present their idea, project or business for 30 seconds and invite those interested to come to a specific tent at a specific time to learn more.

ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND BUSINESS

“Grow your business by working LESS!”

“Lessons learned when buying a company – the journey
of a solo entrepreneur”

“What remote business to start?”

TIME MANAGEMENT & ORGANIZATION

“Free Up 100+ Hours: What to Eliminate,
Automate, and Delegate”

“Analog Tracking and Scheduling System for
Digital Nomads”

“Tips for Adjusting to Different Time Zones”

MARKETING & SALES

“How to Advertise on Social Media
Without Wasting Your Money”

“How to Turn Your Offer into a Story
People Want to Buy”

“Sell More with Practical AI: 3 Tricks”

A short presentation of an idea, project, or business to potential investors, stakeholders, or customers, in order to pique their interest and secure their support.

PUBLICITY & BRANDING

“The Power of Visibility: Branding Yourself
(and Your Business) on LinkedIn”

“How to pitch yourself to brands and get more
sponsorships”

“The Power of PR: Simple and Clever Ways to Help
Your Business Grow”

SOCIAL MEDIA & CONTENT

“40 Million Views and 3,000+ Social Media Engagements for Free!”

“From Social Media Back to Social Networks”

“Let’s Create the Best Social Network for Digital Nomads Together”

START-UP CREATION AND PITCHING

“Nomad Startup Competition”

“Startup Fundraising: Tips for Founders”

“5 Startups Before I Turn 25: My Adventure as a Hacker”

TECHNOLOGY AND ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

“Evolve or Be Replaced: How to Future-Proof Yourself in the Age of the AI Revolution”

“How to Train an AI Team to Advertise Your Company”

“AI in Action: Automate Your Business”

COMMUNICATION AND SOCIAL SKILLS

“Make It Funny: 5 Humorous Tricks to Take Your Work to the Next Level”

“Authentic connection”

“Evening of improvisation and stand-up comedy”

NOMAD LIFESTYLE

“Beyond the Passport: Legal Tools for a Hassle-Free Nomadic Lifestyle”

“Nomadic Families” “How to Find a Sense of Home in an Ever-Changing Reality”

TAXES AND FINANCIAL FREEDOM

“Nomadic Life Without Taxes”

"Taxes and Forming a US Company for Non-US Digital Nomads" "Getting Out of the Tax Trap: The Ideal Business Structure for Digital Nomads Who Hate Paperwork"

REAL PROPERTY INVESTMENT "Real Estate Investments in Bulgaria for Nomads"

"Real Estate Secrets in Bansko: Become a Property Owner" "Property Investment Opportunity in the UK - Looking for a £150,000 Investment"

PSYCHOLOGY AND PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

"The Psychology of the Entrepreneur"

"From darkness to digital nomadism: how this community saved my life."

"Overcome your fears to do bold, amazing things"

HEALTH

"How to stay healthy while traveling: a digital nomad doctor's guide"

"Biohacking for beginner nomads"

"Digestive health online meeting"

YOGA & MEDITATION

"Wake up and move yoga"

"Calming yoga"

"Grounding meditation"

COMMUNITIES & CO-LIVING

"Misconceptions about co-living"

"Building a community for entrepreneurship"

"What makes a co-living community?"

ADVENTURE

"Overland Travel Adventures"

"Inventive Ways to Travel the World Without

Paying for Accommodation"

"Snowboarding in Central Asia"

CULTURE & SOCIETY

"Why Don't We Talk to the Locals?" – a conversation about what we might be missing"

"Beyond the labels: Iraq, Iran, Syria and Afghanistan through the eyes of a traveler"

"Japan Night: Try Japanese Food in Bansko"

DESTINATIONS

"Why Malta? Living, Working and Thriving There"

"Bulgaria as a Place for Nomads to Live"

"Why Korea? Discover the Magic of Working Holidays in Busan"

WRITING AND CREATIVITY

"How to Write a Bestseller"

"User Generated Content for Nomads: How to Create Paid Content (Without Being an Influencer!)"

"Creative Freedom vs. Strategy: Publishing and Promotion in the Digital Age"

It is striking that despite the huge variety of topics, there are no events planned for children of nomads, and there are only a few (and only theoretical) events aimed at traveling families. Two of the organizers tell me that this is intentional and that this is not the target audience. According to Karol (around 50, born in Romania and raised in the UK, a real estate agent in Bansko), however, the festival should attract more young people in their 20s – to this end, there is a discussion about

whether to provide free tickets for students next year, so that they can learn more about digital nomadism and “join this community, it is a safe community, we learn from each other. So in two or three years they will be able to try out so many businesses, jobs and ideas that they will find something that works right away”.

Advance ticket sales for the 2026 Bansko Nomad Fest are underway, immediately after the end of the previous edition. A weekend-only ticket, providing access to networking events, costs 145 euros, a standard ticket is 345 euros, and a business audience ticket is 595 euros. If purchased early enough, tickets are almost half the price, which is aimed at attracting a large number of participants in time.

In September 2025, a table with the types of activities that will be included in the program by day has already been published. In line with the audience's value for an active and healthy life,

every morning there are yoga, stretching, fitness classes and guided meditation.

Part of the event is dedicated to the B2B industry³⁹ – there are several options for business and networking breakfast, lunch and dinner.

The main part of the program is made up of presentations, with over 50 speakers on two stages, covering the thematic areas listed above in the description of “Bansko Nomad Fest” 2025. “Non-conference” events that have proven to be interesting and useful for the audience are also planned.

The afternoons offer group activities such as hiking, mountain biking, rafting, ATV riding, horse riding, wine tours and a visit to the Rila Monastery, while the evenings continue in the same community spirit – game nights, speed dating, comedy and improv theatre, karaoke, acoustic and techno parties, as well as pool and campfire parties.

Other events for digital nomads

One of the advantages of Bansko, which respondents massively point out, is that there are constantly events of interest to a digital nomad happening here. This is confirmed both by my observations and by the “Bansko” application, which I use during the festival – there is a program uploaded there, along with a description of each event and a presentation of its host. I am surprised to find that even after the end of the festival and the corresponding explosion of festival events, this application continues to publish some of the events aimed at the same audience. In this part, I

will look at a few examples revealing how a community is maintained and how/whether the participation of members is monetized.

SERIES OF EVENTS

“MARKETING MEETINGS”

In their ethnographic study of digital nomadism in Bali, Woldoff and Litchfield (2021: 143) cite a respondent, a marketing professional, who admits to holding skill-sharing sessions not only for the altruistic purpose of sharing knowledge with the community but also to generate business opportunities, contracts, and potential employees for his agency. The two authors describe a “skill-sharing” event format that is widespread among digital nomads. It is a 1–2-hour group gathering, usually in a coworking space, where a member of the community teaches a specific aspect of their expertise to others for free or for a donation. Woldoff and Litchfield emphasize that the higher function of skill-sharing sessions is to bring the community together and that they combine several important aspects for nomads – learning and development, along with promoting cohesion and community spirit. In addition, in addition to demonstrating their generosity and willingness to cooperate and share, participants in such events build their reputation. My respondent Iva (around 40, Bulgaria, marketing specialist) says that for more than a year now she has been organizing meetings where marketing approaches and innovations are discussed. “And since many of the nomads are in the marketing field, they have something to share. The attendees are usually marketing experts plus people who want to do marketing. It’s an open conversation, so to speak. And my intention was to take them to a different place every week. There’s no commercial side. Just so they know the places, get to know the hosts of those places. I just show them Bansko.” Before the coronavirus pandemic, Iva was a digital nomad with a home base in Indonesia. She was coming home to be close to her parents, and then she heard her friend recommend “You should check out Bansko, you like communities and you thrive in communities.” In 2021, Iva volunteered for the Bansko Nomad Fest and believes it has changed her life: “I don’t even have to travel to get to know the world because I meet new people with experiences every day.”

Karol (around 50, born in Romania and raised in the UK, a real estate agent in Bansko) also proudly points out the many events that take place every week: “You can go to salsa, to Pilates. Every Monday in a different tavern there is

a nomad dinner where you can meet other people in the city. You can go to this dinner, say: "I'm so-and-so" and immediately create friendships and connections. Every Tuesday or Wednesday there is a meeting of marketers, which is organized in the different coworkings and coworkings. They talk about website optimization, about artificial intelligence tools or about a specific type of marketing. They announce a few days before what the topic will be for the next week and if you are interested – you go and listen. There is a presentation, you can ask questions, they give you feedback. And this is like a funnel for the community, for new people who come."

It is worth noting that such events largely contradict the anti-consumer values of the nomads and question their authenticity – they emphasize that they are moderate and conscious consumers, but they are not shy about using and educating themselves about marketing approaches that provoke consumerism.

"BANSKO NOMAD FRINDGE FESTIVAL"

As an opposition to the commodification and constant sale of all kinds of events, in 2025 the owners of "Coliving 1" and "Coworking 3" organize for the third time the two-day and free "Bansko Nomad Frindge Festival" (translated: an atypical, out-of-the-mainstream festival for digital nomads), which takes place during the "Bansko Nomad Fest". The Facebook description of the alternative "festival" (I put it in quotes because it's more of a gathering) says that it's an event that "enriches your mind and soul with engaging discussions with diverse nomads from around the world." Topics include: tantra and sexual pleasure, climate change, coping with anxiety and panic; longevity and anti-aging; scuba diving; "nomad parents: how to stay sane while traveling with your family," the perils of spirituality; minimalism; concepts of home.

"Come for the knowledge, stay for the community! Whether you're a local, a long-time nomad, or just passing through, this event is a perfect way to connect with like-minded people and immerse yourself in topics that matter. No commercial pitches, just pure passion!" – the event's text assures us. It affirms the belief that not everything in a community can and should be paid for; that an inspiring conversation between like-minded people is something normal and it is unacceptable to monetize it. One can also sense the conviction of the owners of "Coliving 1" and "Coworking 3" that through such informal events they attract suitable new members of the community.

Here is what the organizer Dean (around 50, UK, CFO in the banking sector, owner of a coliving) thinks on the subject: "For us, the key is the length of stay and the size of our community. The question arises

whether some events are useful. Many of the young people who run coliving spaces believe that this is very, very, very important. I think they are wrong. If our mission, our goal, our job is to organize activities for every day of the week and say: "Oh, today is Tuesday - board game night. Oh, today is Sunday - we will watch a movie. Oh, today is Friday - we will have dinner together" - then we suffocate our guests, literally suffocate their creativity. We put them on a schedule that we think works. Betty would probably agree with me that if you really want to build a community, the key is to facilitate the desire of your guests to build a community. For example, one of our guests really wanted to do an event about conscious communication and said, "I've never done an event before, can you help me?" And I agreed. Now that's organic community building. People say, "Oh, wouldn't it be nice if..." and we say, "Yes," and we help them make that happen. But if we impose our personality on them, that's not community, it's dictatorship. And it's all about our ego, our desires, our personality. I think that's very toxic. I spent hundreds of euros on board games and a beautiful poker set, but I don't organize a board game night. But if the guests say, "Let's do a board game night," I'll say, "Oh, yeah." We have the infrastructure - a big space, nice, comfortable. Games, drinks. You make it enjoyable, you make it easy and you allow them, you make it easy for them, to create a community. Many, many community managers miss this, they impose something on their guests - and these people don't come back".

Another of my respondents - Ben (around 40, UK, IT specialist) - who is a former digital nomad, who has been living in Bansko for 5 years, describes to me with disappointment that in his opinion a large part of the people participating in the endless series of events are "fake due to the transient lifestyle", and explains: "Zero authenticity. It's not malicious, it's unconscious. They interact as if they are making business contacts. The human side of things is missing. Today they are very friendly, but tomorrow they will ignore you. It's interesting how they treat each other when they have nothing invested in their relationship. It doesn't correspond to my state in life and is of no interest to me".

Regarding the feeling of fakeness, Casey (around 40, Finland, social anthropologist) shares her experience: "especially if you go to Asia, to places that are nomadic centers, so many people are selling you experiences, communities, everything. All things that you, as a traveler,

know you can do yourself, and in this case they are double the price.” Her impression confirms the observations of a series of scholars studying digital nomadism. As Thompson (2021: 35) emphasizes: “Ambitious digital nomads represent an endless supply of enthusiastic customers, ready to invest in the potential to learn remote work tactics and create networks with other microentrepreneurs.” Monetizing lifestyle and practical advice for expanding potential businesses to remote work and strategic travel often becomes a money-making scheme. The dream of remote work is sold to another group of ambitious people – and that’s how the seller finances his lifestyle.

VISITS TO HOT POOLS

I’ll end this part with a pleasant and recreational story about a group visit to one of the hot mineral pools in the neighboring resort village of Banya. This activity has proven itself over time as a positive factor in building the nomadic community in Bansko and is usually followed by a shared dinner in a provenly good restaurant. I learn a curious fact from my respondents: Bulgaria is second only to Iceland in terms of the number of hot springs. Martin (around 50, Germany, entrepreneur and owner of a coliving space) has negotiated prices of 7.50 euros per person in one of the complexes in Banya and many nomads come regularly, attracted by the large hot pool with an aesthetic appearance that suits their preferences – instead of typical pool tiles, it is lined with real stones, and the surrounding area is dominated by wood and greenery. Even through the fences, there are no other buildings to be seen,

only coniferous hills and the high, snow-capped peaks of the Pirin Mountains. When I find myself there with a group of digital nomads, even though it is Palm Sunday, there are only a few other visitors on Sunday afternoon. Our group consists of 10 people, including an Australian man and woman, a Bulgarian woman (one more besides me), a Romanian woman and an American. All of them are around 30+ years old, without children, experienced travelers. They are youthful and in good physical shape, obviously health-oriented. We spend the whole afternoon and evening together, discussing all sorts of topics from nomadic life in Bansko and beyond. It amazes me how, in this case too, one topic invariably remains aside. Since I find it particularly important, we will discuss it in the next part of the chapter.

