



Universiteit Utrecht

The Connectedness of Digital Nomads with the Host Environment:
Medellin, Colombia

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Abstract

This thesis dives into the phenomenon of digital nomadism and the connectedness aspects of it. One of the global digital nomad hotspots – Medellin, is chosen to conduct the fieldwork. We shed light on the ambiguity of the term ‘digital nomad’ and introduce related concepts, such as coworking and co-living. Community-focused spaces (co-spaces) are distinguished as the core of many digital nomads. By spending time in selected co-spaces and participating in digital nomad events, observations are made. Respondents are selected and interviewed to draw conclusions about digital nomad sociodemographic characteristics, mobility trajectories, the infrastructure used, and the connectedness with the host society. We distinguish that this emerging and rapidly growing segment of the digital workforce is involved in local activities and we identify specific local hubs of connectedness, which are critical in facilitating social and occupational links between the locals and the ‘nomads’. We also shed light on engagement with the local communities and the social networks of digital nomads within the innovative context of Medellin and the city's latest transition towards the knowledge economy.

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Introduction

In this research, we will dive into the world of a so-called digital nomad (further DN). We aim to understand DNs and how they are connected to the host countries they choose to visit and live in. As this is still a nascent and under-researched phenomenon (Schlagwein, 2018), we do not know much about DNs, their connectedness or embeddedness. That is because instead of setting a theoretical definition of what digital nomadism is (Wang et al., 2018, as cited in Hannonen, 2020), up-and-coming literature focuses on descriptions of DN lifestyles and their psychological reflections on self-actualization (Müller, 2016) or loneliness (Nash et al., 2018). Thus, little is known about the scope of the phenomena, the mobility trajectories of DNs or the implications on the regional development of receiving countries and places. Some authors even argue that digital nomadism is more than solely a way of living, but is a very significant phenomenon for humanity as a novel approach to work and organization (Wang et al., 2018, as cited in Hannonen, 2020), so we might want to take a deeper look into the context of these claims.

We live in times when digital technologies have transformed the way we work. Part of this transformation is demonstrated by the emerging phenomenon called digital nomadism. As knowledge workers, DNs are a rapidly growing portion of the digital workforce (Wang et al., 2018). These teleworkers or online workers choose to be location-independent by working from almost anywhere in the world. They became geographically mobile, and not only do they work from various places, but they also chose to live almost anywhere as "perpetual travellers" (Nash et al., 2018; as cited in Wang et al., 2018, p. 2).

Since 2020, after the Covid-19 pandemic began, governments and organizations have started implementing practices and policies encouraging remote work. Lockdowns and social distancing accelerated the adoption rate of everything 'online' and 'remote': work, businesses, education, communication. To survive, businesses and institutions had to rapidly adapt to the new working conditions. Global travelling restrictions put the 'nomadic' lifestyle on hold for a while, but at the same time, remote work is now, if not obligatory, socially accepted and encouraged worldwide. Companies no longer require their workers to come to physical offices if they can do their jobs from home. This is a significant shift in the mindset of both employers and employees, which is reshaping the world on many levels. We could argue that DNs, with their work practices, were "ahead of the game" in this regard, but like everybody else, were taken by surprise by the avalanche of limitations on exercising their freedom of movement.

According to Schlagwein (2018), the defining characteristic of a DN is to not stay in one place for too long. Due to this factor, statistical records do not accurately represent digital nomadism and make it difficult to estimate the scope of the phenomena. Some authors gave a rough estimation of around 200,000 to 500,000 DNs globally (Schlagwein, 2018). However, this might be a very conservative estimation. DNs are becoming part of the rapidly growing independent workforce in Western societies. For example, as was pointed out by Hannonen (2020, p. 5), as of 2018, "the State of Independence in America annual research report" distinguishes DNs "as a separate category". According to a 2019 survey, approximately 4.1 million self-employed individuals and 3.2 million conventional workers in America consider themselves DNs, with a further 16.1 million of them striving to turn into nomads (State of Independence in America, 2019; as cited in Hannonen, 2020). That said, a uniform definition is not provided – "Reports categorize digital nomads as both intermittently mobile remote workers and ongoing travellers" (Hannonen, 2020, p. 6). A clear definition of a DN is still lacking in the academic literature, which is slow to catch up with this evolving trend. However, the future forecasts of the DN phenomena are bold. The creator of nomadlist.com (DN destination ranking platform), Pieter Levels, claims that about 30% of freelancers become DNs and with this logic he estimated that by 2035 there will be one billion of DNs worldwide, if 60% of the total working

population will become freelancers (Jacobs & Gussekloo, 2016). Levels might be not too far off, as freelancing is, indeed, growing rapidly - in the US alone freelancing population increased 7% in 5 years and reached 35% of the total US workforce ("Freelancing in America," 2018).

Despite such an impressive prognosis, the scientific literature has little to no knowledge of how DNs affect countries receiving a high influx of these remote workers. Policymakers are also slow to adapt to emerging realities. Nevertheless, an increasing number of countries are starting to investigate and experiment with so-called 'nomad visas'. These visas have various variants and names with the primary goal of attracting people who are making a living online. For some countries, this is a new way of dealing with the negatively affected tourism sector (due to the Covid-19 pandemic). For others, it is a strategy to attract new residents and taxpayers. Estonia was the first in this innovative approach by implementing e-residency programme for foreign online entrepreneurs, which later led to introducing a "Digital Nomad Visa" for freelancers and remote workers in June 2020 (ETIAS, 2021). Now we have more countries joining with similar initiatives, here is a list of examples: "Barbados Welcome Stamp", "Work From Bermuda Certificate Program", "Anguilla Nomad Digital Residence Visa", "Digital Nomad Visa Aruba One Happy Workation Program", "The Cabo Verde Remote Working Program" ("PEO Worldwide," 2021).

All in all, we see that the digital nomadism topic is becoming relevant on a broader scale and in this research, we are going to provide more details about the subject matter. We will start with the literature review and definition of the term. Here, relevant concepts will be introduced. We will then proceed to explain the methodology of this research, followed by the regional context of Medellin, where fieldwork was conducted. Afterwards, the findings will be presented, focusing on DN characteristics, mobility trajectories, infrastructure, connectedness and community aspects. Finally, the findings will be summarized in the final chapter, where they will also be discussed in comparison to the existing literature on DNs.

Theoretical Framework

Defining Digital Nomadism

The term ‘digital nomad’ (or DN) was first defined as an individual who embraces mobile technologies that allow pursuing a ‘location independent lifestyle’ by working from any place where internet connection is available (Makimoto & Manners, 1997). Dr Makimoto, who was the head of Hitachi and an advisor for Sony, predicted that a ‘Digital Nomad Toolkit’ (contemporary laptop/smartphone) would enable anyone to live a ‘nomadic’ lifestyle if one would choose to. Despite the term being coined more than 20 years ago, DNs did not appear in scholarly journals until the past few years (Makimoto, 2013; Müller, 2016; as cited in Hannonen, 2020).

DNs are often characterized as young, predominantly male work-oriented professionals who reject the traditional 9 to 5 office mentality and emphasize being autonomous, flexible, and free to roam and work from any place they please (Müller, 2016; Reichenberger, 2018; Schlagwein, 2018; Thompson, 2018). Aroles et al. (2020) analyzed self-identified DNs on online forums and distinguished the following professional situations: entrepreneurs (29%), freelancers (29%), remote employees (18%), no professional activity (13%), more than one professional activity (9%), and travelling through work as an employee (2%). See more details about what kind of work each situation entails in figure 1 below, where “Illustrations” provide specific examples.

Figure 1 – Professional Situation of Digital Nomads (based on profiles analyzed on the two main DN forums).

Professional situation	Number of digital nomads	Illustrations
Remote employee	64	Working for a global company; digital marketing for online company; account manager for digital company; remote engineer
Entrepreneur	100	Founder of a SaaS (software as a service) platform; creator of apps; founder of mobile development agency; co-founder of start-ups and online companies
Freelancer	101	Translator; online language tutor; front-end web development; marketing consulting; ‘growth hacker’
More than one professional activity	31	Freelancing with setting up a digital marketing company; working remotely for company and freelance translating
Travelling through work as an employee	6	Travelling for specific projects; global management trainer and coach
No information/have not yet started professional activity	44	

Note. From: “‘Becoming mainstream’: the professionalisation and corporatisation of digital nomadism”, J. Aroles et al., 2020, *New Technology, Work and Employment*, 35(1), p. 120. (<https://doi.org/10.1111/ntwe.12158>)

Scholars have taken time to recognize this pattern of increasing movement (Reichenberger, 2018; Thompson, 2018; as cited in Hannonen, 2020) and DNs received little attention (Sutherland & Jarrahi, 2017). In recent years, an increasing number of researchers, mainly from business & management, sociology, tourism, geography, and information technology disciplines, contribute to understanding various aspects of digital nomadism. The main research body is often positioned within the mobilities which intertwine tourism and immigration, thus groups them together under the term lifestyle mobility (Hannonen, 2020; Hannonen, 2020; as cited in Hannonen, 2020, p. 2; Åkerlund, 2013). DNs fall into the lifestyle mobilities realm together with backpackers and are commonly confused with flashpackers, neo-nomads and global-nomads (see figure 2).

Figure 2 – Interrelations of digital nomadism with related mobility phenomena

Work-related mobility	DIGITAL NOMADS	Lifestyle mobility
Telecommuting		Backpackers
Freelancers		Flashpackers
Traveling professionals		Global/Neo-nomads

Note. From “In search of a digital nomad: defining the phenomenon,” by O. Hannonen, 2020, *Information Technology & Tourism*, **22**, 335–353, p. 5. (<https://doi.org/10.1007/s40558-020-00177-z>). Copyright 2020, by Olga Hannonen. CC-BY 4.0.

