

JAN BEDNORZ

Global labour, local rules:  
Policy responses to digital nomadism





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Policy responses to digital nomadism



UNIVERSITY OF TARTU

Press

School of Economics and Business Administration, University of Tartu, Estonia

The thesis is accepted for the defence of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (in Economics) on June 9, 2026 by the Council of the School of Economics and Business Administration, University of Tartu.

Supervisors: Associate Professor Eneli Kindsiko, University of Tartu,  
Estonia

Associate Professor Mihkel Solvak, University of Tartu,  
Estonia

Opponents: Mari Toivanen, PhD, University of Helsinki, Finland

Anna Triandafyllidou, PhD, Toronto Metropolitan University,  
Canada

Language editor: Djuddah Arthur Joost Leijen (English)

The public defence of the thesis is on September 2, 2026 at 14:00 in room 1018,  
Narva Road 18, University of Tartu

The publication of this thesis is granted by the Doctoral School of Economics and Innovation of the University of Tartu, created under the auspices of the European Social Fund, and by the University of Tartu School of Economics and Business Administration.

ISSN 1406-1309 (print)  
ISBN 978-9908-57-242-0 (print)

ISSN 2806-254X (pdf)  
ISBN 978-9908-57-243-7 (pdf)

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University of Tartu Press  
[www.tyk.ee](http://www.tyk.ee)

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# THESIS OVERVIEW

## List of publications

This thesis is primarily composed of three studies that have been published or accepted for publication. These studies are denoted throughout the document using Roman numerals:

- I. **Bednorz, J.**, & Hannonen, O. (forthcoming). Tourism innovations in the age of digital nomads. In J. Kokkranikal & R. Yung (Eds.), *Handbook of Innovation in Tourism and Hospitality*. Routledge.
- II. **Bednorz, J.** (2024, March). Working from anywhere? Work from here! Approaches to attract digital nomads. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 105, 103715.
- III. **Bednorz, J.**, Orel, M., & Solvak, M. (2025, November). What makes a digital nomad destination? The case of small states. *Tourism Geographies*, 28(1), 80–101.

A fourth study is also included in the thesis. Since it is currently under review, it cannot comprise the core of the thesis and is instead presented as supplementary material. Nevertheless, it forms an integral part of the overall research project and is therefore discussed where relevant in the thesis. It is referred to as ‘supplementary study’ (or ‘study S’):

**Bednorz, J.** (under review). Do digital nomad visas work?: A destination competitiveness perspective. *Journal of Destination Marketing & Management*.

Throughout the study period, I have also contributed to a couple of complementary academic texts, closely related to the focus of this thesis:

1. Martinaitis, Z., **Bednorz, J.**, Pusevaitė, I., & Botyriūtė, K. (forthcoming). Evolution of remote work: what can the future hold? In Di Tommaso, M.R., Mariotti, I., Leone, P., Rossi, F. (eds) *How Remote Working Can Reshape Business, Territories, and Society*. Edward Elgar Publishing.
2. Caprile, M., Arasanz, J., **Bednorz, J.**, Cabrita, J., Makarevičiūtė, A., Sadauskaitė, A., & Sanz, P. (under review). Hybrid work, working time and work-life balance: Time to protect rest time, also when being at home. *Papers: Revista de Sociología*.

Lastly, I have been involved in several policy-oriented research projects in the broader areas of labour market, industrial relations and digitalisation. They have resulted in the following publications:

1. **Bednorz, J.** (2026). *Strengthening democracy at work for the twin transitions: State-of-play of information, consultation, and participation rights in the EU*. ETUC Policy Brief.

2. Teplyshova, A., **Bednorz, J.**, Waweru, C. (2026). *Challenges for collective bargaining in the service sectors*. UNI Europa.
3. **Bednorz, J.**, Morozovaitė, A., Teplyshova, A., & Van Dijk, F. (2025). *Fair Working Time Matters: A consolidated study report*. UNI Europa.
4. Caprile, M., Arasanz, J., **Bednorz, J.**, Makarevičiūtė, A., Sadauskaitė, A., & Sanz, P. (2025). *Hybrid workplaces in the EU: Lessons from case studies in the public and private sectors*. Eurofound Working Paper WPEF25001.
5. Paliokaitė, A., Christenko, A., Aloisi, A., Moore, P., Potocka-Sionek, N., Donoghue, R.S., Krūminas, P., Čop, D., **Bednorz, J.**, Daminov, I., & Ragaliauskaitė, A. (2025). *Study exploring the context, challenges, opportunities, and trends in algorithmic management in the workplace*. Publications Office of the European Union.
6. **Bednorz, J.**, Makarevičiūtė, A., & Sadauskaitė, A. (2024). *Improving collective bargaining in Europe*. European Economic and Social Committee.
7. **Bednorz, J.**, Makarevičiūtė, A., Pozzo, G., Sadauskaitė, A., & Martinaitis, Ž. (2024). *Digital Decade 2024: International benchmarking of the digital transformation*. Publications Office of the European Union.
8. **Bednorz, J.**, & Sadauskaitė, A. (2022). *Unionisation and the twin transition: Good practices in collective action and employee involvement*. Publication for the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs of the European Parliament.

## The author's contributions to the publications

I am the sole author of two publications (Study II and the supplementary study) and the first author of the remaining two (Studies I and III).

Study I was co-authored with Olga Hannonen (University of Eastern Finland). Together, we continuously brainstormed and discussed the chapter's content, including its theoretical framing and the selected examples and case studies. While I wrote most of the manuscript, Olga Hannonen contributed to drafting some sections and revising the text.

Study III was co-authored with Marko Orel (Prague University of Economics and Business) and Mihkel Solvak (University of Tartu). Mihkel Solvak and I jointly conceptualised the research aims and study design. I collected and curated the data, drafted most of the manuscript, contributed to its revision and coordinated our collaboration. Mihkel Solvak designed the methodology, conducted the formal analysis, drafted the relevant sections of the 'Methodology' and 'Results' sections, and produced data visualisations. Marko Orel helped to contextualise the findings, assisted in drafting the 'Introduction' and 'Discussion' and played a leading role in rounds of revisions.

## Acknowledgements

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my supervisors, Eneli Kindsiko and Mihkel Solvak, for their scientific guidance, thoughtful feedback and continued support, as well as for helping me navigate the two new worlds this project opened up for me: the academic community and life in Estonia.

I am especially grateful to my (informal) mentor, Olga Hannonen, for her continued guidance and the many helpful discussions over these four years. I thank both my co-authors, Olga Hannonen and Marko Orel, for their productive collaboration and valuable contributions to the work presented in this thesis.

I am also thankful to my pre-defence opponents, Mari Toivanen and Sigrid Rajalo, for their insightful feedback, which has helped enrich the quality and depth of this thesis.

My thanks extend to my colleagues and fellow PhD students at the University of Tartu for creating a stimulating and supportive research environment, and for many inspiring discussions along the way. I also thank my former colleagues at Visionary Analytics for the work and learning experiences that equipped me with solid research and project management skills, making my PhD journey so much easier.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge my family and close ones for their steady support and encouragement.

## Thesis structure

This thesis consists of four chapters, in addition to the front matter (*Thesis overview*). *Chapter 1* introduces the thesis's rationale and contents, including the motivation for the research (1.1), the research design (1.2) and a summary of the empirical studies (1.3). *Chapter 2* introduces the thesis's approach (2.1) and then discusses its conceptual (2.2), theoretical (2.3) and analytical (2.4) frameworks. The four empirical studies comprising this thesis are included in *Chapter 3*. Lastly, *Chapter 4* reflects on the findings of the four studies (4.1), outlines the thesis's contribution to theory, methodology and practice (4.2), and outlines the directions for future research (4.3).

# 1. INTRODUCTION

## 1.1. Motivation for the research

In 1997, two visionaries pictured a future of work in which technological progress and advancing globalisation would free us from the constraints of location-bound employment (Makimoto & Manners, 1997). According to them, individuals would leverage digital technology and global connectivity to work from anywhere in the world and choose our place of work and life based on lifestyle aspirations, not workplace location, to the point where we could be “marooned on a desert island, still running your business or doing your job” (ibid., p. 39). To describe these futuristic workers-travellers, they coined the term ‘digital nomadism’. Today, **we define digital nomadism as a lifestyle that combines remote work and long-term travel** (Cook, 2023; Hannonen, 2020).<sup>1</sup> In an ideal imagined world, digital nomads move from one location to another, freely choosing where and for how long they stay, unconstrained by time or place. In reality, they are constrained by borders and bureaucracy – they must navigate a grey zone of institutional arrangements, often finding themselves in a state of ‘resistance and compliance’ with host governments – trying to circumvent or minimise state regulations (e.g. visas, taxation, residency rules), while still selectively complying with them when necessary or convenient (Mancinelli, 2020; Mancinelli & Germann Molz, 2024; Wang et al., 2019).

For years, digital nomadism had been a niche phenomenon that few were aware of, and even fewer practised, until the COVID-19 pandemic marked a major turning point. The need for social distancing led to an unprecedented experiment in remote work, as millions of office workers transitioned to working from home almost overnight (Brynjolfsson et al., 2020). This substantially increased the supply of workers who were not (or at least – less) location-bound. At the same time, mobility restrictions aimed at limiting the spread of the virus rendered ‘conventional’ tourism travel risky, if not impossible (Martin & Bergmann, 2021). While digital nomads were not immune to these travel restrictions, **they demonstrated some degree of ‘adaptive superiority’ in contexts of uncertainty and risk** (Ehn et al., 2022). For example, they changed their stay patterns – e.g. by staying longer at a given destination, and travel trajectories – e.g. by favouring destinations closer to their home countries (Holleran & Notting, 2023; Toivanen, 2025a). This adaptive superiority, including longer travel duration, greater time and place flexibility and sustained income from remote work, made digital nomadism relatively resilient amid the tumultuous conditions of the pandemic (compared to mass tourism). As a result of both increased supply of remote workers and increased demand for ‘alternative’ mobilities, the number of digital nomads likely spiked during the pandemic. Though reliable hard data is

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<sup>1</sup> See *section 2.1* for a more detailed conceptualisation of the term.

scarce, one survey of US workers shows that the number of digital nomads more than doubled between 2019 and 2021 (MBO Partners, 2025).<sup>2</sup>

From the perspective of places, the COVID-19 pandemic created an unprecedented testing ground for previously unseen policy interventions (Dunlop et al., 2020), including significant limitations on individual freedoms (especially the freedom to move) and large fiscal stimuli to counter the huge negative demand shock caused by the lockdowns, but also – new travel regimes. As international tourism revenues plummeted, many states have recognised the potential of digital nomads as a new, attractive visitor segment. Their smaller numbers could help mitigate the spread of COVID-19 and facilitate pre-travel testing, while their travel patterns meant they tended to stay longer, thus providing a more stable source of income (Holleran, 2022; Holleran & Notting, 2023). As a result, recognising the failure of most existing mobility regimes to accommodate this group of worker-travellers, **an increasing number of countries began modifying their visa policies to attract and retain remote workers** (KC & Triandafyllidou, 2025; Koskela & Beckers, 2024; Mancinelli & Germann Molz, 2024; Sánchez-Vergara et al., 2023). Such policies have often been labelled ‘digital nomad visas’; in effect, a digital nomad visa is *a legal framework established by a host country that permits foreign nationals to reside in its territory while performing remote work for employers or clients located outside the country* (Bednorz, 2024; Hannonen, 2023). Between mid-2020 and the end of 2023, as many as 36 states, concentrated mainly in Europe and Central America, have implemented such visas (Bednorz, 2024).

Since the pandemic, digital nomadism has also flourished as an area of academic research (de Sousa et al., 2025). However, **two closely interrelated tensions or gaps in the existing literature can be identified that are at the centre of this thesis**. First, digital nomadism is clearly an interdisciplinary topic, attracting attention from a range of fields, including sociology, psychology, human geography, ergonomics, technology and organisational studies (Gupta et al., 2026; Jaiswal et al., 2025). However, economic perspectives have been largely missing from the digital nomadism literature, leaving underexplored questions about digital nomadism in relation to, for example, labour markets and economic development. Second, existing research has disproportionately focused on the micro perspective, using qualitative methods to study digital nomadism as an individual lifestyle (Gupta et al., 2026). At the same time, the macro perspective – digital nomadism as a new structural trend with institutional, economic and spatial implications – has been under-researched (Bozzi, 2024; de Sousa et al., 2025; Wang et al., 2019).

