

At home in the world?

How mobility shapes digital nomads' perceptions of home

Hanna Heicks, S4226933

Faculty of Spatial Sciences, University of Groningen

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prof. dr. Aleid E. Brouwer

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Summary

Advancements in transportation and information and communication technologies facilitated the increasing dimensions of physical and virtual mobility. With the subsequent rise of a new approach to mobility, the new mobilities paradigm developed within which new mobile lifestyles, such as digital nomadism, emerged, and prevailing sedentary notions of home became inadequate. Research on the relationship between these new mobile lifestyles and changing perceptions of home has not been exhaustive in considering digital nomads' unique lifestyle choices and bridging global and place-based notions of home. This research investigates how digital nomads' perceptions of home are shaped by their mobile lifestyles, considering their pursuit of home, the role of location choice and home-making strategies. Semi-structured in-depth interviews with digital nomads showed individuals' development of a self-constructed perception of home embodied through feelings provoked by location-specific characteristics, facilities, home-making strategies, and social relationships. Such feelings co-exist with individuals' current predominant desire for mobility but may be spatially situated in the future. This research highlights digital nomads' self-constructed feeling-based perceptions of home, touching upon past, present and future lifestyle choices.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background

Worldwide, the dimensions of travel have been expanding rapidly, with continuous increases in the number of scheduled passengers in the global airline industry and the number of arrivals in international tourism before the Covid-19 pandemic (Sheller & Urry, 2006; Statista, 2023; The World Bank, n.d.). Together with the growth in travel, the increasing dimensions of technology encouraged the development of a new approach to mobility, undermining traditional sedentary theories. As such, the new mobilities paradigm emerged, moving beyond notions of stability and fixed geographical boundaries while highlighting the networks of connectivity between places (Sheller & Urry, 2006). Prompted by advances in transportation and communication technologies, new mobile lifestyles combining physical and virtual mobility developed (Hannonen, 2020; Sheller & Urry, 2006). As a new mobile lifestyle driven by technological developments, digital nomadism emerged together with Makimoto and Manners establishing the concept of 'digital nomad' in 1997 (as cited in Hannonen, 2020). At first, such mobile lifestyles remained only attainable for a small privileged group (Cohen et al., 2015). However, technological developments made mobile lifestyles more accessible (De Loryn, 2022). Consequently, several forms of lifestyle and work-related mobility have recently been developing, and digital nomadism, as such, is anticipated to grow (Hannonen, 2020).

With the development of new mobile lifestyles, perceptions of home have been changing (Nowicka, 2007). Similarly to mobility, in Western history, prevailing sedentary approaches emphasised a fixed and bounded view of the home, often seen as indistinguishable from the house. However, with the emergence of the new mobilities paradigm, sedentary approaches to home have become outdated and inadequate (De Loryn, 2022; Ralph & Staeheli, 2011; Sheller & Urry, 2006). More recent conceptualisations of home are increasingly blurry and dynamic, and capture the tensions between notions of mobility and values of fixity and rootedness. Thereby, solely place-based notions of home have been extended by new understandings of the relationship between people and place, describing home as rather flexible, moving along with the individual (Nowicka, 2007; Ralph & Staeheli, 2011). Consequently, the changing perceptions of home connected with the growing mobility and accessibility of mobile lifestyles raise questions about how digital nomads may perceive home.

Existing literature on the changing relationship between new mobile lifestyles and perceptions of home often explores experiences of home-making and dynamics of culture, identity and place of transnational professionals with work-driven mobility or families (Butcher, 2010; Mancinelli, 2018; Nowicka, 2007; Whitehead, 2017). There has been research focussing specifically on digital nomads' perceptions of home. However, research by De Loryn (2022) has been location-specific, focusing on digital nomads in Chiang Mai and primarily emphasising digital nomads' global sense of home established through emotional and social factors. Approaching mobile lifestyles and changing perceptions of home from a different angle, literature also criticises notions of an increasingly global sense of home, emphasising individuals' need to connect home with a place (Butcher, 2010). Therefore, it seems the current body of research does not

comprehensively capture digital nomads' perceptions of home, considering their unique lifestyle choices and connecting global and place-based notions of home.

1.2 Research problem

Within the context of the new mobilities paradigm, the subsequent rise of mobile lifestyles, and consequent changing understandings of home, this research paper aims to understand how digital nomads' desired continuous mobility influences their perceptions of home. This leads to the following **main research question**: How are digital nomads' perceptions of home shaped by their mobile lifestyles?

The following **sub-questions** will support the main research question:

- How do digital nomads feel about the objective of pursuing home?
- How does location choice matter in digital nomads' perceptions of home?
- What home-making strategies do digital nomads apply in transforming their surroundings into places of home?