3.3. The Local Community

and Digital Nomads

Driven by the belief that a researcher cannot understand global phenomena without paying attention to their local dimensions, while conducting my fieldwork in Bansko, I am always interested in the attitudes and practices not only of digital nomads, but also of local people. I take time and purposeful efforts to focus on the reality of Bansko residents. I walk not only in the center, but also in the outskirts and countryside of the city, talk to people, sit on benches in front of their houses, eat in restaurants whose customers

are locals, or I deliberately visit established tourist restaurants, but not so much to observe the customers, but to talk to the service staff – waiters, managers, orchestra musicians, etc. The theoretical framework through which I analyze my impressions includes the concepts of “local identity” and “attachment to place”.

Local identity and attachment to place

Boniaiuto et al. (2002: 636) describe two related terms: (1) local identity, which is part of personal identity and is formed on the basis of the physical and symbolic features of the places inhabited by people, and (2) attachment to place – the emotional connection these people have with the places where they live (Fried, 1963). The authors point out that in some cases, due to this emotional connection in combination with economic and other factors, locals may feel as if their identity is under threat and/or they are losing control over their land, and an even stronger attachment to the place may arise. This is confirmed by Fried (2000: 195), according to whom “Attachment to place is deepest when human relationships are embedded in current or past group affiliations and identities, and becomes more intense when the identified groups

are in clear opposition to an external group that functions as a threat”. In other words, threats to territorial continuity and place-related identity can strengthen attachment to it. When it becomes the object of transformation, there is often a sense of disruption of its continuity, of a kind of discontinuity. The changing local territory could be perceived as something that “others” are trying to take away from “us”.⁴⁰

My respondent Thea (around 60, Bulgaria, condominium and coliving manager) gives an example of how she has had constant relations with the locals for two decades, but has never been able to feel at home among them: “They are difficult people. The neighbors are very well-intentioned towards us. They bring me home-made preserves, pickles, tomatoes from the garden. However, beyond that, they try to be hostile towards foreigners, towards intruders, towards... someone who has invaded their

personal space. And God forbid you get into an argument, they immediately ask you “What are you doing here?”, as if “You are on my territory”.

As a researcher of lifestyle migration from urban to rural environments, it is appropriate to note here that a similar clash is also present in counter-urbanization processes, when new settlers arrive in remote and underdeveloped villages. As Markov (2023: 87) describes, they can behave in a “colonialist” way (they show no interest in in-depth communication with the locals and their practices, they ignore them consciously or not) or “anthropological” way – they not only seek refuge from the tense and stressful urban lifestyle, but also change their daily lives in order to “immerse” themselves in the rural environment. If we draw a parallel with Bansko, digital nomads belong to the first type, although they do not aspire to “colonize”.

Her husband Mikhail (around 60, Bulgaria, former diplomat in Lebanon) explains this by saying that “they were always encapsulated. I was a soldier here during the Sotsa. There was a very weak traction on Shiligarnika. And to the Vihren hut there was a dirt road that took several hours with difficulty in an UAZ. There were no hotels, no places to sleep. There were two establishments in the center – “Momini Dvori” and “Orlovo Gnezdo”.

They both agree: “You will always remain a foreigner among the Banska Bystrica”.

Brower (1980: 180) also writes about “the relationship between an individual or group and a certain physical environment, which is characterized by a sense of ownership and attempts to control the appearance of the space”. The act of exercising control over a certain physical environment is defined as “the appropriation of space” and “attachment” is one of its three elements, along with “habitation” and “protection”. Attachment is defined as “the sense of ownership that an inhabitant has for a particular territory, due to associations with one’s own or social identity” (Brower 1980: 192).

According to Giuliani (2003: 150-153), attachment to place is a broad concept. One aspect of it is the tension between continuity and change, especially in terms of sociocultural processes and norms, and I would add infrastructural and economic ones. A strong sense of local identity, combined with a

sense of abandonment in the sense of being unable to resist change, could be the starting point for a growing polarization both between rural and

urban areas (Zumbrunn et al. 2025) and between the groups/communities that inhabit them, which are increasingly intertwined in the modern globalized world.

Creswell (2001) notes how mobility has often been seen in the past as a threat to normality. The life of the locals is “normal”, respectively, it is difficult for them to perceive constant mobility, it is too different from their life.

Globalization vs. local appearance and identity

Bansko is an example of how local identity is built through a combination of historical, social, economic, geographical and political processes. As I described in the Introduction, this is a city with a long and significant history for the country, its residents are proud of having been a Bulgarian bastion during the Bulgarian National Revival. They are also proud of their Pirin Mountain, which has been a source of resources and sustenance for them for millennia. The local community shares similar values and a similar understanding of identity, which are largely determined by the significance of the place.

Yotsov (2025b), who is not only an ethnologist but also a Bansko resident, describes how at the dawn of the 21st century, the significance of agriculture and nature, along with traditional culture, crafts and way of life, gradually became obsolete and not so necessary. He gives the example of the mass sale of agricultural land and private farms to various investors – although it provides the sellers with economic benefits and relief from the heavy agricultural and livestock tasks, they and future generations are deprived of control over what happens there, control over the transformation. Yotsov emphasizes that in place of the sold-off lands, numerous tourist complexes and facilities appear, which further limit and complicate the connection of residents with nature and its riches. “Nature is increasingly seen as a resource for attracting tourists and for economic development. With the increase in the tourist flow, new hotels, infrastructure and facilities for ski tourism appear, which leads to intensive construction and deforestation of mountain areas. (...) Modern agriculture around Bansko is also changing and decreasing in volume, and traditional agricultural practices are gradually giving way to the development of tourism as the main economic sector” (ibid.).

In another article, Yotsov (2025a: 109) outlines the dual nature of tourism – a carrier of innovation and development, but also of abrupt changes and, consequently, of a loss of the sense of belonging.

local identity. Forced adaptation to the needs of the modern market is required. The author analyzes local identity through the prism of globalization as “a process of increasing connectivity and interaction between different parts of the world, which leads to the exchange of cultures, ideas and economic resources” and emphasizes that this understanding of the concept is most appropriate when considering the processes in Bansko. In the context of local identity, globalization leads to the transformation of local traditions and values, while at the same time provoking reactions to preserve and affirm the uniqueness of the local community.

Several examples from my fieldwork are extremely indicative of the described processes. I will present them in the form of three short documentary fragments.

THE COSMOPOLITAN FESTIVAL AND THE LOCAL LAND

On one of the longest days of the year, June 23, at 6:00 p.m. in the afternoon, the sun is no longer so hot and illuminates the surrounding plain, as well as the Pirin peaks. After the first day of the “Bansko Nomad Fest” 2025, which was full of experiences, presentations and pitching sessions, I leave the center of Bansko with pleasure. I cross the streets with local houses, then the peculiar ring road of the city and take the meadows near the socialist

barracks buildings. After them, I continue straight through the field, on a dirt road.

After the last hotel, the road is shady, cool, and in the ditch flows a rushing water, which the locals use to water their crops – beans, potatoes, corn, here and there and pepper. They come here in their battered cars and take advantage of the evening coolness to work. They are not particularly talkative with me – they are in a hurry to work. From the few lines that I exchange with the people in five or six different fields, it becomes clear that they work the land as a family – “young and old”.

Along the picturesque country road, I also meet foreigners out for an evening walk or a run. It leads to the dam, as well as to the Paligoden Monastery, which the owners of Coliving 2 told me about.

The contrast is huge: between the streets in the center of Bansko with shiny establishments like the 5M Shiney Bar and traditional restaurants like the one I was sitting in with my American colleagues a few hours ago;

and above all between the topics and the air of the digital nomads, who talk all day about artificial intelligence, cosmopolitanism and traveling the world non-stop. Set in this landscape and busy with their physical activity, these local people are so far from the globalized world presented at the festival. They embody the rural idyll and the connection with nature that so many of my respondents yearn for.

ON A BREAK IN THE OLD TOWN

The last day of February is cool, but two colorful elderly women are basking on a bench under the rays of the setting sun. Kina (80+ years old) and Zdravka (70+) live in attached houses in the old part of Bansko. They have wrapped themselves in red, once-woven kitenici, in tune with the atmosphere around them: old-fashioned, but large two-story houses, raised above the narrow paved streets along which tourists stroll. The grandmothers are sitting on the only undeveloped plot of land I saw in the Old Town – between the houses, shops and pubs and very close to the church, a symbol of Bansko.

I ask the two women if they have heard of digital nomads. Zdravka explains that they are “people who have come on vacation, open their computers and work”. Kina calls them “nomads” and makes no connection with classic nomadism.

IN TOUCH WITH TRADITION

The evening of March 2, Sunday, is the Proshka holiday and bonfires are traditionally lit in the area. In “Coliving 5”, where I am staying, there is no announcement of such an event, although it is not even a specific one – such bonfires are organized in several places in Bansko, as well as in neighboring villages. The largest is in the area near the SPA complex “St. Ivan Rilski”, where hundreds of people come, including tourists, and we even get into a traffic jam.

Traditionally, a thick tree is stuck in the middle of the huge pyre. A horo dance is winding around one side, musicians play drums.

I have dinner with Bulgarian tourist acquaintances in a typical local tavern – one of those that the reception at “Coliving 5” warned me about not being recommended and that “it’s not for nomads there”. I check the general nomad groups and chats several times for photos and comments about the holiday, but I never come across anything. In the following days, none of the nomads I communicate with raise the issue.

Given these examples, can we claim that locals and nomads coexist in Bansko, but without interacting much, and if so, why is this so – the answers to this question are in the next part of the chapter.

Foreigners' point of view on locals

A Frenchman is fined for clearing terrain

for climbing in Pirin

At the beginning of May 2025, this news appeared in several regional media outlets, which my respondent Dean (around 50, Great Britain, financial director in the banking sector, owner of a coliving) told me about a little later: "An extremely intelligent and successful young man

who lives in Bansko is very passionate about bouldering - climbing rocks without ropes. He looked around the area and saw huge potential for bouldering. He started cleaning rocks so that they could climb them. Although it was selfish, because he was doing it out of his own interest, in his mind this was a good thing. However, someone reported him to the National Park officials and they arrested him for damaging the park. It became a big scandal. The man wonders: "What the hell?! I can prove that I am doing something good - it is good for Bansko, it is good for the community." I spoke to him last week and tried to bring him back to the real world. I said, "Look, everyone supports you, but you have to operate within the established structure. There's a hierarchy, there's a society, and there's social norms." In his life as a nomad, he hasn't encountered any rules or regulations. If something's uncomfortable, he just leaves and goes to the next place. You want something, you get it. The concept of not being able to get what you want is surprisingly foreign to nomads. They are not used to society saying: "Not really, you have to ask the director of the National Park first. He will say "Yes", but you have to ask".

With this illustrative example, I move on to the topic of foreigners' relations and attitudes towards local people and institutions. In the conclusion to their monograph on digital nomadism in Bali, Woldoff and Litchfield (2021: 186) describe how, apart from a few individuals who try to develop deeper connections with the locals,

"we rarely observed digital nomads interacting with Balinese people as full equals (outside of service-related roles). Moreover, digital nomads largely actively avoided more conventional tourists". The impression of the two authors is completely consistent with my own of the situation in Bansko. For ordinary nomads spending several weeks/months here, such relations are reduced to the minimum possible, and this is confirmed by

the respondents. Only foreigners who spend longer periods in Bansko, or who have settled here permanently and founded their own businesses, delve deeper into my question “What are the relations between nomads and locals?” Here are aspects of the problem, supported by specific stories.

For many visitors to the city, the only and most often limited contact with Bansko residents is when buying and selling goods and services – in the ski/tourist equipment shop, in the bakery, with the cooks or cleaning staff in a restaurant or co-living/co-working space, with the person from whom they buy something every week at the Sunday market. When I discuss this with Frank (around 50, UK, rental property broker and handyman), he notes: “It seems very strange to me that all small entrepreneurs here think in the same way. For example, one opened a flower shop and it was doing quite well. And right next to it, another one opened, and then another. The same thing happened with car washes.

One year you opened one, people saw that there were customers, and immediately more came. There is not much originality. And lately the latest thing that keeps opening is cake cafes. But what about coworking spaces? There are not that many of them. Almost all of them are run or were originally created by people from outside – foreigners.”

Dean (around 50, UK, CFO in the banking sector, owner of a coliving) sums up the situation, confirming my own impression that there are at least two thick-walled social bubbles in Bansko: “Integration with the local culture, with the people who live here, is almost non-existent. You arrive in a country, you travel to seven countries a year. You are here for six or eight weeks. There is a ready-made community of international people like you here. Where is the incentive to interact with the local community?”

As Eddie (around 40, Bulgarian-Israeli origin, owner of coworking and coliving spaces) describes it: “Unfortunately, the members and our entire community in “Coworking 1” and “Coliving 4” have not been able to connect with the locals. There is no connection, the views are different, the language is different, the interests are different, they cannot understand these, and these cannot understand them. Then there is no need to force people. There are Bulgarians who come, who work in digital professions, who are potential customers, right, with a laptop – they come to these events and participate in this society. But they are not so much locals, they are more like travelers.”

Ulrich (around 50, Austria, entrepreneur in the real estate sector) also thinks so: “We have always wanted to attract locals, but the way of

thinking is not the same. That is why it was very difficult to attract locals, even though we offered them “Coworking 1” for free – we knew that they had less money. But that didn’t work either. It was just a mindset thing. People sometimes say that locals are rude or something like that. I explain to them: “Look, these are different people. You have to talk to them. You have to show them and you will see that they are open, they are just very different.”