Recognising these research imbalances, **the core motivation for this thesis has been to study digital nomadism as a macro-level phenomenon**. Filling in this gap in digital nomad literature is important for two reasons. First, digital

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<sup>2</sup> The survey targets self-identified digital nomads, though some additional criteria are applied to validate the sample (they must have control over where and when they travel; visit at least three different locations per year; and spend at least 30% of the year travelling).

nomadism is an appealing subject of study in and of itself. A macro perspective allows us to deepen our understanding of digital nomadism as an aggregate, structural phenomenon, in a way that the micro perspective cannot fully capture. It enables the examination of the changing relationships between labour, mobility, and the nation-state and – more broadly – the changing global economic geographies, especially the separation between where people work (production) and where they live (consumption). Second, digital nomadism is an extreme representation of two profound trends: (1) the rise of remote and digitally mediated work, with its implications for the local and global geographies of labour and economic development (Akan et al., 2025; Althoff et al., 2022; Braesemann et al., 2022; Graham et al., 2017); and (2) hypermobility – the expanding scale of human movement (i.e. the growing number of travellers) as well as the diversifying scope of mobilities (i.e. the emergence of various new forms of travel) – which has been one of the defining trends in social science research (Elliot & Urry, 2010; Sheller & Urry, 2006). Studying digital nomadism can be considered a ‘magnifying lens’ that allows us to better understand the broader underlying trends of digital work and hypermobility.

Having chosen economics as my major, I also initially hoped to bring the digital nomad phenomenon to the attention of economists by ‘separating’ its implications for economic geography and development from other research avenues. This approach has not proven realistic – **digital nomadism is inherently multidisciplinary** and requires a more holistic approach, especially at this early stage of conceptual exploration. Thus, my research has pivoted from studying the ‘pure’ economics of digital nomadism to a more fundamental exploration of digital nomadism as a structural force with growing economic and institutional relevance. As a result, while retaining an economic angle, the empirical studies in this thesis have transcended disciplinary boundaries, including sociology and human geography, and touched on a range of interdisciplinary concepts, from innovation diffusion to lifestyle mobilities.<sup>3</sup>

Besides these scientific motivations, **research is often inspired by each author’s lived experience** (Mehrabadi et al., 2024). Qualitative researchers in particular consider reflexivity – self-reflection on how our worldview and position in society shape each stage of our research process – as an integral part of the research design (Jamieson et al., 2023). For example, the perspective of an ‘insider’ vs ‘outsider’ – i.e. whether the researcher belongs to the group they are studying or shares with study subjects some lived experience – can inform the questions they pose and approaches they take to answer them (Kanuha, 2000). I practised the digital nomad lifestyle before, during, and – to a limited extent – after the COVID-19 pandemic, which sparked my interest in the implications of digital nomadism for the destinations I visited. At the same time, for most of my professional career, I have worked in applied policy research, assisting EU institutions in understanding the impacts of the evolving ways of working for policy-making and societal change. Thus, the inspiration for this thesis’s focus comes

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<sup>3</sup> See *Chapter 2* for more details on the theoretical framework of the thesis.

directly from the combination of my life and work experiences. While my prior experience with digital nomadism informed my initial interest in the topic and provided contextual familiarity, I have sought to approach the research in a systematic and analytically rigorous manner, ensuring that the study is grounded in empirical data and existing literature rather than personal experience.

## 1.2. Research design

### 1.2.1. Philosophical assumptions

This thesis is built on ontological, epistemological and methodological assumptions that depart somewhat from prevailing approaches in the existing literature on digital nomadism. They have also evolved as the research progressed, and the understanding of the phenomenon in question has deepened.

*Ontology* concerns the nature of reality and the fundamental assumptions we make about what exists, what kinds of entities or structures constitute the phenomenon under study, and how they relate to one another (Al-Ababneh, 2020; Creswell & Creswell, 2017). As introduced in the section above (see also *Table 1* below), most research on digital nomadism has taken a micro perspective, studying digital nomadism as an individual lifestyle and a cultural and sociological phenomenon. There are at least three likely reasons for the limited macro perspectives in digital nomadism scholarship: (1) recency – emerging phenomena are often first explored theoretically and qualitatively before they can be systematised and quantified; (2) delineation issues – there is considerable fluidity in the definition of digital nomadism, which overlaps with several other phenomena (including remote workers, lifestyle migrants and extended-stay tourists); and (3) lacking data – unlike tourists or migrants, digital nomads are invisible in administrative datasets, which inhibits macroeconomic analysis. While acknowledging these limitations, this thesis's underlying ontological assumption is that **digital nomadism is also a macro-level phenomenon**. As such, it examines its relationships with nation-states (institutions) and geographical destinations (markets) and their institutional and economic implications.

*Epistemology* concerns the nature, sources and limits of knowledge – what counts as valid knowledge, how it is produced and how truth claims are justified (Al-Ababneh, 2020; Creswell & Creswell, 2017). In most of the digital nomad literature, knowledge is produced from the standpoint of the subject (nomads' experiences, practices, constraints). While existing research increasingly acknowledges the roles of institutions and economics, they are typically treated as contextual factors that influence mobile subjects (for example, visa regimes affect and constrain individual travel and stay decisions). This thesis **adopts a different epistemological orientation, approaching knowledge production from the standpoint of systems and relations** (states, markets, governance). Rather than taking the individual as the primary vantage point, it considers how the mobility of remote workers in aggregate contributes to the reconfiguration of institutional and economic structures.

*Methodology* refers to the strategic framework that translates ontological and epistemological assumptions into a coherent research design, specifying how knowledge about the phenomenon will be systematically generated and evaluated (Al-Ababneh, 2020; Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Digital nomads have not been distinguishable in official statistics, such as labour force surveys or migration data. Though states have begun to respond with policy to address the growing digital nomad phenomenon, they still fall far behind in collecting data that would allow for measuring its impact. As a result, there is a great gap in the availability of relevant and reliable hard data that methods of ‘conventional’ economic research typically require. Hopefully, if digital nomadism becomes more embedded in institutional arrangements, data will be collected and lend themselves to a ‘proper’ economic analysis. In the meantime, **the emergence of policy responses to digital nomadism provides a useful lens through which we can examine it as a macro-level phenomenon** and assess its *potential* implications for institutions and economies. This is exactly what this thesis has done.

**Table 1.** A summary of the philosophical assumptions

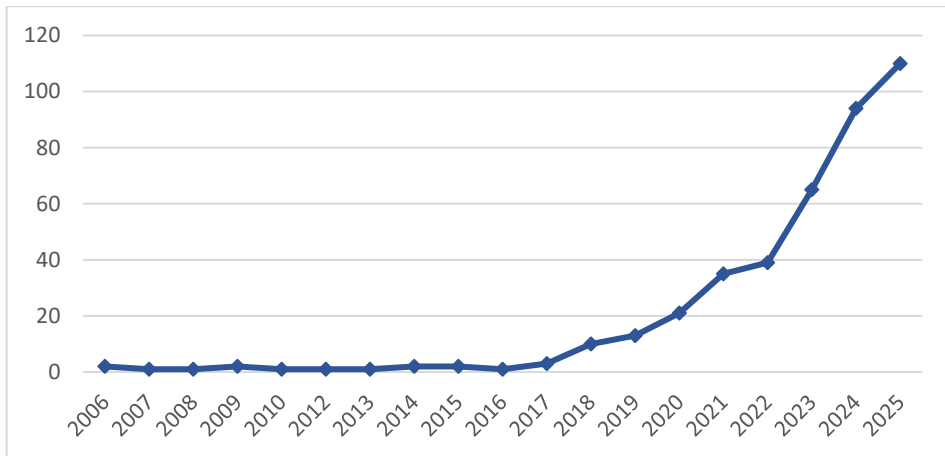
	<b>Predominant view in the literature</b>	<b>Outlook of this thesis</b>
<b>Ontological assumptions (the nature of the phenomenon)</b>	Digital nomadism is a micro-level phenomenon – an individual lifestyle choice with its personal motivations, processes, contexts and outcomes.	Digital nomadism is a macro-level phenomenon with institutional and economic implications.
<b>Epistemological assumptions (the nature of knowledge)</b>	Knowledge about digital nomadism is constructed from the perspective of the individual. Institutional and economic factors are contextual.	Knowledge about digital nomadism is constructed by examining its implications for institutional and economic structures.
<b>Methodological assumptions (the ways of studying a phenomenon)</b>	Digital nomads are studied using in-depth qualitative (often ethnographic) approaches.	The emergence of digital nomad visas provides an opportunity to study digital nomadism as a macro phenomenon through the lens of policy analysis.

*Source: Author’s own elaboration, based on de Sousa et al. (2025); Gupta et al. (2026); Jaiswal et al. (2025); and Morgan & Smircich (1980).*

### 1.2.2. Research gap

Digital nomadism barely entered the academic agenda before the COVID-19 pandemic, with only a handful of theoretical or exploratory studies merely scratching the surface of this complex phenomenon (Hannonen, 2020; Müller, 2016). Just a few years later, the literature on digital nomadism is burgeoning (see *Figure 1*), with scholars looking into all aspects of this new lifestyle from a multitude of

perspectives and disciplines, including psychology, sociology, anthropology, geography, tourism, technology and organisational and management studies (Bozzi, 2024; de Sousa et al., 2025; Šímová, 2022). Nevertheless, **the broader institutional and economic contexts of digital nomadism, including the potential impacts of digital nomad presence on destinations**, were unexplored at the time (Wang et al., 2018, 2019) and remain under-researched to this day (Bozzi, 2024; de Sousa et al., 2025; Šímová, 2022). By treating digital nomadism as a macro-level phenomenon and studying policy responses to its rise, this thesis aims to help fill this gap.



**Figure 1.** Publications on digital nomadism, per year

Source: Scopus.

Note: The chart represents the number of results for the search term “digital nomad\*” within article titles, abstracts and keywords.

Naturally, the research gap at the centre of this thesis has evolved as the research progressed. Initially, **there were significant gaps in our understanding of the institutional and policy context of digital nomadism**, necessitating exploratory research. For example, Wang et al. (2018, p. 5) suggested that future research should ask “how do traditional service providers, including government bodies, respond strategically to digital nomadism?”. Šímová (2022, p. 187) identified policymaking and legislative changes as one of the areas that “have not yet been addressed in formal research and need to be addressed in the future”. Cook (2023) acknowledged that even the total number of digital nomad visas worldwide was unclear, with estimates ranging from 20 to 100.

As these basic, almost factual, questions were being addressed, **the attention of the research community shifted from the *what* questions to the *how* and *why***. Scholars were dissecting the policy rationale, objectives and design of policy innovations aimed at digital nomads (KC & Triandafyllidou, 2025; Koskela &

Beckers, 2024; Mancinelli & Germann Molz, 2024; Sánchez-Vergara et al., 2023). However, significant gaps have remained, including:

- *Longitudinal policy evolution*: e.g. were digital nomad visas an ad-hoc temporary response in the face of the pandemic, or will they become durable policy regimes and, perhaps, evolve in nature and scope over time? (KC & Triandafyllidou, 2025; Koskela & Beckers, 2024)
- *Policy outcomes*: e.g. how have digital nomad visas been received by digital nomads? What has the uptake been? Are these policies well-designed to attract the target group to a destination? (Koskela & Beckers, 2024; Koskela & Szabo, 2024)
- *Policy impacts*: e.g. what are the implications of digital nomads' presence in a destination vis-à-vis the stated policy objectives (for example, related to local demand and spending, human capital, tax base, entrepreneurship, etc.)? (Bozzi, 2024; Mancinelli & Germann Molz, 2024)
- *Systemic changes*: e.g. what are these policies' broader implications for global mobility systems? Do they contribute to the existing power imbalances and mobility inequality? How do 'nomad geographies' alter global migration flows? (Mancinelli & Germann Molz, 2024)

### 1.2.3. Research aim and questions

In light of this evolving research gap, **the overarching aim of this thesis is to advance our understanding of digital nomadism as a macro-level socio-economic phenomenon by examining the policy responses to it.** Specifically, the empirical studies forming this thesis ask the following research questions:

- RQ1. How have market and state actors responded to the emergence of digital nomadism? (Study I)
- RQ2. What are the policy designs and implicit policy objectives behind digital nomad visas? (Study II)
- RQ3. What are the patterns in the implementation of digital nomad visas across countries, including their temporal and spatial diffusion (Study II), and what are the country characteristics associated with a high propensity to adopt them (Study III)?
- RQ4. What are the policy outcomes, evaluated through the patterns of digital nomad visa adoption among their intended target group? (Study S)

Reflecting the state of research at the time, RQ1 is exploratory – it aims to uncover the market and state innovation patterns and provide a foundational empirical base. On the other hand, RQs 2–4 are explanatory – building on the evidence accumulated in the scholarly literature and new emerging data sources, they ask the questions of *how* and *why* and apply existing scientific theories to the new context of digital nomadism and digital nomad visas, aiming to form new both empirical and theoretical contributions. Overall, **such a research design**

**allows for a comprehensive examination of policy responses**, including policy context (RQ1 – *what*), policy content and rationale (RQ2 – *how* and *why*), policy actors (RQ3 – *who*) and policy outcomes (RQ4 – *with what effects*).