1.3 Structure of the thesis

In what follows, firstly, a review of the existing literature is provided, followed by a description of the methodology, based on which the results are presented and analysed in synthesis with the reviewed literature. To conclude, key findings are situated in the context of the broader framework, strengths and limitations of the research are reflected on, and suggestions for future research are made.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1 Literature review

2.1.1 The new mobilities paradigm

In the past, sedentarist theories of mobility have been predominant, establishing stability as the norm and bounded and fixed places as vital to human identity, criticising movement and change (Sheller & Urry, 2006). With the increasing scale of physical and virtual mobility in a globalising world, the emerging mobility turn undermined traditional Western sedentary perspectives of life (De Loryn, 2022; Sheller & Urry, 2006). The new mobilities paradigm emphasised the networks of connectivity between places and the rapidly increasing scale of the movement of people and information (Bauman, 2000; Sheller & Urry, 2006). As part of that, the rapid growth of information and communication technologies facilitated the development of new forms of communication, coordination and mobility. By bridging the gap between transport and communication technologies, individuals have been enabled to be present while being absent simultaneously through existence in informational spaces and communication beyond distance (Sheller & Urry, 2006). Therefore, Western society has become increasingly mobile and images of individual mobility have changed to become positive through associations with freedom,

advancement and success in direct contrast to rootedness and stability (Bauman, 2000; Whitehead, 2017; Whitehead & Halsall, 2017).

2.1.2 Digital nomadism

Processes of globalisation and digitalisation and the integration of physical and virtual mobility into everyday practices, paired with the increasing desire for individual lifestyle choices, resulted in new types of mobile lifestyles (Cohen et al., 2015; Hannonen, 2020). Such a lifestyle, established by mobile and location-independent professionals, is digital nomadism (Hannonen, 2020). In facilitating nomadic work, mobility and technology are highly interrelated, and by being able to take work with them, digital nomads can realise professional activities while fulfilling their desire to travel (Hannonen, 2020; Nash et al., 2018; Nash et al., 2021). Further, digital nomads often share their lifestyles on social media, representing and promoting an independent and autonomous life (Chevtaeva & Denizci-Guillet, 2021; Hannonen, 2020). According to Reichenberger (2018), digital nomads can be characterised as primarily young, highly educated professionals working as freelancers, entrepreneurs or remote employees that tend to be Western, single and without family commitments. Reichenberger (2018) further defines digital nomads by levels of mobility:

- Level 0: Work-related location independence as an essential requirement for digital nomadism.
- Level 1: Remaining in the home environment but using work-related location independence on a small spatial scale.
- Level 2: Occasional travel with returns to the home environment.
- Level 3: Maximising work-related location independence through constant, full-time travel with no home environment.

Therefore, travel is an opportunity stemming from digital nomads' work-related location independence rather than a necessity (Reichenberger, 2018). In differentiating the emerging forms of lifestyle and work-related mobility, digital nomads can be considered unique firstly in accomplishing work while travelling and secondly, in their personal lifestyle choice enabling continuous mobility and personal location choice (Hannonen, 2020; Nash et al., 2018; Nash et al., 2021).

2.1.3 Global perceptions of home

Contemporary approaches to mobility have challenged the notion of home, and portrayals of home as indistinguishable from the house have become inadequate (De Loryn, 2022; Nowicka, 2007). The social dimension and feelings of home enable separating the physical space of the house from the home as a 'symbolic space of attachment, comfort, intimacy, and feelings' (Mancinelli, 2018, p.310). Thus, home extends from being the starting and end point of movement into something that can exist along with individuals' mobility (Mancinelli, 2018; Nowicka, 2007). Cohen et al. (2015) propose 'the destabilisation of home and away' (p.160). Place-based notions of home are thereby extended, and home is no longer limited to a particular location (De Loryn, 2022; Nowicka, 2007). Home is then experienced through its social and emotional dimension in connection with the development of a global sense of place (De Loryn, 2022; Saar & Palang, 2009).

2.1.4 Place-based perceptions of home

In contrast to the narrative of individual mobility contributing to place detachment in favour of global understandings of place and home (Saar & Palang, 2009; Whitehead & Halsall, 2017), Butcher (2010) highlights that individuals may still need to connect home to a place to achieve a sense of stability and familiarity despite mobility. This connects with criticism of the development of a global sense of place, highlighting that processes of globalisation may have led to the diminishing importance of geographical, physical space; however, place and place-based characteristics, entrenched by meaning, remain relevant in affecting people and provoking feelings (Saar & Palang, 2009; Smaldone et al., 2005). Corresponding notions of mobility and fixity are often portrayed as conflicting (Nowicka, 2007). According to Morley (2000), however, the emphasis should not be placed on the tension between place-based and global notions of home but rather on recognising different experiences of home (as cited in Ralph & Staeheli, 2011).

2.1.5 Home-making

In a globalised world, home becomes self-constructed and mobile (Butcher, 2010; Nowicka, 2007). According to Al-Ali and Koser (2002), 'conceptions of home are not static but dynamic processes, involving acts of imagining, creating, unmaking, changing, losing and moving "homes"' (as cited in Butcher, 2010, p.24). Mobile individuals may apply home-making strategies, filling spaces with meaning and lived experiences and thereby creating places of home (Mancinelli, 2018). Social interaction and the social environment are fundamental to home, part of which loving relationships and interaction with like-minded individuals, particularly from the same cultural background, are crucial, especially in avoiding loneliness (Butcher, 2010; De Loryn, 2022; Nash et al., 2018; Nowicka, 2007). Notions of home can also be connected to family. Home may be associated with the family (home), providing a place of refuge and rest but also distress (De Loryn, 2022; Mallett, 2004; Nowicka, 2007). Further, home can take on nostalgic and romantic notions constructed through memories and imagination (De Loryn, 2022; Mallett, 2004). In creating home, objects (of emotional value) and familiar food may also be brought along (De Loryn, 2022; Mancinelli, 2018; Nowicka, 2007). Furthermore, developing routines and rituals are fundamental in adapting to new settings (De Loryn, 2022; Mancinelli, 2018; Nowicka, 2007). Lastly, a home base may provide stability and rest while simultaneously constituting a starting point for new mobility (De Loryn, 2022; Nowicka, 2007). Therefore, home can be constructed through practices creating a sphere that feels secure, familiar and comfortable, providing continuity despite mobility (Mancinelli, 2018).