Vanessa (around 40, Italy, (co)owner of a series of digital nomad events and organizations) is one of the few respondents I interviewed who got to the heart of the problem and why it is difficult and even impossible to solve: “The question is how to present this lifestyle to the locals, which is probably the hardest part. Because they don’t have our communication channels. With digital nomads it’s easy – we have channels and we communicate with them, but with locals I’m not sure if we have such channels. It’s very difficult to explain to them, and explaining is the first and most important step. The second is to do something substantive, a concrete action.” He gives me an example of the Spanish village with 400 inhabitants described in Chapter One, where

for 4 years an NGO has been attracting digital nomads with the aim of a two-way exchange of experience between locals and foreigners and therefore achieving revitalization of the village: “Rooral has been organizing temporary nomad visits here for four years now and they have done it ten times within a year – despite all this, there are still huge difficulties for the locals to welcome nomads into their homes. The reason is that they don’t understand them. They don’t want them, they think it’s too much of a risk. They wonder what these people are who come, they ask themselves: ‘What is this thing? Who are you and what are you fighting for? I don’t get it.’”

Joel (around 30, of Romanian-American origin, online English teacher), who is a former coliving space owner in Sibiu and although he grew up in America, has visited Romania many times and speaks the language with a strong accent, draws a parallel with the locals’ non-acceptance of him as a foreigner. His experience shows that “the best way to have good integration is to organize events in the coliving/coworking space, where locals come regularly and do something there. That way they see the place, they interact with those who live there, and the nomads also get out of their bubble. The locals have a very different, completely different perspective on life. The difference is too big for them to be able to get involved.”

While I agree with the opinions expressed, they do not address something else that is extremely important. The incentive to make such integration happen is

minimal on the part of both locals and nomads and those who build the social and physical infrastructure for them⁴¹. Even if they speak a foreign language perfectly, locals are not the target customers of coliving/coworking spaces and various events. They also see no reason, nor do they consider it necessary/intriguing to delve deeper into the nomadic way of life. Each of the two types remains unknown and misunderstood by the other. I realize that there are exceptions, but the general picture is like this.

If for ordinary Bansko residents it makes no particular sense to delve into the attitudes and lifestyle of their foreign guests, this is not the case at the level of local (and state) government. Since my own repeated attempts to interview representatives of the Bansko municipality were unsuccessful, here I will present its attitude towards foreigners and, more specifically, towards nomads from their point of view.

Damian (around 35, Bulgaria, IT specialist and coworking founder) touches on smaller, everyday problems: “We have talked a lot with the mayor and the municipality, we have passed on information about some complaints of the nomads. They have seen somewhere

Miocevic (2024: 711) gives a positive example of potential interaction between locals and nomads: “The tech community in Split (Croatia), a popular destination for digital nomads, regularly organizes meetings of the type “Locals’n’nomads”. In such a case, the dominant association with the “in-group” (the nomads themselves) can be replaced by a more favorable attitude towards the “out-group” (the locals).

a problem that they want to be fixed – garbage, stray dogs and so on. I help in some way to write the document to the municipality. But now there will be a separate channel specifically for nomads to report such problems to the municipality. A new version of the site is being worked on and there will even be a chat bot with which it will be possible to communicate in different languages”.

Dean (around 50, UK, financial director in the banking sector, owner of a coliving) has a perspective both as a citizen and as a person who, after 12 years of living in Bansko, in 2015 ran for municipal councilor from the list of the “Reformer Bloc” coalition. He defines himself as “very, very active in local politics for 20 years” and emphasizes that he maintains friendships with the former and current mayor. According to Dean: “It’s

basically a difficult balancing act for the municipality to do between who shouts the loudest. The ski season is very, very, very important. The schools, the hospital, the roads, the infrastructure are very, very important. 200, 300, 400 digital nomads are basically irrelevant. If any of them wanted to be proactive in the community, the municipality would immediately help. Here's an example. The national park is going to help create a forest fire ranger initiative. They came to me and said, 'Would any of the nomads like to volunteer?' They're very open. Friendly and open if you put in the effort."

Martin (around 50, Germany, entrepreneur and coliving space owner) also realizes that "we overestimate our influence as nomads. We paved the way for digital nomadism – fantastic. We believe that we come to this country, we bring them all our money and they must be very happy. Bansko has really developed as a big nomad destination, but even in this big nomad destination we have about 250 nomads on average. I talked to the mayor and we did a calculation, I said to him: "Mr. Mayor, I believe that I am personally responsible for 5% of Bansko's GDP". And he said: "Yes, Martin, I believe that too". But when you think about what else is going on in Bansko, you realize: "Oh, there are 10,000 tourists! Of course they have a lot more influence than 250 nomads. Also, some of these nomads are frugal. We want to live in long-term accommodation, we don't stay in a Kempinski hotel, but in a cheap AirBnb. We take advantage of the existing infrastructure without contributing to it. And we don't want to pay taxes. I came to Bulgaria to pay 10% taxes, I was like, "Wow, this is amazing, I love paying 10%". I've been here for 10 years now and I think: "10% seems like a lot to me". Martin gives an example of some destination development projects supported at the municipal/national level financially and not only. He mentions my respondent Gustavo (around 40, Portugal, entrepreneur and volleyball player), who "Helps municipalities attract nomads. He has done it in several places – basically, they give him money, he promotes them, and after a year or two they say: 'Thank you very much, Gustavo, goodbye'." And, of course, these projects and destinations die out. Now Gustavo is doing Pipa Beach in Brazil, in Rio, he did Albufeira in Portugal. He helped make things happen, but he got public money, and public money is always a bad thing. In that sense, I am very happy that I am not Bulgarian. Because if I were Bulgarian, I would have to join a local party." Gustavo confirms what Martin said and points out that as a digital nomad, his way of life and work is not perceived well on a political level in the long term – that the authorities do not tolerate maintaining neutrality, they demand taking sides/party and until this happens, they consider the independent worker a threat.

Ulrich (around 50, Austria, real estate entrepreneur) admits his disappointment that the Bulgarian government does not take advantage of his experience and knowledge in promoting nomadic destinations: “Working with the municipality has always been a bit difficult. I remember how before we opened “Coworking 1”, we went to meet the mayor and explained to him: “We are from Austria and we want to open a coworking space. We want to invest in the economy of the region”. He did not help, but he did not create obstacles either. We even have a photo of him cutting the ribbon at the opening. Great, but from today's perspective, I'm being invited to Japan, Malaysia, the Philippines. The authorities there want to copy what we did in Bansko, in Bulgaria, and they want

to attract digital nomads. This has not yet happened in Bansko itself. It is necessary to clarify who this group of people is and how they can influence the place.”

After I specified earlier in the chapter why such a statement is true in theory but not confirmed in practice – due to the closed social bubble and frugal lifestyle of nomads, their small number compared to tourists, the niche nature of digital nomadism in general – it remains to point out one way in which they still contribute significantly.

Carol (around 50, born in Romania and raised in the UK, real estate agent in Bansko) explains: “From the municipality's point of view, some of these nomads have started to like Bansko more and more in the last seven years. They tell the world about Bansko. And they start buying properties. They buy or rent from people, and people pay taxes. Every time you buy a property, 2.5% goes to the municipality. Property tax. So the municipality's budget also increases. Then it has more money for sports facilities, for the city, for everyone”.

What is the municipality's attitude towards the “Bansko Nomad Fest” – the key and most visited event by nomads during the year, thanks to which for a few weeks in June/early July the city is filled with life at a time when tourism levels are usually low?

Karol tells me that the municipality provides the two conference halls for rent and is not a sponsor of the event. He remembers how: “As expected, in the first and second year of the festival, the municipality in Bansko didn't understand what it was, they didn't know what they were dealing with. Then they started to get it. First, when the nomads come, the locals realize that they rent rooms in hotels and guesthouses, in apartments. They go to restaurants and cafes – they spend money in the community. Suddenly you see that some people start to have a little more income in

June, when before there was no work at all, because there were no tourists. When the nomads come, the bars fill up. And the cafes. The supermarkets sell a lot. So that helps.”

Martin (around 50, Germany, entrepreneur and coliving space owner) gives an example of the misunderstanding and underestimation of the importance of the event not only at the municipal level, but also by local people who complain about the excessive noise: “For the festival, we asked the municipality on the opening night to make an exception to the noise rules and instead of 11:00 PM, it would be until midnight. That is within their powers. And they said: “Yes, okay, of course”. But two minutes after 11:00 PM, the police chief comes and says: “Oh, yes, Martin, I know we said we would make an exception to midnight tonight, but the neighbors are complaining. Please stop.” And I say to myself: “Okay, thank you very much for your exception”.

In this part of the chapter, I cannot help but touch on the problem of the language barrier. As much as they are community-oriented and self-contained, nomads still show an interest in local traditions and everyday practices, for example. But because they change countries and languages so often, they have a hard time keeping up, even with learning the phrases they need.

Judith (36, Germany, psycho- and hypnotherapist) tells me: “In the last 12 months we have been in three different countries – Bulgaria, Portugal and England. I barely spoke Portuguese and then I had to switch to Bulgarian. At first my brain was confused and I greeted Bulgarians in Portuguese. My partner has learned Russian, so it is easier for him to get used to it, he can immediately translate or order food. And I am so bad with languages. As a German, I am glad that at least I speak English. Slavic is so different from Latin. You need to stay here for at least a year and not have a child around you, just to learn and talk to people, to try. I am a little ashamed that I still do not speak Bulgarian, because I have been here five times and I can only say “Hello, how are you”. But the effort to learn the language... I don’t know when and how it will happen, especially now with my son and my job, and considering that we are leaving in July... It is definitely a minus, because I remember how when I was in a restaurant, surrounded by locals, I really wanted to talk to them. In order to have this big horizon, we need to talk to

people, and many of the locals don't speak English, and if you can't communicate verbally... For example, our nanny is local and has been with us for months, and her English isn't the best. But because we have time

and patience, suddenly we start to understand each other, and then we realize: "Oh, we are very similar, we like each other."

Audrey (about 35, Norway, English and Spanish teacher) recalls her two-week stay with her daughter in 2024: "None of the locals spoke English, so it was a little difficult to communicate and understand each other. But when you are with international people, more or less that gives you enough communication and connection. We managed. But it's also beautiful that people are in their own environment and stay true to their culture. You don't have to speak English to have a good life."

Betty (38, UK, coworking space owner) addresses the language barrier issue when it comes to foreign children and their relationship with local children. When she decided to move to Bansko permanently and took her 10-year-old daughter with her, she enrolled her in school in the nearby larger town of Razlog. Without prior arrangement, there is another child from England in the class – a few years older, as the small number of classes necessitates mixed-age education: "My daughter didn't speak Bulgarian at all, but she learned it very quickly. And now, nearly five years later, she speaks it perfectly. She talks to her friends. They also speak English very well, so they switch easily between English and Bulgarian. We have always told her that if she doesn't like it here, we don't have to stay, but she prefers that to going back to England. She visits the UK regularly, but she really likes life here. She is like us, in the sense that she likes snowboarding in the mountains and the freedom. It is much safer here. There is a freedom here that she couldn't have safely at home."

Do and how do the locals comment on what is discussed in this part of the chapter? I will present their point of view in the next part.

The Local's Perspective on Foreigners

The first days of my fieldwork in Bansko are spent mostly in conversations with locals and long tours of the center and outskirts of Bansko. Starting from the central Pirin Street, I walk and directly ask the various people who have come out in front of the shops/restaurants where they work: "Do you know that there are digital nomads in Bansko? Do you have such customers?". Most of them immediately answer negatively, which does not mean that they do not have such customers, but that communication with them is limited to the lines necessary for the purchase and sale,

and ends immediately after the transaction. Among the sites visited are places often needed by guests of Bansko – an "EasyPay" cashier, winter equipment and souvenir shops, as well as a second-hand clothing store. In the latter, I spend a long time choosing a scarf, only to predispose the

saleswoman with a conversation and eventually receive a negative answer: "No, this is the first time I have heard of it." I also ask a 30-year-old municipal parking and blue zone worker who works right across from Coworking 1, and he replies: "You see them, they're a bit like drug addicts. They organize something in the summer," referring to the Bansko Nomad Fest.

My tour continues to a wooden souvenir shop, where a 30-year-old man behind the counter knows that there are digital nomads in Bansko, but replies that he "has nothing to do with them." Another young man, who works in a watchmaking workshop, also knows about digital nomads, but describes them as "people who are home office workers," and doesn't associate them with travel.

Locals call coworking spaces "computer rooms" or "offices": "Hey, there's an office nearby, down this street and immediately to the right. It's a pedestrian street, wide, nice, with a stream in the middle. There's a room there that's for nomads, and they gather there, they have computers," a 50-year-old man tells me, with whom I conduct a brief interview, while he stands in front of the entrance to a well-known

an ethno-restaurant right next to one of the most famous bars for foreigners. Here's what else he tells me: "I've talked to such nomads a lot and I'm telling you that there are absolutely from all over the world. There are Americans, there are Argentines, there are Uruguayans, there are Canadians, there are all kinds, for Europe of course. A lot of them come in the winter to ski or snowboard. They buy a season ticket, rent an apartment for the whole season and that's it - they, you know, are on a floating job, they decide it themselves." I ask him if they are different from other tourists: "I haven't asked them what they are interested in, but they are intelligent people, they are pleasant to talk to. From my point of view as a promoter who invites people to the establishment, I see - the people are intelligent and cultured. There is no aggression. They are nice people and that is why I see Bansko in 10 years to be very prevalent. I have asked them specifically how they found out and they say "Through other people like that, from various platforms". Some have told me that also from this German... (referring to my respondent Martin - b.m., P.D.)". He confirms that there is "encapsulation" - digital nomads are in their own (micro)community, they distinguish themselves from tourists.