### 1.3. Overview of the empirical studies

This thesis is composed of four studies (see *List of publications* and *Table 2* below).

**Study I is exploratory.** It situates digital nomadism as a form of ‘in-between’ mobility on the tourism-migration continuum and discusses how the emergence of this new class of workers-travellers prompted responses from the market and state actors. It recalls examples of innovations that address the needs of this new group and categorises them using a typology of tourism innovations (Hjalager, 2010) and a stakeholder perspective. As such, it outlines innovations implemented by service providers (product or service innovations), governments (process and institutional innovations) and in public-private partnerships (management and marketing innovations). Among other conclusions, it identifies digital nomad visas as a primary form of institutional (policy) innovation – a way for nation-states to attract and retain digital nomads.

**Study II systematises the knowledge about digital nomad visas.** Applying the principles of a systematic review to policy analysis, it identifies and examines digital nomad visas implemented worldwide as of January 2023. The findings enable the categorisation of such policies, emphasising their heterogeneity in policy rationales, designs and potential implications. They reveal how digital nomad visas can reinforce governments' broader strategic priorities, including tourism development and diversification, fostering an entrepreneurial ecosystem and attracting high-skilled workers or high-spending residents. The study also notes that the spread of digital nomad visas across countries appears non-random, highlighting distinct structural features of digital nomad visa implementers and their spatial and temporal clustering.

**Study III examines the structural differences among digital nomad visa implementers**, building upon the preliminary insights from Study II. Based on theories of innovation diffusion (Rogers, 2010) and concepts from economic and tourism geographies, such as the core-periphery model (Butler, 1980; Krugman, 1991), it identifies a range of factors that likely distinguish innovators from non-innovators. Using a mixed-methods approach on a sample of 50 small states, the study compares countries that have implemented digital nomad visas with those that have not. Additionally, in the sample of digital nomad visa implementers, it examines different trajectories (combinations of factors) that lead to the same outcome – implementation of a digital nomad visa. The findings reveal that innovators are structurally different from non-innovators and identify cumulative – but not distinct – trajectories to the outcome.

**The supplementary study (Study S) shifts the focus from policy design and rationale to policy outcomes.** Focusing on a critical case study of Estonia’s

Digital Nomad Visa (DNV), it builds on unique administrative data and a mixed-methods approach to examine policy effectiveness. Specifically, it studies DNV adoption over time and analyses DNV holders as a highly specific tourism market segment. It demonstrates DNV’s moderate impact at the height of the pandemic, when digital nomads accounted for a sizeable share of total nights spent in Estonia by non-Schengen visitors, though this impact diminished as tourism recovered post-pandemic. The study also proposes three theoretical conceptualisations of digital nomad visas as tourism (policy) innovations, market segmentation tools and elements of a broader destination competitiveness framework.

**Table 2.** Overview of the empirical studies

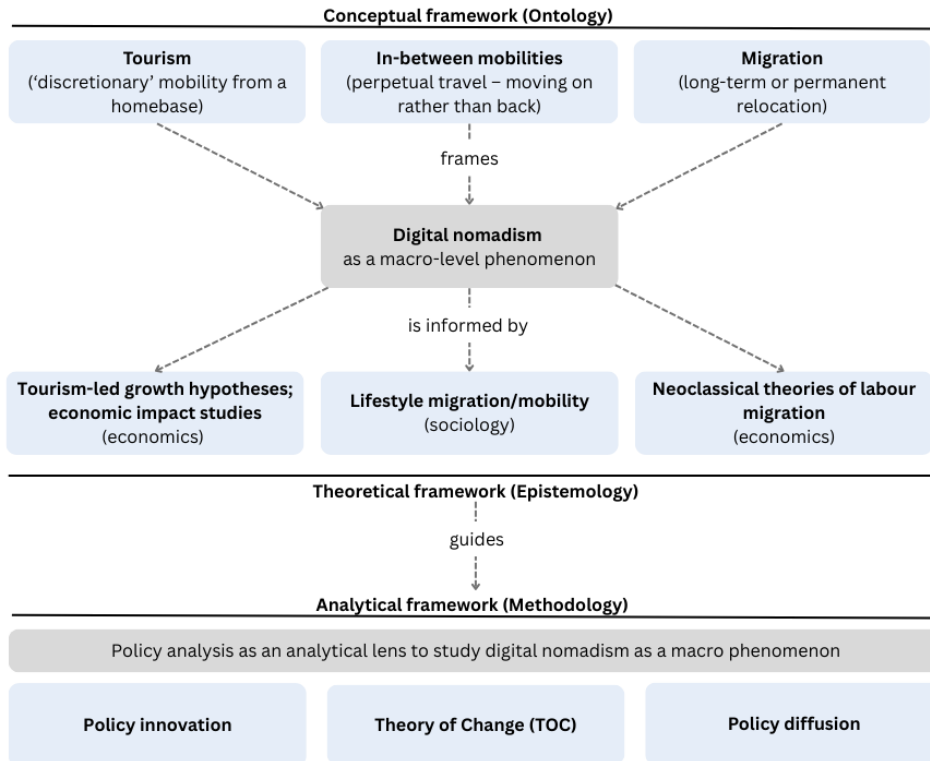
<b>Research questions</b>	<b>Study I</b> RQ1	<b>Study II</b> RQs 2–3	<b>Study III</b> RQ3	<b>Study S</b> RQ4
<b>Literature streams</b>	Lifestyle mobilities Tourism innovations	Lifestyle mobilities Policy diffusion	Policy diffusion Small states and core-periphery	Tourism innovations Market segmentation Destination competitiveness
<b>Methodology (methods)</b>	Exploratory study (desk research)	Systematic review (desk research)	Comparative analysis (statistical analysis, qualitative comparative analysis)	Critical case study (statistical analysis, process tracing)
<b>Key findings</b>	An overview of innovations targeted at digital nomads	A typology of digital nomad visas; insights into their temporal and spatial diffusion	A comparative analysis of innovators (digital nomad visa issuers) and non-innovators	A breakdown of adoption patterns of a digital nomad visa

*Source: Author’s own elaboration.*

## 2. CONCEPTUAL, THEORETICAL AND ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

### 2.1. Summary of the approach

**The following sections elaborate on the conceptual (ontology), theoretical (epistemology) and analytical (methodology) frameworks,** introduced in *section 1.2.1* (see also *Figure 2* below). Ontologically, the thesis situates digital nomadism vis-à-vis concepts from tourism and migration studies, as well as the emerging lens of ‘in-between’ mobilities that blur their boundaries. Epistemologically, I particularly focus on the different perspectives and theoretical approaches, which rest on distinct assumptions about what can be known about a phenomenon and how it can be known. Specifically, I combine economic (macro) approaches to studying tourism and migration with a sociological (micro) perspective on lifestyle migration/mobility and argue that principles of economic impact assessment could (and should) also be applied to digital nomadism as an example of lifestyle mobilities. Methodologically, I draw on concepts and analytical tools from the policy analysis literature to study digital nomadism as a macro-level phenomenon from several policy-relevant angles (including policy context and needs, policy objectives and designs and policy outcomes).



**Figure 2.** Conceptual, theoretical and analytical frameworks of the thesis  
*Source: Author's own elaboration, based on sources discussed throughout the following sections.*

## 2.2. Conceptual framework: Digital nomadism as a new form of mobility

As introduced in *section 1.1*, digital nomadism is a lifestyle that combines remote work and long-term travel (Cook, 2023; Hannonen, 2020). While the basic building blocks of its definition are clear – remote work and travel (see *Table 3* below) – **the precise separation between digital nomadism and other forms of mobility is ambiguous**. Recent definitions have tried to clearly delineate digital nomadism, including for the purpose of survey design and data collection, for example, by introducing the ‘three relocation rule’ that emphasises digital nomads’ continuous travel (Cook, 2023; MBO Partners, 2025). However, earlier definitions of a digital nomad tended to take a broader perspective. For example, Reichenberger (2018) proposed a graduation approach, describing several ‘levels’ of digital nomadism based on the commitment to travel. Such an approach treats location independence through online-based work as a basic precondition for becoming a digital nomad, but does not regard travel as a necessary requirement for being one – it is rather one possible way of utilising location mobility

(Reichenberger, 2018). Other researchers have also emphasised digital nomads’ ‘motility’, i.e. the potentiality to move that can be exercised or not (Matos & Ardévol, 2021, cited in Hannonen, 2023, pp. 4–5):

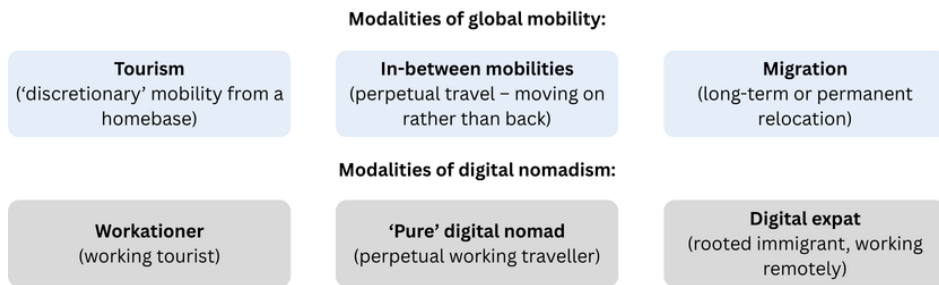
Nomadic life brings the potentiality to move, but one can also feel at home in a place and stay longer, always maintaining the conditions to travel if one wants to. In this sense, the nomad does not necessarily move physically, but has and represents the potential to move – if desired.

**Table 3.** Definitions of digital nomadism

<b>Source</b>	<b>Definition</b>
<b>Müller (2016)</b>	Digital nomads are a new generation of location-independent freelancers, young entrepreneurs, online self-employed persons.
<b>Reichenberger (2018)</b>	(0) Digital nomads are individuals who achieve location independence by conducting their work in an online environment, (1) transferring this independence to mobility by not consistently working in one designated personal office space, (2) but using the possibility to simultaneously work and travel, (3) to the extent that no permanent residence exists.
<b>Schlagwein (2018)</b>	Digital nomadism refers to professionals using a range of information systems (IS) and information technology (IT) tools to perform work digitally over the Internet so to enable a lifestyle of perpetual travelling and expat living.
<b>Wang et al. (2018)</b>	Digital nomads are teleworkers who [...] choose to work from everywhere, living a life of ongoing interleaved work and travel.
<b>Thompson (2019)</b>	Digital nomadism is defined through the ability for individuals to work remotely from their laptop and use their freedom from an office to travel the world.
<b>Hannonen (2020)</b>	Digital nomads are a rapidly emerging class of highly mobile professionals, whose work is location independent. Thus, they work while traveling on a (semi)permanent basis and vice versa, forming a new mobile lifestyle.
<b>Cook (2023)</b>	Digital nomads use digital technologies to work remotely, they have the ability to work and travel simultaneously, have autonomy over frequency and choice of location, and visit at least three locations a year that are not their own or a friend’s or family home.
<b>Bednorz (2024)</b>	Digital nomad is a foreign professional who stays at the destination for a fixed period of time (defined by visa rules), sustained by their income from work or entrepreneurial activity based abroad and performed digitally.
<b>Bozzi (2024)</b>	Digital nomadism is a tech-enabled lifestyle that transcends geographical constraints tied to traditional workspaces and that seamlessly blends remote work and travel.

*Source: Author’s own elaboration, based on sources cited in the table.*

Particularly in this broader understanding of the phenomenon – adopted in my empirical studies and this thesis – **digital nomads blur the boundaries between the well-established concepts of migration as long-term or permanent resettlement and tourism as a discretionary short-term mobility** (S. A. Cohen et al., 2015; S. Cohen & Hannonen, 2026; Hannonen, 2020). Digital nomadism may encompass a diverse range of lifestyles with ‘workationers’ – occasional working tourists – at one end (Chevtaeva & Denizci-Guillet, 2021; Voll et al., 2022), ‘slowmads’ or rooted, remote-working expats at the other (Cangià et al., 2022; Holleran, 2022), and ‘traditional’ digital nomads – continuously relocating from destination to destination – in the middle (e.g. Cook, 2023; see *Figure 3*).



**Figure 3.** Modalities of digital nomadism vis-à-vis global mobility  
*Source: Author's own elaboration, based on Bednorz (2024).*

### 2.3. Theoretical framework: Theoretical perspectives on mobility

Corresponding to the customary conceptual duality of migration and tourism, migration and tourism studies have been two long-standing interdisciplinary fields, occupied by human geographers, sociologists, political scientists and, importantly, economists. Regarding (labour) migration, **the neoclassical economic theory of migration dictates that migration occurs because of differences in wages and labour supply and demand:** people migrate from low-wage places with labour surpluses (generally located in the Global South) to high-wage places with labour shortages (the Global North) (Lewis, 1954). While other economic theories have nuanced this view by, for example, considering migration with regard to household strategies (New Economics of Labour Migration) or emphasising the structural labour demand in destination economies (Dual Labour Market Theory), the main assumption of migration as an economically rational and necessity-driven phenomenon has not fundamentally changed (Massey et al., 1993; Oso et al., 2022). In this context, economists have long studied the impacts of migration on host countries (including on labour markets, fiscal outcomes,

economic growth, etc.) as well as sending countries (e.g. the effects of remittances or ‘brain drain’), typically using quantitative methods based on administrative datasets or large-scale surveys (Salamońska, 2022; Vargas-Silva, 2013).