2.2 Conceptual model

Figure one conceptualises how digital nomads' mobile lifestyles shape their perceptions of home. It considers the new mobilities paradigm as the contextual framework within which new forms of mobile lifestyles, such as digital nomadism, develop and perceptions of home change. It further contrasts newly emerging global and persisting place-based perceptions of home. Consequently, it explores home-making strategies and the dynamic relationship between perceptions of home and home-making.

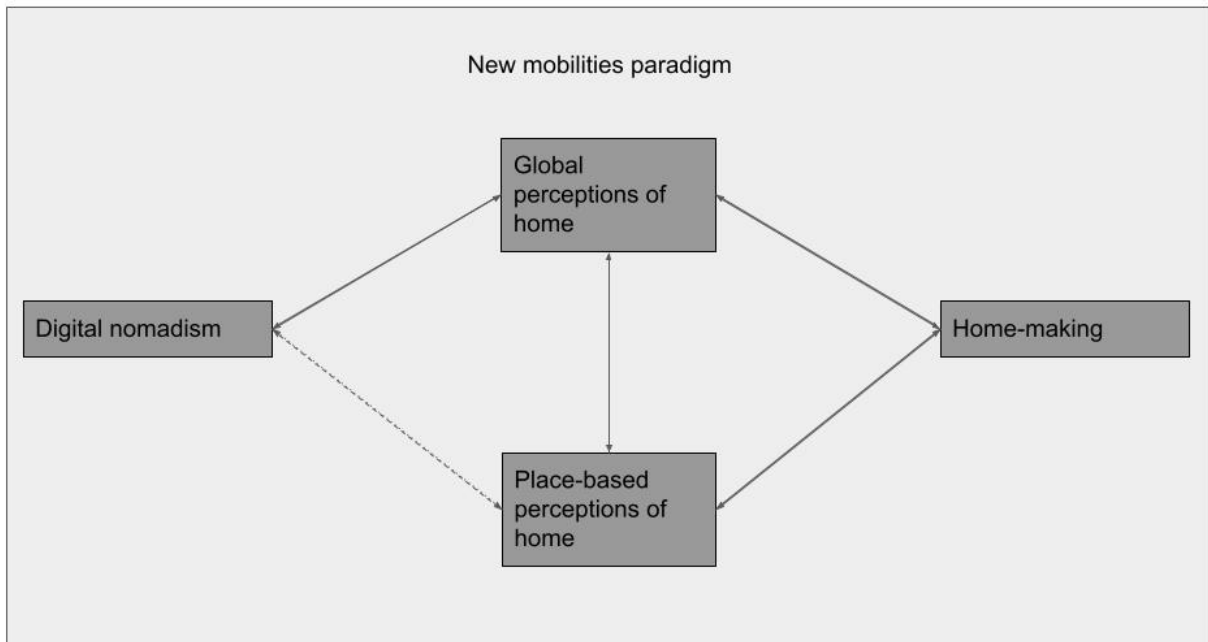


Figure 1: Conceptual model

2.3 Expectations

Based on the literature, I expect digital nomads' perceptions of home to align with more recent approaches to conceptualising home within the new mobilities paradigm. Therefore, despite not expecting digital nomads to pursue an idea of home bound to a fixed geographical location or a house, I expect digital nomads to pursue having or creating a home. Furthermore, I expect personal preferences in location choice, arising from spatial characteristics, to be influential along with emotional and organisational home-making strategies.

3. Methodology

3.1 Data collection

Qualitative data gathered through semi-structured in-depth interviews with digital nomads was used to comprehensively understand the dynamics between digital nomadism and the notion of home in respect of mobility. Participants could share experiences, perspectives and perceptions in their terms and connection with the context of their lived experiences, generating a holistic understanding of the topic (Punch, 2014). The interview, see Appendix A, firstly allowed gaining insights into participants' personal and professional background and their pathways to developing a digital nomad lifestyle. Further, digital nomads' understandings of home, the importance of social relationships, location-specific characteristics, facilities and corresponding understandings of home were investigated. Based on that, the interview explored participants' home-making strategies and provided insights into their future as digital nomads. Finally, the interview allowed for reflecting on deeper feelings connected to home to fully understand digital nomads' perceptions of home.

Six digital nomads were interviewed online via video-conferencing in March and April 2023. The interviews took approximately 40 minutes, with one exception of approximately 30 minutes. To reduce cross-cultural differences, and account for sufficient experience with digital nomadism, interview participants were from Europe and had been digital nomads for at least six months. Defining a digital nomad was inspired by levels two and three of Reichenberger's (2018) classification of digital nomads by levels of mobility. Therefore, participants maximised their work-related location independence through ongoing travel; however, they might have a permanent residence or home base. Further, linked with digital nomads' work as freelancers, entrepreneurs and remote employees (Reichenberger, 2018), participants were employed in the creative industry, based on the definition of the United Kingdom's 2001 Creative Industries Mapping Document, including 'those industries which have their origin in individual creativity, skill and talent and which have a potential for wealth and job creation through the generation and exploitation of intellectual property' (as cited in GOV.UK, 2022).