His colleague, dressed in a Santa Claus costume and inviting tourists to another famous establishment, does not know "what this digital nomadism is", even though he is in Bansko all winter, and disguises himself in a

captain's sailor's uniform all summer and does the same in the Old Town of Nessebar.

Another man in his 30s, an employee of a property management company (rental,

accommodation of tourists, etc.), emphasizes: "They, the nomads, are a closed group. They know the places in the city better than us – where to eat and so on. And they are very stingy. We have experience with tourists – my grandmother used to rent rooms back in the 90s. Tourists are those who come for a week or two. Digital nomads are something else. Here, I have just accommodated a girl – she will stay for 45 days."

A few days later I meet my friend, who has been running a family hotel in Bansko with her husband for 10 years and has even longer experience in the field of alternative tourism. It was built at the beginning of the new century and has not been renovated or refurnished since then. At the beginning of the war in Ukraine, the two decided to open their doors to refugees – women and children, who were allowed to live in the hotel for six months. They collected donations from acquaintances and friends, and also received subsidies from the municipality, but the funds were not enough to cover the costs and pay salaries. In the end, some refugees stayed there for almost three years in rent. The disadvantage is that the apartments depreciate to such an extent that after they leave, it takes several days to fix the problems with the ruined interior.

Given its experience with long-term room tenants, as well as the presence of an industrial kitchen, a sufficiently large common room and a garden, the hotel is suitable for restructuring into a coliving space and my acquaintance, together with her husband, plans for this to happen in 2026.

, with the apartments also being renovated with kitchenettes. In 2025, the two are in the process of applying for a European project with this aim. When I ask her what she thinks is the difference between a hotel and a coliving, she touches on community and sharing events: "The difference between a coliving and a hotel is the question: 'What are we all going to do together on Friday night?'" From her long experience in the tourism industry, she has found that even small gestures "like a bottle of champagne for 4 euros, chocolate for another 2 euros and ice in the freezer, impress tourists and lead to excellent reviews on the internet. The same applies to coliving – it is important that people feel cared for and that their needs are taken into account".

She has found that “having even a small hotel means an enormous amount of work: a lot of cleaning and difficulty finding staff who can cope and are willing to train to a sufficiently high level”. In this vein, he wonders how Martin's “Coliving 6” would function. Yet he admires that he “keeps his word and his business projects succeed” and that he “has the infrastructure to organize events. Some people get annoyed with him for asking for a 15 euro entrance fee, and say: “We'll do it ourselves!”, but in practice it's not that easy. Martin started with a small room and has grown his business.”

Half a year later, my acquaintance contacted me again to share the news of the development and to discuss which name for the future coliving would attract a target group and be perceived best in my opinion. She is about to partner with a French woman – a single mother and nomad with almost a decade of experience, who visited Bansko a year ago and was impressed by it. From October 2025, she will help attract and welcome nomadic families to the unique coliving all year round with a minimum stay of at least one month. Her post on the Facebook group for nomadic families in Bansko emphasizes common activities and building a community:

A weekly organizational round is planned, as the goal is to share our knowledge through activities for both children and parents. And, of course, to plan

outings! Additional one-off activities will

be offered by local residents, such as afternoons with educational games and creative activities

with artists. A teen club will also be established in Bansko (for

young people aged 10, 11 and above). Please note that only 8 rooms are available for rent,

which limits the number of families!

Although many of my respondents travel the world alone, a significant number do so with their families or with one or more children (Korpela 2018). In recent years, Bansko has established itself as a center of attraction for world schooling – this and the phenomena related to it will be discussed in the last part of Chapter Three.

3.4. Dimensions of home and family

Alienation and misunderstanding in the home/place of origin

Following the claim that world travel can be a form of escape, escapism (Cohen and Taylor, 1992), it should be specified that in some cases it is not due not to a personal or professional crisis period that provoked the departure, but to a more general feeling of alienation at home, to an unsatisfactory idea of life before (hyper)mobility. And yet, most of the nomads have to return to their home or homeland sporadically, even for short periods. The topic of home, relatives and loved ones there and the relationships with them is not of particular interest to my respondents and although I raise it in every interview, few of them delve into it. The fact emerges that for these mobile and autonomous travelers, returns home are usually marked, if not with anxiety, then with a disturbing feeling of culture shock and confusion, of alienation and stagnation, of “stopped time”. Cohen (2011) explains this by spending long periods in “traveler enclaves” or “tourist bubbles” (Wilson, Richards 2008) and adopting the values and behaviors associated with them. For example, with their typical inclination towards orientalism, romanticism and the counterculture of the 1960s, travelers profess ideals of freedom, spontaneity and

challenges that are not typical of their settled relatives and friends back home/in their home country.

Woldoff and Litchfield (2021: 169) describe “the spatial distance of nomads from their homes, which is accompanied by an increased social distance from those homes.” Their respondent commented on the remoteness, lack of intimacy with people back home, and the tourist enclaves and bubbles described above as follows: “I do miss some close friends, but not as much as I thought I would. I think that’s true for anyone who comes to Bali and does it long-term – you just feel this lack of connection with your friends back home, and then you start to feel much more connected to your friends here. Then you feel elements of... people being jealous of the things you do. [You feel] disinterest, envy, resentment.”

My respondent Mary (a little over 50, Netherlands, translator) emphasizes that she is very close to her family, that she misses them and that she was “quite happy in the Netherlands. It’s just that it’s: a) very expensive there; b) it always rains; and c) we don’t have mountains. And I’m attracted to places that have mountains. My family and relatives think I’m crazy. They don’t understand my desire. Well, my father understands to some extent. My parents also love to travel – I obviously learned it from them. But for example, my brother, who is five years younger than me, hates to travel.

He always jokes that I inherited all the travel genes in the family. I also have cousins,

who are wonderful people, but they don't understand my desire to travel. They go on vacation for two weeks a year and think that's enough. I think they're crazy. A few years ago we had a serious talk with them. They are married and have children, and I don't have any and never will. I made a conscious decision a long time ago. And they kind of feel sorry for me because I'll never understand what it's like to have kids. "And I feel sorry for you because you work all day, all year, and you don't see the world, and you miss out on fantastic experiences," was my response. I told them it was stupid to judge someone who decided to do something. But they're the kind of people who say, "I have kids, so everyone should have kids." And they also can't put themselves in the shoes of others."

The lack of understanding of sedentary people towards those who prefer (hyper)mobility is also evident in the story of Martin (around 50, Germany, entrepreneur and owner of a coliving space), who has been attending the reunions of his native Germany for five years. "Some of these people are close to me. After all, we made friends as children, very strong friends. I go to them and they say: 'I follow you on Facebook and I have no idea what you do.' They simply don't understand. Most people who live the mass life don't understand how you can live differently. How come at your age you still don't have children, you still have dreams? How? Why?"

My respondents expressed polarised opinions on whether nomadism and raising children are compatible – some, like those quoted above, believe that it is impossible, while others emphasise that being a parent means growing up in a unique way that is not possible otherwise. "Having children is not the most comfortable experience, but it is a growth experience for everyone involved, especially the parents. In a nice way, it forces you to grow up in your mind and heart. So if you want to keep not answering questions and if you don't want to grow up, then not having children is a great model. However, you have to take into account that we all disappear sooner or later if we don't have children" – Arnold (around 50, Germany, tech and social entrepreneur).

Building a home

Laoire et al. (2010: 157, 160) describe the association of the concept of home with a place that inspires security, safety⁴² and a sense of belonging and local identity (it could

Regarding safety, I will share my own observation, supported by an example from the field. One of the presenters on stage at the "Bansko

Nomad Fest” 2025 tells how when he moved to study in Switzerland, he organized a lot of house parties and preferred them to those in clubs or other places, simply because of the atmosphere: “It was a homely atmosphere. It made people feel safe”. My personal experience shows that the so-called homebodies prefer this because control over the environment and stimuli brings them precisely the feeling of safety that is difficult to achieve outside.

to be talking about a specific village/country). As my respondent Gustavo (around 40, Portugal, entrepreneur and volleyball player) puts it: “I love coming back to Bansko. When I do, I already know who is here, the foreigners and the original community managers – and they come at different times. I already know the woman I leave my clothes with for washing. I know the café. I know the restaurants. I can arrive here and feel at home. Even if I stay in a different place each time, I am at home in Bansko.” According to Laoire et al. (ibid.), “home is not only and necessarily associated with a place to which one has moved or from which one has moved, but is expressed in the combination of multiple and complex attachments and detachments at different scales.”

De Loryn (2022: 115) summarizes that for digital nomads, “home can be anywhere in the world, and it becomes even more comfortable if the journey is made with a loved one or at least with objects charged with emotional value.” In addition, the scientist highlights another aspect that facilitates the feeling of being at home anywhere in the world – stable high-speed internet, thanks to which video calls are widely available: “For the first time in human history, it is possible to communicate with the important people in one’s life instantly and almost for free, regardless of where they are in the world. At the same time, this technology allows friends and family members to remain at a comfortable distance, to avoid

uncomfortable discussions or even regression to the previous way of life (...) Keeping in touch with family at home also keeps the doors open in case one needs to seek refuge in times of crisis.” All this is confirmed especially during the coronavirus pandemic, as in the following quote from Judith (36, Germany, psycho- and hypnotherapist): “It makes me sad that my parents don’t see my son that often. They say: ‘You have to do it. Well done. Good!’, although my father was very skeptical at first. But he sees how satisfied we are and how we send loads of photos from different places. Today, with WhatsApp, we can share everything. And they really travel with us. (...) He also visited us in Portugal, and now he is coming in April for our son’s second birthday.”

Mancinelli (2018: 309-310) examines the concept of home in relation to tourism and migration, which themselves presuppose that the individual has a home. In the Western world and beyond, “there is an ideological connection between home and the limited, physical space that we usually call ‘home.’ It becomes a place for narratives and expectations about class, wealth and family composition (...) a powerful marker of status (...) home embodies a normative order in society, as it signifies stability in the form of a financial asset to demonstrate the solvency of citizens and their ability to earn a living”.

Accordingly, the distinction of digital nomads from this framework generates misunderstanding and disapproval from those who are settled.

Mancinelli (ibid.) continues with the fact that “home” and “outside” are usually considered in a dichotomy – home is a point of departure and a static and symbolically charged opposite of the location one sets out to. However, this ceases to be an adequate juxtaposition when travel is not a temporary experience but a permanent way of life. Although for (hyper)mobile individuals home is not a building, it continues to be a place of residence, a place where stories and relationships intertwine. However, it becomes a mobile entity, a “structure that can be created anywhere” (ibid.).

Exploring the circumstances that led respondents to adopt a location-independent lifestyle, Mancinelli finds that the choice to become mobile is the result of two main reasons: excessive work pressure and the desire to spend more time with their children. This brings us to those digital nomads who have decided not only to have children, but also to continue traveling with them, rather than settling down.

Traveling with children

Hello!

We are a small creative family from Estonia with two children (aged 11 and 13) and we are planning to spend some time in Bansko this autumn. I work as a web developer

in the creative field and I am flexible in terms of location – and Bansko sounds like a beautiful place to combine work, family life and a little inspiration.

We would be happy to find out if there are other families around this season and if there are any activities or groups where the children can connect with other children.

We are also looking for a comfortable and affordable apartment for this period - any recommendations are welcome.

Hello! We are here in Bansko until the end of October.

My daughter is 12. We would love to meet.

Hello! We are a Japanese family traveling around the world. We arrived in Bansko about two weeks ago. We have a daughter (13). I will write privately.

Hello!

If you would like to stay in a small worldschooling community in Bansko, we will open a coliving for nomadic

families in early October. We are now three

families with children between the ages of 8 and 14. You will find more information in this article (Sorry,

it is in French, but you can translate it or

contact me for more information!).

Similar posts and subsequent exchange of comments are common in the Facebook group for foreign families with children in Bansko, of which I am a member. This is one of my virtual terrains, where in September 2025 there were 3,600 users and daily activity. I have met the administrators several times during my visits to Bansko and have been part of events organized by them and their like-minded people. Before I started my fieldwork in the city, I did not know about the existence of a community of digital nomads with children there. However, it turned out that about a third of my respondents are such. In this and the next part of the chapter, I will present and analyze their life practices and attitudes.

According to Murray and Cortés-Morales (2019: 2-3), childhood, as well as mobility, do not exist independently, but are the product of connections and interactions. In this sense, children's mobility is built through relationships between them and other people, spaces, times, materials, representations, etc. The authors point out that children's mobility is

extremely significant within the broader understanding of mobilities, but is poorly researched and theorized. It includes multiple aspects, including not only physical travel and security, but also intersecting flows of bodies, objects, spaces, ideas, communications and representations. We move towards, away from or because of someone, something or somewhere (ibid., 260).

Mclachlan (2007: 234-5) notes that parents and children who move frequently between countries are not passive agents, but are aware of the dilemmas arising from the constant change of places and develop a relative resilience to them. Such families use a range of strategies to overcome difficulties, the aim being not only to survive but also to thrive. Regularly leaving one country for another, they live in a constant state of impermanence and transition – moving or changing from one place, state, condition to another (Wallach, Metcalf: 1994).

Mclachlan (ibid.) focuses on individuals who have spent a significant part of their formative years in one or more countries outside the one indicated in their passport, most often because of their parents' profession. The term to describe them is "third culture children", coined by Pollock and Van Reken (1999: 13), who argue that such children often develop connections with all the cultures they have lived in, but do not feel fully at home in any of them. They grow up in different cultures, following their parents who are transferred due to their professions – military, diplomatic or missionary missions, offices of international companies, etc.