Tourism scholars (Paris, 2012; Richards, 2015) used the term flashpacker (to distinguish from a backpacker or a global/neo-nomad) as someone who travels like a backpacker but carries a laptop, a smartphone and can afford comfort (Paris, 2012). However, flashpackers, which are presented as synonymous with DNs in this study, travel for only 2 months a year, undertaking less than one trip a year (Richards, 2015). This way of travelling disagrees with findings where DN focus on (semi)permanent travel, meaning their journey is nonstop throughout the year (Nash et al., 2018; Thompson, 2018; Thompson, 2019b; as cited in Hannonen, 2020). On top of it, merely using technology while travelling in no way renders one a DN. It is rather through capital creation and attending to vocational or professional tasks during a trip that establishes one as a DN (Hannonen, 2020). This is a common characteristic among DNs and not among other travellers (backpackers, flashpackers and global/neo-nomads).

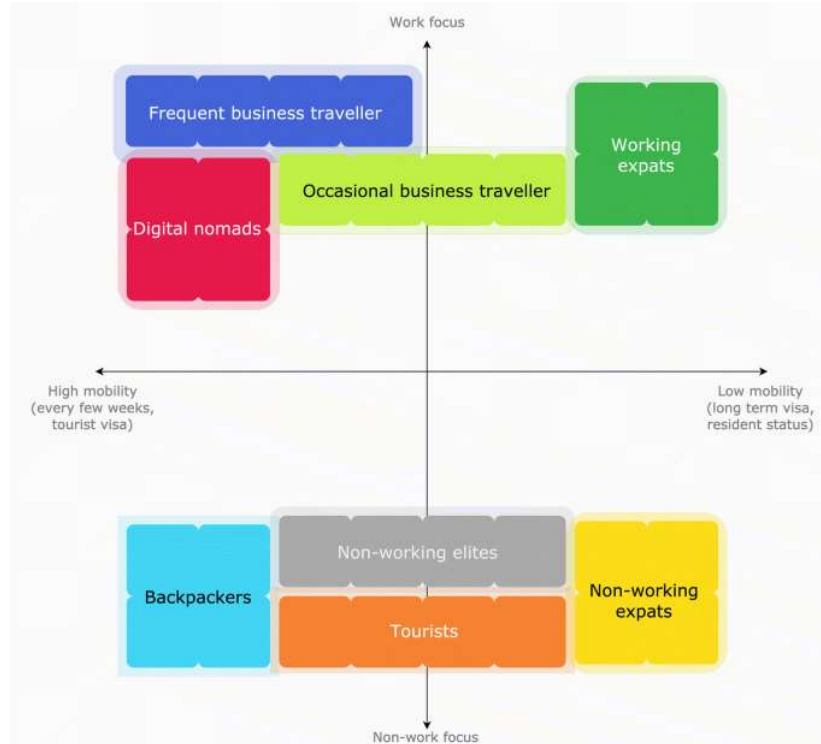
Despite being working individuals, DNs are also similar to global/neo-nomads in many ways. A common feature among DNs and global/neo-nomads, that Hannonen (2020) highlights, is “downshifting or departure from consumerism” (D’Andrea, 2006; Kannisto, 2014; Nash et al., 2018; as cited in Hannonen, 2020, p. 10). This incorporates “practices of slow travel” (Hannonen, 2020, p. 10), minimalist lifestyles (e.g. travelling exclusively with a carry-on bag) and alternative forms of exchange (e.g. volunteering in exchange for accommodation and often using various sharing economy platforms). For example, Airbnb is a commonly used platform to find accommodation abroad, but DNs (contrary to global-nomads) are more likely also to rent their real estate to fund their travels. Nevertheless, compared to their settled peers, DNs are often underemployed due to social change and the employment uncertainty in the Western world (Thompson, 2018; Thompson, 2019b; as cited in Hannonen, 2020). Such a professional downshift seems more adaptive than a mere preference of leisure instead of work (Hannonen, 2020).

So far, the literature on the matter has been scattered and centered around descriptions of DNs lifestyles as opposed to definitions of digital nomadism (Wang et al., 2018; as cited in Hannonen, 2020). Ambiguity in defining DN is growing with the studies, while the term is employed in wide-ranging but at the same time opposing fashions. Specifically, research of Hannonen (2020, p. 7) pointed out many different ways in which authors identify DNs, namely as: “frequently travelled young adults” (Richards, 2015), “workers of tech hubs” (McElroy, 2019), “global nomads” (Kannisto, 2014), “mobile workers” - when accounted as an intersection between travel, leisure and work- (Orel, 2019), “teleworkers”, “a hybrid of a travelling businessperson and a backpacker” (Wang et al., 2018), “independent or remote workers” (State of Independence in America, 2018), and “nomadic tourists” (Prabawa & Pertiwi, 2020). It’s been suggested that the term must depend on the individual’s self-identification as a DN, given that to comprehensively categorize the movement of a DN is nearly impossible (Jacobs & Gussekloo, 2016; as cited in Hannonen,

2020). At the same time, Aroles et al. (2020) highlight the fluidity of the DN concept and how difficult it is to grasp this new and subtle lifestyle and the modality of work.

However, we see attempts to differentiate DNs based on how they exercise mobility. For instance, Reichenberger (2018) define DNs on a spectrum of 3 levels (level 0 fulfils only the basic requirement of working in an online environment, without exercising any mobility): (1) online workers that do not consistently work in one office space but remain in a home environment, (2) frequent travellers for restricted periods of time with subsequent returns to a so-called ‘homebase’, (3) constant travellers without permanent residence or homebase to return to. Meanwhile, Cook (2020) maps DNs on a diagram where they subjectively place themselves as both considerably mobile and work-focused, clearly separating themselves from expats, tourists and backpackers (figure 3). Nevertheless, being newly added to the lifestyle mobilities, DNs are still comparable with lifestyle migrants, such as second homeowners, retirees or hypermobile expats (Hannonen, 2020).

Figure 3 – Subjective Positioning of Digital Nomads among other categories on high/low mobility and work/nonwork scales



Note. From: “The freedom trap: Digital nomads and the use of disciplining practices to manage work/leisure boundaries”, by D. Cook, 2020, *Information Technology & Tourism*, p. 3 (<https://doi.org/10.1007/s40558-020-00172-4>). Copyright 2020, by Dave Cook. CC-BY 4.0.

Conceptually, digital nomadism is also portrayed as a “form of creative tourism” (Putra & Agirachman, 2016, as cited in Hannonen, 2020, p. 3), as a “leisure activity” (Reichenberger, 2018, as cited in Hannonen, 2020, p. 3), as a new “location-independent workforce” (Orel, 2019; Wang et al., 2018, as cited in Hannonen, 2020, p. 3), and as a “new economic activity and a cultural phenomenon” (Wang et al., 2018, as cited in Hannonen, 2020, p. 3). So, taking all of this into account, in this thesis, we will use the most recent and all-encompassing definition, which considers all aspects around work, life and lifestyle:

“ ‘Digital nomad’ refers to a rapidly emerging class of highly mobile professionals whose work is location independent. Thus, they work while travelling on a (semi)permanent basis and vice versa, forming a new mobile lifestyle” (Hannonen, 2020, p. 12).

DN Positioning Between Lifestyle Migration and Lifestyle Mobility

What characterizes “lifestyle mobility” is continuous travelling of which the length as well as occasional settling down may vary and there is no urgency nor plans to go back home (Cohen & Cohen, 2015; as cited in Hannonen, 2020, p. 15). This standpoint seems to conceptually agree with the DN phenomenon since DNs are often distinguishable from the duration of their journeys together with the choice to abstain from having a homebase (Nash et al., 2018; as cited in Hannonen, 2020). The term “lifestyle mobility” also indicates lack of intent to go back (to a home): “lifestyle mobility pre-supposes the intention to move on, rather than move back” (Cohen & Cohen, 2015, p. 159; as cited in Hannonen, 2020, p. 14). However, since lifestyle mobility accepts several ‘homes’, how do we define returning home? This seems to be the differentiating part between lifestyle mobility and migration. It is difficult not to confuse these concepts, especially in the context of digital nomadism, since lifestyle migration applies to “permanent or seasonal forms of lifestyle-led relocation”, which the all-embracing title of lifestyle-led mobilities does not include (Cohen & Cohen, 2015; as cited in Hannonen, 2020, p. 14). Hannonen (2020) argues that lifestyle mobility diminishes the relevance of just one home and ignores the instance of on and off visits, such as visiting family and friends or passing by for other important reasons. However, ‘no return’ is quite too restrictive for framing DNs in lifestyle mobility exclusively. Theoretically and practically, no restrictions are set for someone who wishes to move back and forth from travelling permanently to temporarily, to no travelling or returning home (Hannonen, 2020). When DN settles, is it a return home? Or is a DN then entering a distinct group where he then becomes a “lifestyle migrant” (Hannonen, 2020, p. 15)? Hannonen (2020) suggests to look into the two frameworks with some extent of flexibility and considers returning home as a phase of life as opposed to just a seasonality or trajectory between the lifestyle and home location(s). She offers the main argument against Cohen and Cohen (2015), who depicts lifestyle mobility as autonomy to travel anywhere. This argument entails that DNs are not going where they want but are moving only within institutionally structured contexts, and their travels are actually quite limited (e.g., by visa regimes, geopolitics etc.). Thus, this leads us to an attempt of understanding the complexities of DN connectedness.

The Connectedness of Digital Nomads

A farther mutual characteristic between global/neo- and DNs is disassociation from a nation-state, its systems and social structure (apart from already mentioned down-shifting) (Hannonen, 2020). Korpela (Korpela, 2020; 16p, cited in Hannonen, 2020) indicated that throughout their stay in various places, lifestyle travellers strive to bond with similar others whose lifestyle and values are akin to their own. The same attitude is found among DNs. Apparently, relationships that revolve around *similar* lifestyle is among the top priorities of a DN which is why they are often found in coworking & co-living spaces, DN conferences & cruises, “workcations”, & “coworkations, places that are almost exclusively governed by DNs - these happenings substitute for traditional relationships and communities that would be otherwise found in the setting of the workspace, housing neighborhood or homeland (Hannonen, 2020). Some of the most popular DN hotspots globally are those of Chiang Mai in Thailand, Bali in Indonesia, Medellin in Colombia, that cater for the lifestyle demands of travellers via coworking and co-living industries that keep attracting continuously more DNs (Hart, 2015; Spinks, 2015; Thompson, 2018; Wang et al., 2018).