Since digital nomads generally actively share their lifestyles online (Hannonen, 2020), and were meant to work in the creative industry, participants were recruited online via social media and travel and personal blogs. This recruitment strategy represented a purposeful and volunteer sample, enabling sampling in line with the objectives and purpose of the study (Burt et al., 2009). Further, snowball sampling was applied (Punch, 2014). On Instagram, the search function was used to find accounts via keywords and hashtags. Beyond the direct search function, the comment section, reposts, tagged posts and followers/following lists were used. Further, the Reddit group 'r/digitalnomad' and the Facebook groups 'Digital Nomads Around the World', 'Campfire: Find a Travel Buddy', and 'Digital Nomads' were used. Moreover, digital nomad travel and lifestyle writers and bloggers were approached; as part of that, the blog/website 'The Broke Backpacker' was used in addition to independent bloggers and writers. Potential participants were contacted via direct messages on social media or email, and posts were shared in the Facebook and Reddit groups mentioned above.

3.2 Data analysis

The interviews were recorded, transcribed verbatim, anonymised and imported into ATLAS.ti for data analysis. To identify themes and patterns in the data, deductive coding based on insights from the theoretical framework was combined with inductive coding based on interpretations from interview data (Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019; Punch, 2014). The codes were organised and categorised in a code tree, see Appendix B, based on the structure of the interview guide, see Appendix A. In tandem with coding, memoing was used to go beyond data description, revealing dynamics and relationships found in the data (Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019; Punch, 2014). Finally, the data was analysed and interpreted in synthesis with theory and concepts established in the theoretical framework.

3.3 Data quality

Considering the relatively small number of six participants, it is noteworthy that more than 30 digital nomads had been contacted. The small number of participants resulted from potential participants not meeting the research criteria and a low reply rate. Furthermore, community

guidelines on Facebook and particularly Reddit created difficulties in the recruitment process, making the recruitment of participants through Reddit unsuccessful. Nonetheless, despite the small number of participants, data saturation could be achieved due to the in-depth nature of the interviews.

3.4 Ethics

Data collection and analysis were done following the Netherlands Code of Conduct for Research Integrity (NWO, 2018). Interview participants expressed written informed consent to participation in the research, audio recording and transcription of the interview and the use of anonymised quotes. As part of the transcription, the interviews were anonymised. More specifically, this referred to the participants' names, names of family members or friends mentioned, and company names. The participants' countries of origin, indications of ages and job descriptions were not anonymised. Apart from the country of origin, however, other countries or cities mentioned, also specific references to hometowns were anonymised. The audio files and anonymised interview transcripts are stored securely and are only available to the University of Groningen for data quality control.

4. Results

Table 1: Participants' key characteristics

PSEUDONYM	ORIGIN	AGE	GENDER	RELATIONSHIP STATUS	OCCUPATION	HOME BASE / RESIDENCE	DIGITAL NOMAD SINCE ...	PACE OF TRAVEL
Rahul	India (lives in Europe)	45	Male	Solo digital nomad	Business owner in digital marketing	Home base in Serbia	2011	1-2 weeks per destination
Holly	England	≈32	Female	Digital nomad with her boyfriend, daughter, dog	Content editor; social media strategist; business coach	No	August 2022	Very flexible in route and planning
Rebecca	England	31	Female	Digital nomad with her boyfriend	Travel writer and blogger	Legally, in England	July 2021	7-10 days per destination; up to app. 1 month
Konstantin	Germany	27	Male	Digital nomad with his girlfriend	Freelance work; content writing/creation; HR-based work	Flat in Germany	2021	At least 2 weeks per destination; varies depending on the visa
Emilia	Germany	25	Female	Digital nomad with her boyfriend	Social media marketing and coaching	Parents' residence in Germany	2021	Between 2-4 weeks per destination but varies
Oliver	England	≈26	Male	Digital nomad with his girlfriend	Digital content writing No for a company; studying master's in journalism	No	2017	Usually 1 month per destination; possibly shorter trips in-between

4.1 Participants' key characteristics

Table one presents the key characteristics of the interviewees. Following the research requirements, all interviewees except Rahul, who was based in Europe, were from Europe. England and Germany presented most of the interviewees' countries of origin, which was coincidental but reflected the primarily Western background of digital nomads (Reichenberger, 2018). The age group ranged from 25-45, with most interviewees in their late twenties and early thirties, following the literature (Reichenberger, 2018). Interviewees represented male and