Children of digital nomads can be perceived as third culture children, although the motives and practices of their parents are different and do not entirely correspond to those of the mobile professionals described. Here

what else Mclachlan writes (ibid.): "Although parents consider their children's needs when deciding whether or not to move, career and financial considerations tend to take precedence. Parents feel guilty and fear that moving and living an internationally mobile lifestyle may cause irreparable harm to their children. Parental guilt is a common theme (...), as is the fear that children may not develop emotional security and lack a sense of place or belonging." However, this is not true for digital nomads, who are more proud of their lifestyle and upbringing in values such as freedom, autonomy, minimalism, maintaining a connection with nature, etc.

The nomads' need for belonging is based more on their relationships with like-minded mobile families like themselves than on geography. This is

exactly what Judith (36, Germany, psychotherapist and hypnotherapist) describes: “Community is when you know where you can meet people you like, who you would call friends and with whom you support each other. For me, this does not mean living in the same building, but it would be nice to have them as neighbors. My long-term vision with my husband is to travel with several families or go to the same places and have this common base. (...) Now we have a baby and we want to travel. We are not yet at the stage where we say, ‘Okay, we want to have one base,’ but the long-term plan is to have two or three bases around the world. But wherever we go, we know people, we know what to expect, we don’t have to find everything anew.”

Audrey (around 35, Norway, English and Spanish teacher) also emphasizes how important a community of like-minded people is: “For me, the number one thing is support. Also, it creates an opportunity for self-development, because I learn from other people, from other cultures. I learn new ways of life, I try new foods. We don’t go to restaurants very often. We prefer to meet in the forest, have a picnic and everyone brings something to the table. This is also the old way of building a community. Everyone has to participate and give a little of themselves.” Audrey was in Bansko with her daughter for a few weeks in 2024 and was inspired by the community there, emphasizing again that this is the traditional and natural style of communication. “It’s like the community in a normal village. People have lived like this not for centuries but for millennia – something really, really beautiful and the possibility of it happening amidst all the craziness that’s going on in the world right now makes me so happy just thinking about it. (...) In Bansko there were children from 1 to 17 years old and they were all playing together in a very natural environment. And they were creating their own play and their own environment without any outside interference.”

I share Mancinelli’s (2018: 318) observations that the lack of community and like-minded families with children of a similar age was

identified by some respondents as the most difficult part of the journey and to some extent influenced their trajectory. Often the extended families of nomads are skeptical of their decision to set out on the road and this has caused some alienation. At the same time, already along the way, the presence of other families, independent of their location, is felt as encouraging and supportive – it normalizes such a status. This is one of the key roles of network capital for the social life of nomads.

Mancinelli (2018: 316) also lists some cohesive practices and actions that allow nomads a certain predictability and repeatability, regardless of

where they are – training, shared meals, watching shows/movies or singing/dancing. He also mentions the role of various objects brought from the initial/previous home, creating “stability in mobility” – stuffed toys, photo albums, blankets, pillows, music, technological devices, kitchen utensils and exercise equipment.

The community of nomadic families in Bansko is also united by another aspect of their lifestyle – the inclination towards homeschooling and/or worldschooling, which we will examine in the last part of this chapter.

Worldschooling – learning by traveling around the world

Worldschooling is a newly emerging term that has not yet been introduced into Bulgarian science. The phenomenon is defined as a radical leap towards practical learning and an alternative educational philosophy, according to which the world is the best classroom for a child. As Germann Molz (2021: 3) describes it in his seminal work with the indicative title “The World is Our Classroom”, it is “something similar to homeschooling, with the obvious difference that it does not take place at home. Instead, an increasing number of middle-class families are selling their houses, quitting their jobs and taking their children out of conventional schools to educate them while traveling around the world”. Some of them travel during vacation or using their savings, others finance their mobility by working remotely.

Germann Molz (ibid.) lists the key aspects of the phenomenon:

- the opportunity to earn income online;
- access to online tools to support mobile learning;
- growing dissatisfaction with institutional education and consumer society;
- persistent concern of parents about how to raise independent and resilient children, ready for life and work in the globalized world of the 21st century.

Most often, these are relatively wealthy professionals from countries in the Global North. As Germann Molz notes (ibid.): “Traveling with young children may not be a particularly problem-free undertaking for these families, but the strong passports they possess, combined with their belonging to the white middle class, provide them with the opportunity to cross international borders freely.”

The author also traces the emergence of the term. The term “worldschooling” was first coined in 2004 by Eli Gerzon, then a

25-year-old American writer and traveler, who announced in a blog post that he would be organizing a series of “worldschooling trips” to Mexico and Japan for teenagers. Gerzon coined the phrase that has become the motto of worldschooling: “The whole world is your school instead of your school being your whole world.” Gerzon himself left the formal education system at the age of 15 and is a staunch advocate of alternative educational movements such as homeschooling and “unschooling.” However, he believes that both terms fail to capture the kind of learning he experienced through travel. Unschooling is a philosophy of free, natural learning, introduced in the 1970s by John Holt, and is close to Gerzon’s ideal of a less structured and more self-directed form of education. However, he does not like the fact that the name emphasizes what the movement

is not, so he has come up with a more positive term to describe the process of actively experiencing and learning from the world around him. The term competes with “roadschooling”, “travelschooling”, “wanderschooling”, “life-learning” or “edventure”.

Germann Molz (2021: 8) points out that those who define themselves as worldschoolers cover a whole spectrum – sometimes children are formally enrolled in (online) school, other times they follow structured homeschooling curricula or are radical representatives of unschooling. It is possible for families to call themselves worldschoolers even though they only travel with their children during school holidays and summer vacations. They may have abandoned their home base altogether to travel the world, in some cases for an indefinite period.

Germann Molz (2021: 4) highlights that, like their upper- and middle-class counterparts, worldschoolers are adamant about providing their children with an excellent education, but fear that this is not possible in traditional schools. They share many commonalities with the lifestyle migrants described by Benson and Osbaldiston (2009: 625) – they are disillusioned with the version of success that consumer society presents to them, as well as with life in the big city/suburbs. Germann Molz (ibid.) lists: “they feel squeezed by the demands

in their corporate jobs, exhausted from long commutes, overwhelmed by the fast pace of life with their children’s overly busy schedules. This is not the good life they imagined. Nor is it a life that will teach their children what they need to know to succeed in an uncertain future.”

Worldschooling is such an attractive alternative because it offers an opportunity to escape the pressures of work and school and spend valuable time as a family while its members explore and learn about the

world together. One of the author's key conclusions (ibid.) is that for these parents, the mobile lifestyle is a strategy for coping with uncertainty. They are united not so much by a specific set of educational practices as by shared values and the philosophy that experiential learning is the most effective and adequate way for children to survive and thrive in the modern world, to be flexible and prepared for things not taught in school.

Embracing the hyper-individualistic tendency of digital nomads and lifestyle migrants, *worldschoolers* “do not expect the state to improve their quality of life in these uncertain times; the good life they pursue is theirs their own choice. Instead of participating in collective projects that could lead to a more secure society as a whole, *Worldschoolers* take an individual approach. We see evidence of this in their decision to take their children's education into their own hands,

as well as in their other life choices, such as becoming self-employed entrepreneurs, pursuing their own individual parenting styles, and finding communities that support their personal choices and pursuit of freedom. These families do not see themselves as victims of a risky society or an insecure labor market, but as beneficiaries of a freer and more flexible⁴³ world of work, play, and family life. They use strategies related to their personal lifestyles that make them “entrepreneurs—architects of their own lives” (Germann Molz 2021: 17).

Germann Molz (2021: 10) acknowledges that traveling with children is not a new phenomenon and that “with or without the label ‘*worldschooling*’, parents around the world have been educating their children on the move and through practical experiences of the world around them for millennia and moving with them in search of a better life.” According to her, *worldschoolers* share common experiences with military, missionary, diplomatic or expatriate families, but they often do not travel under the auspices of institutions such as the church, government or a corporation. They also differ from migrant/refugee families seeking a better life for their children in their voluntary mobility and the ability to exercise control over their movements. An important and still poorly researched question is how this flexibility and fluidity affects children, especially adolescents/teenagers. Due to space limitations, this topic remains outside the scope of this monograph (see Korpela 2022 and 2023).

I agree with Germann Molz (2021: 19, 23) that the contemporary approach of “intensive parenting” is key to understanding the approach of *worldschoolers*, who raise global, third-culture children on the move. Intensive parenting is characterized by significant parental investments of time, energy, money, and attention in children's development, and often

by structuring family life around their activities and needs. Although worldschoolers advocate free play and learning and reject the neuroticism of modern parenting approaches, their own approach is also particularly intensive – at least one, and often both, parents devote themselves entirely to the educational, physical, and emotional needs of the child.

I find another dimension of control in the work of Aurini and Davies (2005: 61) – according to them, parents choose their children’s educational experience not simply on the basis of specific skills or knowledge that they want them to acquire, but as an expression of their own values and attitudes. The bias towards control and selection, as well as the intensity of worldschooling, is evident in the statement of Ekaterina (a little over 30, Russia, language teacher): “For me, it’s not a problem to be with the children. I love it, but sometimes, of course, I feel trapped and I want a little freedom. But overall, I really like seeing them grow and being the creator of their lives. I want to shape them. They absorb like sponges and I want to be the one who writes their future, rather than someone else in kindergarten. And I don’t want them to be strongly influenced by someone I don’t approve of, because there you have no control over who they interact with.”

Ekaterina and her husband met in 2018 at Coworking 1 in Bansko. He is Dutch, attracted by the peace and nature of the resort town. “Everything happened very quickly for us – it was as if every item on our list had been checked off, everything matched perfectly and we said, ‘Let’s get married.’ They got to work on her documents and eventually she got a residence permit and then citizenship. They first rented and in 2020 bought an apartment in the New Town, close to the forest and one of the local reservoirs: ‘The nature here is beautiful, and that’s something we both love very much.’ Ekaterina emphasizes that she comes from Moscow – ‘a big and stressful city where I can’t live’ – and that she longs for peace and quiet. She doesn’t like going to the city center, where there are a lot of people, and prefers to be ‘in the forest or in the field.’

From the very beginning, she and her husband were certain that they did not want to send their two children to a standard kindergarten “with 25 children and only one or two teachers.” They would have agreed on the spot to small groups and the Montessori or Waldorf methods. However, there is no such thing, so they decided to take their children’s education into their own hands. At home, their roles are clearly divided.

Ekaterina’s husband is the “hunter,” responsible for financial support, while she takes care of the children, the household, and several pets, which she says make everyday life very complicated. For four years, a

nanny helped with their older child, who is now six. However, she left because she was moving to Sofia.

The family recently organized a trip to the Thai island of Koh Phangan, where there are many communities and kindergartens dedicated to alternative education. They enrolled their older daughter in a Russian-speaking Montessori kindergarten. Although she likes the place, the stay turns out to be more difficult than expected. The child is constantly sick and brings infections home. In addition, despite the beautiful surroundings, the family feels homesick and after three weeks they are already longing to return to Bansko. They miss the comfort of their own home, where they can cook, taking into account their specific dietary requirements – Ekaterina is lactose intolerant, and her husband cannot consume many foods due to stomach surgery. In Thailand, rented houses have small kitchens, which makes cooking difficult.

Ekaterina's story shows how the two of them are transforming from slow travelers to settled expats. She tells me that in the near future they are discussing traveling with friendly families for a few weeks to places like Greece, instead of staying for an entire season in a faraway country. After

return, they focus on their life in Bulgaria. They buy a house in a village near Bansko, "where we can finally grow our own vegetables. Here I decide for myself what our environment will be, who the people around me will be. We are lucky to have found people we truly love. (...) I am very close to three families and for me that is absolutely enough because I am so busy that I am not able to keep in touch with everyone. To create a relationship and be very close, you have to meet all the time and have energy" – here is another confirmation of the intensity of raising and educating children at home without the help of a nanny or an institution.

Ekaterina's son and daughter attend organized classes once a week in the yard of a French woman in a village 40 minutes drive from Bansko. "She lived in South Africa, then Ireland, as far as I remember. But then she ended up in O. a few years ago and she has a beautiful place, property, and she does activities for the children – gardening, she also teaches them that everyone has a right to an opinion, no bullying and things like that, she does it very well. It usually starts late in the spring and is maybe until September."

Since she was 18, Ekaterina has dreamed of homeschooling after learning about an American family who educates their four children this way. She is grateful that her husband supports her and shares the same dream. She does not approve of online schools because "a lot of the things in them

are irrelevant". However, it is necessary to enroll them in one – she learns from another woman from the worldschooling community in Bansko about the existence of the so-called umbrella schools⁴⁴: "There is an American online school that is recognized in Bulgaria. Parents pay a fee and receive a certificate that serves as proof that the child is enrolled in school, in case of problems with the Bulgarian authorities." Umbrella schools offer: tools for managing and documenting the student's academic progress, assessment (free parent assessment, professional teacher assessment or standardized test), teacher and student cards – for discounts and participation in events or extracurricular activities; homeschooling coaching and personalized guidance; support from an online parenting community; podcasts, blogs and newsletters with advice and encouragement from experienced parents who educate their children at home.⁴⁵

In terms of language learning, it is important for Ekaterina that her children speak Russian and English. She plans to learn Bulgarian as well, but for now they do not communicate with Bulgarians, even though they live predominantly in Bansko. As a former language teacher, she believes that learning a language requires a consistent environment, and believes that if

A specific legal and educational structure (mostly in the United States) that allows families practicing homeschooling or worldschooling to be officially enrolled in school while in reality educating themselves.