However, as pointed out by Hannonen (2020) DNs are not able to entirely disassociate from their home country - their capacity to move along is often hampered by immigration, visa and passport validity, social

services, medical insurance or other national demands. It is those matters that frequently define one's length of stay, time of exit or entry in a country and the general conditions.

Relationships based upon lifestyle with similar-minded individuals frequently lead to formation of "communities within communities" in DN spots (Hannonen, 2020, p. 11). Current academic findings depict a dichotomy between the locals and DN populations (Thompson, 2018, 2019b). However, there are studies insisting that global nomads do attempt to assimilate with the locals and that in fact, this is among the top of their success factors of their trip (Kannisto, 2014; as cited in Hannonen, 2020).

Ubud Example

MacRae (2016, p. 23) elaborates on how Ubud (a town in Bali, Indonesia) started attracting an increasing number of online entrepreneurs, digital nomads or so called "knowmads". Apparently, the main catalyst was fiber-optic internet connectivity since 2012. These self-described "location-independent" people chose Ubud for nice weather and environment, affordability, safety, international schools, shops and restaurants. Additional argument was the "community" —meaning likeminded people from similar socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds. Meanwhile, the Balinese community would maintain in the background and would not influence the appeal of Ubud - it is not essential to engage with the locals that much.

The epicenter of this community is Hubud - "a collaborative working space, home to a diverse community of local and visiting creatives, techies, entrepreneurs and businessfolks, changemakers, downshiffters and truth-seekers" (Hubud, 2014; as cited in MacRae, 2016, p. 22). In other words, a work environment which is "post-corporate, post-institutional" (Johanson, 2014; as cited in MacRae, 2016, p. 22). Hubud coworking space also hosts a wide range of events for their "diverse community" members (MacRae, 2016).

Consequently, the segregation between two distinct groups, with a handful of integral links, was emerging - large differences in wealth and lifestyle, not to mention language and cultural gaps. However, the migrant community is in itself intercultural, with a large part of it wedded to locals, though at the same time its own world, similar to many more expat sub-communities. These communities are separate worlds but not completely: they all overlap in terms of geographic area and thus merge in various everyday ways, some "unequal", some significant for instance: "marriage, intercultural childhoods, and business partnerships, creating points where boundaries are increasingly blurred" (MacRae, 2016, p. 23).

Wang et al. (2018) state that these kinds of advances (fiber-optic internet) are helping to reduce regional inequality and pinpoint Ubud as an example of a successful transformation from a "village" into a "diversifying international town". As of now, digital nomadism has exhibited the capacity to enhance economic efficiency in peripheral areas (Black, 2018; as cited in Wang et al., 2018). Though the question remains what the implications on those areas are where many DNs chose to come.

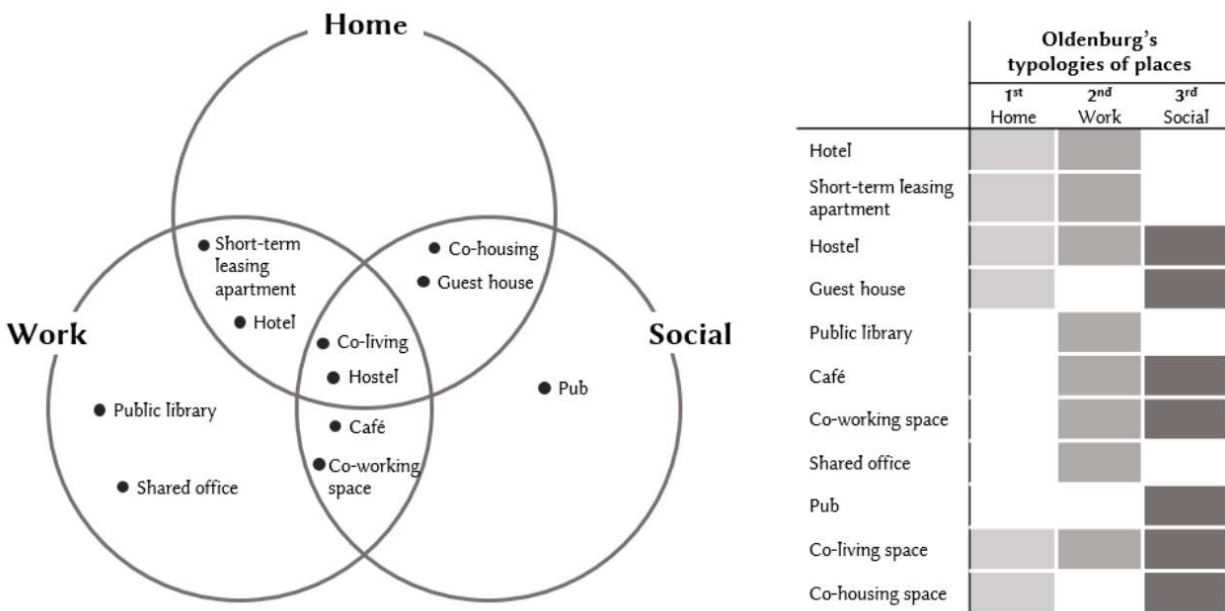
Thompson (2019a) states that DNs interactions with places of stay are superficial by not engaging in local life or local culture. In practice, when it comes to selecting a partner or marriage, DNs by far favor those that are demographically alike to them, instead of locals. Thompson (2019a) highlights the difference between expats, that are likely to marry a local and make a home in a new country, and DNs whose primary focus is to keep on traveling and thus, are on the lookout of similar others that are likely to join them in that.

The Social Infrastructure of Co-spaces

DNs often face a sense of loneliness and rootlessness (Haking 2018, as cited in Lee et al., 2019), which often turn them into looking for alternative places or so-called co-spaces (more on them in the next section) where they have the chance to bond with others and form part of a community. Joining spaces with loads of sociability opportunities like pubs, cafés or attending networking events enable DNs to make new connections. Though, these relationships are temporary and for this reason, DNs also seek pre-established communities and specific programs where it is easy to mingle every day to build long-lasting relationships (Lee et al., 2019).

Lee et al. (2019) used Oldenburg’s typology of places, which serve as 1st home, 2nd work and 3rd social places and maps DN perceptions of them (see figure 4 below). Hostels, coworking, and co-living spaces are effective ways for DNs to mingle and bond with one another through working and living in the same area. Co-living programs that incorporate all facets (1st to 3rd), could mean a “full immersion” opportunity to participate in a community for a pre-determined time period. However, as many co-living programs extend for a somewhat long period of time and on fixed schedules, DNs can be overwhelmed by feeling too constrained in such a great deal of involvement for too long. This is a somewhat paradoxical discovery, indicating that DNs seek opportunities or spaces to build deep relationships in the short time-period that they have congruent with their nomadic mode of living.

Figure 4 - DN’s perception of places



Note. From “The Social Infrastructure of Co-spaces: Home, Work, and Sociable Places for Digital Nomads”, A. Lee, A. L. Toombs, I. Erickson, et al. 2019, *Proceedings of the ACM on Human-Computer Interaction*, 3(CSCW), 1–23. (<https://doi.org/10.1145/3359244>).

Sutherland and Jarrahi (2017) indicated that even more social places, like DN “meetups or a motorbike trip to a waterfall in Bali, yielded long-term social connections with other nomads and locals” (p. 13). DNs then, attended coworking spaces both as a way to discover other DNs and as a way to network with those local startups that frequently found employment there (Sutherland & Jarrahi, 2017).

Co-spaces & Community

Coworking and co-living spaces are at the center of many DN's lifestyle. These businesses can be identified by how much they emphasize on 'sharing spaces'. Several businesses focus on economic value and prioritize providing an operating place for professional customers for a fair price. Alternative businesses emphasize on the community side, a place that inspires individuals to come together, both at work and in real life – the latter type of businesses represent community-based spaces (hence made known as 'co-spaces') (Lee et al., 2019, p. 2).

Lee et al. (2019) noted that DNs express motivation for utilizing a co-space for the sake of a truly psychological demand, belonging, by meeting people and engaging in communities. However, this psychological demand can collide with DNs need for personal development, which causes them to leave home and build their life nomadically in the first place. Thus, DNs are under constant pressure of these two factors and seek help by utilizing co-spaces, though co-spaces often disappoint. Co-spaces still lack specific services oriented at building interpersonal relationships between residents, with too few (if any) facilitators to guide DNs in building community (Lee et al., 2019).