Likewise, **economists have commonly analysed tourism as an export sector and a source of foreign exchange, and as a consumption-led driver of local economic development.** Proponents of the tourism-led growth (TLG) hypothesis have emphasised the impact of international tourism on foreign exchange, local employment levels, investment and overall economic growth (e.g. Schubert et al., 2011). Therefore, economic impact studies have long attempted to capture these effects through largely quantitative approaches, including Keynesian-type multipliers, cost-benefit analysis (CBA), input-output (I-O) models and computable general equilibrium (CGE) frameworks (Song et al., 2012).

At the same time, relatively new conceptual frameworks have emerged to capture the phenomena ‘in-between’ tourism and migration. In particular, **‘lifestyle migration’ refers to migrants who relocate in pursuit of a different lifestyle or a higher quality of life,** and are often driven by relative privilege rather than economic necessity (Benson & O’Reilly, 2009, 2016). Pensioners who relocate to places with better climates and lower costs of living are an iconic example of this trend (e.g. Repetti et al., 2018). The term ‘lifestyle mobilities’ extends this perspective to include more spatially and temporally fluid forms of mobility, such as second-home owners, backpackers and digital nomads (S. A. Cohen et al., 2015; S. Cohen & Hannonen, 2026). Thus, both perspectives describe the movement of relatively affluent individuals “in search of a better way of life,” though with different temporal foci: permanent relocation (lifestyle migration) and temporary, circular, seasonal or continuous movement (lifestyle mobility).

While tourism and migration have long been subject to macro-level analysis (i.e. examining how aggregate flows of tourists/migrants influence markets and societies), **lifestyle migrants have been predominantly studied from the micro perspectives** (i.e. examining individual contexts and experiences). Lifestyle migration and mobility have also been largely ignored by economists, not least because of the difficulty of capturing them in official statistics and analysing them quantitatively. This is not to say that economic aspects have been entirely absent from the examination of lifestyle migrants – for example, geoarbitrage, the strategy of earning income in a high-wage economy while spending in a low-cost destination has been prominent in the literature on lifestyle migration/mobility as well as digital nomadism (Gaspar & Hannonen, 2025; Hannonen, 2025; Holleran, 2022; Toivanen, 2025a). However, these economic aspects have been approached exclusively from the perspective of the individual and their lifestyle, rather than as an aggregate macroeconomic phenomenon.

Conceptually, digital nomadism – as an aspiration-driven lifestyle and mobility – certainly fits into the theoretical framework of lifestyle migration and mobility (S. Cohen & Hannonen, 2026; Hannonen, 2020). Nevertheless, as this thesis argues, the study of digital nomadism can be extended to macro traditions

typical for tourism and migration research, treating mobility as **a macro-level phenomenon with institutional and economic implications** (see *Table 4*).

As the following sections detail, not only does digital nomadism *necessitate* such an approach, but it also *enables* it. The forefathers of the lifestyle migration perspective have explicitly cautioned against attempts to rigidly delineate lifestyle migrants (at least based on available, highly imperfect proxies) and subject them to quantitative analysis (Benson & O'Reilly, 2016, p. 27):

*/.../* Intended as an analytical tool, lifestyle migration is difficult to operationalise as a category. This is not a problem specific to that term; it is a general issue for migration studies: mobility flows are notoriously difficult to measure and map, mainly because of their fluidity, and the difficulties of categorising, measuring and finding adequate statistics.

For example, they criticise the work of Huete et al. (2013), which uses nationality as the sole proxy and analyses all British migrants in Spain as lifestyle migrants. However, they acknowledge that quantitative research in migration is often possible “where visa categories – themselves indicators of policy and legal definitions [of different categories of migrants, such as asylum seekers and labour migrants] – stand as proxies for these concepts” (Benson & O'Reilly, 2016, p. 26). **The emergence of digital nomad visas solves (at least partially) this challenge of delineation of digital nomads** from other travellers in a given destination.

**Table 4.** Overview of the theoretical lenses relevant for digital nomadism

	<b>Tourism</b>	<b>Lifestyle Migration / Mobilities</b>	<b>Labour Migration</b>
<b>Underlying assumptions</b>	Mobility is temporary, discretionary, and leisure-oriented; tourists are distinct from residents and migrants.	Mobility is choice-driven and aspirational, often enabled by relative privilege; boundaries between migration and travel are blurred.	Migration is economically rational and necessity-driven; migrants respond to structural constraints and opportunities.
<b>Key subject positions</b>	“Tourists”, “visitors”, “travellers”	“Lifestyle migrants”, “expatriates”, “mobile subjects”	“Migrant workers”, “economic migrants”, “foreign labour”
<b>Temporal orientation</b>	Short-term, temporary visits with clear expectations of return	Open-ended or semi-permanent mobility; fluid temporalities; settlement may be contingent or reversible	Medium- to long-term relocation with intentions of settlement
<b>Migration flows</b>	Predominantly North–South and intra-North	Predominantly North–South and intra-North	Predominantly South–North
<b>Relation to place</b>	Place as a consumable experience and destination	Place as a resource for identity, lifestyle and affect (as well as economic accumulation)	Place as an economic resource (a site of work, production and social reproduction)
<b>Connection with digital nomadism</b>	Digital nomads often enter destinations as tourists, consume tourism infrastructures (short-term rentals, tourist attractions), and inhabit tourist zones.	Temporalities are fluid and open-ended; mobility is choice-driven and aspirational with a strong emphasis on quality of life, self-realisation and autonomy.	Work and income generation are central to digital nomadism.
<b>Contradiction with digital nomadism</b>	Digital nomads’ stays are typically longer and more embedded; their everyday practices tend to resemble residency more than visitation.	Lifestyle migration/mobilities were intended as a conceptual lens centred on subjective motivations and aspirations, not as a bounded category suitable for macro-level analysis.	Work is spatially decoupled from the destination labour market; digital nomads often operate in legal grey zones, complicating migration governance frameworks.

	<b>Tourism</b>	<b>Lifestyle Migration / Mobilities</b>	<b>Labour Migration</b>
<b>Implications</b>	The tourism lens captures spatial practices and (some) consumption patterns but fails to grasp the work-based and semi-residential dimensions of digital nomadism.	Digital nomadism extends lifestyle migration by foregrounding work as an integral, rather than backgrounded, element of mobility; it allows and necessitates research into broader economic and institutional implications.	Digital nomadism undermines key assumptions about labour demand, wage arbitrage and integration into host-country labour markets.

*Source: Author's own elaboration, based on Benson & O'Reilly (2009); Cohen et al. (2015); Oso et al. (2022); Song et al. (2012)*

## 2.4. Analytical framework: Mobility governance

### 2.4.1. Digital nomad visa as a policy innovation

Considering the highly mobile nature of digital nomadism and its economic attractiveness (including digital nomads' high skills and purchasing power), Makimoto and Manners (1997) envisioned that an interstate competition would arise for mobile residents: "Just as we are already seeing governments competing with each other to attract industrial investment, we may see governments competing with each other for citizens" (ibid., p. 207). Recognising the benefits of human capital inflows and boosting local demand (among other things), governments have long attempted, including through favourable visa regimes, to attract tourists (Chi et al., 2022; Lawson & Roychoudhury, 2015) and especially high-skilled migrants (Cerna, 2009; Czaika & Parsons, 2017). These attempts, especially regarding high-skilled migration, have indeed sometimes been framed as interstate competition – 'competition for talent' in this case (Florida, 2006). Nevertheless, generally, **conventional state policies have followed the binary distinction between tourism and migration, thus excluding digital nomads**, for example, by limiting travel duration (tourist visas) or allowing only locally sourced work (immigration visas) (Mancinelli, 2020; Mancinelli & Germann Molz, 2024).

In the empirical studies (especially Studies II–III) and this thesis, along with other scholars (Toivanen, 2023; Zhou et al., 2024), **I have argued that the emergence of digital nomad visas has represented a significant policy innovation in national mobility regimes**. Policy innovation can be defined simply as "a programme or policy which is new to the states adopting it" (Walker, 1969, p. 881). Policy innovation often entails radical or transformative changes in public policy, including problem framing, policy instruments, processes, practices or structures (Goyal & Pattyn, 2025; Mulgan & Albury, 2002). More broadly, it can be viewed as a form of public sector innovation, which can be defined as "implementing something novel to the context in order to achieve impact" or as "a proactive strategy that governments can use to respond to, adapt to and prepare for this context" (OECD, 2019, p. 5; see also Demircioglu, 2024). From the perspective of mobility research, I have also built on Hjalager's (2010) categorisation of innovations in tourism, which includes 'institutional innovations', understood as new organisational structures or legal frameworks that influence certain tourism market segments.

As introduced in the previous section, this thesis argues that **the emergence of digital nomad visas as policy innovations provides an opportunity to study digital nomadism as a macro-level phenomenon**. First, the policy rationales and designs behind digital nomad visas can inform research into the *expected* impacts of digital nomadism on destinations, i.e. they can help explain why nation-states would want to attract this group of travellers. Second, the uptake of these visas can help us delineate digital nomads from other travellers. This is not

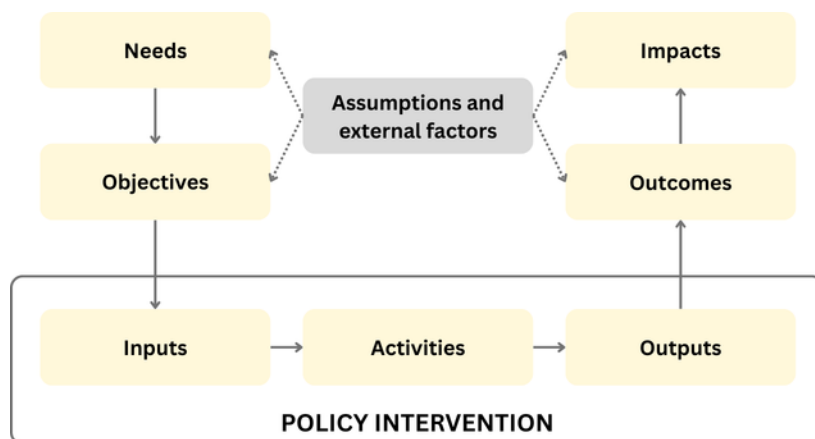
without limitations – digital nomad visas cannot capture the whole population of digital nomads in a destination (in the same way as, for example, work visas can capture labour migrants), since digital nomads do not *have to* use them – for example, they can still choose to travel on tourist visas (e.g. if they prefer shorter stays and/or want to minimise bureaucracy) or enjoy visa-free travel (e.g. for intra-EU nomads). Thus, digital nomad visas likely capture only a subset of the overall digital nomad population, skewing towards nomads who stay longer and come from visa-constrained countries (Koskela & Szabo, 2024; Mancinelli & Germann Molz, 2024). Nevertheless, they provide the best available lens for studying digital nomads in aggregate.

But how exactly can policy innovations, including digital nomad visas, be studied? By definition, they involve novel instruments, designs or governance arrangements, thereby introducing heightened uncertainty about implementation, effectiveness and unintended consequences. For this reason, policy evaluation – the assessment of public policies to determine their effectiveness, efficiency, and impact against intended goals (Dunn, 2012) – is particularly relevant. **One way to frame policy analysis and evaluation is through the Theory of Change (ToC) framework** (Connell & Kubisch, 1998; Mayne, 2017). In this approach, a policy is conceived as a purposive response to a clearly defined societal problem and its contextual determinants (the *needs*). It specifies the changes the policy seeks to bring about (*objectives*) and the causal pathways through which policy actions are expected to produce these changes, linking deployed resources and instruments (*inputs*) to planned measures (*activities*), their immediate deliverables (*outputs*) and subsequent systemic effects (*outcomes*), culminating in broader societal improvements (*impacts*). The framework explicitly states the underlying causal assumptions and contextual conditions (*assumptions* and *external factors*), thereby providing an analytical basis for implementation, monitoring and evaluation (ibid; see *Figure 4*).

**The ToC framework (applied to a digital nomad visa as a policy innovation) serves as the analytical cornerstone of this thesis**, and each empirical study examines specific element(s) of the ToC framework.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> See *section 4.1* for an elaboration on how the empirical studies fit into the ToC framework.



**Figure 4.** The Theory of Change (ToC) framework

Source: Author's own elaboration, based on European Commission (2025); Mayne (2017).