How Umbrella Schools Work. 17.10.2024. Available at: <https://www.theumbrellaschool.com/post/how-umbrella-schools-work> (last accessed: 18.09.2025)

her daughter starts doing sports, such as snowboarding, where she will learn Bulgarian naturally.

In the future, the family hopes to travel to different countries for a few months at a time so that the children can learn geography, languages, and how people around the world live. Ekaterina claims that in their schools she and her husband "didn't learn anything particularly useful for real life and the world," and gives the example of the lack of lessons in emotional and financial intelligence. She also adds that "in a normal school, children are so tired of the busy schedule that they don't have the mental capacity to learn further outside of it."

Ekaterina's story and attitudes are similar to those of Judith (36, Germany, psycho- and hypnotherapist). She also met her future husband in 2020 in one of the co-working spaces in Bansko. His initial plan was to leave

Bansko after the end of the ski season, but he was forced to stay because of the lockdown. Judith, on the other hand, does not want to spend the pandemic in her native Germany, where the measures are very strict. So events bring them together. She returns only briefly (about a month) to Hamburg. Since her relationship with her future husband started so quickly and he is already a nomad, Judith decides to join him. "The woman who brought me to Bansko – she also met her husband here. Both men are from England. And at the same time, we had a baby boy. It's a nice story, but now they are permanently in

Germany, because their family helps with the care of the child." In contrast, Judith and her partner continue on the path of nomadism.

For the first time, the two see traveling families with children while they themselves are traveling in Bali. This encourages them to believe: "Wow, it's possible!". Later, when they return directly to Bulgaria from Bali to visit the "Bansko Nomad Fest", one of the lecturers talks about the advantages of traveling with children. Judith remembers saying to herself, "Oh, maybe this is a sign!"

She tells me that after the birth of their son, Bansko changed for them. Previously, they had mostly socialized with digital nomads who travel often and a lot, but now they are joining the community of Worldschoolers, who are slow travelers with a focus on values. "The Worldschooling community is a mix of Bulgarians and foreigners. It's definitely a place where I felt connected right away. People are open and have seen an incredible amount. And when you have children of a similar age, it's always a good time to connect. Just this weekend, I was talking to a few families about how much I love deciding where I want to live. Having children is beautiful, but sometimes it's also very boring. I love traveling because it gives me the excitement that I miss in everyday life." In confirmation of her words, in July 2025, after spending half a year in Bansko, the family traveled to another country for six months.

The length of stay, as well as the difference in daily routines, make it difficult to maintain regular and in-depth contact between the two groups. My respondent Dean (around 50, UK, CFO in the banking sector, coliving owner) finds from personal experience that the two groups have difficulty coexisting in the same shared spaces: "If I host guest A, that automatically excludes guest B. When it comes to families, we tried it, but it doesn't work. We are either a destination for nomadic families or we are not. We can't be both. I'll give you an example. Bob and Sandra are here with their three children, aged five, eight and ten. A group of Italian guests are also here and it's a Friday night. They decided to smoke some hash in the

garden, take some LSD, play techno music and have a wild party. Bob and Sandra's children come downstairs and ask: 'What are you smoking? You're a bit strange'. It doesn't work! It would be nice to say that you can open your arms to everyone. We are very, very open. We accept couples, singles, transgender people, people whose lives are incredibly complicated. But unfortunately, I think that nomadic families need their own space."

The same is confirmed by Mira (around 30, Bulgaria, marketing specialist and entrepreneur): "As far as I know, there is a group of families who share their time together and are mobile and move to different destinations, but this is a separate group from the digital nomads who are in coworking

spaces. There is some division, the two groups do not coexist so much together. Different interests - parents have very different interests, they have to go to the kindergarten to play, feed their child, maybe they have already built some kind of career, business, while people who do not have a family and are currently building a business cannot be distracted so often by children and the community with children."

Judith and Ekaterina, described above, are two of the mothers I also meet during the opening of a new space specifically aimed at nomadic families with children and worldschooling. The "Open Circle" event takes place just before the "Bansko Nomad Fest" - on a Saturday afternoon in a newly opened and renovated spacious cafe, where 15 adults and a dozen children are present. The owner, a native of Bansko, has renovated the interior to include several children's playrooms, and has also paid a Ukrainian artist to paint some of the walls. He has partnered with Israeli Liz (around 40, Israel, behavior analysis specialist), who lives with her family in Bansko and initiates various activities there. The idea for this space, a kind of study room, dawned on her while she was traveling with her family to Thailand and Cambodia, where she saw "the concept of flexible space for children while parents work" in action. The idea is to have morning closed groups for visitors aged three times a week (Monday, Tuesday and Thursday).

between 4 and 10 years old for four hours. Liz warns that she can only lead the groups on these three days and that if someone is interested, she could take over the other days. The space can also be rented out for similar purposes. Activities include art, sports and science, Lego building, coloring, robotics, puzzles, reading books, and free play.

The morning group will consist of a maximum of 7-8 children, and if there are more than 10 or if there are younger or older than the announced age group, Liz will call an assistant. Parents who do not want to leave their children can stay in the nursery. The price for the morning group is 22.50 euros per day (for four hours), with weekly or monthly payments possible and preferable, and advance booking is required.

Afternoons and evenings are reserved for open events for parents and children, such as dance parties, movies with the kids while the adults are away, quizzes, etc.

During the open discussion, Liz gives us colorful pieces of paper and invites us to write on them an idea for group activities in the coming days. Here is the result: drawing a large picture together; book club; foreign language lessons; costume party; musical jam sessions; meditations with the children; musical quiz; dance lessons (e.g. Latin); chess tournament; water pistol fight; ecstatic dances; treasure hunt.

Liz has Bulgarian citizenship. Regarding her motivation to open an alternative daycare center, she says: "The idea of not sending my children to kindergarten arose in me when my daughter was six months old. I realized that I didn't want anyone else to take care of her. That I wanted to watch her grow up. All my friends were sending their children somewhere and it seemed so natural. But suddenly the baby was mine and it seemed illogical to give her to someone else for so many hours. Homeschooling has been happening to this day with my two children - to be with them and give them the opportunity to interact with other children." She also emphasizes that there is a friendly attitude and support for parents in Bansko.

Liz created a group on "WhatsApp" and also published current invitations in the several existing "Facebook" groups for Bansko, where there have already been many questions such as: "Where is a daycare center for children in the city?"

There is a lack of satisfaction of the consumer needs of families and as an entrepreneur and parent, my respondent Damian (around 35, Bulgaria, IT specialist and founder of a coworking space) has noticed a potential business niche: "This is one of the problems that we are currently struggling to solve, since such people travel with families. The first things they research are healthcare and education. The consumers themselves are more particular, they want something more particular to be offered to them. We are currently working on a project

for a bilingual dual-program school. We have a verbal agreement to receive an old part of a school immediately. We just need to find time to look for trainers. (...) The idea is to have two programs. One should be taught in the morning, be it the Ministry of Education and Science, which will develop your general culture, and then subjects that interest you – according to the child’s interest. It should be balanced, between the two things. You study general culture, and then you specialize in what interests you.”

Another social entrepreneur who has focused on alternative education for years and is one of the pillars of the World Schooling community in Bansko is the parent of 5 children Arnold (around 50, Germany, technology and social entrepreneur), with whom I have a long conversation on the topic. According to his observations, home education in Bulgaria has existed for over 20 years. “There is an Association of Home Education in Bulgaria, led by a lawyer in Sofia. At this stage, about 15,000 children are being educated and raised in Bulgaria outside the conventional state school system – and their number is increasing.”

He gives me the example of “Khan Academy” (a free online platform with educational resources – mostly video lessons and practical exercises): “All these numerous options that you can become a part of if you want, and no longer limit your children to a 7:00 a.m. curriculum, which is unnatural. My experience with my younger children is that it works very well for them and they have a lot of

a more balanced childhood if they wake up when they’ve fallen asleep, not because you have to put them on the school bus at 7:00.”

Here’s an example of the leitmotifs in an article Arnold sent me after our interview. The title image shows several children on a swing in the yard, with a house with traditional architecture and the peaks of the Pirin Mountains in the background. It talks about “the simple pleasures of observing children’s independence and self-discovery in nature,” “the spirit of free learning, where every corner of Bansko is a potential classroom, encouraging a love of exploration and a deep connection with the natural world,” and “the dream of raising children in an environment where they can experience freedom, playfulness, and natural learning.” “The image of children forced to sit still for long periods of time contradicts the idea of natural, experiential learning,” the author warns. She emphasizes that developing a sense of responsibility for the environment often motivates people to lead healthier physical and mental lifestyles, and calls on adults to “create a purposeful and organic learning environment that is consistent with the principles of freedom and nature”

and to “adapt the curriculum to the child’s unique interests, pace, and learning style.” Examples of this include organizing nature hikes and barbecues (I’ve observed these happening every Monday afternoon in the summer of 2025) and creating a small garden at home so that children can learn to recognize plants and be aware of their life cycles; history lessons through visits to sites around the Old Town of Bansko; physical education through activities such as climbing, etc.

Arnold gives me examples from the everyday life of his own children, who spend every summer in Bansko (and winter in Malta): “In Bansko, there is still the traditional, grandmotherly type of socializing. On the next street during the snow-free months, which are probably eight or nine months a year, there are 15 children playing. It’s a local dynamic, it’s a community. With our neighbor, the first thing we did was to remove the upper part of the fence and rebuild the lower part. So now she can come to the children or give them what she has from her garden. And we love watching her take care of her plants.” Another example is how Arnold buys 20 water pistols and organizes “battles” for children and adults every Friday during the hottest periods.

He emphasizes that the key is community and that the sedentary Western lifestyle does not support its flourishing: “Mothers are expected to leave the house, leave their children with another woman or somewhere else, earn money to pay people to take care of their own children. This whole model has created an environment where you have no community and where parents are mostly alone when they spend time with their children. There is no life of two or three generations under one roof or in close proximity.

And when there are two or three generations, ideally three, supporting each other, that community factor amplifies childhood probably tenfold. The quality of life for children who know they can run to the next door and know who they are going to is incomparable.”

Another of my respondents, who is impressed by the community of nomadic parents in Bansko, tells me that he came here after Arnold told him about the city in Malta and bought a plane ticket for him and his daughter in 2020. Vince is a Maltese journalist and photographer who has traveled all over the world, and as an experienced social entrepreneur, Arnold knows how important it is to attract these types of people to tell and spread information about the community. Vince has since come several times during the holidays of his daughter, who lives with her mother and attends a “normal” school. He tells me: “Both the children and the parents love the weekly barbecues. And the walks on Mondays. There

are also organized activities, various lessons, film screenings. All these activities are really useful, and besides, as a parent, in Bansko I feel calmer. My daughter, who is 13, goes out on her own, it's just that the city is very safe. (...) As for nature, it is a huge part of education. My daughter goes to the river, she loves it, she wants to go to the forest, to play with others in the forest, she loves to do these things," Vince assures me and shows me a video that his daughter shot on the river."

My respondent Audrey (about 35 years old, Norway, English and Spanish teacher) also has warm memories of her two-week stay in Bansko in August with her daughter. They returned a week earlier than planned because "We came from 10 degrees and rain in Norway, and in Bansko it was 36 degrees. In the end she refused to leave the house. But we did a lot in two weeks and immersed ourselves in the international community there." The warm climate is the only thing that concerns Audrey when I ask her if there was anything they didn't like about Bansko. Her positive impressions of the city and the community prevail: "We also have a WhatsApp and Facebook group where we organize meetings - for example, to go to the forest and have a barbecue or just meet in the central park in Bansko. All kinds of workshops are also announced in the groups. If you want to come, you just meet people. Every Friday we were about 10 families in someone's house. People are kind of hospitable, they like to give you things, like to try banitsa." Audrey plans to "live permanently in an international community and be where I want to be" - but first she needs to find a job that allows remote work. One of her ideas is to start developing worldschooling in Norway with her friend, "because I really miss the open, down-to-earth, spiritual, international community - a community from the heart and so that children and adults can connect and learn from each other." Her friend has experience with developing

of such communities elsewhere in the world, as well as the development of homeschooling curricula. "My friend wants to be a coach for other homeschoolers in the future," Audrey explains, which reminds me of the leitmotif of entrepreneurship and monetization of knowledge and experience described in Chapter Two.

Audrey's quote also leads to Germann Molz's (2021: 161-2) observation that people involved in worldschooling are "masters of the impermanent and temporary encounters" and that this is one of the tools to maintain "a community that is by definition in constant motion." The author describes how her respondents move along a certain trajectory - from community to community, gathering information and choosing based on online discussion groups, playdates with other parents, educational camps, etc.

She describes how, through worldschooling, children learn all sorts of practical lessons and useful skills about travel – they gain experience navigating airports and train stations, using public transport and different currencies, etc. Also – how to connect with others and how to say goodbye, how to use technology to maintain relationships from a distance. Last but not least – if they are “particularly perceptive”, as the author emphasizes – how to commercialize and consume the dimensions of a given community.

However, there is also a serious challenge here, which she warns about (ibid., 91) – the blurring of the line between family life and the public world of business and industry. As a result, aspects that we consider private – family hobbies, parent-child relationships or friendships – are becoming commercial products, for example being published in various formats (including video) online, the so-called “lifestyle content”.

Riley (2017: 190) also lists these and other challenges – time, cost, fear of travel or exploration, the temptation to force learning while traveling despite loud claims that it happens naturally and organically. And most of all – the challenge of getting the outside world to accept worldschooling as a legitimate form of education.

3.5. Summary

According to Elliott and Urry (2010: 11), people with a rich and extensive network of contacts are highly mobile and can encourage others to move from one place to another. This is precisely what is observed in digital nomad communities and is why I dedicate a third of my book to the topic of the importance of community in choosing a destination, as well as the overall well-being of digital nomads.