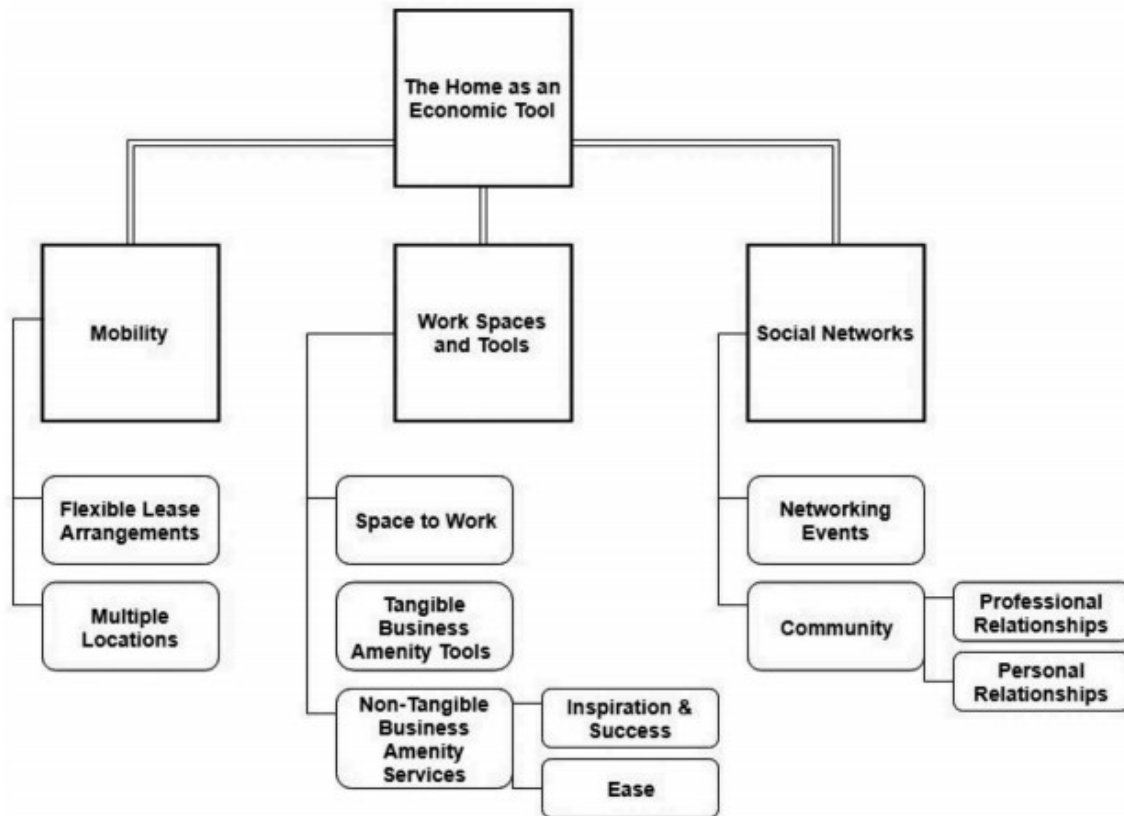
Mancinelli (2020) indicates that community building was a great obstacle to DNs - their work by default made physical exchanges difficult (due to digital presence), and irregular relocations caused feelings of loneliness, amplified by the cultural and language obstacles of the local culture. Their social life became a mixture of the online and offline settings: (1) Online environment was crucial in forming professional and social relationships, yet the quest for (2) offline social bonds and intimacy continued to be essential (Mancinelli, 2020). For this reason, the existence of an international community of similar-minded people is an important component in shaping the movement prototype of DNs globally (Mancinelli, 2020).

Co-living as an Economic Tool

Co-living is "a new commodified form of shared housing catering to knowledge economy labourers" (Bergan et al., 2020, p. 2). "These for-profit organisations offer community, relationships and networking workshops as commodified domestic cultures. Premises are designed to facilitate 'communal living' and encourage 'social behaviour'" (O'Brien, 2016; as cited in Bergan et al., 2020, p. 12). Relationships are encouraged by occasional proximity even though they do not depend on it exclusively. Plenty of co-living spaces provide 'curated events' that include community managers onsite that support residents in forming friendships and networking. Some coliving institutions specifically market the importance of a home for social media access (Bergan et al., 2020).

Bergan et al. (2020) made conceptual contributions to understanding home, mainly by distinguishing meanings and cultures of home that are rising through the latest creative class iterations – DNs. For DNs (referred to as the 'creative class 2.0'), co-living welcomes that a novel meaning of home is created through mobile homes, facilitated by a range of temporary stays throughout the world, "home-as-work home-as-a-social network" (Bergan et al., 2020, p. 14). Figure 5 outlines the conceptual model (Bergan et al., 2020, p. 9).

Figure 5 - Meanings and cultures of home in coliving



Note. From "Coliving housing: home cultures of precarity for the new creative class", by T. L. Bergan et al., 2020, *Social & Cultural Geography*, 22(9), p. 9, (<https://doi.org/10.1080/14649365.2020.1734230>).

Geo-arbitrage & Gig-economy

"The 4-Hour Workweek", Tim Ferris's international best-seller in 2007, a book regarded as the "manifesto" of the DN movement, was what called attention to the term "geographic arbitrage (or geoarbitrage)" (Mancinelli, 2020, p. 14). This term encompasses the strategy of utilizing earnings made in expensive countries and spending them in more economical countries, which helps individuals benefit from the gap between living costs and labor found in different place in the world. Hayes (2014) compares individualistic geoarbitrage to offshoring of companies "whereby corporations take advantage of lower labour costs in developing countries and sell finished products to higher-earning labourers in high-cost geographic regions" (Hayes, 2014, p. 1962; as cited in Mancinelli, 2020, p. 14). Similarly, this geoarbitrage is accessible only to DNs from specific nationalities that are at the advantage of using systemic privileges or 'exit' growing inequalities in their own countries (Mancinelli, 2020). Mancinelli (2020) further elaborates how living in low-cost countries enabled DNs to dare entering the entrepreneur world by inventing or launching their own products, in other words finding ways to increase their earnings through inaugurating some innovative online companies. He emphasizes that geoarbitraging empowered DNs either "to scale up or to scale down their living expenses and outsource some of their daily tasks", namely food preparation, grocery shopping or house cleaning (Mancinelli, 2020, p. 14).

According to Sutherland and Jarrahi (2017), the increase in DN population is comparable to the prevalence of the so-called digital gig work. The gig economy encompasses "crowd work and work-on-demand via apps" (De Stefano, 2015), which is enabled by corporate online platforms matching the supply and

demand of work assignments. Being part of this “just-in-time-workforce”, DNs are allowed to work from any location. The gig economy is often praised as a win-win solution: workers are in charge of their work time, while employers can reduce their expenses by not needing to provide office space, healthcare or other benefits (Thompson, 2019b). Thompson sheds light on the fact that many DNs start their career in the online gig economy, where they receive individual work tasks provided by websites connecting freelancers with employers. These online platforms enable employers to post a work assignment (i.e. text translation, audio transcription, copywriting, website development), while freelancers bid on these jobs and receive a review after completing the task. However, in reality, these new freelancers often end up working below market price (sometimes for free) simply to receive positive reviews to build a successful and attractive profile for the future ‘gigs’, not to mention that DNs must cover their own retirement, healthcare, operational expenses, etc. (Thompson, 2019b). Thus, DNs are always at the mercy of these “precarious work” situations, and to cope with all the uncertainties, they reach out to related online communities to find guidance and support with daily challenges (Sutherland & Jarrahi, 2017). Sutherland and Jarrahi (2017, p. 11) made an analysis of DN work practices within the framework of the gig economy and observed common tactics. Figure 6 below summarizes the work practices connecting DNs with the gig economy and addresses independent digital work demands. Most of DNs in this context were undertaking business operations as individuals and had to deal with the following practices: (1) “branding and marketing”, (2) “transacting and contracting”, (3) “making place”, (4) “professional mentoring and knowledge sharing”, (5) “community building” (Sutherland & Jarrahi, 2017, p. 11).

Figure 6 – Key work practices connecting digital nomads with the gig economy

Work Practice	Description	Sub-practices
Branding and marketing	Using the online space to publicize, create, brand, catalogue talents or services, and market oneself.	Advertising
		Promoting web presence
Transacting and contracting	Carrying out the practicalities of professional interactions online. The concrete acts of engaging with clients, and finding, hiring, and paying subcontractors.	Recruiting
		Payment processing
		Screening contractors / clients
Making place	Identifying and leveraging multiple places and available technologies to conduct nomadic work.	Finding space
		Harnessing technology in place
Professional mentoring and knowledge sharing	Giving and receiving knowledge and know-how online. Sharing experience, information, and professional advice.	Sharing on daily problems
		Keeping abreast of developments
		Professional development
		Peer-to-peer mentoring
Community building	Developing and defining the community as foundation of the gig economy, its values, purpose, exclusionary or inclusionary delineations.	Creating and augmenting community ties
		Consolidating the digital nomad identity

Note. From “The Gig Economy and Information Infrastructure: The Case of the Digital Nomad Community”, W. Sutherland & M. H. Jarrahi, 2017, *Proceedings of the ACM on Human-Computer Interaction*, 1(CSCW), 1–24, p. 11, (<https://doi.org/10.1145/313473297p>.)

Methodology

Research Aim

This research aims to understand the connectedness of DNs within the 'host' place. Since DNs are hypermobile individuals, we also want to understand what affects their mobility trajectories. Consequently, the following objectives were set:

- To describe what are the typical characteristics of a DN and if they can be categorized.
- To outline the driving forces behind their mobility trajectories.
- To understand the role of various places and communities in their daily lives.

Research Questions

The main research question and the sub-questions are the following:

Which factors shape the mobility trajectories of DNs in Medellin, and how do they connect to the city both professionally and socially?

- 1) What are the sociodemographic characteristics of DNs in Medellin?
- 2) Which factors affect their mobility trajectories?
- 3) What is the infrastructure available to DNs in Medellin, and how do they make use of it?
- 4) To what extent are DNs involved in activities with the locals?

Operationalization

The table below (Figure 7) indicates the key concepts and their measurements, these will be used to answer the research questions.