## 2.4.2. Institutional and spatial models of policy diffusion

As a new policy – or policy innovation – emerges in one place, it tends to spread – or diffuse – across other juridical units. **The diffusion of digital nomad visas and their evolution as they are adapted to local policy and economic contexts are the central themes of this thesis.** The scholarship on policy diffusion stems largely from political science and originates primarily from the analyses of American federalism (Gray, 1973; Walker, 1969), though it has also expanded to comparative politics and international relations literature (Berry & Berry, 2018; Gilardi & Wasserfallen, 2019; Simmons et al., 2006). It can be (in a simplified manner) boiled down to four key components of policy diffusion: (1) diffusion object (*what*); (2) diffusion mechanisms (*how*); (3) diffusion speed (*when*); and (4) diffusion population (*who*). The *what* – digital nomad visas as a policy innovation – has been introduced in the section above; the following text focuses on the remaining three components.

First, **four key mechanisms of policy diffusion can be distinguished** (Dobbin et al., 2007; Dolowitz & Marsh, 2000; Gilardi, 2010; Shipan & Volden, 2008):

1. Governments *learn* from other adopters and adopt policies after observing their effects elsewhere.
2. Governments *emulate* those policies adopted by others that are socially constructed as appropriate solutions to given problems. *Imitation* can be an extreme form of emulation, whereby governments directly copy the policies of others.
3. Governments adopt policies to *compete* with other states to attract capital, firms or voters.
4. Governments are *coerced* into adopting policies, driven by external pressure (e.g. donors, international organisations or treaties).

Second, **Boushey (2012) outlines three ‘speeds’ of policy diffusion that are closely related to the diffusion mechanisms they follow.** *Gradual* policy diffusion via incremental learning is the slowest form of diffusion, whereby states learn about a policy and adopt it gradually, not through pure copying, but by making small, incremental changes over time based on what they observe in other states. *Rapid* policy diffusion via imitation refers to a relatively rapid diffusion that resembles a policy ‘bandwagon’: once several states adopt a policy, others tend to copy it more quickly. This is more about mimicry or imitation rather than deliberate, bounded learning – states may copy policies because they have become ‘popular’ or because imitating others confers political legitimacy or signals value, and not necessarily because they have carefully evaluated the policy’s performance elsewhere. Lastly, the most dramatic scenario is *nearly immediate* policy diffusion via a common exogenous shock. In this case, many states respond almost simultaneously to a common exogenous shock, resulting in rapid policy adoption across multiple jurisdictions.

Third, there is extensive scholarship as to which juridical units are more prone to innovate early, while others lag, and why. Two fundamental propositions have been offered to answer this question (Berry & Berry, 1990). One proposition is the *regional diffusion model*, which emphasises the influence of nearby states. It assumes that states view neighbouring states as laboratories for policy experimentation and emulate their neighbours when confronted with policy problems (Matisoff, 2008). It can be traced back to Hägerstrand’s (1967) spatial diffusion model that explains how innovations spread geographically. According to him, diffusion occurs through spatial contagion, in which actors adopt an innovation after coming into contact with prior adopters (Hägerstrand, 1967). **Adoption is therefore geographically and temporally patterned, producing waves of diffusion radiating outward from an origin point.** Besides contagious diffusion (spread to nearby units via proximity), Hägerstrand (1967) also notes that hierarchical diffusion (spread from large/central places to smaller/less central ones) and network diffusion (spread along transportation or communication networks) are vital pathways of diffusion.

Another answer to the question of which states are more prone to innovation lies in the *internal determinants model*, which explains policy adoption as a function of factors that are internal to the state, such as its political, economic and social characteristics (Berry & Berry, 1990). In this framework, **states develop and implement policies based on the attributes and resources they possess.** These features can either encourage policy innovation or act as barriers to it. Among the most prominent factors examined in the literature are: (1) sociodemographic characteristics, such as the population size of the juridical unit, as well as education or urbanisation levels; (2) economic capacity, including wealth, fiscal capacity and industrialisation levels; (3) institutional capacity, such as administrative infrastructure or prior policy experience; and (4) political factors, such as ideology of the government or the electoral cycle (Walker, 1969; Berry & Berry, 1990; Shipan & Volden, 2008).

Against this theoretical backdrop, the “rapid diffusion of digital nomad visas within [such] a short period /.../ is an intriguing policy phenomenon” (KC & Triandafyllidou, 2025, p. 73) In particular, **this thesis has used policy diffusion processes as a lens to study an important aspect of digital nomadism as a macro-level phenomenon**: the institutional, policy and economic contexts of countries that position themselves as ‘digital nomad destinations’. In this context, the diffusion population is especially worth examining: which internal and regional factors can increase or decrease the propensity of states to innovate and proactively attract digital nomads by issuing them? (see *Table 5* below). Overall, the economic geography of digital nomad destinations, drawing on concepts from small-state economics and core-periphery theories, would predict that: (1) small, tourism-dependent states would be most motivated to innovate and attract digital nomads; and (2) ‘core’ destinations – those with stronger tourism industries and better digital infrastructure – would be better equipped to position themselves as digital nomad destinations (while peripheral small states will face greater barriers to innovation). Empirical studies included in this thesis (Studies II–III) test these hypotheses.

**Table 5.** Features of policy diffusion in the context of digital nomad visas

Feature of policy diffusion	Models / modalities	Assumptions about digital nomad visas
<b>Diffusion speed</b>	Gradual Rapid Nearly immediate	With as many as 36 visas implemented worldwide amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, one can assume this reflects a pattern of <i>nearly immediate</i> diffusion in response to a common exogenous shock.
<b>Diffusion mechanism</b>	Learning Emulation/imitation Competition Coercion	The speed of diffusion suggests a high degree of emulation or imitation and/or an intense intra-state competition predicted by some scholars (e.g. Makimoto & Manners, 1997).
<b>Diffusion population</b>	Internal determinants model	The attraction of a specific, likely very small, segment of visitors is unlikely to constitute an important policy goal for any large, industrialised economy. However, a body of literature on the economics of small states has emphasised that <b>small states</b> have historically employed innovative revenue-raising methods, including establishing tax havens, ‘selling’ passports, hosting military bases, legalising online gambling, and more (Prasad, 2004). Attracting mobile workers (high-spending resident consumers) could be seen as yet another ‘creative’ revenue generation scheme for such economies (Foley et al., 2022).  Furthermore, <b>tourism-dependent economies</b> were disproportionately harmed by the COVID-19-induced halt to tourism mobility (Mostafanezhad, 2020) and were more likely to implement digital nomad visas as an ‘emergency’ tourism diversification strategy (Sánchez-Vergara et al., 2023).

Feature of policy diffusion	Models / modalities	Assumptions about digital nomad visas
	Regional diffusion model	<p data-bbox="594 276 1144 411">Building on the core-periphery concepts from tourism and economic geography (Butler, 1980; Krugman, 1991), it could be argued that ‘core’ regions are better positioned to innovate in response to changing contexts than ‘peripheries’.</p> <p data-bbox="594 443 1144 605"><b>Location</b> likely represents the ‘geographical’ core. According to previous research, destinations proximate to the European and North American markets have been more successful in positioning themselves as both tourist (McElroy &amp; Parry, 2010; Prasad et al., 2013) and digital nomad destinations (Zhou et al., 2024).</p> <p data-bbox="594 637 1144 896"><b>Tourism maturity</b> and <b>digitalisation</b> can be seen as ‘economic’ core attributes. In tourism contexts, innovation typically emerges in established tourist areas with high demand, strong infrastructure and global visibility (Hjalager, 2010). Likewise, digitalisation has often been linked with destinations' competitiveness and propensity to innovate, particularly in the context of digital nomads who require digital connectivity to sustain their lifestyles (Buhalis, 2020; Lacárcel et al., 2024).</p>

*Source: Author's own elaboration, based on sources cited in the table.*



### **3. EMPIRICAL STUDIES**

## 4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

### 4.1. Discussion of the key results

As introduced in *section 1.2*, this thesis aimed to answer four research questions. **RQ1 was exploratory, asking how market and state actors respond to the emergence of digital nomadism.** In answering this question, Study I reviewed innovations implemented by both public authorities and service providers, while theoretically embedding digital nomadism within the context of lifestyle mobilities and tourism innovations. It has emphasised that relevant innovations are emerging across all categories of tourism innovations, as conceptualised by Hjalager (2010). It highlighted, among other things, that digital nomad visas have been a primary form of government response to digital nomadism to date (see also Zhou et al., 2024). A digital nomad visa can be viewed as a policy innovation, as it constitutes both a new policy instrument (a new visa regime) and – perhaps more fundamentally – a new proactive strategy by governments to respond to a new context (the rise of hypermobility and remote work) by attracting high-skilled workers and/or high-spending resident-consumers (Demircioglu, 2024; OECD, 2019; Walker, 1969).

**RQ2 then asked what policy designs and implicit policy objectives underlie digital nomad visas.** Study II explored this theme by systematising knowledge of digital nomad visas. It developed a two-tier typology of approaches to implementing a digital nomad visa, based on:

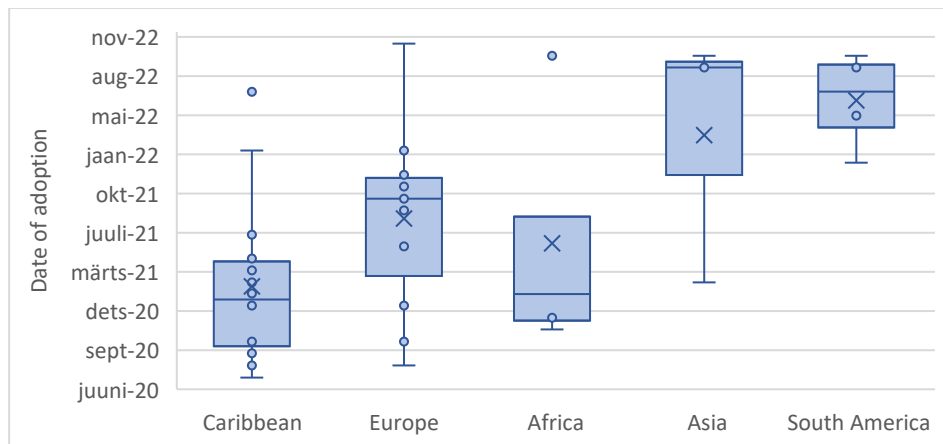
1. Policy rationale, whereby states implement the policy merely to close the gap in visa regimes and legalise the stays of digital nomads, or they use the digital nomad visa to reinforce another existing or emerging policy priority.
2. The targeted ‘identity’ of digital nomads, whereby states appeal to different profiles of digital nomads, approaching them as working tourists, high-earning expats, skilled workers or digital entrepreneurs.

This targeting reflects the diversity of broader policy priorities and implicit policy objectives of the host countries, including:

1. *Tourism diversification*, focusing on short- to medium-term stays and boosting economic growth via consumption of primarily tourist services and the use of tourist infrastructure.
2. *Residency*, encouraging long-term stays, often leading up to permanent residency rights, and emphasising local development via the introduction of ‘wealthy neighbours’ with resident-like consumption patterns.
3. *Human capital development*, emphasising the (at least partial) integration of digital nomads into the local business networks and labour markets.
4. *Tax revenues*, encouraging physical and/or legal relocation in exchange for tax benefits.

These heterogeneous rationales and objectives also influence policy design. For example, tourism-focused digital nomad visas may upsell ‘packages’ of tourist services along with the visa offering; human capital-focused visas may encourage work for local employers (typically forbidden in other categories of digital nomad visas) or networking with local entrepreneurs; taxation-focused visas may condition the granting of a visa on establishing tax residency (which is, again, not expected or possible in most other cases). Most notably, by dictating the eligibility criteria and stay rules, they appeal to different modalities of digital nomadism, or remote workers more broadly, from workationers (tourism-focused visas) to digital expats (residency-focused visas), reflecting the varied temporal travel patterns of digital nomads (as presented in *Figure 3* in section 2.2; see also Koskela & Beckers, 2024).

RQ3 asked about the patterns in the implementation of digital nomad visas. First, **RQ3 set out to examine the temporal and spatial patterns in the diffusion of digital nomad visas across countries.** In this context, Study II concluded that there was a degree of geographical clustering in digital nomad visa implementation across countries, with two regions particularly standing out as dominant innovators: (1) the Caribbean islands; and (2) Europe, particularly its Mediterranean shore and the North. This regional clustering was paired with temporal clustering – countries in close geographic proximity to one another were generally more likely to implement digital nomad visas within a short time (see *Figure 5*). For example, six digital nomad visas emerged in the Caribbean within just three months (between August and October 2020). These results build on the *regional diffusion model*, which predicts that policies spread geographically as neighbouring states learn from or emulate one another (Hägerstrand, 1967; Matisoff, 2008).



