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BAUMAN'S METAPHORS IN MOTION: THE TOURIST METAPHOR AND DIGITAL NOMADISM

Životnost Baumanovih Metafora: Digitalni nomadi i metafora turista

ABSTRACT: *Zygmunt Bauman's artistic form of sociology, characterised by its use of metaphors, provides a distinct perspective to analyse contemporary social phenomena like digital nomadism. Bauman's metaphors, such as "liquidity", "tourists", and "vagabonds", vividly capture the fluidity and mobility of contemporary society. In "liquid modernity", social structures are constantly in flux, and individuals are often on the move, either by choice or necessity. Digital nomads represent multiple facets of Bauman's "tourist" metaphor. They are mobile, flexible, and often from the global North, moving freely between locations and engaging in consumer culture. This way of life embodies the changing identities and experiences typical of "liquid modernity". Bauman's "tourist" metaphor highlights the privileged nature of digital nomadism, where mobility is a class divide, distinguishing the "haves" from the "have-nots". Prioritising transient experiences and surface-level interactions over substantial cultural immersion, digital nomads mirror tourists and thus exhibit what Bauman calls "tourist syndrome". This perspective challenges traditional notions of community and highlights the tension between mobility and belonging. By applying the "tourist" metaphor to digital nomads, this paper demonstrates the usefulness of Bauman's poetic sociological imagination in capturing contemporary social phenomena.*

KEYWORDS: *Bauman, liquidity, tourists, mobility, digital nomads*

APSTRAKT: *Baumanov pristup sociologiji kao umjetnosti, karakteriziran uporabom metafora, pruža posebnu perspektivu za analizu suvremenih društvenih fenomena poput digitalnih nomada. Baumanove metafore, poput „likvidnosti", „turista" i „skitnica", zorno prikazuju fluidnost i mobilnost suvremenog društva. U „likvidnoj moderni" društvene strukture neprestano se mijenjaju, a pojedinci su neprestance u pokretu. Digitalni nomadi višestruko utjelovljuju Baumanovu*

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metaforu „turista". Oni su mobilni, fleksibilni i često dolaze s globalnog Sjevera, često mijenjaju lokacije i uključeni su u potrošačku kulturu. Njihov način života utjelovljuje promjenjive identitete i iskustva tipična za „likvidnu modernu". Baumanova metafora „turista" naglašava privilegiranu prirodu digitalnih nomada, gdje je mobilnost novi oblik društvene stratifikacije. Dajući prednost prolaznim iskustvima i površinskim interakcijama u odnosu na produbljenije odnose, digitalni nomadi manifestiraju ono što Bauman naziva „turističkim sindromom". Digitalni nomadi rastvaraju tradicionalne predodžbe o zajednici i pripadanju. Primjenjujući metaforu „turista" na digitalne nomade, ovaj rad nastoji pokazati korisnost Baumanove poetske sociološke imaginacije razumijevanju suvremenih društvenih fenomena.

KLJUČNE RIJEČI: *Bauman, likvidnost, turisti, mobilnost, digitalni nomadi*

Introduction

Bauman was a lyrical sociologist. Lyrical sociology commonly employs vivid figuration and personification, prioritising the communication of the author's emotional engagement with the subject of study over a purely explanatory approach (Abbot, 2007). Bauman's "poetic sociological imagination"[2] expressed through the extensive deployment of metaphors, forms the core methodology for his conceptual framework and his uniquely engaged and humanistic brand of sociology.[3] His metaphorical language illuminates fundamental aspects of the social reality (Jacobsen and Marshman, 2006:308). For Bauman (1967: 406) metaphors, alongside other qualitative methods, have a superior capacity for representing real-life experiences. Bauman's metaphors can be categorised into three interconnected, yet distinct, types: 1) landscape or societal metaphors, which illustrate macro-level social structures; 2) portraits or human metaphors, which focus on individual experiences and social roles; and 3) progress or utopian metaphors, which address the trajectory of social change (Jacobsen, 2006; Jacobsen and Marshman, 2008; Višić, 2024: 51-54). However, Bauman's employment of metaphors is not always successful. In his works, there is no singular metaphor that functions as a model for social analysis (Višić, 2024: 47). Since metaphors are sometimes used for dramatisation instead of systematisation, a clear apparatus for studying society is lacking, causing a "hypertrophy of metaphors" (Jacobsen and Marshman, 2006: 309). Some of Bauman's metaphors

2 Poetic sociological imagination fuses sociological imagination (Mills, 1959) and cognitive aesthetics (Brown, 1977). Poetic sociological imagination as an outlet of cognitive aesthetics views metaphor as a logic of discovery that includes science and the arts. This approach suggests a reformulation of deductive and inductive scientific explanation, viewing formal representations, in both science and art, as metaphorical redescriptions of the explanandum (Brown, 1977:79-80).