Figure 7 – Thesis operationalization

DN Concept	Measurement
Characteristics	Age, gender, education
	Employment, income, working place & hours
	Nationality, citizenship & language proficiency
	Household, relationship & legal status
	Living place & area, leisure activities
Mobility Trajectories	Arrival, length & purpose of the stay
	Willingness to stay & to return
	Previous & future destinations, main reasons
Infrastructure	Number of co-places & their classification
	Frequency & motive for the usage of co-spaces
	Role of co-spaces in facilitating connectedness
	DN perception of work & social places
	Local DN events & communities
Connectedness	Membership of communities or organizations
	Real estate ownership & investing in general
	Type of local activity & frequency/motive/with whom/where
	How DNs view locals and vice versa

Research Design

First of all, desk research was conducted to identify the places around the world where DN communities are the most present. By reading countless blogs and news articles about DNs it became evident that Medellin in Colombia and Chiang Mai in Thailand were the most 'vocal' cities as DN hotspots. The other options were in Argentina, Chile, Costa Rica, Bali, Vietnam, Cambodia, Philippines. After discovering, joining and engaging in the biggest and most popular DN online communities, such as HashtagNomads.com, NomadForum.com, NomadList.com and Facebook groups (e.g. 'Digital Nomads Medellin', 'Work Surf Travel, Digital Nomads Around the Word'), it was confirmed that Medellin and Chiang Mai stood out as having the highest number of active members. The Colombian option was chosen because of the lower cultural and language barrier compared to Thailand.

Methods

Three methods of data collection were used: (1) interviews with DNs, (2) observation, and (3) participation in DN-events. This approach meant that the researcher was open about their intentions but could choose to remain 'invisible'. The research was mainly qualitative but included some quantitative measurements (e.g. tracking numbers of attendees in meetups, the growth of online groups) and had some netnographic elements (observing public conversations recorded by contemporary communications and social media networks).

Interviews

To understand how research subjects see themselves and their environment, one-on-one semi-structured interviews were used. A list of open-ended questions about different topics was prepared (see the list in Appendix 1). The first interviews tested the flow of the questions, which led to adjusting the sequence of questions to make the conversation more natural. 22 interviews ranging from 30 minutes to 2,5 h were recorded and amounted to 23 hours of voice recordings. These were transcribed into more than 40,000 words and imported into NVivo 11 software for coding and qualitative analysis. The names of the respondents were changed to retain anonymity. On top of the recorded interviews, there were countless 'off the record' interactions, which contributed to the research process in numerous ways.

Since the definition of a DN is still fluid and developing, it was not always easy to identify whom to interview. To have a sufficient sample size of respondents, Nomad Cruise played a role in providing an additional 'buffer' of DNs to interview onboard. The selection of respondents was the following.

A list of DNs was made with whom a rapport was established in Medellin (appendix 2). Firstly, 8 interviewees from Ondas coworking were selected, including the owner who provided insights from the coworking/co-living perspective. Later, 2 respondents from other co-spaces were added: one from 20Mission & one from AtomHouse. This way, the sample was less concentrated on the members of just one coworking place. To increase the sample to DNs who do not locally use any coworking place, a further 8 DNs were selected. These DNs were encountered in 3rd places, such as a yoga studio, a sightseeing tour, DN meetups, the weekend DN retreat, and online communities. There was also an attempt to minimize the 'snowball' effect by including DNs who were not part of the main DN communities. For example, William - "a professional sport better" (as he calls himself) was encountered at a city tour. He matched a DN definition and was unaware of it, still, he agreed to give an interview.

The gender ratio was intentionally maintained to about one-third female and two-thirds male, representing an average ratio encountered during the DN events (see "DN Events" section of "Connectedness & Communities" of the Findings chapter). On top of that, it was important to hear the

opinions of the locals and their perspectives on DNs, so 3 Colombians from Medellin were interviewed, they were present in many DN events as well.

Observation & Participation

Observations were carried out both online and offline. The field observations started at a 'Digital Nomad Retreat' about 1,5h hour drive from Medellin. It was organized by "On-Board", founded by Maria – an active Colombian and her German boyfriend Andy (both were later interviewed during the Nomad Cruise). This weekend retreat was targeted at DN's in Medellin. It was hosted in the Andean mountains just outside of the city, a small village of Bolombolo, in a very local setting – at an 'hacienda' (ranch). During various interactive activities (e.g., local coffee tour), a few new friendships were established with fellow 'nomads'. One of them was Ben, who was kind to offer an empty room at his apartment in Laureles neighbourhood of Medellin. Ben, a 54 years old Canadian, was running a lucrative e-commerce business and living in Medellin for 3 years already. He was accommodating with his insights on the local DN community. 2 weeks were spent at his apartment until a room became available at the Ondas co-living place. During this time, Ben also introduced a new coworking place – La Casa Redonda, the first coworking in Laureles neighbourhood. We went to the opening event, and the snowball effect of meeting DNs continued from there. This also led to a successful interview with the manager of La Casa Redonda.

Most of the working days were spent in various coworking areas (totaling around 20). This approach would allow to observe the interactions between the coworkers, examine the billboards and posters, get to know the managers and the neighborhoods where these places were based. It was interesting to understand which coworking spaces were more popular with DNs, what events (if any) were hosted. Most of the time was spent in Ondas coworking, but visiting other places helped compare the services, the physical layouts and the potential communities.

The initial plan was also to visit Ruta N (a government organization focused on innovation in Medellin) during the GEC 2016 (Global Entrepreneurship Congress) in the middle of February, which included a tour of Ruta N. Unfortunately, the tour was cancelled due to local unrest, so no connections were established for further interviews. Though, towards the end of the fieldwork, a coworking gathering was attended at the Ruta N premises, where many of the places were present and gave a good overview of the coworking industry in Medellin.

Many related events were attended, among them: biweekly Facebook Group 'Digital Nomads Medellin' meetups, monthly Dynamite Circle Juntos (open to the public), Intercambios de Idiomas (language exchange). At the same time, there were also quite a few serendipitous DN encounters which would lead to deeper conversations at Colombia Immersion Spanish school, Global Entrepreneurship Congress, Flying Tree Yoga Studio, City Tours and more.

Co-spaces & DN Online Communities in Medellin

The research focuses on the places where DNs are likely to spend their time. There are increasingly more and more innovative co-spaces in Medellin, which indicate the city's rapid transition to the knowledge economy; At the time of the fieldwork (2016), there were about 20 of them. These include coworking, co-living spaces, startup accelerators & incubators, tech-hubs and even an Innovation District (see Medellinnovation District in Regional Context chapter). Below is the initial list of the most relevant organizations, which were identified before arriving at Medellin:

- AtomHouse – a coworking space and start-up nucleus based both in Medellin and Bogota;
- Ruta N – technology complex founded by the Medellin city government in 2011;

- Epicentro – the first coworking space in Medellín, opened in 2014;
- Ondas Cafe – a coliving & coworking space;
- Espacio – a coworking place recently upgraded to an incubator;
- Impact Hub Medellín – coworking place for social entrepreneurs, part of a global network (one of 65 Impact Hubs);
- 20Mission Medellín – a coliving community for art and technology creators.

After identifying potential physical places where DNs are active, another list of virtual places was created (see Appendix 3). This list of the key DN online communities for Medellín members mainly consists of Facebook Groups aimed at DNs and expats. They often have overlapping members and sometimes even overlapping administrators (indicating connectedness between them). Apart from open to the public communities, there are also paid ones with specific criteria for joining or uniting members with a unique skill set or professional discipline (e.g., software developers, digital marketers, online business owners). Many communities are global but have local 'chapters' and regular meetups in Medellín (e.g., Dynamite Circle and Internations).

Timeline & Hosting Organizations

The fieldwork was carried out between February - May 2016 and had no official hosting organization as an independent research project. Before arriving in Medellín, a list of local DN-related online communities, organizations, and events was made, leading to meeting DNs on the field. DN weekend retreat organized by "On-Board" was the first event that matched the arrival date and was attended. Two local co-living spaces were discovered and approached. Consequently, 6 weeks were spent at Ondas co-living, which was the main unofficial hosting organization. Afterwards, another 4 weeks were spent at 20Mission co-living on the opposite side of Medellín for additional insights. This was planned intentionally to paint a better picture of DN places of connectedness in a big city.

Additionally, NomadCruise 2016 (nomadcruise.com), which started at the end of May, was chosen to come back to Europe (the route was from Cartagena, Colombia to Lisbon, Portugal and lasted 13 days). This cruise carried almost 200 DNs across the Atlantic Ocean and hosted daily thematic activities and events, which shed more light on the DN lifestyle in general. At the same time, many DNs who were based in Medellín were also taking the cruise, so it was easier to arrange the interviews with some of them there.

Limitations & Risks

The main limitation of this thesis is dated data. Primary data gathered on co-spaces and DNs offers just a snapshot in time 5 years ago, and things have evolved considerably ever since. Nevertheless, it offers insights into the overall development of digital nomadism in Medellín. Furthermore, at the time, academic literature about the DN topic was scarce, and the phenomenon was unresearched, especially in the context of Medellín. Thus, the initial preparation for research and some of the research proposal assumptions on DNs were constrained by lack of secondary data.

On a personal level, few challenges were encountered when gathering data in Medellín. Firstly, the researchers' laptop had technical issues and was out of order for 3 weeks. On top of that, a smartphone used to gather data and observations (interview recordings, photos, and notes) was stolen. It happened at the beginning of the fieldwork, so even though some valuable data was lost, it did not undermine the whole project. Nevertheless, it limited the available time to have more interviews and a bigger sample size of respondents.

Regional Context

Colombia’s second biggest city and capital of the Antioquia region, Medellín, is situated amidst the Aburrá Valley in the middle of the Andes (Morisson, 2019). According to 2018 Census, Medellín has 2,5 mln. inhabitants and its metropolitan area 3,7 mln. (*Perfil Demográfico 2016 - 2020*, 2018). Antioquia region is also the second-largest contributor to the national gross domestic product (GDP) (13.9%) of Colombia (*DANE*, 2018).

Geographically, the city stretches within two mountain ranges, which results in a steep topography. These natural features serve the city’s residents in two ways. First of all, the combination of the altitude (around 1500-1600m. above the sea level) and the proximity to the equator creates near-perfect spring weather throughout the year, hence Medellín is often called “Ciudad de la Eterna Primavera” or the “City of Eternal Spring”. The temperature is relatively stable (see Figure 9), making this ideal weather one of the main reasons expats chose to live here (Medellin Colombia, 2021). Secondly, the natural Río Medellín outpouring is a lush water source of the Aburrá Valley, making tap water fresh and safe to drink for the whole municipality of Medellín.