**Figure 5.** Temporal spread of digital nomad visas by region  
*Source: Author’s own elaboration, based on Bednorz (2024).*

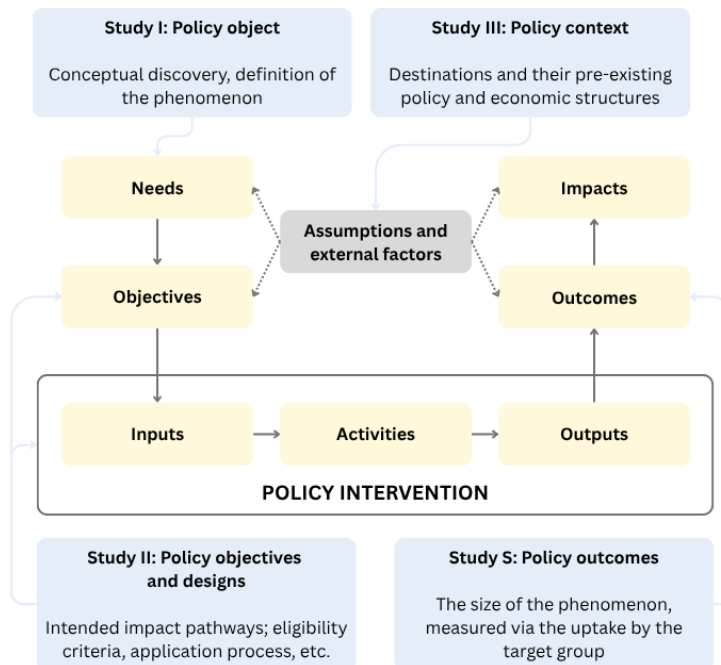
Study II also suggested that a combination of diffusion mechanisms was in play regarding digital nomad visas. On the one hand, the implementation and subsequent diffusion of digital nomad visas occurred suddenly and rapidly, with over half of the analysed policies (20 out of 36) being implemented within a 12-month period. The extremely quick implementation of these visas (at least in some states) suggests *nearly immediate* policy diffusion via a common exogenous shock (Boushey, 2012), whereby governments quickly respond by *emulating* or even *imitating* others (Dobbin et al., 2007; Dolowitz & Marsh, 2000; Gilardi, 2010; Shipan & Volden, 2008). This certainly seems to hold true for the Caribbean islands, many of which have implemented tourism-focused digital nomad visa programmes in a very short time, with few design differences between them and a very explicit aim of an ‘emergency revival’ of their tourism industries that collapsed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. On the other hand, the emergence of different types of digital nomad visas addressing different policy objectives (see above) suggests that some states have engaged not in mere copying but in deliberate *learning* and adaptation. While previous scholarship suggested that this is a *gradual* process and the slowest form of diffusion (ibid.), the case of digital nomad visas is not fully consistent with this view. Adaptation of the generic idea of a ‘digital nomad visa’ to local needs and conditions happened in a reasonably short time, likely driven by the sense of urgency, considering the disruptive context of the post-pandemic era, as well as perhaps a degree of interstate competition predicted by some early scholars (Makimoto & Manners, 1997) and also hypothesised contemporarily (Mancinelli & Germann Molz, 2023).

**The second part of RQ3 then delved into the issue of country characteristics associated with governments’ propensity to innovate through the implementation of digital nomad visas.** While not an explicit focus of Study II, it already revealed some broader macro trends in the implementation of digital nomad visas. In particular, the countries’ economic structures seem to have determined their policy choices. For example, tourism-dependent economies generally treated digital nomads as a new tourist segment; established tax havens tried to attract nomad entrepreneurs by offering opportunities for fiscal reallocation; big, industrialised economies tended to opt for the ‘legitimising’ approach, with no apparent strategy. Furthermore, the study emphasised the bias in the sample of innovators – in particular, it noted that small and island states were overrepresented among implementers of digital nomad visas and typically implemented them more quickly.

Based on these preliminary insights, Study III built on the *internal determinants model*, which explains policy adoption as a function of certain country characteristics (Berry & Berry, 1990). It found that innovators and non-innovators indeed differed along several characteristics, pre-identified through a literature review. Within the sample of small states, innovators were wealthier and smaller, more likely to be island states and had higher government effectiveness scores. They were also better connected physically and digitally and had significantly more nomad-specific infrastructure (coworking spaces and Airbnb listings).

Lastly, **RQ4 shifted the focus from policy context, design and objectives to the policy outcomes**. Thus, the supplementary study examined the policy effectiveness of a digital nomad visa, seen as a tourism (policy) innovation, a market segmentation tool and an element of a broader destination competitiveness framework. It concluded that the adoption of the Estonian Digital Nomad Visa has been generally low, constituting only a small fraction (around 1%) of both the short-term (tourist) and long-term (work) visas over the same period (even though the number of total visas granted during this period was unprecedentedly low due to the COVID-19 pandemic). However, it also emphasised the effective segmentation and targeting of a specific tourism segment focused on a narrow group of high-income worker-travellers with distinctive stay characteristics. Such diversification of the tourism offering may help alleviate some of the pressures of mass tourism, especially those associated with seasonality. Lastly, the study highlighted the importance of endogenous (the overall attractiveness of the destination) and exogenous (economic and geopolitical) factors in influencing both the adoption rate and the composition of the cohort.

Overall, in this thesis, **I have studied digital nomadism as a macro-level phenomenon by examining its policy implications across most elements of the ToC framework** (see *Figure 6*), exploring the policy object (Study I), policy designs and their implicit objectives (Study II), policy contexts and destination-specificity (Study III) and policy outcomes (Study S).



**Figure 6.** Empirical studies along the Theory of Change (ToC) framework  
*Source: Author's own elaboration, based on European Commission (2023) and Mayne (2017)*

## 4.2. Contribution of this thesis

### 4.2.1. Theoretical contribution

The core contribution of this thesis is to **frame and study digital nomadism as a macro-level phenomenon**. Such approaches have so far been largely absent from the literature on digital nomadism and, more broadly, on lifestyle mobilities, which have predominantly treated mobility as a micro-level sociological and cultural phenomenon – a lifestyle choice with its motivations, contexts and experiences (Gupta et al., 2026; Jaiswal et al., 2025). Bringing in this macro perspective expands our view of digital nomadism by recognising it as a structural trend that should be studied not only from the point of view of the individual, but also from its systemic relationships with macro structures – nation-states and markets. Neglecting this macro perspective, we might miss valuable insights into digital nomadism’s institutional and economic contexts and – more broadly – the changing global economic geographies that it represents (especially the separation between where people work and where they live).

Furthermore, this thesis **advances our understanding of potential institutional and economic implications of digital nomadism**. From a micro perspective, individuals operate within certain economic and institutional contexts – for example, they engage in geoarbitrage to maximise utility from their incomes or navigate visa regimes. From a macro perspective, the aggregate movement of digital nomads causes certain institutional and economic consequences. The institutional implications are clear, and this thesis studies them at length: the rise of the digital nomad has prompted policymakers to reconsider well-established conventions (especially visa regimes) and to innovate to adapt to the emerging contexts of hypermobility and remote work – most notably by implementing digital nomad visas. The economic implications have yet to be empirically tested (see section 4.3 on directions for future research), though the studies conducted in this thesis advance our understanding of the *potential* or *expected* impacts of digital nomads’ presence on destinations (see *Table 6*).

**Table 6.** Potential impacts of digital nomads on destinations

	Potential positive impacts	Potential negative impacts
<b>Consumption</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>Injection of foreign income:</b> Digital nomads are high-earners who spend their foreign income locally (Study II, Study S).</li> <li>- <b>Year-round demand:</b> Long stays can smooth out seasonality, compared to tourism inflow patterns (Study S).</li> <li>- <b>Growth of local service sectors:</b> Coworking spaces, mid-term rentals and hospitality services expand to meet nomads' demand (Study I, Study III).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>Consumption-driven gentrification:</b> Foreign high-earners can increase rents and property prices in urban centres, displacing local residents.</li> </ul>
<b>Fiscal</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>Tax revenues:</b> In cases where tax residency is required (and/or incentivised) by visa rules, nomads can provide fiscal stimulus (Study II).</li> <li>- <b>Revenues from visa fees:</b> Some digital nomad visas are implemented as 'special' programmes and involve high application fees that can fuel local budgets (Study I, Study II).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>Pressure on public services:</b> In cases of no local tax contribution, nomads can constitute a net burden on public services and infrastructure (e.g. waste, water, transport).</li> </ul>
<b>Labour market</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>Knowledge spillovers:</b> Digital nomads may transfer skills, connections, and ideas into a destination (Study II).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>Dualisation of labour markets:</b> Local job creation may be mostly limited to lower-wage service sectors, catering to digital nomads.</li> </ul>
<b>Regional development</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>Development/revitalisation of peripheral areas:</b> Focus on digital nomadism may offer a more sustainable alternative to tourism-led growth (Study III).</li> <li>- <b>Infrastructure demands:</b> Catering to digital nomads can result in broader infrastructure investments and service upgrades (Study III).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>Overcrowding:</b> Overconcentration in urban 'hotspots' may further rise demand for limited space and strain local amenities.</li> </ul>

*Source: Author's own elaboration, based on empirical studies, as well as Arslan (2024); Bozzi (2024); Jaiswal et al. (2025); Lopes et al. (2025); Sciuva (2025).*

### 4.2.2. Methodological contribution

As discussed in *section 1.2*, **digital nomads are not distinguishable in official statistics, such as labour force surveys or migration data**. At the same time, no policy databases exist that track policy evolution, as is common in migration research (e.g. through the Migration Policy Database or the ILO's Migration Law Database). As a result, the empirical base for academic research is very limited and, thus far, a large majority of digital nomad research has constituted conceptual or theoretical work (e.g. Hannonen, 2020; Müller, 2016) and qualitative research based on small-sample interview programmes (e.g. Mancinelli, 2020; Thompson, 2019; Toivanen, 2025b) or social media analysis (e.g. De Almeida et al., 2022; Hemsley et al., 2020).

In this thesis, **I have diversified the sources and methods used in digital nomad scholarship**, particularly in Studies II through S, which all used methods previously unseen in digital nomad literature:

- Study II applies the systematic review methodology (usually conducted in the context of literature reviews) to policy analysis.
- Study III employs a mixed-methods approach, combining a means difference comparison with a fuzzy-set qualitative comparative analysis.
- Study S provides one of the first quantitative overviews of digital nomad visa outcomes and an analysis of the digital nomad population, building on a unique administrative dataset and mixed methods (descriptive statistics and process tracing).

### 4.2.3. Practical implications

This thesis naturally carries some implications for practitioners. In the most general sense, I emphasise (especially in Study I) that digital nomad-focused innovations are in a nascent phase. The market is characterised by a large degree of experimentation and creative destruction, with an outpour of diverse business models and new services, many of which have already failed. In the context of state policy, the uptake of digital nomad visas has been, at least in some cases, rather low (especially after an initial temporary boom), **suggesting a potential misfit between the design of these policies and the needs of digital nomads** (as shown in Study S; see also Koskela & Szabo, 2024). It remains to be seen whether governments will learn and adapt, cementing digital nomad visas as an integral part of global mobility and migration systems, or whether digital nomad visas will fade as a failed post-COVID-19 experiment. States that do see the attraction of digital nomads as a viable policy goal should ask two principal questions. One is related to internal needs and perceived impacts on the destination country: *What are our underlying policy priorities, and how can we leverage digital nomadism to advance these priorities?* The other relates to the destination's attractiveness and the value proposition for the target group: *How can we nudge digital nomads to choose our country or our visa scheme?* While some

states seem to have addressed the first question (as evidenced by the diverse designs of these policies – see Study II), the second appears to have been much more neglected.