3 Bauman's metaphor-driven sociology rests on four themes: privileging lived experience over abstraction; tracing how macro forces shape individual lives; aligning analysis with political action in an irrational, ambivalent world; and ethically confronting the resulting suffering, especially among the marginalised (Tester, 2004:5-6; Višić, 2024:46).

lack depth, which limits their usefulness for developing new theories (Turner, 2010: 51, 136-141).

Despite their limitations, metaphors prove adequate when they simplify phenomena (Brown, 1977: 104-105), enable quick conceptualisation (Goodman, 1976: 80), remain credible to audiences (House, 1979), integrate diverse symbolic domains, and successfully demonstrate experience (Martin, 1975: 168-208). Bauman's metaphors are mobile and contextually flexible, constrained only by the researcher's creativity. They provide fresh interpretations through innovative terminology—"vagabonds" for the new poor and "tourists" for the new elite or digital nomads (Jacobsen and Marshman, 2006:312; Jacobsen and Marshman, 2008:815; Višić, 2024:50).

Hence, this paper explores the applicability of Bauman's "tourist" metaphor to the contemporary phenomenon of digital nomadism. The paper builds upon similar scholarship, that has successfully employed Bauman's metaphors, such as Jovanović Ajzenhamer's (2022) use of "Titanic syndrome" to analyse psycho-social consequences of COVID-19, Kamete's (2017) application of the "gardening state" metaphor to illustrate urban and social planning in Zimbabwe, and Çelik's (2023) study on integrating immigrants and refugees in Istanbul by applying Bauman's distinction between "tourist" and "vagabond". This paper challenges Davis's (2008:151) assertion that the metaphors of "tourists" and "vagabonds" lack clear social referents by applying the "tourist" metaphor to digital nomads (DN). Furthermore, Reichenberger's (2017:15) content analysis and semi-structured in-depth interviews revealed that digital nomadism is a new form of tourism. DNs embody many of the aspects of "liquid modernity" and "touristification" and can be seen as among the most liquified social figures (Xiao and Lutz, 2024:4). Departing from earlier research (Cf. footnote 3) focused on the economic, technological, or lifestyle dimensions of digital nomadism, this study underscores the efficacy of Bauman's poetically-informed sociological perspective in understanding current social phenomena by systematically applying Bauman's metaphors as the primary theoretical lens. This paper extends Bauman's mobility-based stratification theory by exploring how digital nomads exemplify the new social figure and division within liquid modernity and embody the "tourist syndrome". The paper's contribution also includes expanding the metaphorical range of Bauman's work, illustrating its versatility in different settings. Finally, the paper connects sociological theory with tourism studies, digital work research, and mobility studies, demonstrating the cross-disciplinary relevance of Bauman's framework.

Digital Nomads

The term DN was first introduced by Makimoto and Manners (1997) in their utopian manifesto on a nomadic lifestyle. Makimoto and Manners (1997:57) envisioned that one of the identity choices in the 21st century would be nomads or commuters. The three enablers of the nomadic lifestyle are changes in attitude, technology, and communications (Makimoto and Manners, 1997:25).

Many of their predictions have since become reality, and although they were likely unfamiliar with Bauman's work, their wording echoes Bauman's themes. Makimoto and Manners (1997:152-153) describe the prerequisites for a nomadic lifestyle as "lightness" and "mobility": "... technological developments stimulate nomadism — removing the bulky features of high-tech goods and allowing the nomad to travel light (...) nomad (...) must have affordable, and above all, pocketable, tools". The "liquefaction of solids", both on macro and micro level and the "disdain for possession" is described as: "... declines in materialism and nationalism, diminishing power for governments (...) And the demands of work are increasingly encouraging nomadism. Jobs, in the late 1990s, are becoming more 'project-oriented'(...) Project working (...) entails a nomadic lifestyle (...) Relationships could benefit enormously from the nomadic lifestyle. As settlers, we often get locked into a closed circle of friends (...) A nomadic lifestyle [allows] meeting vastly more people than a settled lifestyle (...) Also people often feel more inclined to be open and friendly with people they are unlikely ever to meet again" However, they were right in predicting that nomadism is a lifestyle for the "tourists" from the global North/first world: "... nomadic lifestyle (...) could be a good thing for the citizens of the developed world (...) the main facilitator for the DN is a credit card backed by a healthy bank balance. Nomadism will not, for a while yet, be an inexpensive lifestyle" (Makimoto and Manners, 1997:196-201).