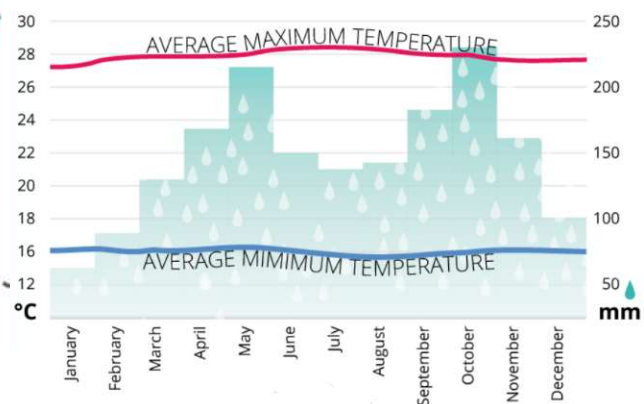
The municipality comprised of both urban and rural areas. Rural areas are split into 54 ‘hamlets’, while the urban part is divided into six large zonas (zones) holding 16 comunas (communes). Comunas are then divided into barrios (neighbourhoods), totalling 249 (Garcia Ferrari et al., 2018).

Figure 8 – Medellín Municipality and areas



Note. From: medellincolombia.co (2021)

Figure 9 – Average yearly temperature in Medellín



Note. From: medellincolombia.co (2021)

Medellin History & Development

Medellin has gone from the ‘murder capital of the world’ in the 1990s, to being renowned as “the most innovative city in the world by the Urban Land Institute (ULI) in 2013” after implementing innovative ways of urban planning and management (Garcia Ferrari et al., 2018, p. 1) Consequently, being the host of the World Urban Forum in 2014, the city demonstrated the main components of its approach: foundation for advanced transport, “culture-led regeneration, support of local development from the local business sector, and a successfully municipally-owned utilities company” – EPM (Garcia Ferrari et al., 2018, p. 1).

Notwithstanding its roots as a small town of merchants, which was found “in 1675 as a gold-mining town and a trading centre”, Medellín was and continues to be crucial for Colombian politics and economy (Garcia Ferrari et al., 2018, p. 3). It is speculated that Medellín, especially Poblado area, was first settled by Spanish Jews, who were fleeing from the Inquisition, which is also why some historians think that Paisas (the locals of Medellín) were so independent (Schwartz, 2021). According to A. Morisson (2019), Medellín underwent four phases of economic development. The latest phase is transitioning the city towards the knowledge economy, which might play a role in attracting a growing number of knowledge workers (DNs including), so we will shed some light on how this evolved.

During the first phase, Medellín flourished as a mining city, and the profits from this industry were reinvested in coffee production. Since the 1880s, this caused an increased need for agricultural equipment and related materials (Restrepo Santamaría, 2016). This led to the second phase when Medellín entered industrialization around 1904. It was powered by protectionist policies, growing coffee exports, local entrepreneurial elites, and the mining industry knowledge. All of this accelerated the growth of “light manufacturing and a durable consumer goods industry” which by the 1970s put Medellín among the biggest industrial hubs of Latin America (Caballero Argáez, 2016; as cited in Morisson, 2018, p. 7). During this phase, private companies became an essential part of shaping Medellín via public-private projects (Garcia Ferrari et al., 2018). For example, in 1910, “an open competition to design the ‘Plan Medellín Futuro’” was held by ‘Society of Public Improvement’ (or SMP) - a private company with a “civic” mission to support “spatial and cultural development” (Garcia Ferrari et al., 2018, p. 4). Every new building or renovation was required to be among the boundaries of the Plan Futuro, which introduced the square-shaped future city with wide avenues and plenty of trees. Public parks and spaces would become essential at all edges of Medellín ‘squares’ and were inspired by New York's Central Park. Consequently, a century later, the city looks very visually appealing with abundant, well looked after greenery and colourful flowers.

However, during the second phase, Medellín started to experience a massive rural to urban migration. The internal Colombian conflict, which started in 1964 (and is still present), was the main cause of internal displacement. This low-intensity asymmetric war would erupt occasionally and would lead to three key waves of internal displacement. To explain the severity of the situation, it was estimated that about half of all Medellín residents arrived as Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) by the year 2000 (UN-Habitat, 2004). Things did not get better in the next phase, though.

The third phase started in the 1980s when Medellín became the narcotics city. The infamous era of the drug lord Pablo Escobar was caused by the combination of industrial crisis, explosively growing population, high poverty, and the city’s strategy with regards to production and distribution of cocaine (Maclean, 2015). All of this coincided with the third wave of the Colombian conflict internal violence between 1984 and 1999, which arguably affected the city of Medellín the most. During Escobar's and Medellín Cartel's peak activity, the Colombian government and law enforcement were the weakest in 1980-1990. The city was taken over by ‘sicarios’ (hitmen including paramilitaries, guerrillas and urban

militia of various ideologies) who followed orders of the drug traffickers (Garcia Ferrari et al., 2018). By the 1990s, the local population was so exhausted by all the atrocities that it was ripe for a change - the success of Medellín development after the 1990s is attributed to its most violent period. In 1988 federal government allowed cities to elect their mayor all by themselves and the new urban legislations of 1989 enabled Medellín to start urban reforms linked to decreased violence. The Strategic Plan for Medellín was developed in 1995-1997 with a view to 2015, and this program sparked a shift in planning practices from then on (Garcia Ferrari et al., 2018).

Currently, Medellín is undergoing its fourth phase of development - the city is transitioning into a city of knowledge. The decrease in violence, innovation-focused policies, and social initiatives by the iconic Mayor Sergio Fajardo (2004–07) paved the way for the 'Medellin miracle' (Maclean, 2015; as cited in Morisson, 2019, p. 7) and 'Medellin's half a miracle' (Fukuyama & Colby, 2011; as cited in Morisson, 2019). One of the key components that transformed Medellín into a knowledge city is Ruta N and the Medellín innovation district. Ruta N was chosen as an important and influential case, as it assisted the "path formation and path branching" by bridging extraterritorial intelligence into the regional innovation system (Morisson, 2019, p. 4).

Medellin Innovation

Some authors (Mazzucato, 2014; Rodrik, 2008; as cited in Morisson, 2019, p. 5) called for a "smart state", "experimental state" and "entrepreneurial state" to support the innovation process in Latin America. In Colombia and Medellín particularly, these approaches to local economic development were well accepted (Bergan et al., 2020). Further, we will provide examples of how innovative policies shaped Medellín and made it attractive to knowledge workers (DNs among them).

In 2009, Medellín city administration and the public multi-utility company EPM developed Ruta N Medellín – a regional innovation agency with more than a thousand employees. An interesting fact is that EPM is one of the largest corporations in Colombia that provides hundreds of millions of dollars each year to city development by financing various social programs (Schwartz, 2021). The main assignment of Ruta N is to revolutionize the city into a knowledge city and an innovation hub by applying the science, technology, and innovation (STI) plan. This plan prioritizes regional path development in: (1) "information and communication technologies (ICTs)", (2) "energy", and (3) "health" (Morisson, 2019, p. 4). This led to Medellín attracting 379 technology companies to set up offices, which created about 11,000 jobs over the past six years and the most valuable of those companies are all international (Schwartz, 2021).

Due to its history and topography, Medellín was quite detached from the rest of the world, preventing the spread of extraterritorial knowledge into its regional innovation system. These circumstances influenced the local culture to be inward-looking, which added to the city's segregation from the global economy even further. However, since the 1990s, GEA (Grupo Empresarial Antioqueño), a conglomerate labeled "The Other Medellín Cartel", started to be more open to extra-regional investments and supported a shift to service and knowledge-based activities. Ruta N became an institutional tool that promoted this transition to the knowledge economy (Morisson, 2019). All in all, Ruta N has three targets: (1) to enhance RIS's ability to "acquire, absorb and diffuse extra-regional knowledge"; (2) to "connect Medellín and Ruta N to related innovation hubs around the world, such as Boston, Austin, Silicon Valley, Israel or Cambridge by generating formal and informal networks" between these actors; and (3) to "improve the visibility of Medellín and Ruta N as a relevant innovation system in the world" (Morisson, 2019, p. 15). These efforts are yielding results. For example, in 2019, The World Economic Forum opened the "Center for the Fourth Industrial Revolution" in Medellín, which is the first in a Spanish speaking

country (*ACI Medellin*, 2019). This further strengthened the city's image as an innovative and making bold steps towards the development of the knowledge economy.

Medellin Library Parks (MLP) illustrate another successful example of city planning in Medellin. MLP emerged as a solution to social injustice and violence. In 2007, Sergio Fajardo, mayor of Medellin at the time, emphasized the need to reshape public spaces to symbolize social inclusion (Granda & Machin-Mastromatteo, 2018). Consequently, nine library parks were built in Medellin. MLP offer innovative services and opportunities that are not very traditional for libraries, these are: writing promotion, admission to information and communication technologies (ICT), auditoriums and amenities for workshops, playrooms, cultural activities, and entrepreneurship centres (Peña, 2011; as cited in Granda & Machin-Mastromatteo, 2018). Architecturally, the MLP are also impressive and improved the aesthetics of the city.

These days, the city of Medellin refers to itself as the “Valley of Software”. Apart from being a nice marketing slogan, it also emphasises that the latest mayor (2020-2023), Daniel Quintero Calle, is a former software developer with more than 10 years of experience in the IT sector (Schwartz, 2021). The city is indeed leveraging the talent developed by foreign companies and growing its own startup ecosystem supporter by government-financed incubators and technical education programs (Schwartz, 2021).