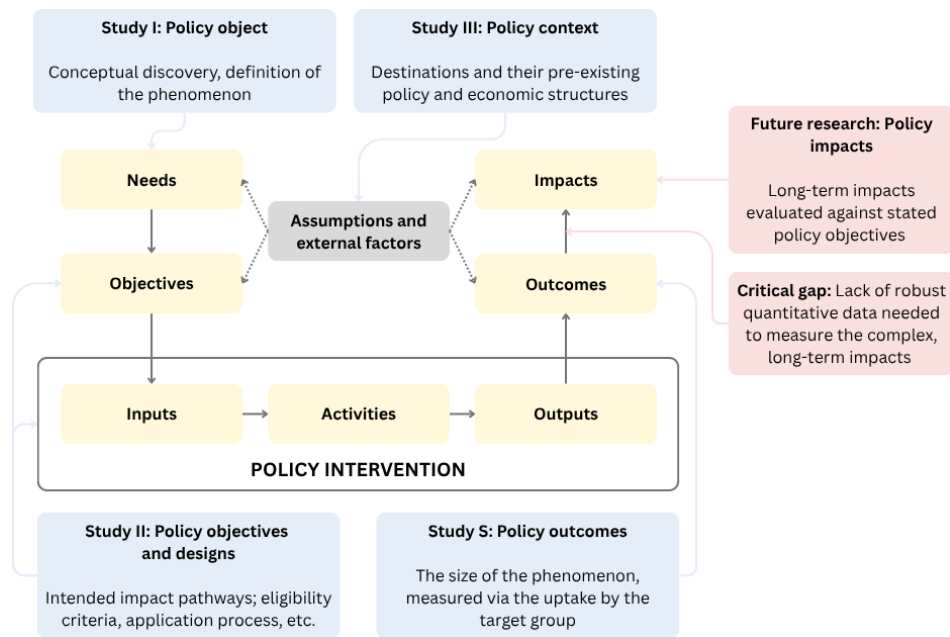
Lastly, the conclusions of this thesis (particularly Studies III and IV) **carry an encouraging message for stakeholders in peripheral destinations**. Digital nomads might be exacerbating the problems of gentrification, housing availability and price levels in urban centres that already struggle with over-tourism. However, for peripheral destinations (including rural and island areas), they might prove to be a sustainable solution in bringing high-spending visitors who are fewer in numbers but stay longer, are less prone to seasonality, and likely exhibit a more ‘dispersed’ consumption behaviour (i.e. they do not only consume tourism services, but rather resemble local residents, at least to some extent), as Study S shows. Furthermore, as Study III demonstrates, these destinations do not require an infrastructural overhaul to become digital nomad destinations, although targeted investments and marketing efforts are certainly needed. The island of Madeira (Portugal) can serve as a good practice example: following an explicit goal to become a digital nomad hub, a range of initiatives, often in public-private partnerships, were launched to create the ‘Digital Nomad Village’. The creation of coworking and co-living spaces, the building of digital infrastructure, and the launch of a branding and marketing campaign, among other initiatives, have quickly established Madeira as one of the most iconic digital nomad destinations worldwide (Sardinha et al., 2023).

### 4.3 Directions for future research

As argued in *Chapter 2*, this thesis has studied digital nomadism through the lens of policy analysis by examining most elements of the ToC framework, including policy object (Study I), policy designs and objectives (Study II), policy contexts, i.e. structural characteristics of destinations (Studies II–III), and policy outcomes (Study S) (see *Figure 6* in *section 4.1*). It has also suggested potential or expected policy impacts (in *section 4.2* above). However, **there is a clear need to also study the actual long-term impacts of digital nomads on the destinations they visit**, as articulated throughout this thesis and emphasised by other researchers (e.g. Bozzi, 2024; Mancinelli & Germann Molz, 2024). By conceptually defining digital nomadism as a macro-level phenomenon, outlining policy designs and objectives, studying the institutional and economic contexts of policy implementers, examining policy outcomes and outlining impact pathways, this thesis has hopefully ‘cleared’ the steps necessary as preconditions for conducting an economic impact assessment. It thus has laid a foundation for applying more formal economic models, the likes of which have long been applied to both migration and tourism (see *Figure 7*).

Nevertheless, before this is possible, **one critical gap remains, namely the prevailing scarcity of rich administrative data**. Even though digital nomad visas provide the first opportunity to clearly delineate digital nomads from other

types of visitors, complementary data (e.g. on digital nomads’ income, local spending, taxes, local employment and entrepreneurship, etc.) remains largely unavailable. Thus, it is critical for future economic research that public authorities collect more comprehensive data on digital nomads either by integrating them more tightly with existing institutional procedures and databases (e.g. in destinations where digital nomads stay longer and establish (temporary) residency) or surveying digital nomad visa holders (e.g. in destinations which attract digital nomads for more short-term workations).



**Figure 7.** Suggested future research guided by the ToC framework  
*Source: Author’s own elaboration.*

Several other research gaps remain. First, this thesis studied a broad cross-section of countries and digital nomad visas (in Studies II–III), while examining only one in depth – Estonia (Study S). **Studies of other destinations would provide a more nuanced understanding of destination choice and policy dynamics,** particularly those that offer different endowed attractors (e.g. the European Mediterranean or the Caribbean) and/or exhibit distinct approaches to digital nomad visas (e.g. workation- and residency-focused visas). It must also be noted that the total number of digital nomad visas worldwide has increased since Study II was conducted – according to one recent study, about 50 such visas currently exist

(KC & Triandafyllidou, 2025), and web sources sometimes put the number much higher.<sup>5</sup> This evolving picture merits ongoing exploration.

Second, this thesis positions digital nomad visas as a primary form of policy innovation implemented by states today (see also Zhou et al., 2024). However, **other emerging approaches to attracting digital nomads also merit investigation**, such as tax breaks or other relocation incentives. Implications of digital nomadism for other state institutions, such as social security and healthcare systems, should also be explored, for example, in the context of social security coordination vis-à-vis cross-border remote work in the EU, or the potential commodification and privatisation of healthcare insurance among mobile high-income workers. These non-visa policies are of particular interest in areas where visa regimes are less significant (e.g. the internal movements of nomads within the EU single market or the United States).

Lastly, this thesis has primarily adopted a destination-oriented perspective, focusing on how states design and implement digital nomad visa schemes to attract mobile professionals. **Future research would benefit from engaging more explicitly with critical perspectives on these developments** (in line with Mancinelli, 2020; Mancinelli & Germann Molz, 2024). In particular, examining digital nomad policies through the lens of neoliberal global competition for high-value, mobile labour could help illuminate aspects of innovative migration governance shaped by broader market-oriented logics. Such an approach would also enable a deeper exploration of how these schemes intersect with the commodification of citizenship (and other public services), where access to rights and mobility is increasingly stratified along lines of income, investment capacity and professional status. Future studies should also interrogate the role of privilege embedded in digital nomadism and its implications for inequality and mobility justice. By incorporating these critical dimensions, subsequent research can move beyond instrumental accounts and offer a more nuanced understanding of the inequalities and power structures underpinning the rise of digital nomad visa regimes.

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<sup>5</sup> For example, Citizen Remote lists 73 digital nomad visas as of June 2025: <https://citizenremote.com/blog/digital-nomad-visa-countries/>.

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## SUMMARY IN ESTONIAN

### Globaalne tööjõud, kohalikud reeglid: Poliitikavastused diginomaadlusele

#### Motivatsioon ja töö uudsus

Väitekiri käsitleb diginomaadluse ehk kaugtööd ja pikaajalist reisimist ühendava elustiili kasvu mustreid (Cook, 2023; Hannonen, 2020). COVID-19 pandeemia kiirendas üleminekut kaugtööle (Brynjolfsson jt, 2020) ja populariseeris alternatiivseid liikuvusvõimalusi, mis sageli hõlmavad pikemat välismaal viibimist ning töö, reisimise ja vaba aja veetmise kombineerimist (Martin & Bergmann, 2021). Kuna rahvusvahelise turismi tulud vähenesid pandeemia tõttu järsult, märkasid paljud riigid just digirändurite potentsiaali uue atraktiivse külastajate segmendina ning hakkasid muutma oma viisapoliitikat, et meelitada ligi ja hoida kaugtöötajaid (KC & Triandafyllidou, 2025; Koskela & Beckers, 2024; Mancinelli & Germann Molz, 2024; Sánchez-Vergara jt, 2023). Siit on välja kasvanud „diginomaadi viisa“ – 2020. aasta keskpaigast kuni 2023. aasta lõpuni on selliseid viisasid rakendanud kogu maailmas 36 riiki (Bednorz, 2024).

Kuigi diginomaadluse kui nähtuse teaduspõhine uurimine on ajas kasvamas (de Sousa et al., 2025), on see ebaproportsionaalselt keskendunud mikroperspektiivile, kasutades kvalitatiivseid meetodeid diginomaadluse kui individuaalse elustiili uurimiseks (Gupta et al., 2026). Samal ajal ei ole piisavalt uuritud makroperspektiivi – diginomaadlust kui uut struktuurset suundumust, millel on institutsiooniline, majanduslik ja ruumiline mõju (Bozzi, 2024; de Sousa et al., 2025; Wang jt, 2019). Väitekirjas on eesmärk uurida diginomaadlust just makrotasandi nähtusena. Makroperspektiiv võimaldab mõista diginomaadlust laiema struktuurse nähtusena – viisil, mida üksnes mikrotasandi käsitlus täielikult ei ava. See aitab uurida, kuidas muutuvad tööjõu, liikuvuse ja rahvuse-riigi vahelised suhted ning laiema ka üleilmne majandusgeograafia. Eriti olulise küsimusena tõuseb esile töö tegemise koha (tootmise) ja elukoha (tarbimise) üha suurem lahkumine.

Väitekiri heidab valgust kahele sügavale suundumusele, mis on diginomaadluse nurgakiviks: (1) kaugtöö ja digitaalselt vahendatud töö levik koos selle mõjuga kohalikele ja ülemaailmsetele tööturgudele ja majanduspiirkondadele (Akan et al., 2025; Althoff jt, 2022; Braesemann jt, 2022; Graham jt, 2017); ning (2) sotsiaalteaduste ühe olulise uurimissuunana käsitletav hüpermobiilsus – inimeste liikumise ulatuse kasv ja liikuvusvormide mitmekesistumine, hõlmates nii reisijate arvu suurenemist kui ka uute reisimis- ja liikumisvormide tekkimist (Elliot & Urry, 2010; Sheller & Urry, 2006).

#### Uurimiseeesmärk ja -disain

Akadeemilises kirjanduses on diginomaadluse institutsioonilist ja majanduslikku konteksti, sealhulgas selle võimalikku mõju sihtkohtadele, seni käsitletud veel

üsna piiratud ulatuses (Bozzi, 2024; de Sousa et al., 2025; Šimová, 2022; Wang jt, 2019). Sellest lähtudes, **käesoleva väitekirja eesmärk on avardada arusaama diginomaadlusest kui makrotasandi sotsiaalmajanduslikust nähtusest, keskendudes sellele, kuidas poliitikakujundajad diginomaadlusele reageerivad.** Täpsemalt otsivad käesoleva väitekirja empiirilised uuringud vastuseid järgmistele **uurimisküsimustele:**

- **Uurimisküsimus 1.** Kuidas on erinevad turu- ja riigitasandi osapooled diginomaadluse esilekerkimisele reageerinud? (Uuring I)
- **Uurimisküsimus 2.** Kuidas on diginomaadi viisad kujundatud ning milliseid otseseid ja kaudseid eesmärges need täidavad? (Uuring II)
- **Uurimisküsimus 3.** Millised mustrid iseloomustavad diginomaadi viisade kasutuselevõttu eri riikides – nii nende ajalist kui ruumilist levikut (Uuring II) kui ka neid riikide omadusi, mis suurendavad viisade kasutuselevõtu tõenäosust? (Uuring III)
- **Uurimisküsimus 4.** Milliseid tulemusi on diginomaadi viisad andnud, hinnates neid selle põhjal, kuivõrd kavandatud sihtrühm on neid viisaid kasutusele võtnud? (Uuring S)

Ülaltoodud teadusuuringute ülesehitus võimaldab põhjalikult uurida poliitika-meetmeid, sealhulgas poliitilist konteksti (uurimisküsimus 1 – *mida*), poliitika sisu ja põhjendust (uurimisküsimus 2 – *kuidas* ja *miks*), poliitikas osalejaid (uurimisküsimus 3 – *kes*) ja poliitika tulemusi (uurimisküsimus 4 – *milliste mõjudega*).

## Empiiriliste uuringute ülevaade

Lõputöö koosneb neljast empiirilisest uuringust.

**Uuring I** on uurimuslik ja kaardistab, kuidas turu- ja riiklikud osalejad on reageerinud diginomaadluse tekkimisele. See asetab diginomaadluse kontseptuaalselt turismi ja rände vahelise liikuvuse vormiks. Tuginedes turismiinnovatsiooni teooriatele, kategoriseerib uuring diginomaadlusega seotud uuendusi nii erasektoris kui ka avalikus sektoris. Erasektoris hõlmavad need näiteks koostöötamiskeskusi (jagatud kontorid) ja majutusteenuste kohandamist, avalikus sektoris aga näiteks uusi viisarežiime.

**Uuring II** laiendab teadmisi diginomaadi viisade kohta üle maailma, kasutades selleks poliitikaanalüüsile rakendatud süstemaatilise kirjandusülevaate meetodit. Töötatakse välja diginomaadi viisade tüpoloogia, lähtudes nende poliitilistest ajenditest ja sellest, millisena diginomaadi sihtrühma nähakse. Samuti annab uuring esmase ülevaate sellest, kuidas diginomaadi viisad on riikide vahel ajas ja ruumis levinud.

**Uuring III** tugineb eelnevatele järeldustele ja analüüsib põhjalikumalt diginomaadi viisade levikumustreid, keskendudes viisa kasutusele võtnud ja mitte võtnud riikide majanduslikele, institutsioonilistele ja geograafilistele eeldustele.