Paradoxically, the pursuit of freedom, independence and new experiences that underpins the digital nomad lifestyle leads to

an intense search for community and belonging. Unlike the traditional understanding of tourism, where a person is alone in a new place, for digital nomads, travel is motivated by the desire to be among “their tribe”. The value of a destination is not measured only by traditional indicators such as price and infrastructure, but also by its “social infrastructure” – the presence of a community of like-minded people. This makes social capital a key economic asset.

One of the ways in which digital nomads deal with the conflict between the search for freedom and autonomy and the resulting loneliness is by buying access to communities, most often through membership in a

coliving/coworking space. It is the presence of a strong community that justifies the significantly higher prices of these places compared to ordinary housing or offices. However, questions arise about the authenticity of connections in such a market-oriented environment.

Communities are selected that combine the geographical principle with the principle of common interest. These communities are fluid, but based on similar values and a mobile lifestyle. In the context of digital nomads, we are talking about “dispersed communities” and “subgroups” forming around specific coliving and coworking spaces. Also, the community is characterized by emotional charge – the presence of solidarity and closeness.

For a community to be sustainable, it needs spontaneous interactions, but it cannot rely on them alone. Therefore, strategies for management and conscious design are introduced – for example, a requirement for a minimum stay of one or more months, prior communication in order to avoid the joining of new members who are excessively self-oriented and weakly contributing to the collective, etc. The organization of events also plays a key role in consolidating a community. Eventfulness turns the ordinary into special, attracts an audience, strengthens group bonds and creates experiences and memories. It is the “lingua franca” through which nomads express their identity and shared values. It is also a mechanism for overcoming loneliness and other psychological challenges characteristic of digital nomads. However, it is important that authenticity, spontaneity and sincerity are not completely lost in the pursuit of offering a standardized experience that will attract a wide range of users.

Bansko has a community of locals, another community of foreigners who live predominantly or permanently in the city, and a third community of short-term digital nomads. The silent conflict between locals and newcomers is rooted in their different attitudes, values, and understandings of place and identity. Locals, who have a deep emotional connection to the city

and its history, perceive the changes caused by tourism and the influx of foreigners not only as an economic opportunity but also as a challenge – if not a threat, then as something far removed from their worldview.

Relationships between nomads and locals often boil down to transactions such as buying goods or services. Many nomads, especially those who stay for a short time, have no incentive to connect with the local community. In turn, some locals perceive nomads as a “closed group” or “tight-knit”,

which highlights the lack of deep understanding between the two groups. There is a clash between the individualistic nomadic approach and the more traditional norms of the local community, which – paradoxically – are individualistic in the sense of being more closed. The language barrier is also a significant obstacle to quality integration between the two communities and reinforces the existence of the two social bubbles.

Many digital nomads also experience alienation when they return to their hometowns. Their lifestyle is so different from that of their settled friends and relatives that it leads to a lack of understanding, envy and/or denial. The divergence in values creates social distance, even when physical distance is easily overcome with the help of digital technologies. For nomads, the sense of home depends not so much on physical space as on the repetition of daily activities and, above all, on connections with like-minded people.

Digital nomads are not necessarily independent travelers – some of them choose to continue this lifestyle even after starting their own families. Such parents are proud of their lifestyle, have developed strategies to overcome the difficulties associated with mobility and a constant state of transition, and raise their children in harmony with their values and preferences. The lack of a community of like-minded families is defined as the most difficult part of the journey, and the coexistence of nomads with and without children is difficult due to the differences in their goals and needs. Against this background, the presence of other families independent of their location is felt as encouraging and supportive, and the community is further united by the inclination towards homeschooling and worldschooling.

Worldschooling is a new phenomenon in which families educate their children while traveling the world. It is a conscious choice, motivated by the growing dissatisfaction with conventional education and the desire of parents to provide their children with practical skills suitable for life in a globalized world – skills that the outdated, in their opinion, classical education system does not provide. This is mostly a strategy for dealing with uncertainty and for exercising control over how much the System influences adolescents. Parents take almost full responsibility for

control over their children's education, social connections, and environment, creating a new form of "intensive parenting," albeit through a narrative of freedom. In Bansko, a community of worldschooling families is thriving, collaborating to create an alternative educational environment adapted to their needs. Even this, however, is subject to stockpiling.

As Woldoff and Litchfeild (2021: 193) write, Understandably, some people have become skeptical of the word “community” and of the organizations and marketers who exploit, claim, and perhaps abuse it. Such distrust is natural when even the most ordinary online groups and the most hierarchical and strictly administered places for social interaction start to be called that.

Given everything presented in Chapter Three, the conclusion is that digital nomadism stands on the border of the usual ideas not only of work, but also of community.

CONCLUSION

Less than an hour before our paths take a radically different direction, Casey (around 40, Finland, social anthropologist) and I are sitting under one of the tents of the “Bansko Nomad Fest” 2025 and discussing the bittersweet transience of the nomadic lifestyle. We both have serious experience in both travel and anthropology and the topic of digital nomadism. We have shared an extremely useful and inspiring few hours together, and soon it is time to part ways – and thus we are deprived of the chance to share more stories, reflections and inspiration.

Casey tells me, “In the nomadic world, goodbyes are an opportunity for a new encounter. I actually like goodbyes—things have a beginning and an end. You can choose to say ‘Bye’ forever, or you can take a little break and decide if it’s worth the effort to see each other again. Because there’s nothing better than traveling for a while and then going to some random place in the world and going, ‘Hey, that’s a familiar face.’ And you pick up where you left off and meet all their new friends. But quite often you have to say goodbye quickly.”

I also recall the opinion of my respondent Mira (around 30, Bulgaria, marketing specialist and entrepreneur), who lived in Budapest for several years and her biggest problem was: “that many

people come, stay for a year and then leave; that you have to meet new people all the time. You have no friends. You have friends for a year and then they leave, and you start all over again with small talk: “Hey, what’s your name?” But sometimes people find themselves in different communities, for example in Europe, in Asia and it becomes “I met her in Bansko, and now we’re together in Vietnam”. Or on the island of Bali, in Chiang Mai, Lisbon, Malta, Rio. Mira and I also discussed how sometimes it happens that if you create really close friendships in one place, you want to stay – to extend your stay, to establish a “home base” or even to put down roots there.

I also recall a quote from Ekaterina (a little over 30, Russia, language teacher), who is a semi-slow-semi-sedentary traveler: “When you meet people and get used to them, and you love them so much, but then they leave – because Bansko is a place where you come for a while and then move on with your life – then it’s hard to say goodbye. You meet someone you really like, and then they leave, and your heart breaks a little.”

After the conversation with Casey (about 40, Finland, social anthropologist) I get on the bus from Bansko to Sofia once again and

although “my heart has broken a little,” I enjoy the three hours in which I have the opportunity to observe and make sense of the experiences of the last few days – experiences of an anthropologist conducting

fieldwork, but also of a young, location-independent professional who loves to travel the world and meet new people. I put on a favorite song and, as vocalist Peter Broderick’s voice repeats “I Say Goodbye Too Often – Hello, Hello, Helloooo,” I reread parts of my favorite ethnographic work by Woldoff and Litchfield (2021: 94), which I have cited many times in this monograph. I will quote them in the conclusion: “Departures actually contribute to community by freeing up channels for the expression of the excitement and energy of newcomers. For individual nomads, journeys begin with departure – the act of leaving provides a crucial confirmation of their nomadic identities.” These are identities fueled above all by constant change (ibid., 187) and by the privilege of feeling that you have free will in two of the most important areas of life: where to live and what work to do (ibid., 193).

The choice of this lifestyle will remain a socio-political privilege of relatively well-educated middle-class individuals, usually originating from wealthy societies in the Global North. As such, location-independent living is based on the availability of specific forms of capital: economic, social and, above all, networked (Mancinelli 2018: 315). But however privileged I and my respondents may be, we should not forget that our freedom

is limited partly by the System, partly by our own preferences and attitudes. Krasteva (2023: 29) writes about the “constructed nature of Homo viator: a vast “industry” is mobilized to create users of mobility products. These products are creative, attractive and prestigious. And yet, the traveler is just an extra in a play written by others: roads, new roads that enter endlessly, shamelessly, as if all that matters is being somewhere else.”

Given that we share quite a few common values and experiences, it was easy for me to fit into the community of digital nomads in Bansko, not only because they are very open to new people (since they themselves are constantly new to different places around the world), but also because that is the design of any nomadic community – you pay for a coliving or coworking space and you get an entrance ticket to the community.

As a proud Homo viator, I also travel and continue to reflect. Did I fulfill the goals of my research – to get to know and understand the sociocultural processes conditioned by the phenomenon, as well as to document the transformations resulting from them? In searching for and examining

them, I applied an innovative prism for Bulgarian science, uniting lifestyle, consumer and work practices with mobility. What does my work contribute? Although not only digital nomads come to Bansko, but also numerous researchers, this monograph is the only in-depth study to date of the city as a recognized center for digital nomadism for almost a decade, where people from all over the world flock and where some return, while others... stay and make their home base. In order to analyze the trajectories and transformations, I introduce into Bulgarian science a previously unused term, already established internationally – worldschooling, as well as several other terms, previously only mentioned in short Bulgarian scientific text forms – digital nomadism, working vacation, slow travelers, coliving spaces.

My contribution is also that I repeatedly raise the topic of the “dark” (or at least controversial) side of nomadism – both to the readership and to those who practice it. It is also a contribution that I spoke to many locals about nomads and tried to explain who they are and what is important to them. In order to have more understanding and curiosity, and accordingly – less opposition.

I realize that no matter how in-depth my monograph is, it could not touch on all aspects of digital nomadism. For example, the need for future multidisciplinary research on:

- ~ digital storytelling of nomadic life (vlogs, influencers, etc.) is outlined;
- ~ the representation of digital nomads in the media;
- ~ work processes and the balance between personal/professional relationships in coworking/coliving spaces;
- ~ the role and challenges of community managers;
- ~ gentrification;
- ~ environmental issues and sustainability;
- ~ mental health;
- ~ identity formation;
- ~ the development of local digital nomad hubs and the reasons for their rise/fall;
- ~ the possibilities for re-examining a fluid nomadic micro-community;
- ~ tracing more settled and nomadic phases in an individual’s life.

These are just some of the opportunities and challenges that this (hyper)mobile group faces on a daily basis – the pursuit of the much-desired freedom leads to a series of paradoxes. The choice to be radically free and independent of geographical constraints often leads to unexpected existential loneliness and a sense of isolation. This, in turn, provokes a frantic search for community – the nomad does not want to be alone, he wants to be “alone together” with like-minded people – as well as the development of an infrastructure in which belonging becomes a commodity.

Opportunities and challenges for digital nomads

In his book on online communications, Germann Molz (2012) describes how they blur the dualisms between escape and acceptance, solitude and sociability, home and away, order and disorder, work and leisure, connection and disconnection. A decade later, I can argue that digital nomadism, as an offspring of online communications, is doing exactly this. Nomads abandon their fixed location and embrace multilocality – maintaining social, professional and emotional connections in several different locations. It is multilocality that makes new beginnings possible, as well as new opportunities for withdrawal or participation in different environments (Rolshoven 2007).

Woldoff and Litchfield (2021: 181) define digital nomadism as a movement for radical self-reinvention for those who feel that the cities and workplaces of the “creative class” have failed them; that individuals there fail to develop their potential or, if they do, it is at too high a cost – large expenditures of money, time and energy, unsatisfying work tasks, psychological problems, etc. By embarking on a journey without an end point, they also embark on the construction of a more authentic self, which they describe as independent, autonomous, free. Most of them have gone through a turning point, something or a series of things happened to them that

prompted them to decide to travel – not necessarily negative.

What opportunities open up to them as a result, apart from the possibility of escaping the cities of the creative industry?

The ability to decide both where they will live and what kind of work suits them – employment contract, freelance or entrepreneurship. The ability to optimize the balance between work and free time. The ability to surround themselves with like-minded people who affirm, support, contribute to their identities and goals. The ability to easily find nomadic centers in different places around the world, to be quickly accepted in another new

place and therefore the ability to quickly develop a network of social and/or professional contacts (the so-called social capital), even if people are constantly changing. The ability to find a life partner and, in some cases, to continue their travels, but now with a family and children, respectively, the ability to embark on the path of world schooling.

There is selective mobility, as well as transnational communities that condition it. Nomads insist on going to “others of their tribe” and seek information about this not only in online groups and platforms, but mostly from other nomads. Even those who are just embarking on “On the Road” soon find that “freedom is hollow unless shared, and they use their freedom,

to fulfill their dreams of engaging with a community of like-minded people (...) Without a doubt, one of the most distinctive features of digital nomads is their unique combination of community and freedom” (Woldoff, Litchfield 2021: 184).

Despite the romanticization of nomadism, the analysis presented in this monograph reveals a number of challenges that affect both the individual existence of nomads and their interactions with individuals and the environment. Although nomads insist that they have achieved freedom, their mobility patterns are shaped by various policies and legal restrictions – visa, tax, etc. Nomads do not fit into traditional categories of labor law, tax systems or social security, and government efforts to offer them adequate innovative options have not been particularly successful. The reason is that these individuals strive to maintain their fluid lifestyle and often do not know for how long they will be “nice” to stay in a given country.

Mobility patterns are also conditioned by the presence of a specific infrastructure of coliving and coworking spaces around which micro-communities are built, and the provision of specific services for foreigners (e.g. housing/item rentals, property sales, etc., insurance, healthcare). There is a monetization and commodification of everything that could attract digital nomads to a given

destination, including the presence of a community of like-minded people. Those who seek an established community in coliving/working spaces not only pay more for it, but are also very likely to fall into a social bubble, thanks to which a comfortable, middle-class, Western environment is now available in a wide variety of places outside the Western world, while excluding the local population and cultural contexts (Thompson 2018: 28).