Tourism

At Vitrina Turística (biggest annual travel fair of Colombia), the government emphasized the new record number of tourists visiting the country in 2019 – it exceeded the target of 4,5 million, bringing the overall hotel occupancy to 57.8%. This is up from 540 thousand visitors in 2002 while Colombia was regarded unsafe (Medellin Colombia, 2021). Non-residential tourism grew above 3.3% of GDP in 2019, the highest for a Latin American country. “When you think of ‘Colombia,’ we want the global community to think of a country that receives with open arms all tourists,” commented President Duque at Vitrina Turística. He also declared that Colombia wants 6 million visitors in 2020 (City Paper Staff, 2020).

Medellin is one of the fastest-growing tourist and expats hotspots in Latin America - it is promoted as one of the top must-visit cities by reputable media namely the National Geographic, The Guardian, the BBC news (Medellin Colombia, 2021). According to government statistics, Medellin is Colombia’s 3rd most popular city receiving international visitors after Bogota and Cartagena. 20% of Medellin's tourism comes from the U.S., and 16% are from Europe (mainly Spain, France, Germany, and the UK) (Medellin Colombia, 2021).

An illustration of the growth of tourism in Medellin, is shown by the amount of hostels that increased from 5 in 2010 to about 150 in 2016 (Medellin Colombia, 2021). The Expat community is also rising. In 2016 there were 1,647 expats who owned real estate in Medellin, and the number of long-term expats could easily be at least 10,000 people, including retirees and those who work here officially and unofficially (like many DNs) (Medellin Colombia, 2021). In 2017, there were 6,704 retirement checks sent to Colombia according to the U.S. Social Security Administration, which is now the 2nd most popular retirement country after Mexico in Latin America – an increase of 85% compared to 2010 (Wyss, 2018). Over the last few years, Colombia started climbing up the ladder of the best places to retire worldwide – it reached 4th place in 2021 (International Living, 2021). Healthcare, climate, cost of living and visa rankings were the highest among the criteria of the ‘retirement index’ (see Figure 10 below).

Figure 10 – 2021 Global Retirement Index rankings by International Living

INTERNATIONAL LIVING'S 2021 GLOBAL RETIREMENT INDEX BY THE NUMBERS											
Country	Housing	Benefits	Visas/Residence	Fitting in/ Entertain	Development	Climate	Healthcare	Governance	Opportunity	Cost of Living	Average
Costa Rica	74	88	86	92	92	80	97	80	79	84	85.2
Panama	80	96	97	80	76	80	88	82	82	83	84.4
Mexico	86	78	88	94	86	86	90	68	72	87	83.5
Colombia	77	78	88	82	86	87	96	79	71	89	83.3
Portugal	87	86	64	87	88	88	95	79	74	84	83.2
Ecuador	84	95	87	84	75	87	81	70	74	93	83
Malaysia	75	64	82	82	92	62	90	82	78	91	79.8
France	65	75	68	74	96	82	84	80	71	69	76.4
Malta	66	76	86	90	81	63	79	75	76	68	76
Vietnam	72	60	60	85	70	60	84	82	83	99	75.5
Spain	69	62	60	85	86	72	96	70	66	82	74.8

Note. From: "The World's Best Places to Retire in 2021," *International Living*, 2021, (<https://internationalliving.com/the-best-places-to-retire/>)

Research Findings

In this chapter, the findings of the fieldwork are presented. This is done in four sections: (1) DN characteristics, (2) mobility trajectories, (3) DN Infrastructure, (4) Connectedness & Communities. We start from the sociodemographic characteristics of DNs and their mobility trajectories, mainly based on the interviews. Afterwards, the map of Medellin is presented in the DN infrastructure section. Here, the neighbourhoods where respondents reside are presented, along with a list of places where DNs tend to spend their time generally. These are based on both the interviews and the observations. We conclude the chapter by elaborating upon the DN connectedness of and their communities.

Let us start by introducing the interviewed DNs. The table (Figure 11) below lists all the respondents, their age, gender, nationality, and work area. The methodology chapter explains how they were selected.

Figure 11 – Digital Nomads interviewed in Medellin (names changed to maintain anonymity)

Name	Age	Gender	Nationalities (residence)	Area of Work
William	29	male	Dutch	Professional sport better
Mantas	27	male	American/Lithuanian	Aspiring entrepreneur & blogger
Pamela	33	female	Finish	Digital marketing manager
Peter	23	male	French	Aspiring entrepreneur
Natron	26	male	German	Software developer
Albert	28	male	American	Ecommerce
John	25	male	American	Freelance writer
Shane	26	male	British (Colombian)	Online entrepreneur & copywriter
Craig	26	male	American	Website developer
Ada	35	female	Slovakian (Australian)	Human resources manager
Tim	37	male	Dutch	Freelance mechanical engineer
Ronda	48	female	German/American	Freelance consultant & writer
Emanuel	30	male	Brazilian	Online entrepreneur
Angel	31	female	American/Colombian	Non-profit founder
Marco	32	male	American/Italian (Colombian)	Investor & day-trader
Andy	32	male	German	Freelancer artist
Maria	26	female	Colombian	Entrepreneur & public speaker

Note. Adapted from: "Community and cosmopolitanism in the new Ubud", G. MacRae, 2016, *Annals of Tourism Research*, 59, 16-29. (<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annals.2016.03.005>)

DN Characteristics

General Characteristics

One-third of the DNs interviewed for this study was female, while the majority was male. This imbalance can be partly attributed to South America being considered less safe to travel than South-East Asia, where women feel safer travelling alone. However, also other studies point to the dominance of men among DNs. Most of them were in their twenties and thirties, with an average age of 30. This is not to say that DNs are only to be found in younger age categories, as we also observed older DNs attending events in Medellin. The oldest nomads aged 50-60 and the total older-aged (40+) DN amount was about 5-10% of the total encountered.

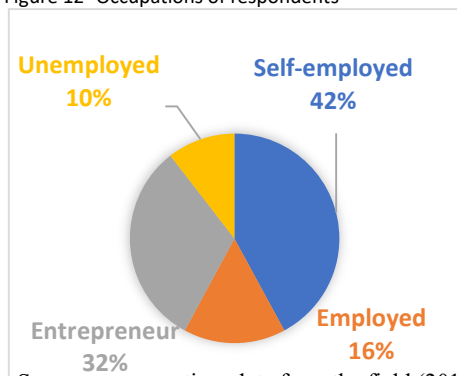
All respondents were highly educated - more than half of the sample had a graduate degree (master's or PhD). Out of 17 respondents, 7 had bachelor's degrees, and 8 had master's degrees. There were two outliers. A 26-year-old college dropout who instead pursued an alternative education and entrepreneurial path. On the other side, a 48-year-old PhD in Biochemistry had a rich history of top positions in well-known international companies during her executive career (self-employed now).

The disciplinary background was vast: Civil & Auto mechanical Engineering, Linguistics, Graphic design, Tourism, Journalism, Public Relationships, Social Sciences, Computer Science, Arts & Culture and Politics. There were a few more popular choices, though – Finance, Business and Marketing (6 out of 17 had degrees in these areas). While computer-related studies, such as computer science or graphic design, were not that popular (only 3 out of 17).

70% of the respondents studied abroad for at least a short period of time. Of those who did not, a few indicated that they regret not doing so. Of those who did, 2 had this experience as early as high school, while others later in their life's. Many agreed that studying abroad was an eye-opening and life-changing experience. Few respondents mentioned that the choice to study abroad was driven by the will to go as far as possible from home (and family). To others, studying abroad was the consequence of a multicultural identity (e.g., visiting family abroad and studying there at the same time). For example, Angel's (32 years old) story was:

"I used to come to Colombia every summer to see my mom, and I even flew independently from 5 years old. I also had an aunt in London, so I went there when I was 12 for summer, then also visited France and Holland to visit some relatives. At 14, I took part in a Russian exchange program (by the US government in 1999). In college, I went to France for 3 months to improve my language skills. Was travelling ever since - it's in my blood."

Figure 12 -Occupations of respondents



Source: own creation, data from the field (2016)

The work was as diverse as the educational backgrounds. When asked about their occupation, many could not be specific or started listing various income streams from multiple business ideas. These were about half of the respondents, and they were making money through various online pursuits (e-commerce/webshops, online courses, copywriting, selling e-books, and other digital niche products & services) combined with gig work (undertaking and getting paid per individual project per client, such as website development, PR consulting, etc.). There was no significant difference between genders in their

identifying opportunities to make money online and to position themselves as experts in niche areas. The only difference was that no women worked in the software development field, predominantly men's profession.

Some mentioned that their occupation is an entrepreneur, and then it turned out that they are self-employed and do not manage or employ anyone. On the other hand, some investors were also assigned to the entrepreneur category. There were also overlapping categories between the employed and self-employed categories, mainly because some full-time remote workers (those who work on a flexible arrangement that allows them to do their job from a remote location outside of the employers' office) were employed as freelancers (self-employed individuals responsible for their own taxes and social

benefits). Usually, the company of the employer would be based in a DN's country of origin. Remote workers often emphasized that they worked for the same company for years before a new arrangement of working remotely was made at their initiative. Some freelancers also agreed that the bulk of their work comes from previous employers or through word of mouth.

About half of the respondents stated that they earn between €1,000 and €2,000 per month netto. Everybody agreed that this is a very comfortable salary to have in Medellin. For example, Albert mentioned:

"Medellin is much better than Los Angeles because I gave myself like a quadruple raise by moving here".

Second, came the 'no income' bracket - almost one-fourth of all DNs had no income streams at all. They mainly were living on their savings or supported by their families. These nomads were either taking a break from work or in the process of figuring out how to make money through new online ventures.

About one-tenth had low income (up to €400 per month), while another 10% had higher (between €2,000-€6,000 per month). One outlier was earning a seven-figure yearly income, which was not disclosed.

The working time ranged from 4h/week to 80h/week – the two outliers. William was: *'just placing the bets 30min before going to sleep'*, and Peter (23yrs. aspiring French entrepreneur) was: *'working like crazy on his startup'*. The overall majority were in the range of 15-30h/week. They were mainly freelancers with flexible schedules, and it seemed that work & life balance was essential to them.