An agreed-upon understanding of DNs[4] is that they are young, mobile professionals who work remotely from various locations, relying on reliable

4 There is an ongoing debate regarding terminology and definition (cf. Hannonen, 2020; Reichenberger, 2017; Müller, 2016). Terms such as "neo-nomads", "global nomads" (D'Andrea, 2006), "neo-tribes" (Hardy and Robards, 2015), and "lifestyle traveller" (Cohen et al., 2013:156-158) have also been proposed to describe the interrelation between global hypermobility and subjectivity formation, as well as the intersection of work, leisure and travel. Voll et al. (2022) describe digital nomadism as an extreme form of flexible work, enabled by technological advancements and globalisation. This lifestyle involves working from multiple locations and primarily relying on the internet and portable devices. Šímová (2022) views digital nomadism as a lifestyle predominantly associated with younger and digitally literate generations. She identifies key aspects of this lifestyle as flexibility, mobility, location-independent work, self-identification, and the integration of productivity with leisure activities. According to Reichenberger (2017), DN strives for a holistic lifestyle that balances professional, spatial, and personal freedom. Ideally, they view work as intrinsically fulfilling, similar to leisure activities, rather than an obligation. Sánchez-Vergara et al. (2023) emphasise the significance of co-working and co-living spaces, as well as values such as well-being, quality of life, and personal growth, but also the challenges of rootlessness and social alienation. Matsushita uses the term "workcation" to study digital nomadism. According to Matsushita (2024:2) "workcation" involves "flexible leave systems and ways of working that integrate extraordinary leisure into daily work, which individuals value and choose independently". The concept of "workcation" reflects Bauman's notion of "liquid modernity", where increased mobility dissolves the boundaries between work and leisure, and blurs national borders. Cook (2023:259) provides an updated definition and proposes a taxonomy for DN. According to this definition, DN uses digital technologies to work remotely, allowing them to travel and work simultaneously. They have autonomy over the frequency and choice of location and typically visit at least three different locations annually that are not their own or a friend's or family home. Cook (2023:259) categorises DN into five types: 1) freelancers, 2) business owners, 3) salaried DN, 4) experimental DN, and 5) armchair DN. Likewise, Woldoff and Litchfield (2021:15-16) distinguish between three phases of nomadism based on the duration of residence. These

internet access to perform their jobs (Mancinelli, 2019:2; Miguel et al., 2024:2; Thompson, 2019:2-3). According to the Nomad List (2025)[5], the average DN is a 36-year-old, single, progressive and not religious, white heterosexual male with a bachelor's degree who works as a software developer. They do not have student debt and come from middle– to upper-class families. Their parents often have additional sources of income beyond their salaries, which has contributed to their ability to adopt a DN lifestyle (Thompson, 2021:25-27). Working in the gig economy makes it difficult to estimate their annual earnings. Many rely on their paychecks to cover their expenses, often seeking financial help from family (Thompson, 2021: 55-56). Recent statistics show a surge in people identifying as DN, increasing from about 10.9 million before the COVID-19 pandemic to 35 million by the end of 2022 (Think Remote, 2023).

DNs favour both online and offline co-living and co-working spaces. This preference aligns with the "fluid" nature of friendships, as noted in a study by Kuzmanović and Tošković (2023), which suggests that online and offline friendships are no longer distinct categories. Hence, DNs adopt a non-spatial and fluid perspective on community, characterised by constant flux as individuals frequently come and go, forming and breaking social bonds. This further limits the capacity to form enduring personal relationships. However, DN are expected to conform to a norm of fluidity, where the transient nature of social relationships is the standard (Thompson, 2021: 81-90; Woldoff and Litchfield, 2021: 91-118; Miguel et al., 2024: 2-3). Thus, DNs epitomise the melting of *gemeinschaft*. As Bauman (2000: 92) notes: "Community is these days the last relic of the old-time utopias of the good society; it stands for whatever has been left of the dreams of a better life shared with better neighbours all following better rules of cohabitation". To ease feelings of loneliness stemming from the lack of deep social connections inherent in their mobile lifestyle and network individualism, DNs use digital media platforms to connect. Homophily, or the ability to connect with like-minded individuals even briefly, is a key characteristic of DNs' communities. It also shapes their choice of travel destinations (Miguel et al., 2024; Woldoff and Litchfield, 2021: 94, 207). However, shallow connections made through apps like MeetUp can exacerbate loneliness rather than ease it (Miguel et al., 2024: 15). Thus, to Bauman (2000: 200-201), they resemble "carnival communities" which provide temporary relief from the isolation of daily struggles. These communities are ephemeral events that disrupt the monotony of solitude, allowing participants to release pent-up energy and better endure the routine to which they must return. However, Bauman (2000: 200-201) notes that such carnival communities are not a solution to the sufferings of liquid modernity; rather, they are both symptoms and sometimes causal factors of the

phases include: 1) "honeymooners": first-time nomads who stay in one place for less than two months; 2) "visa runners": nomads who temporarily leave a country for visa renewal purposes; and 3) "resident nomads": individuals who stay in the same location for more than a year, often demonstrating their commitment by signing a long-term rental lease. Despite nuanced differences in terminology and definitions, DNs align with Bauman's "tourist" metaphor, as it effectively captures the core aspects of their lifestyle.