female digital nomads equally. Untypically, most interviewees were in a relationship (Reichenberger, 2018). Following Reichenberger (2018), the interviewees represented digital nomads as (young) professionals working remotely or freelancing, working in the creative industries as established by the research requirements, as entrepreneurs, coaches, writers and content creators. According to the research requirements, all interviewees were digital nomads pertaining to levels two or three of Reichenberger's (2018) definition of digital nomads by mobility. Therefore, all interviewees had a home environment they may occasionally return to or had no home base or permanent residence. Rahul was the only interviewee with a home base, where he returns to regularly when he is not travelling. The other interviewees had their residence at their parents' place or still had their own residence in their home country, primarily for practical reasons. Some interviewees had no permanent residence or planned on giving it up for practical and financial reasons. Following the research requirements, all interviewees had been digital nomads for at least six months; however, experiences varied from having been digital nomads for nine months to twelve years. Corresponding to Hannonen (2020), Nash et al. (2018) and Nash et al. (2021), all interviewees shared a desire to travel but had previously fulfilled this to different extents. Also, to varying degrees, mobility previously played a role in their lives through moving around in their childhood or taking opportunities to live abroad and travel. Many interviewees were initially unaware of digital nomadism and got into it through different paths. Following Hannonen (2020), Nash et al. (2018) and Nash et al. (2021), digital nomadism provided the opportunity to combine fulfilling desires to travel with work. Sometimes, this desire led to a career switch, allowing individuals to combine work and travel; other times, work-related location independence induced the choice to give into the personal desire to travel. Unsatisfaction with the current living situation in the home country was also influential for some. While there was variation in the interviewees' pace of travel, interviewees usually spent between one week and one month at a destination.

4.2 Changing perceptions of home

Along with the changing notions of home in the context of mobility, discussed by Nowicka (2007), by becoming digital nomads, the interviewees' perceptions of home changed. Traditional and sedentary notions of home associated with the house, home country, home town or family home, discussed by De Loryn (2022), and Mallett (2004), were initially common among some interviewees, as explained by Emilia, 'So, when I grew up, I always thought I had this in mind, like, home is a, is a big house in a city where you choose to be with a family in Germany.' Other individuals who experienced much mobility growing up still felt that creating a new sense of home after uprooting and settling down again took time.

After becoming digital nomads, interviewees experienced a change in their values and mindset shaped by their continuous mobility, as mentioned by Rebecca, 'So, I guess, yeah, my whole mind just shifted when I started doing this, like everything changed. All of my values changed, and I realised quite a lot about sort of how home necessarily isn't a place.' In line with the tensions between ideas of rootedness and perceptions of home connected to one's origin and notions of mobility and perceptions of home as self-created discussed by Nowicka (2007), it seems, digital nomads tend to experience home as two-faceted and sometimes conflicting, as summarised by Emilia:

So, when I think of home, I think there's, there's two types of home. Like there's the home where you were born, the home where you came from, the home where your family is. ... And then there's the home you create, and that comes with your choice, where you go and what you create around you.

Therefore, on the one hand, despite individuals' changes in mindset and values, the interviewees associated home with their origins, even if this did not reflect their actual perceptions of home, as noticed by Rebecca, 'See, like when I say home, I mean to England. I still call it home even though I don't feel it that way.' In line with De Loryn's (2022) and Mallett's (2004) findings, such associations with one's origins were connected with positive and negative experiences. Some interviewees experienced their family home as a safety net. Contrastingly, others expressed dissatisfaction with their previous lives or guilt for leaving and not missing their origins and feelings of having become guests in their family home.

However, on the other hand, home becomes self-constructed in connection with individuals' mobility and personally embodied, in line with Butcher (2010) and Nowicka (2007). Following Whitehead's (2017) and Whitehead and Halsall's (2017) discussion on mobility concerning freedom and autonomy, the self-constructed home was perceived as enrichment and opportunity for many interviewees, especially concerning individuals' origins, as discussed by Butcher (2010) and De Loryn (2022) and confirmed by Holly, 'When I left the UK, I really, I really processed some issues I was dealing with, and I feel like I'm 100 times a better human and someone that I really like now.' Therefore, by engaging in digital nomadism, individuals' perceptions of home changed to represent a rather two-faceted and sometimes conflicting experience. To some extent, associations with one's origin remain but have been augmented by the development of a self-constructed perception of home moving alongside personal mobility.

4.3 The pursuit of home

The current narratives of mobility and globalisation led to the development of an image of mobility strongly connected to progress, advancement and success, directly contrasting ideas of rootedness and stability (Whitehead, 2017; Whitehead & Halsall, 2017). This positive image of mobility was emphasised by the interviewees' representation of their lifestyles as independent and free. Participants explained their desire to be on the move and explore the world, as highlighted by Rahul when talking about his home base and travelling, 'I tend to get very bored if I'm doing this every day, so I need to see new people, meet new people, see new places, see, discover the world, learn more about myself.'

Still, in line with Nowicka (2007), despite their desire for mobility, individuals seemed to pursue home, as confirmed by Emilia, 'I don't really have like one place where I stay all the time, but I would say I have a home because we all need a home.' Considering individuals' changed idea of home as self-constructed, home manifests on an emotional level embodied through feelings and can therefore be taken along with personal mobility (Butcher, 2010; De Loryn, 2022; Nowicka, 2007). Home was thereby pursued through feelings of comfort, safety, freedom and familiarity. Rebecca, for example, explained, 'It's like where I feel like comfortable, it's like where

I feel like I can relax, like home isn't necessarily somewhere that you go back to every single day for like your life.' Further, social relationships, particularly friendships, romantic relationships and family, were crucial to digital nomads' feelings of home, as Konstantin expressed:

I don't relate it to a certain place but rather to my surroundings. So, and, the most important thing for me to feel home, to feel at home, is the people that surround me and the, the closer the people are, the more home I feel.