Opportunities and challenges for locals

When I describe and summarize my findings about digital nomads, I allow myself to make statements that are valid for the majority of representatives, regardless of their location in the world, because their values, attitudes and practices are relatively unified and globalized. When I write about locals, however, it is difficult to use statements that are generally valid on a global scale, since their socio-cultural characteristics – both theirs and the specific location – are specific. In other words, the locals in Bansko and in another mountain resort outside Bulgaria are different from each other, let alone comparing them with the locals in Bali or Chiang Mai. And yet, there are some conclusions that are confirmed by both

me and other authors of ethnographic works on digital nomadism, who have conducted fieldwork in radically different places around the world.

Regarding the opportunities that open up for locals in connection with the concentration of digital nomads, the stimulation of the local economy is often emphasized. In theory, the nomads' need to rent properties and goods, access food, transport and services, can lead to job creation. Both nomads and locals can decide to be part of the gig economy, providing them with services such as cleaning, catering, and tour guiding. They can also be entrepreneurs, establishing/maintaining the infrastructure for nomads described in Chapter Two, and even collaborating with them to grow their businesses, exchanging knowledge and experience. However, the reality is often different.

On the one hand, digital nomads most often travel purposefully on a limited budget, which does not necessarily mean that they are not wealthy, but that they are frugal, conscious consumers and that they look for the best price for the highest quality services. This distinguishes them especially from tourists who come for a short period of time and are much more likely to spend unbridledly. On the other hand, it often happens that the infrastructure that attracts them is built and maintained, if not by other people with extensive experience in nomadism, then by serial entrepreneurs, businessmen with a flair for unmet consumer needs - for example, an overnight stay in an apartment with

certain features, a warm mineral pool, a modern co-working space, etc. These are just two of the reasons why locals stay out of the buying and selling processes and mostly perform their “gig” roles.

Digital nomad centers around the world are often established tourist centers. Locals have a built-in image of the tourists who visit them, and they automatically attribute the same to digital nomads – to them, they are

simply “tourists who work on a computer”. Locals fail and have no incentive to understand the values and lifestyle of digital nomads (and vice versa), therefore the two groups are encapsulated in two separate bubbles.

Last but not least, nomadism is a niche sector compared to tourism and accordingly even at the municipal/state level, there is often no incentive to understand the motives and needs of nomads, and to offer them appropriate services. As my respondent Martin (around 50, Germany, entrepreneur and coliving space owner) puts it regarding the state support for the promotion of digital nomadism in Bulgaria: “I know the Minister of Tourism and the previous Minister of Tourism, and the one before him. I also met with a few people from parliament. And they say: ‘Okay, Martin, you’re great, but... It doesn’t make sense for a country to focus on such a small niche.’”

Digital nomadism has also been cited as a cause of inflation, over-competition in renting housing, and gentrification – a process in which a neighborhood becomes richer and more desirable, leading to higher property prices and the displacement of poorer residents. This can diminish the unique character and culture of an area, making it more homogenous and suited to tourists and wealthy people. In addition, given their relatively high incomes, nomads may decide to invest in property purchases, which increases prices and makes housing less affordable for locals. Homeowners may also re-design their offerings and now only offer short-term rentals instead of long-term ones. The solution to this problem is for authorities to manage and regulate the short-term rental market and prioritize the supply of affordable housing to ensure that locals have access to adequate housing (Bruns, Lee 2023; Bozzi 2024).

The biggest challenge for locals is to prevent the geographical features of their area, as well as their own traditions and cultural practices, from becoming completely commodified, which would lead to the loss of their authentic character.

The Future of Nomadism

Governments and countries around the world are already working on creating specialized visas and tax regimes, but for them to be useful and effective, they should take into account not only the economic potential of digital nomads and the fact that they are a highly skilled workforce, but also their attitudes and values – free choice, autonomy, fluidity, conscious consumption. These often conflict with the stricter control of the nomadic lifestyle by countries. It is possible that in the future the tension between

the individualistic ethos of freedom and the collective need for tax and social regulation will increase, and nomads will prefer countries where control is relatively weak.

Also, overtourism and overmobility have a serious contribution to the pollution of the planet and the destruction of its resources. Given the policies of sustainability and environmental protection, nomadism, like tourism, is likely to be observed increasingly strictly. Regarding hypermobility, the challenges and negative consequences it leads to are yet to be explored and assessed (Cohen, Gössling 2015).

Given that digital nomadism is currently inherent mainly to millennials and Generation Z – people who are or will soon enter a stage of life when it is common to start a family and raise children – it is likely that in the near future

the phenomenon will attract more and more families employed in the creative industries. The number of nomads travelling as a family is expected to increase, as well as older professionals seeking flexibility in the later stages of their careers. In the case of Bansko, there are already visionaries there, striving to build and maintain such an image for the city. The challenge is for family units to imagine the good and quality life not as a personal, but as a collective project (Germann Molz 2021: 226) – and then to take concrete steps and actions to make it happen. It is also possible to deepen the divide between nomads who are just starting to travel and experienced ones who have found that having several bases around the world, combined with moderate and slow travel, is a balanced solution that leads to well-being and satisfies their needs. There are also possible long-term consequences for individual life trajectories, for sending societies, as well as for host countries. Given current societal trends and the growing popularity of this lifestyle, it is likely that new generations of digital nomads and a continuous influx of them will continue to emerge (Henkens 2025).

The change in the family status of the target group should lead to the emergence of nomad centers that not only offer fast internet and spaces for work and shared living, but also appropriate for the target group (i.e. alternative) education, healthcare and access to communities

of families. Many nomads are keen to teach their children how to survive in a risky society and distinguish themselves from the current education system. Given their inclination towards holistic medicine, which considers the connection between the psyche and the body, more alternative to current health services will also be needed.

It is possible that more and more middle- and high-skilled people will adopt a multi-local lifestyle, dividing their time between a main home and temporary periods of remote work or staying in several home bases at different times of the year. This is a tool to mitigate the challenges associated with loneliness and lack of stability, while preserving the elements of freedom and mobility. The future digital nomad is likely to be less of a nomad in the classical sense and more of a multi-local citizen, navigating between several different spaces and identities.

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Appendix 1:

Respondent Profile

Arnold (around 50, Germany, technology and social entrepreneur)

Ben (around 40, UK, IT specialist)

Betty (38, UK, coworking space owner)

Vanessa (around 40, Italy, (co)owner of a series of events and digital nomad organizations)

Vera (around 30, Russia, doctor)

Vince (around 50, Malta, freelance journalist, videographer)

Gustavo (around 40, Portugal, entrepreneur and volleyball player)

Damian (around 30, Bulgaria, IT specialist and coworking space founder)

Joanna (around 30, Poland, marketing specialist and co-owner of a temporary coliving space)

Joel (around 30, Romanian-American, online English teacher, former coworking space owner)

Judith (36, Germany, psycho- and hypnotherapist)

Dean (around 50, UK, CFO in the banking sector, coworking space owner)

Eddie (around 40, Bulgarian-Israeli, coworking and coworking space owner)

Ekaterina (a little over 30, Russia, language teacher)

Iva (around 40, Bulgaria, marketing specialist)

Irina (28, Serbia, marketing specialist)

Carol (around 50, born in Romania and raised in the UK, real estate agent in Bansko)

Casey (around 40, Finland, social anthropologist)

Liz (around 40, Israel, behavioral analyst)

Margo (around 35, Czech Republic, marketing specialist)

Martin (around 50, Germany, entrepreneur and owner) coliving space)

Massimo (around 30, Italy, IT manager in the banking sector and co-owner of a temporary coliving space)

Mary (around 50, Netherlands, translator)

Mira (around 30, Bulgaria, marketing specialist and entrepreneur)

Mikhail (around 60, Bulgaria, former diplomat in Lebanon)

Nixon (around 40, Denmark, IT specialist and business coach)

Audrey (around 35, Norway, English and Spanish teacher)

Ray (around 35, Canada, IT specialist)

Thea (around 60, Bulgaria, condominium and coliving manager)

Ulrich (around 50, Austria, real estate entrepreneur)

Frank (around 50, UK, rental property broker and handyman)

Janush (around 25, Estonia, IT specialist)

Appendix 2

The buildings in the New Town, built over the past few decades, meet the requirements of the Regulation on Specific Requirements for the Appearance of Urban Spaces, Buildings and Architectural Ensembles on the Territory of the Town of Bansko



Buildings in Bansko's New Town.

Appendix 3

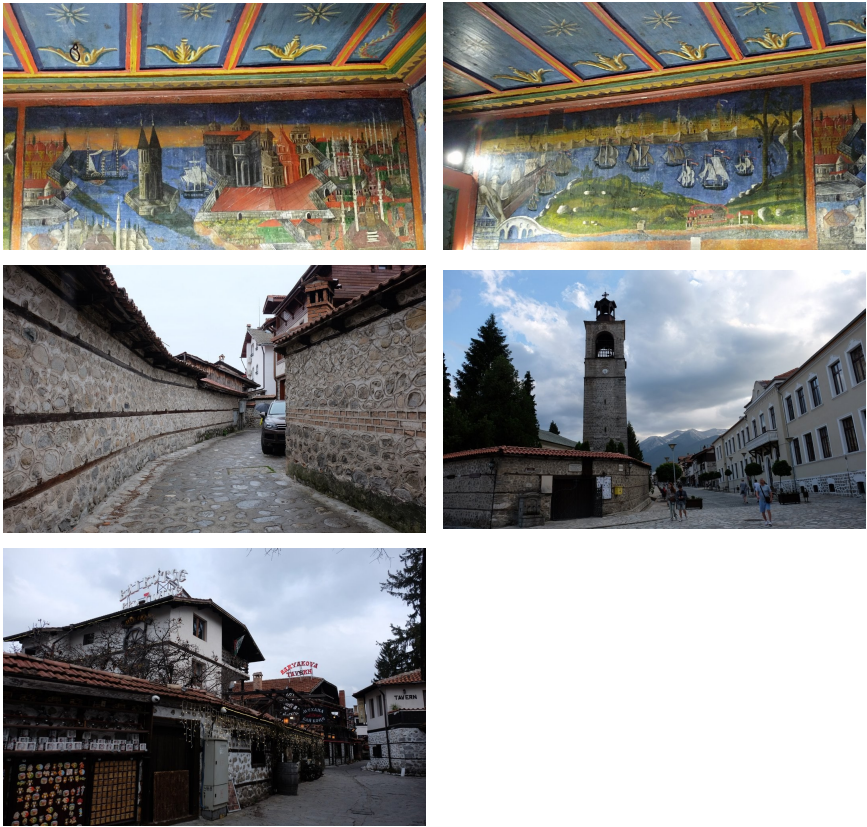
Houses of Local People with a Typical Appearance from the Second Half of the 20th Century



Local houses dating mainly from the second half of the twentieth century.

Appendix 4

Murals in the Velyanova House Museum and Shots from the Old Town



Murals in the Velyanova House Museum and views of Bansko's Old Town.

Appendix 5

Popular statements in personal development publications and their potential harms. Adapted from a Facebook post by Vanessa Videnova.

“Manifest your dreams with positive thinking”: can cause feelings of guilt and shame if dreams don’t come true, and can make a person feel “broken.”

“You are the reason for everything that happens to you”: toxic for victims of violence or people who grew up in an unfair environment.

“Just let go of control”: not applicable for people with anxiety or obsessive-compulsive disorder who rely on control to feel safe.

“Get out of your comfort zone”: ignores the need for rest and security and can lead to overload.

“Say yes to everything life throws at you”: leads to burnout and tolerating adverse situations.

“Your morning determines your entire day”: ignores different biological rhythms, work schedules, and personal issues/conditions such as depression.

“Choose love, not fear”: Fear often has a protective function and should not always be rejected.

“Just follow your passion”: downplays the difficult circumstances of people who cannot afford to follow their passion.

“Be here and now”: Escaping into the past or future can be a defense mechanism against a painful present.

“Clear your environment of negative people”: can easily lead to isolation and lack of empathy for different perspectives.

“Everyone should be self-sufficient”: contradicts the fact that humans are social beings and need mutual help to be mentally healthy.

“Give away the energy you want to attract”: leads to toxic positivity, as it makes people pretend to be happy and feel guilty if they are not.

“High vibrations cure everything”: ignores the need for medical care and material support.

“Your body holds all the answers”: sounds derogatory to people with autoimmune diseases or dissociation.

“Be completely yourself”: can create pressure if you don’t know who you are, or lead to extremes that alienate loved ones.

“Do it with your heart, not your mind”: following emotions too much can lead to bad decisions, and following reason too much can lead to a lack of joy and satisfaction.

“It doesn’t work if you don’t feel it”: progress often requires discipline and routine, not just inspiration.

“Love yourself to be loved”: suggests that if you don’t receive love, you don’t love yourself enough, which is cruel to people who feel abandoned.

“If you are grateful, you will receive more”: forces people to suppress their negative emotions, which can be harmful to their health.

“You are simply an observer of your thoughts and emotions”: for people who already feel disconnected from themselves, this deepens feelings of alienation.

“Have no expectations, only then will you not be disappointed”: breeds a fear of intimacy and toxic self-sufficiency.

“Every pain comes with a lesson, don’t resist, accept it”: can set a person up for chronic hurt.

“There is no good or bad, everything just is”: disregards conscience and morality, which makes the world a more dangerous place.

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Bansko Nomad Fest: “Go global, stay free.”