5 https://nomads.com/digital-nomad-statistics

social disorder characteristic of the liquid modern condition. DNs' communities resonate with what Bauman (2001: 116-117) termed "voluntary ghetto". Unlike traditional ghettos, where insiders are trapped, "voluntary ghettos" exclude outsiders while allowing insiders—DN—to sway. Therefore, "voluntary ghettos" advance the cause of freedom. This reduces the chances of experiencing cultural diversity and confronting cultural challenges (Bauman, 1995). DNs seldom engage with locals outside tourist pathways (Thompson, 2021: 70-79). Hence, DNs exemplify what Bauman referred to as "tourist syndrome"[6], characterised by two key features: weak connections to physical and social spaces and "grazing behaviour". Rather than seeking deep cultural exchanges, DNs prioritise short-term experiences and sensations. This type of tourism does not foster meaningful cross-cultural interactions, as locals are encountered in the capacity of hospitality workers rather than as peers or community members (Bauman and Franklin, 2003:207-213).

A DNs' utopia involves working as little as possible and spending leisure time in exotic locations instead of prioritising productivity and on-site work. In a DNs' liquid lifestyle that values dematerialisation and mobility, "temporal privilege" – based on the perception of time abundance and time sovereignty – is a prized status symbol. By leveraging digital technologies to foster a "nowist"[7] lifestyle, DNs achieve temporal control and escape the constraints of corporate life (Atanasova et al., 2023:25-28). Therefore, the five core values DNs share are freedom, personal development, sharing, positivity, and minimalism. For them, freedom means defining oneself independently of societal structures and institutions, emphasising self-determination and autonomy in all aspects of life. This concept of freedom is tied to mobility, as frequent travel serves as a rebellion against being tied to a specific place, job, or situation. DNs embody what may be referred to as "neoliberal nomadism" – the belief that freedom can be bought through market mechanisms. Their lifestyle exemplifies a strategic response to the conditions fostered by neoliberal entrepreneurial ideals (Mancinelli, 2022). Hence, this freedom is framed as an escape from traditional work structures while reinforcing market-based solutions to life dissatisfaction. Personal development among DNs takes on a "liquid" form as well. Their approach to learning is eclectic and self-oriented, often critical of conventional educational institutions. Instead, they favour a customised search for knowledge, drawing inspiration from self-help literature and business gurus. As a result, many identify themselves with labels such as genius, futurist, change-maker, polymath, thought leader, and inspirational speaker to describe their evolving identities.

6 Although digital nomads often engage in tourist-like activities, they are quick to dismiss the "tourist" label and prefer the "traveller" label (Lacárcel et al., 2024). However, this label masks their reliance on tourism infrastructure—such as short-term rentals, coworking spaces, and English-speaking hosts—and their preference for tourist destinations. Digital nomads often prioritise leisure over work.

7 Bauman (2016) describes modern life as an eternal present he dubs "nowist time," highlighting its fragmented, immediate nature. He contrasts this with past eras' linear, planned temporality: "Once upon a time there was time. But time is no more (…) There's a word to define this notion: nowist time. The time of this particular moment".

For DNs, sharing is the core value that promotes social bonding and networking. This sharing encompasses a wide range of behaviours, from tangible actions like teaching skills without charge, to practical forms of support such as advice on housing and visas, and emotional support like attending group talks to show encouragement. DNs are unrelenting optimists, inspired by self-help literature and motivational speakers. They reject competition, viewing it as a "scarcity mindset", and instead embrace an "abundance mindset", believing they do not compete. Despite working in the gig economy, they maintain this outlook even when finances are tight, drawing inspiration from successful figures in science, technology, and business. Thus, their distancing from conventional professional identities, the romanticised narratives they construct about themselves, and their curated presentations on social media collectively contribute to the aestheticisation of their labour and the deliberate cultivation of self-branding. DNs take pride in their minimalist lifestyle, carrying everything they need in their backpacks and viewing minimalism as a protest against overconsumption. Despite their minimalist ideals, DNs engage in conspicuous consumption by buying high-quality items, flight tickets, Airbnb apartments, travelling to exotic locations and showcasing their experiences on Instagram (Woldoff and Litchfield, 2021:96-108, Thompson, 2021:45-60). DNs values are rooted in positive psychology, which acts as another melting agent of solids by emphasising personal responsibilities over structural factors such as institutional constraints and social inequalities. This perspective aligns with neoliberalism, where individuals are held accountable for their success in a competitive economy that benefits the wealthy. Consequently, DNs believe anyone can become and succeed as a nomad through hard work (Thompson, 2021:45-51). Guides promoting the DNs' lifestyle are filled with "liquid", vague language and offer little "solid" advice. They are primarily motivational, with little advice on how and where to find specific jobs and the salary range (cf. Lonely Planet, 2020).