Nonetheless, experiences of homesickness and loneliness, suggested by Nash et al. (2018), were indicated by many interviewees. In line with Mancinelli (2018), interviewees also expressed missing the feeling of community, as explained by Oliver, 'Yeah, I would say I don't feel part of any community.' In line with Whitehead and Halsall (2017), globalised images of mobility are rather idealised. Such images seem to present a one-sided image of digital nomadism and underestimate the complexity of digital nomads' experiences of mobility and home. Rebecca explained:

Like people think it is the best thing in the world. They really do; they're like, oh, you have such a great job; you can travel anywhere you want, you can work whenever you want, go wherever you want, and I'm like, yeah, that's great, but do you know what I sacrifice.

Depending on travel patterns, individuals experienced constant mobility as exhausting and unsustainable. Furthermore, individuals encountered technological limitations in facilitating their social relationships when virtual mobility was not always successful in bridging physical distance. Therefore, participants' experiences have shown that beyond their embodied emotional and social home, they desired a home base, combining their mobile lifestyles with having their own place, as suggested by De Loryn (2022) and Nowicka (2007). Rahul returning to his home base in Serbia regularly, see Table 1, said, 'I get exhausted if I travel more than one month or two months, ... so I need that base.' However, the desire to connect feelings of home to a place explored by Butcher (2010) was expressed to varying extents. Some interviewees wanted to slow down, settle temporarily, and have several home bases worldwide. Further, for some interviewees, the home base would provide a place for rest and the opportunity to be in personal contact with family and friends, allowing them to visit more easily, as explained by Holly:

[W]e're still travelling and doing what we want to do, and living that nomad life, but we can actually unpack in that place, and people can come and visit us, and we can kind of make it a little bit more like a home, I guess.

Other interviewees, however, expressed the desire to settle more permanently at some point, as indicated by Rebecca:

I would like to have like, you know, I'd like to have my own house one day, like, I'd love to be able to renovate a house and like I still have those dreams, you know, that most people do, of like owning a house, having children, having like a pet. Like, I still have

those dreams that everyone else does; I just don't have them right now. Like right now, I'm like quite comfortable with my lifestyle, and I still want to see a lot more of the world.

Therefore, in line with Morley (2000), it is crucial to recognise different experiences of home (as cited in Ralph & Staeheli, 2011). It seems fundamental to understand that in addition to the emotional and social perception of home associated with individuals' desire to travel, there seems to be a desire to connect home, as self-constructed and personally embodied, to a place. Currently, the desire for mobility seems predominant in determining lifestyle choices and subsequent global understandings of home, but this may change.

4.4 Location matters

As part of the narrative of globalisation and subsequent growing personal mobility, the literature suggests the development of an increasingly global sense of place, undermining personal place attachment (Saar & Palang, 2009; Whitehead & Halsall, 2017). Linked to the idea of a mobile, self-constructed home, Konstantin emphasised how this global sense of place connects with the feeling of being at home in the world, 'I feel like the whole world is my home now.' However, Saar and Palang (2009) highlighted that while the importance of geographical, physical space may have declined, the meaning entrenched in places and their characteristics is crucial. In line with Smaldone et al. (2005), the importance of place was further confirmed by the interviewees' experiences, showing that location-specific characteristics and facilities matter in their location choice as they provoked certain feelings associated with their self-constructed home. Oliver highlighted, 'Like sometimes you arrive in a place, and it just kind of feels much more homely.' Generally, individuals tried balancing feelings of comfort and familiarity with their desire for unique experiences. Nonetheless, in line with their feelings of home, most interviewees highly valued features facilitating their lifestyle and establishing comfort and safety. As part of that, language and potential language barriers and hospitality were mentioned. Natural conditions like the climate or natural environment were perceived as important, whereby being near the sea and mixing up urban and natural environments was emphasised. On a smaller scale, many interviewees highlighted the importance of comfortable accommodations and suitable work environments. Accessibility and infrastructure, especially the internet, were highly valued, and some interviewees particularly emphasised digital nomad-specific infrastructure, such as co-working spaces or coffee bars.

Following Smaldone et al. (2005), the importance of feelings provoked by a place and its characteristics was further reflected in digital nomads' location choices in the long-term. Depending on individuals' travel patterns, some interviewees explained they would stay longer in or return to destinations they particularly enjoyed or felt comfortable in, as highlighted by Rebecca, '(country in Southeast Asia) is like a place, like, I'll go back to often because I just feel so at home there.' This was also reinforced regarding the location of a potential home base, as indicated by Emilia, 'Yeah, where you could have, where you could see yourself having a good life, where everything that you learned about yourself while travelling is fulfilled in that one place.' More specifically, proximity to the sea, friends, family, and socio-economic conditions mattered. Therefore, corresponding to their mobile lifestyles, global understandings of place and home dominate digital nomads' perceptions of home. However, the feelings and meanings

connected with places emerging from location-specific characteristics and facilities are vital to digital nomads' location choices and perceptions of home.