Väikeriikide võrdleva analüüsi kaudu tuvastab uuring struktuursed tunnused, mis on seotud selle poliitikameetme kasutuselevõtuga.

Lisaks hinnatakse **täiendavas uuringus** poliitikatulemusi Eesti digitaalse nomaadviisa kriitilise juhtumiuuringu kaudu, analüüsides unikaalseid andmeid kasutuselevõtu, killustatuse mõju ja sihtkoha konkurentsivõime hindamiseks.

## Töö põhijäreldused

**Esimesele küsimusele** vastates rõhutati uuringus I et diginomaadi viisade pakkumine on seni olnud peamine viis, kuidas valitsus reageerib diginomaadluse kui nähtuse tekkele ja levikule (vt ka Zhou et al., 2024). Seega saab väita, et diginomaadi viisat võib pidada poliitiliseks innovatsiooniks, kuna see on nii uus poliitikavahend (uus viisarežiim) kui ka – võib-olla põhjalikumalt – valitsuste uus ennetav strateegia, et reageerida uuele kontekstile (hüpermobiilsuse ja kaugtöö kasv), meelitades ligi kõrge kvalifikatsiooniga töötajaid ja/või suuri kulutusi tegevaid residendist tarbijaid (Demircioglu, 2024; OECD, 2019; Walker, 1969).

**Teise uurimisküsimuse** käsitlemiseks töötati II uuringus välja diginomaadi viisa rakendamise lähenemisviiside kahetasandiline tüpoloogia, mis põhineb järgmisel: 1) poliitika põhjendus (olemasolevate või kujunemisejärgus poliitiliste prioriteetide tugevdamine); ning 2) diginomaadide sihipärane identiteet (lähendas neid töötavate turistide, suure sissetulekuga väljarändajate, oskustöölise või digiettevõtjatena). Uuringu põhijäreldus on, et diginomaadi viisade erinev kujundus peegeldab vastuvõtivate riikide mitmekesiseid poliitilisi prioriteete ja kaudseid eesmärke.

**Kolmanda uurimisküsimuse** puhul jõuti uuringus II järeldusele, et diginomaadi viisade rakendamine on riigiti teataval määral geograafiliselt koondunud, kusjuures domineerivate uuendajatena on eriti silma paistnud kaks piirkonda: 1) Kariibi mere saared; ning 2) Euroopa, eelkõige selle Vahemere rannik ja põhjaosa. Piirkondlik klasterdumine oli seotud ajalise klasterdumisega – üksteisele geograafiliselt lähedal asuvad riigid rakendasid diginomaadi viisat üldiselt suurema tõenäosusega lühikese aja jooksul. Lisaks ilmnesid III uuringus struktuursed erinevused rakendajate ja mitterakendajate vahel. Väikeriikide valimis olid innovaatorid jõukamad ja väiksemad, suurema tõenäosusega saareriigid ja neil oli kõrgem valitsuse efektiivsuse skoor. Nad olid ka füüsiliselt ja digitaalselt paremini ühendatud ning neil oli märkimisväärselt rohkem nomaadspetsiifilist taristut (koos-tööruumid ja *Airbnb*-nimekirjad).

**Neljandale uurimisküsimusele** vastates uuriti täiendavas uuringus diginomaadi viisa poliitilist tõhusust. Uuring käsitles diginomaadi viisat ühtaegu turismi-innovatsioonina, turu segmenteerimise vahendina ja osana laiemast sihtkoha konkurentsivõime raamistikust. Uuringus järeldati, et Eesti diginomaadi viisa kasutuselevõtt on olnud üldiselt tagasihoidlik, moodustades vaid väikese osa (ligikaudu 1 %) nii lühiajalistest (turismi-) kui ka pikaajalistest (töö)viisadest sama ajavahemiku jooksul (kuigi kõigi sel ajavahemikul antud viisade arv oli COVID-19 pandeemia tõttu enneolematult väike). Samas rõhutas uuring ka seda,

et diginomaadi viisa võimaldab tõhusalt segmenteerida turgu ja sihtida konkreetset turismisegmenti. See võib aidata leevendada mõningaid massiturismiga seotud pingeid, eriti hooajalisusest tulenevaid probleeme. Samuti tõi uuring esile, et viisa kasutuselevõttu ja taotlejate koosseisu mõjutavad nii endogeensed tegurid, näiteks sihtkoha üldine atraktiivsus, kui ka eksogeensed tegurid, sealhulgas majanduslikud ja geopoliitilised olud.

## Lõputöö panus

Väitekirja keskne **teoreetiline panus** seisneb diginomaadluse mõtestamises ja uurimises makrotasandi nähtusena. Selline käsitlusviis on seni olnud diginomaadluse kirjanduses ning laiemalt ka elustiilipõhise liikuvuse uuringutes suuresti puudulik, kuna liikuvust on valdavalt käsitletud mikrotasandi sotsioloogilise ja kultuurilise nähtusena (Gupta et al., 2026; Jaiswal jt, 2025). Makroperspektiiv avardab diginomaadluse käsitlust, näidates seda mitte üksnes individuaalse elustiilivalikuna, vaid laiemana struktuurse suundumusena, mis on seotud majandusruumi ja riigi toimimisega. Sellest vaatenurgast lähtudes väidab väitekirja, et diginomaadlusel kui nähtusel on olulised institutsioonilised ja majanduslikud tagajärjed. Väitekirjas läbi viidud uuringud aitavad paremini mõista, kuidas diginomaadide kohalolu võib mõjutada sihtkohti, sealhulgas kohalikku tarbimist, riigieelarvet, tööturget ja regionaalset arengut.

Väitekirja **metodoloogiline panus** seisneb selles, et see mitmekesistab diginomaadluse uurimisel seni tavapäraselt kasutatud allikaid ja meetodeid. Kui senine uurimistöö on tuginenud peamiselt kvalitatiivsetele ja etnograafilistele lähenemistele, siis käesoleva väitekirja empiirilised uuringud rakendavad meetodeid, mida diginomaadluse kirjanduses ei ole varem kasutatud. Nende hulka kuuluvad süstemaatiline kirjanduse ülevaade (uuring II), kombineeritud lähenemine, kus ühendati kirjeldav statistika ning hägusate hulkade kvalitatiivne võrdlevanalüüs ehk fsQCA (*fuzzy-set Qualitative Comparative Analysis*) (uuring III), ning esimene kvantitatiivne ülevaade diginomaadi viisa tulemustest ja diginomaadide populatsioonist, mis tugineb ainulaadsele Eesti viisaandmestikule (uuring S).

Lõputööl on ka **praktiline panus**. Esiteks näitab väitekirja, et diginomaadidele suunatud uuendused on veel varases arengujärgus. Seda turgu iseloomustavad rohke katsetamine ja loov hävitus: kiiresti on tekkinud mitmesuguseid ärimudeleid ja uusi teenuseid, kuid paljud neist ei ole püsima jäänud. Teiseks osutab väitekirja võimalikule ebakõlale mõne diginomaadi viisa ja diginomaadide tegevlite vajaduste vahel (vt ka Koskela ja Szabo, 2024). Üheks indikatsiooniks sellest on nende viisade suhteliselt tagasihoidlik omaksvõtt.

Väitekirja julgustab poliitikakujundajaid diginomaadi viisa kasutuselevõtul arvestama kolme keskse aspektiga. Esiteks tuleks läbi mõelda poliitikavajadused ja viisa eeldatav mõju sihtriigile: kuidas saab diginomaadlust kasutada laiemate poliitikaeesmärkide saavutamiseks? Teiseks on oluline väärtuspakkumine: kuidas

motiveerida diginomaade valima just seda sihtkohta või viisaprogrammi? Kolmandaks kannab väitekiri julgustavat sõnumit perifeersetele sihtkohtadele, kus diginomaadid võivad pakkuda massiturismist kestlikumat arenguvõimalust.

### **Peamised piirangud ja soovitus edasisteks uuringuteks**

Kõigepealt on selge vajadus uurida põhjalikumalt diginomaadide tegelikku pikaajalist mõju sihtkohtadele, kus nad viibivad. Käesolev väitekiri on loonud selleks olulise eeltöö, sest see mõtestab diginomaadlust makrotasandi nähtusena, kirjeldab diginomaadi viisa poliitikadisaini ja eesmärgesid, analüüsib nende kasutusele võtjate institutsioonilist ja majanduslikku konteksti, hindab poliitikameetmete tulemusi ning visandab võimalikud mõjukanalid. Sellega on väitekiri loodetavasti aidanud ette valmistada tulevastele uurijatele samme, mis on vajalikud diginomaadluse majandusliku mõju hindamiseks.

Samas jääb sellise hindamise eelduseks üks oluline kitsaskoht: kvaliteetsete ja detailsete andmete vähesus. Seetõttu on tulevaste (majandusmõju)uuringute jaoks hädavajalik, et avaliku sektori asutused koguksid diginomaadide kohta põhjalikumaid andmeid. Seda saab teha kas sidudes diginomaadid tihedamalt olemasolevate institutsionaalsete protseduuride ja andmebaasidega, näiteks sihtkohtades, kus nad viibivad pikemalt ja registreerivad end ajutiste elanikena, või küsitledes diginomaadi viisa saajaid, eriti sihtkohtades, mis meelitavad diginomaade lähemateks tööpuhkusteks.

Alles on ka mitmeid teisi uurimislünki. Esiteks, võttes arvesse sihtkohtade ja poliitiliste lähenemisviiside heterogeensust, annaksid eri riikide diginomaadi viisade uuringud nüansirikkama arusaama sihtkoha valikust ja poliitika dünaamikast. Teiseks vääriks uurimist ka muud kujunemisejärgus lähenemisviisid diginomaadide ligimeelitamiseks, näiteks maksusoodustused või muud ümberpaiknemise stiimulid. Uurida tuleks ka diginomaadluse mõju teistele riigiasutustele, näiteks sotsiaalkindlustus- ja tervishoiusüsteemidele, näiteks sotsiaalkindlustuse koordineerimise kontekstis seoses piiriülese kaugtööga Euroopa Liidus või seoses tervishoiukindlustuse võimaliku kaubastamise ja erastamisega suure sissetulekuga mobiilsete töötajate seas. Kolmandaks, kuigi käesolev väitekiri lähtub peamiselt sihtkohakesksest vaatenurgast, oleks tulevastes uuringutes kasulik suhestuda selgemalt ka kriitiliste käsitlustega. Näiteks võiks diginomaadidele suunatud poliitikat analüüsida neoliberaalse globaalse konkurentsi raamistikus, kus riigid võistlevad suure väärtusega mobiilse tööjõu pärast. See aitaks avada, kuidas laiemad turupõhised loogikad kujundavad uuenduslikku rändepoliitikat, ning uurida diginomaadluses sisalduvaid privileege ja nende mõju ebavõrdsusele ja liikumisõiglusele.

# CURRICULUM VITAE

Name: Jan Bednorz  
ORCID: 0000-0001-7133-011X  
Email: jan.bednorz@ut.ee

## Education

- 2022–2026      PhD, Economics  
*University of Tartu, School of Economics and Business Administration*
- 2016–2018      Master’s Degree, International Business and Management  
*Nottingham Trent University*
- 2012–2015      Bachelor’s Degree, Tourism Economics  
*Poznan University of Economics and Business*

## Employment history

- 2022–2026      Junior Research Fellow  
*University of Tartu, School of Economics and Business Administration*
- 2025–...      Policy Research Consultant  
*Independent practitioner*
- 2018–2025      (Senior) Policy Researcher  
*Visionary Analytics*
- 2018–2018      International Fellow  
*Caucasus Research Resource Center*

## Languages

Polish (native), English (proficient), Spanish (intermediate), Russian (elementary)

# ELULOOKIRJELDUS

Nimi: Jan Bednorz  
ORCID: 0000-0001-7133-011X  
E-post: jan.bednorz@ut.ee

## Haridustee

- 2022–2026 doktorikraad, majandusteadus  
*Tartu Ülikool, Majandusteaduskond*
- 2016–2018 magistrikraad, rahvusvaheline äri ja juhtimine  
*Nottingham Trent University*
- 2012–2015 bakalaureusekraad, turismimajandus  
*Poznan University of Economics and Business*

## Töökogemus

- 2022–2026 nooremteadur  
*Tartu Ülikool, Majandusteaduskond*
- 2025–... poliitikauuringute konsultant (vabakutseline spetsialist)
- 2018–2025 vanemteadur poliitikauuringute valdkonnas  
*Visionary Analytics*
- 2018–2018 rahvusvaheline stipendiaat  
*Caucasus Research Resource Center*

## Keeled

poola keel (emakeel), inglise keel (väga hea), hispaania keel (keskmine),  
vene keel (baastase)

## DISSERTATIONES RERUM OECONOMICARUM UNIVERSITATIS TARTUENSIS

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