Metaphors of "Liquidity", "Tourists", and "Vagabonds"

Bauman's (2000; 2005a; 2005b) central metaphor that captures social and life changes is "liquidity". "Liquid modernity" is characterised by the dual processes of globalisation and individualisation, which contribute to the fragmenting and weakening of social bonds. The dissolution of solid social structures (state, community, marriage, vocation) facilitated the progressive decoupling of economic activity from its traditional political, ethical, and cultural embeddedness, resulting in the sedimentation of a new social order defined by economic imperatives (Bauman, 2000: 4). Therefore, grand-scale visions of solid modernity were fragmented into numerous private utopias. They are each custom-designed for solitary personal satisfaction (Bauman, 2005a: 152). The allure of these utopias lies in the promise of continuous new beginnings and experiences. This stems from the fundamental characteristic of "liquid modernity," which, lacking fixed objectives or endpoints, renders transience the sole enduring condition (Bauman, 2005a: 66). Hence, liquid modernity's temporal framework is pure

presentism: Bauman (1992: 164–190) portrays time as consequence-free episodes, undifferentiated moments, an endless present and a future subsumed into now, drawing on "nowist culture"[8] and Heller's (1993) "absolute present," thus making it the perfect setting for a "nowist time" of "hurried life": "[t]he chance that each point might contain will follow it to its grave; for that particular (...) chance, there will be no 'second chance.' Each point might be lived through as a new beginning (...) but if there was no fast and determined spur to instant action, the curtain will have fallen right after the start of the act with (...) little happening in between. Procrastination is a serial killer of chances" (Bauman, 2008: 173; 2007: 35). Communication technologies, with their capacity to expedite tasks and facilitate remote operations (as exemplified by the DN lifestyle), have provided a "tangible" foundation to cultivate DN utopia and have further accelerated the pace of life. Bauman (2010a) referred to this phenomenon as an "offline-online" lifestyle, encapsulating the lived experience of DN.[9] By preferring *screen time* instead of *real-time*, Bauman (2010a: 21-28) reminds us of the diminishing importance of face-to-face communication, which makes up the ethical fabric of society: "[i]n a life of continuous emergency, virtual relations easily beat the 'real stuff'. Whereas it is primarily the offline world that prompts young [people] to be constantly on the move, such pressures would be to no avail were it not for the electronically based capacity to multiply encounters between individuals by making them brief, shallow and eminently disposable. Virtual relations are equipped with 'delete' and 'spam' keys that protect against the cumbersome (...) consequences of in-depth interaction". Unlike offline life, which values few strong, long-lasting relationships, the online world fosters many superficial and short-lived connections. For DN, reinventing themselves is what matters. Perpetual reidentification replaces their ancestors' concept of one-time identification. The interactive capacities of the online sphere, where quantity and not quality of relationships count, provide a platform for reidentification (Bauman, 2010a: 22-23). According to Bauman, this reflects another manifestation of hyper-consumerism wherein the nomadic lifestyle obscures the reality of living on borrowed credit[10] (Bauman, 2010b; Davis, 2016: 4).

Therefore, in a liquid online and offline environment, everything is in flux. Bauman (2005a: 2) describes liquid life as precarious, existing within perpetual uncertainty, and a series of unending beginnings. Central to liquid life, Bauman (2005a: 3) argues, is avoidance of responsibilities in both one's

8 Bertman (1998: 82-87) uses the term "nowist" to describe a society that lives by flux, that is always inclined to move forward rather than rest, where patience is not a virtue and where transience rather than permanence is its central characteristic.

9 Bauman (2010a: 21) quotes a student whose sentiments resonate with DNs: "' I don't want my life to control me too much. I don't want to sacrifice everything to my career… The most important thing is to be comfortable … Nobody wants to be stuck in the same job for long." One nomad respondent described her experience similarly: "I just travelled the world by myself for eight months. I can do anything (…) I didn't want to get a full-time job. I was like, 'Hell no! I am not being stuck in an office again'" (Woldoff and Litchfield, 2021: 179).

10 DNs usually come from middle-class families, have no college debt and are given money from their parents to kick-start their nomadic lifestyle (Thompson, 2021:25-28).

work and personal life. Long-term commitment is a trap that should be avoided by diluting relations and submitting them to an annual inspection just like vehicles. Therefore, the ideas of lifetime employment and marriage are outdated (Bauman, 2003: x). Unlike traditional communities, DNs do not form bonds based on shared youth or history. Even when they make bonds, it does not follow that they settle in the same place. Instead, the social connections of DN form and fade depending on work and personal needs, as everyone arrives alone to reinvent themselves. Thus, DNs accept the fluid nature of their relationships (Woldoff and Litchfield, 2021: 117). The lack of social support often related to the capacity to stay in one place long enough to connect with other people contributes to the greater level of loneliness. To combat loneliness, DNs build online communities. Platforms like Instagram, Facebook groups, Slack, Meetup, Couchsurfing, and Tinder facilitate networking among DN, focusing on creating new connections, in contrast to WhatsApp, which is for maintaining existing bonds (Miguel et al., 2024). As Živković and Petrović (2024: 67), and Chayko (2019) suggest, modern communication technologies and social media platforms have evolved to replicate the functions of traditional communities. Therefore, Bauman's "liquidity" effectively captures the context in which digital nomadism emerges and thrives and in which people are made into "strangers" (Jacobsen and Marshman, 2008: 805-806). To succeed in this lifestyle, one must prioritise lightness and mobility; this is accomplished by discarding excess belongings instead of acquiring things[11] (Bauman, 2005a: 2).