4.5 Home-making

When home becomes self-constructed and mobile, beyond location-specific characteristics and facilities, home-making strategies may establish feelings of home on a smaller scale. Following Mancinelli (2018), the interviewees' experiences highlighted practices of filling spaces with meaning and turning their chosen surroundings into places of home. De Loryn (2022) discussed home-making strategies concerning solo digital nomads; however, they are also relevant for digital nomads in a relationship. Not all interviewees shared this desire to create a home for themselves. Rahul, the only interviewee returning to his home base regularly, see Table 1, explained, 'I don't need to feel home. The whole point is I'm going away from home.' Most interviewees, however, engaged in home-making strategies stimulating homely feelings.

As mentioned above, accommodation choice has shown to matter in creating a comfortable living situation, leading individuals to choose higher-quality apartments or hotel and (private) hostel rooms according to personal preferences. Further, some individuals, such as Emilia and Konstantin, enjoyed creating a comfortable environment by decorating their living space or buying candles and flowers, which other interviewees perceived as unnecessary. Bringing along objects (of emotional value), as highlighted by De Loryn (2022), Mancinelli (2018) and Nowicka (2007), was mostly indicated to be superfluous; however, some interviewees indicated bringing along objects of comfort, like a pillow, like Rahul or a speaker to create a cosy atmosphere, like Emilia and Konstantin. Oliver highlighted engaging in activities he enjoys, such as watching a football match, creating a sense of familiarity. In line with Mancinelli (2018), familiarity was also commonly mentioned concerning food. While familiar food may be a home-making strategy for some, others did not try to replace foods. Rebecca, talking about English Breakfast Tea, explained, 'Yeah, cause I like to have one every morning when I wake up. And that's kind of like my little slice of home.' Contrary to the importance of nostalgic notions of home and imagination and memories discussed by De Loryn (2022) and Mallett (2004), the interviewees did not mention these. Furthermore, Butcher (2010), De Loryn (2022), Nash et al. (2018) and Nowicka (2007) highlight the value of social relationships and interaction with like-minded individuals. While the interviewees highly valued these, none expressed them as home-making strategies. Still, it is worth noting that interviewees in a relationship, see Table 1, felt supported by sharing their lifestyles with a partner. Rahul, the only solo digital nomad, see Table 1, highlighted the importance of meeting people and sharing his travel experiences with them. The notion of family and the family home, highlighted by De Loryn (2022), Mallett (2004) and Nowicka (2007), was not mentioned as a home-making strategy but played a role in digital nomads' relation to home.

Considering organisational and practical matters, in line with De Loryn (2022), Mancinelli (2018) and Nowicka (2007), routines were indicated as crucial in establishing comfort and familiarity. Many interviewees explained practical matters of settling into a new destination, such as unpacking and getting groceries, and highlighted the importance of familiarising themselves with

the new living environment. This might be in the form of understanding the new destination; as Rebecca explained:

I know what to do; then you can start to feel relaxed, like I can blend in. I can blend in in the background now, anyone would think I am an expat here, and I live here; like that's when I start to feel at home.

Furthermore, individuals might explore the new living environment and present amenities. Some digital nomads highlighted the importance of flexibility and spontaneity in their travelling, while others indicated the importance of preparing their travels based on past experiences ensuring their expectations are met, as explained by Konstantin, 'We plan our travels, that makes it easier to find good locations, good apartments in long-term and also, it just gives you the, the, the sense of relaxation that you need.'

Bridging the emotional, practical and spatial dimensions of home-making, the home base was discussed by De Loryn (2022) and Nowicka (2007). However, a home base was not directly related to home-making by the interviewees but rather seen as a future idea in slowing down the lifestyle, as discussed above. Thus, home-making strategies stimulate and connect with digital nomads' perceptions of home, enabling them to transform their chosen surroundings into places of home.

5. Conclusion

In the context of the increasing dimensions of physical and virtual mobility and the rise of the new mobilities paradigm, new mobile lifestyles, such as digital nomadism, developed and, over time, became increasingly popular (De Loryn, 2022; Hannonen, 2020; Sheller & Urry, 2006). Along with increasing mobility, sedentary notions of home have been extended by mobile and dynamic conceptualisations of home (Nowicka, 2007; Ralph & Staeheli, 2011). This research paper investigated how digital nomads' perceptions of home are shaped by their mobile lifestyles, considering their pursuit of home, the role of location choice and home-making strategies. Qualitative data from interviews with digital nomads highlighted a fundamental change in mindset, values and subsequent perceptions of home induced by mobility. Individuals' rather rooted associations of home in connection to one's origin were extended by the development of an understanding of home as self-constructed and mobile. Digital nomads, thus, perceive home as embodied in themselves, allowing it to move along with their mobility. The self-constructed, mobile home further connects with digital nomads' desire to travel associated with freedom, independence and progress. Home is then pursued through feelings of comfort, familiarity, safety and freedom, and social relationships. However, this continuous mobility has also proven to have downsides, such as exhaustion, loneliness, and limits of technology in bridging physical distance. Therefore, despite individuals' current predominant desire for mobility and subsequent feeling-based pursuit of home, digital nomads seem to pursue combining traditional and mobile perceptions of home in situating feelings of home spatially in a home base in the (distant) future. Considering the role of location choice, the growing individual mobility also connects with the development of a global sense of place and feelings of being at home in the world. Nonetheless, it has come to show that the feelings and

meaning connected with places provoked by location-specific characteristics and facilities matter. Thereby, feeling safe and welcome, as well as the natural, living and working environment and infrastructure, are crucial in digital nomads' location choice. Beyond feelings induced by location-specific characteristics and facilities, digital nomads further apply home-making strategies, creating a cosy atmosphere, engaging in their hobbies, eating familiar food, developing routines, familiarising themselves with new environments or planning their travels to stimulate homely feelings and transform their surroundings into places of home.

