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First pleasure, then work? Digital nomads, location independence, and the changing meaning of work

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Abstract

Today's lifestyle mobilities have resulted from past decades' global developments, namely digitalization, economic accumulation, more generalized freedom of movement for some individuals, and the rise of knowledge-based economies and the gig economy (Cohen et al. 2015; Benson & Osbaldiston 2016; Thompson 2021). This presentation deals with digital nomads' understandings of work. It focuses on the modes and meanings of work as narrated by nomads who work in a location-independent manner. How do self-identified digital nomads arrange work-related practicalities? What negotiations or compromises has the move toward location-independent work required? How do nomads narrate the meaning of work, particularly in relation to their mobile lifestyle choice? This presentation's research was conducted within an Academy of Finland project called Digital Nomadism: Lifestyle Mobilities, Nation-State and the Mobile Subject (2020-2025). The analyzed data are drawn from multi-site ethnographic fieldwork, specifically qualitative interviews with 70 digital nomads in Thailand (2019), Spain (2021-2022), Estonia (2022), Bulgaria (2022), and Mauritius (2023), as well as observations from co-working spaces, informal get-togethers, and digital-nomad conferences. The findings presented will shed light on mobile individuals' agency in navigating labour markets in search of location-independent work and, more broadly, the changing meanings of work in the post-COVID-19 context.

Biography

Mari Toivanen is an Academy of Finland Research Fellow at the Swedish School of Social Science, University of Helsinki (2020-2025). Her research focuses on lifestyle mobilities and location-independent work in the form of digital nomadism. Her publications have appeared in *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, *Ethnicities*, *Social Inclusion*, the *Journal of Genocide Research*, and the *Nordic Journal of Migration Research*. Her award-winning monograph, *The Kobane Generation: Kurdish Diaspora Mobilising in France*, was published in 2021. She has co-edited several volumes and is Co-Editor of the book series *Transnationalism and Diaspora*, which is published by Edinburgh University Press. For more information on her ongoing project, please visit www.diginomadproject.com.