The condition of "liquidity" engenders new social stratification marked by the opposition between "tourists" and "vagabonds", wherein *mobility* functions as a class divide, delineating the "haves" from the "have nots".[12] Bauman (1998: 77) argues that in liquid times, "we are all on the move" either in an online or physical world. Thus, mobility has become a paramount value and unequal access to it is the main stratifying factor of late modernity (Bauman, 1998:2). Bauman juxtaposes "tourists" and "vagabonds" with the "pilgrims" of solid modernity. However, in contrast to the latter, the former lacks a destination[13] (Bauman, 1993: 240; 1995: 83-88). They are constantly on the move, willingly or otherwise. The "tourists" are the elite who can participate in the consumer society. They are the

11 This is exemplified by DN's backpacker lifestyle. As DNs explained: "I've got to carry everything I own on my back. I have to have an Osprey backpack" (Thompson, 2021: 57); "I travel with a carry-on only, so 45L, and I have a little backpack with my laptop. The mental clarity I've had from having less stuff is amazing (…); I've never been materialistic. I remember going backpacking when I was twenty-one around Asia with just a tiny backpack, and I'm like, 'I don't need stuff.'" (Woldoff and Litchfield, 2021: 106-107).

The sole possession they require, according to Makimoto and Manners (1997: 85) is a "nomadic toolset" a miniaturised, multifunctional device akin to today's smartphone.

Lonely Planet's (2020) DN handbook is full of advice for backpackers' minimalistic lifestyle.

12 Bauman's sociology features "will-to-dualism", a tendency to analyse social phenomena through binary oppositions (Davis, 2008: 142).

13 This is not the case for DNs. Some popular destinations for DNs include Bali (Woldoff and Litchfield, 2021: 74), Portugal and Madeira, which is home to Europe's first DN village (De Carvalho, 2024: 4), and Chiang Mai (Thompson, 2021:38). Additionally, DN destinations overlap with touristic ones: Southeast Asia, Spain, and Greece (Thompson, 2021: 70). To Bauman, these places hold a cult-like status (Bauman and Franklin, 2003: 210).

epitome of fluidity, the masters of melting the solids, and they move by choice. The "vagabonds" serve the tourists.[14] They are those who lack resources and are "flawed consumers" making up a broad spectrum of immigrants, refugees, and the underclass.[15] Unlike tourists who travel for pleasure and see the world as welcoming, vagabonds move because of need, viewing the world as unwelcoming (Bauman, 1997: 89-93). Bauman (1998: 89) posits that the "tourists" class encompasses professionals such as business managers and academics. However, the "tourist" metaphor meets the criteria of adequacy and, thus, can be expanded to include DN. The flow of "tourists"/DNs follows the same path as the flow of capital, commodities, and information.[16] The privileged "tourists"/DNs belong to the "first world/global North" while the unprivileged to the "second world/global South". As Bauman (1998: 88) remarks: "For the first world, (...) of the globally mobile, the space has lost its constraining quality and is easily traversed in both its 'real' and 'virtual' renditions. For the second world, (...) of the 'locally tied', of those (...) bound to bear passively whatever change (...), the real space is fast closing up. This is a kind of deprivation which is made yet more painful by the obtrusive media display of the space conquest and of the '*virtual* accessibility' of distances that stay stubbornly unreachable in non-virtual reality". The quote's end is especially relevant to DNs, who spend much of their free time online, creating perfect Instagram images while consuming others' content. An Instagram search for *#digitalnomad* mostly reveals attractive young white women in bikinis on

Lonely Planet (2020: 138-145) lists five key attributes to consider when choosing a location: 1) connectivity at least 100Mbps, 2) plenty of cafes and co-working spaces, 3) easy visas, 4) abundant and affordable accommodation, and 5) low living costs.

14 Bauman's employment of the metaphors "tourist" and "vagabond" to elucidate the mobility feature of liquid modernity has garnered scholarly and popular acclaim (Jacobsen & Marshman, 2008: 808). However, Bauman notes that mimicking capital flow and the liquefaction of bonds is not a choice available to everyone. Vagabonds have their fate imposed on them (Tester, 2004: 180).