This research has limitations in its data. Overall, the interviewees were homogenous in their demographics, except for one interviewee, Rahul, who was an 'outlier', reinforced by the interview's comparatively short length. Additionally, Konstantin and Emilia were a couple. They were interviewed separately, and their experiences seemed individual; still, this might have influenced the data quality. However, drawing on research emphasising global perceptions of home linked with ideas of freedom and progress (De Loryn, 2022; Nowicka, 2007; Saar & Palang, 2009; Whitehead, 2017) and research highlighting place-based notions of home reinforcing the relevance of place and limitations of mobility (Butcher, 2010; Saar & Palang, 2009; Smaldone et al., 2005), this research was able to portray nuanced experiences of mobility and home. In bridging the gap between global and place-based notions of home, this research touched upon changing ideas of mobility and home over time. Within the scope of this research, the temporal dimension of mobility choices and perceptions of home could only be explored limitedly. Future research could investigate changes in digital nomads' perceptions of home across the life course, exploring the influence of life course trajectories also accounting for digital nomads' identity markers.

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Appendix A - Interview guide

Interview guide

Introduction:

My name is Hanna Heicks, and I am a third-year student studying Human Geography and Planning at the University of Groningen in the Netherlands. I am currently working on my bachelor's thesis investigating how recent developments in physical and virtual mobility gave rise to new mobile lifestyles, such as digital nomadism, and changing perceptions of home. More specifically, I am interested in investigating how digital nomads' mobile lifestyles shape their perceptions of home. As part of that, I am exploring whether the pursuit of home conflicts with the lifestyle choices of digital nomads. Further, I want to discover how much location choice matters in digital nomads' perceptions of home and what strategies digital nomads may apply to transform their surroundings into places of home.

Before we start the interview, I would like to make some remarks about the interview and your participation. During the interview, we will discuss your personal experiences. Your participation in this interview is completely voluntary. Therefore, please let me know if you feel uncomfortable answering a question. You can also stop the interview at any time should any of the questions make you feel uncomfortable. Participation in this interview is anonymous; therefore, your name and any information that could reveal your identity will be changed. The interview data will only be available to the University of Groningen. I would like to make an audio recording of this interview to transcribe the interview and facilitate further data analysis. The interview will take approximately 45 minutes.

Do you have any questions about the interview before we start?
Would you still like to participate in the interview?

Opening questions:

- To start off, could you tell me a little bit about yourself?
- How old are you? (birth year)
- Where are you originally from?
 - Do you have family/friends that still live there?
- Are you in a relationship?
 - Are you travelling with your partner or solo?
- Where are you currently travelling/living, and how long have you been there?
- What do you currently do for work?
- How long have you been location independent and travelling?
 - How did you become a full-time traveller?
 - Why did you decide to become a full-time traveller?
 - Prior to becoming a full-time traveller, did you actively pursue travelling or experiences abroad (e.g. study abroad, work trips abroad, backpacking trips)?
 - Do you have a permanent residence or home base?
 - How much time do you spend there?
 - How did you choose the location of your permanent residence or home base?

Key questions:

- What does home mean to you?
 - What do you associate with home?
- While engaging in ongoing, full-time travel, do you pursue or desire a sense of home or having a home?
 - Does your continuous mobility and full-time travelling conflict with your idea of having a home?
- How do social relationships impact your sense of home?
 - Are you in contact with your family?
 - Do you visit them, or do they visit you?
 - Do you feel your family home is a place of refuge?
 - In the case of a partner: How does being with your partner contribute to your feelings of home?
 - Could you also imagine to be a digital nomad on your own?
 - Do you connect with the local community in your destinations?
 - Do you surround yourself with like-minded people (e.g. in co-working spaces, hostels, trips for digital nomads and digitally through online forums)
 - When moving frequently, do you form deeper, meaningful connections with people?
 - Do you keep in touch with people you meet while travelling?
 - How does technology facilitate your social relationships and, consequently, your sense of home?
- Do your destinations impact your feelings of home?
 - In choosing your destinations, do you consider certain location-specific characteristics/ features that would contribute to your feeling of home?
 - For example, culture, language, climate, and natural environment
 - For example, types of accommodation and facilities (e.g. gyms, co-working spaces, cafes)
 - Would you leave a destination if it does not feel like home?
 - Would you stay longer somewhere if the destination makes you feel at home?
- How do you 'make yourself at home' while travelling?

- Do you establish specific routines?
 - Do you engage in certain activities?
 - Do you take along specific objects (that might be of emotional value)?
- In the future, could you see yourself giving up your mobile lifestyle?
 - Why/ Why not?
 - What would impact your choice?
 - How would you decide where to settle down?
- Reflecting on the interview, what feelings came to mind when discussing home?

Closing questions:

- Is there anything you would like to add?
- Do you have any questions?

Appendix B - Code tree