15 The socioeconomic impact of digital nomadism fosters a process where locals are becoming "vagabonds". Tourism raises prices of land, food and imports and this impacts what locals can buy and where they can live (Thompson, 2021:18-19,69). This prompts discussion on neocolonial gentrification (De Carvalho, 2024:4). In contrast Choudhury (2022) argues that DNs can boon the economy. Almeida and Belezas (2022: 181-193) identify digital nomadism as a potential avenue for the touristification, digitisation, and revitalisation of peripheral areas.

Makimoto and Manners (1997: 13-22) optimistically envisioned that nomadism would resolve unemployment, spur the development of new cities for temporary residents and expand settlements in scenic locations for short-term visitors.

DNs often avoid taxes, reflecting their aversion to commitment and responsibility (Thompson, 2021: 68). This behaviour hinders local community development and reinforces their "vagabondisation".

The influx of DNs can clash with local traditions and practices. In Bali, for example, locals value dogs as home protectors, unlike tourists who are troubled by the many street dogs. Increased crowding is causing more traffic and accidents, largely due to nomads' unfamiliarity with Balinese traffic regulations. Furthermore, DNs believe Indonesia's laws infringe on their civil liberties, citing regulations on marijuana and swimwear on the beaches around temples as examples (Woldoff and Litchfield, 2020: 84-86).

16 Bandyopadhyay and Patil's (2017: 645) study on volunteer tourism found that every year 1.6 million young volunteer tourists come from the global North to the global South and spend $2 billion.

beaches, often with inspirational quotes. Roughly one-fifth of the images feature muscular Caucasian men participating in physical activities or enjoying beer, each accompanied by a motivational quote (Thompson, 2021: 10; Woldoff and Litchfield, 2021: 56-67). Therefore, immobility becomes the new form of social disadvantage in a world where mobility is highly valued. As Bauman (1998: 94) explains: "Ask the vagabonds what sort of life they would wish to have (...) and you will get a pretty accurate description of the tourist's bliss 'as seen on TV' [and on Instagram]. Vagabonds have no other images of the good life – no alternative utopia (...) The sole thing they want is to be allowed to be tourists (...) In a restless world, tourism is the only acceptable, human form of restlessness". The vagabonds, those who are tied to their locality, are seen by Bauman (1997: 93) as an alter-ego of the "tourists". The worse the vagabonds' conditions, the more satisfying it is to be a tourist. If there were no vagabonds, the tourists would have to invent them (Bauman, 1998: 98). Examining how mobility is actualised, Bauman (1998: 87) observed the diminishing role of entry visas and the rise of prising passports[17] which could be taken as a metaphor for a new stratification. DNs are Westerners with strong passports and resources that allow them to travel to almost every country (Thompson, 2021: 14-18). Bauman (2000: 209) sees the nomad as the symbolic figure of liquid modernity. However, Bauman (1998: 87-88) challenges the indiscriminate application of the term, arguing that this usage conflates the distinct experiences of "tourists" and "vagabonds". This is the nomadic paradox. "Vagabonds" are tied to their locality (as are hosts of DNs' countries) or are "involuntary tourists" forced to move.[18] This reveals the nomadic paradox, which shows that freedom from traditional constraints and self-determination can lead to new inequalities and social fragmentation. The nomadic elite's liberty relies on others' immobility and vulnerability. In liquid modernity, greater individual freedom coexists with heightened anxiety, uncertainty, and social disconnection. What seems liberating for some becomes a source of displacement and marginalisation for others. However, DNs/"tourists" and "vagabonds" embody the "social figure" of "liquid modernity". Social figures are inter-figurative references between contrasting figures (tourists/vagabonds). They are not random individuals but symbolic representations of contemporary society, characterised by their traits and behaviours. Social figures emerge in public discourse during times of crisis and societal transformation, such as the 'melting of solids' in liquid modernity. They articulate new challenges and

17 The "tourist" metaphor could also be applied to another type of nomadic movement "passport bro". They are Western men who travel to developing countries, like Thailand, seeking wives who embrace traditional gender roles. Here is their testimonial on "liquefication" which "pushed" them into a nomadic lifestyle: "Passport Bros are driven by a desire for peace, appreciation, respect, kindness, and love within relationships, values they feel are increasingly rare in their own cultural context. They see the trend of shifting demographics and cultural changes within Western societies as a cause for concern, believing that the traditional foundations of relationships are under threat. As a response (…) [we] choose to explore relationships with foreign women who are (…) more in line with their desired values and expectations" (Passport Bro, 2023).

18 According to a 2023 report by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), in 2022, 108.4 million individuals were forcibly displaced worldwide, attributed to factors including war, persecution, violence, and human rights violations.

unresolved issues and can manifest in various forms, including that of DNs (Schlechtriemen, 2024:213-214).

A primary criticism is that Bauman's portrayal of "liquid life" is unduly bleak and depressing. He sees globalisation as a negative force at both the macro and micro societal levels. The effects of globalisation in bringing different cultures in touch with each other are seen only from the negative side. Furthermore, Bauman sees the human experience of globalisation as a duality between "tourists" and "vagabonds". However, as with all dualities, the line between them is blurry. It is difficult to categorise specific people as either "tourists" or "vagabonds," because these labels do not always fit.[19] For example, some wealthy and resourceful social groups may choose not to engage in "touristic" lifestyles because of ethical or other considerations (Davis, 2008: 151). Davis (2008: 137-152) makes a partly valid point. Metaphors offer flexible interpretations and can either limit or broaden imagination. They cannot substitute for empirical evidence but may help sharpen sociological imagination and provide a general understanding and direction in approaching empirical cases. Therefore, the metaphors „liquidity," „tourist," and „vagabond" serve as heuristic devices rather than factual descriptions of reality (Višić, 2024: 47-51). Moreover, metaphors can dismantle conventional wisdom, encouraging critical examination of existing beliefs. Metaphors of "tourists", "vagabonds", and "liquidity" successfully redefine popular connotations through Bauman's preferred strategy of defamiliarization. Defamiliarization involves making the familiar seem strange. It "may open up new and previously unsuspected possibilities of living one's life with others with more self-awareness, more comprehension of our surroundings in terms of greater self and social knowledge and perhaps also with metaphors of more freedom and control" (Bauman and May, 2001:10–11). Thus, by using "tourist" and "vagabond", Bauman anthropomorphises the abstract ideas, making them more relatable (Jacobsen, 2008:810).

Concluding remarks

Bauman's metaphors – "tourists," "liquid modernity," and "vagabonds" – developed before the rise of digital nomadism, offer profound insights into it. His conceptualisation of the "offline-online" lifestyle offers an insightful model for understanding the digital nomad experience, anticipating how screen-mediated interactions would replace face-to-face encounters in remote work environments. Bauman's insight that mobility has become a paramount value and unequal access to it is the main stratifying factor of late modernity directly anticipates how digital nomadism represents a new form of privilege. Bauman's observations about communication technologies anticipated their role in establishing the foundations for what might be termed the "digital nomad utopia." His analysis of consumption-based identity formation predicted

19 Bauman's distinction between a mobile elite and an immobile mass oversimplifies the diverse realities of contemporary movement and, by focusing on Western cotexts, risks overlooking how other cultures differently interpret mobility and settlement (Ray, 2020).

the lifestyle-driven, experience-centred characteristics that define digital nomadism. Furthermore, his concept of "carnival communities" foreshadowed the temporary, event-based social structures that characterise digital nomad networks. Like Bauman's "tourists", DNs are free to move and engage in consumer culture. They exemplify the "tourist" experience, prioritising short-term experiences and superficial connections over deep cultural exchanges. Both "tourists" and DNs are characterised by their mobility and flexibility. Both also reflect the stratification inherent in "liquid modernity", where mobility serves as a class divide. An insight about "perpetual reidentification" anticipated how digital nomads constantly reinvent themselves through travel and online presence. Table 1 showcases parallels between Bauman's metaphors and DNs.

By connecting Bauman's metaphors to digital nomadism, the paper highlighted that Bauman's metaphorical framework, developed before the emergence of DN, still provides an analytically powerful tool for understanding this contemporary phenomenon. This underscores not only the contextual adaptability and mobility of metaphorical analysis but also affirms the relevance of Bauman's poetic sociological imagination for analysing emerging social phenomena.

Table 1 Key parallels between Bauman's metaphors and DNs

Concept	Tourist Metaphor	Liquidity Metaphor	DNs
Mobility	The freedom to move and explore, often for leisure or personal fulfilment.	Characterises a society where boundaries are fluid, and mobility is a key aspect of life	Involves frequent travel combined with remote work, using digital technologies.
Flexibility	Tourists are free to choose their destinations and experiences, reflecting a flexible lifestyle	Liquid modernity promotes flexibility and adaptability in all aspects of life	DN enjoy flexible work arrangements and locations, often working remotely
Consumerism	Tourists often engage in consumerist behaviours, such as shopping and dining, as part of their experience.	Liquid modernity is marked by consumerism, where identities are shaped by consumption	DN may engage in local consumer activities while travelling, but their lifestyle also emphasises self-sufficiency and flexibility
Identity Formation	The tourist identity is fluid and can change with each new destination or experience	In liquid modernity, identities are constantly being reformed through consumption and mobility	DN often redefine their identities through their experiences and connections in different locations
Globalisation	Tourism reflects globalisation by facilitating interactions across cultures and borders	Liquid modernity is deeply intertwined with globalisation, emphasising global connections and mobility	Digital nomadism is a product of globalisation, allowing individuals to work and live across different countries
Economic Impact	Tourism can have significant economic impacts on local communities, both positive and negative	Liquid modernity involves economic fluidity, with capital and labour moving freely	Digital nomadism can boost local economies, but may also lead to gentrification and other socio-economic challenges

Source: author

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