Cohen (26yrs. American website developer) was very clear:

'I came here to work less and live more, there are always projects waiting for me, but I'm not undertaking too much'.

While others had no clear boundaries between their work and leisure, Marco (32yrs. American day-trader) confessed that:

"Current situation is that my life is my business. Travel blog attracts people who want to day trade because of the lifestyle I live. So that's what my life is about - taking pictures & making videos on social media, which does not feel like work anymore."

Others enjoyed working an average workweek (not less than 30-40h per week), like Shane (26 yrs. British): *'I like to work, I try to have a solid 8h workday even though I don't have to'*. Ronda (48yrs. German) confirmed: *'I do some work even on the weekends, so my weekly hours are probably more than a standard working week'*.

Remote workers were much less flexible though, they had to clock in 40h/week no matter what. That did not mean they did not manage to enjoy their free time. For example, Pamela (33yrs. Finish) managed to do intensive Yoga teacher training and traineeship while working full time. She said that:

'I can put in the hours in advance, so I work more before the travelling day, or I work at nights if I have something else planned for the day'.

Those whose clients were on the other side of the world needed to work at inconvenient times to make calls. However, Medellin was a perfect time zone for North Americans since they did not struggle with significant time differences.

Nationality, Citizenship & Language Proficiency

Respondents were mainly from Western countries, and the majority had a ‘strong’ passport (USA and European Union member states). There are a few passport ‘strength’ indexes (such as passportindex.org, Henley Passport Index) ranking passports according to how many countries a passport holder can enter visa-free. The higher the number of visa-free countries specific passport enables, the more powerful it is. However, two DNs with weaker passports (Colombian & Brazilian) were at a disadvantage to exercise their global mobility.

Figure 12 - Number of passports of the respondents

Passport	#
American	7
More than one	4
Colombian	2
German	2
Planning to get a second passport	2
Slovakian	1
British	1
Brazilian	1
Italian	1
Dutch	1
French	1
Finish	1
Lithuanian	1

Source: own creation, data from the field (2016) stopping him, since he already gained Dutch higher education and Dutch language proficiency during his last visit, he is now planning to come back and stay for a minimum of 5 years to become a citizen of The Netherlands.

The most prominent finding was that about one-fourth of them had two (or more) nationalities - 4 ‘nomads’ had two passports. One even had three passports (the third one was for tax purposes and remained of unknown origin).

Americans were the most significant part of the sample and most likely to hold a second passport (or even three) - one of them had a Colombian passport, one had Lithuanian, another had Italian and an undisclosed one. One German passport holder also gained an American passport after emigrating to the USA 20 years ago (though she was considering renouncing it if Donald Trump would win the elections). Another migrant example was a Slovenian passport holder who gained Australian citizenship.

Apparently, European passports were in high demand - there were also those who were in the process of planning to get a second passport. A Brazilian DN applied for an Italian passport since he had Italian roots from his grandparents’ side, and Italy is known to have liberal laws regarding that. Another example was of an American, his Dutch father did not recognize him until he was a teenager and made it too late to inherit the nationality. However, this is not

Emanuel (30yrs. Brazilian): “Now I want to get an Italian passport because it’s going to change my life, I will be free and able to go wherever I want.”

Almost half of the nomads have more than one passport or citizenship. These people have a mixed identity and tend to not associate strongly with just one nationality. Angel, an American-Colombian, despite calling herself a DN, also identified as a ‘return migrant’, and this identity resonated the most with the people of a similar background. She was able to find her group of people with whom she belonged – well educated and motivated American Colombians who were leveraging their skills and network to contribute to local development in many ways.

DNs with one nationality were more inclined to associate their identity with the country of origin. For example, Shane: *“I am British and always will be, I will come back home one day”.*

Regarding languages, the average number of spoken languages by all respondents was more than 3. About a third of respondents spoke two languages, another third spoke three and the final third spoke more than three. We cannot know the proficiency level of each language, but all respondents spoke at least a basic level of Spanish as well as advanced/fluent English. English native speakers were learning Spanish or were speaking it since childhood (e.g. children of immigrant Americans). Non-native English speakers would possess at least three languages in their arsenal, indicating multi-cultural backgrounds or willingness to learn languages in general. Not a single interviewee spoke just one language, a few outliers claimed to speak seven or even nine languages! Naturally, it was not possible to check their proficiency level, so this could skew the data.

Household, Relationship & Legal Status

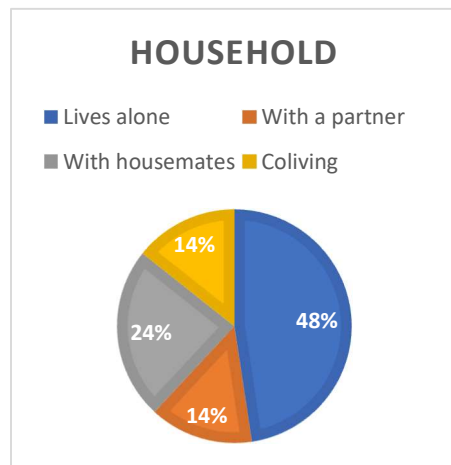
The overwhelming majority of the respondents are single – just 3 respondents were in a relationship and had local partners. Two (Peter & Shane) had relationships with Colombians, while Adrianas' relationship was with a Dominican residing in Medellin, which complicated legalities when trying to extend the stay outside the limitations of the tourist visa. Shane's relationship resulted in a domestic partnership migrant visa (temporary residence for 3 years with a possibility to apply for a resident visa afterwards). While Peter was not yet committing outside his tourist visa status.

Having a long-term Colombian partner allows one to receive a Domestic Partnership or Common-Law Marriage (Union Marital de Hecho or Union Libre) declaration, a valid union in Colombia for the Marriage Visa. This visa is granted if the couple lives under one roof for a minimum of 2 years, but it is also possible even if the union is just a few months old (ExpatGroup, 2021).

Relationships was a sensitive topic to many of the respondents. Eight of them acknowledged that they went through a recent break-up after a long-term relationship. One lady (Ronda, 48yrs.) declared that her marriage fell apart after 18 years and that this caused her to start living this nomadic lifestyle in search of a place where she can plant her roots again. There were also three male respondents whose statements stood out. Emanuel (30 yrs.) stated that he could not find a '9' (grade on the scale of 10), while '10' is impossible to meet, but he is not settling down for an '8'. Albert (self-employed 28 yrs. American) mentioned that he struggles to meet a 'nomadic' type girlfriend. While Marco (32 yrs.) said: "Unfortunately, women are a distraction from businesses."

On top of that, a few of the couples broke up during the fieldwork making it difficult to gain insights on non-single people in DN communities.

Figure 13 - Household of respondents



Source: own creation, data from the field (2016)

Almost half of the DNs were living alone. The living conditions ranged from living in a hostel dorm (William) to owning a six-bedroom penthouse with a full-time chef and a maid (Marco). On average single nomads would rent a studio or a one-bedroom apartment. The rental costs ranged from €100 (for a room) to €800 (for an apartment) per month, averaging €300/month. Two respondents owned their apartments (both were Americans with Colombian citizenship). Purchasing real estate enabled them to become permanent residents of Colombia through investor visas.

All of those living with housemates had Colombian roommates (from one up to three). So, taking DNs with local partners into account, about 38% had a household with Colombians.

Mobility Trajectories

There were two paths into DN lifestyle: those who became DNs while travelling and those who started from remote work and later transitioned into a DN lifestyle. This became apparent because working while travelling was usually a shorter time period than just travelling.

Shane: "I was traveling for 3 years and started to get involved with the DN community in Tarifa (Spain). First couple of year was a learning curve, it's a lot to learn if you want to make money, you need a niche and to know what you are good at. Have to build up the reputation and be prepared to work."

However, there were also respondents for whom working online was the norm in a home country for many years before they took a step further to move abroad.

Marco: "As a day-trader, I'm making money online for about 11-12 years, but I started traveling full-time only about 6 years ago. I was afraid to quit my job, even though I had a lot of money saved up. On vacation I took a trip to Argentina and in the rental apartment I realized that I can still continue day trading. This epiphany empowered to say that I'm leaving as soon as I came back to the office. I decided to go to Canada first, because it was the most similar place to the US. Then I went to Argentina into the same apartment. After that I just kept going."

The vast majority of the respondents arrived in Medellin between 1-3 months ago, and most of them were planning to stay as long as the tourist visa allows (6 months). The rest arrived 1-3 years ago, these were Colombian passport holders and residents. There were also 2 'beginner' respondents who started travelling only a few months ago, and for both, Medellin was the first destination to 'test out the waters of the DN lifestyle. The others were 'on the move' for a period ranging between 1 and 7 years, with the majority living as a DN between 6 months and 3 years. A few even mentioned that they are on the move for most of their lives (due to their parents continuously changing living places since childhood).

When listening to the stories of how the journeys were evolving geographically, a few insights stood out. Some nomads had their routes planned well in advance; some reacted based on how they feel in the moment, while others were somewhere in between.

Albert (28 yrs. American): *“I’m planning to go counter-clockwise around the continent, so first Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia. Want to see Brazil, Argentina and Chile, but they are more expensive. Plans might change, I am location independent, so open to everything, but I’m not planning to come back to Medellin.”*

Albert represents an example of a beginner nomad - it was only his second month after leaving the US. Whereas for others, who already spend years travelling, Medellin became a place they are based and wanted to stay. For example, Marco travelled for 6 years before stumbling upon Medellin, which ‘ticked all the boxes’ for him. For Shane, it took 3 years of travelling before settling down in Medellin.

Marco (32 yrs. American-Italian): *“The first time I arrived here in 2013, and it felt like home before I was just travelling around the world. The weather is great, plus I hate the beach. Women are beautiful, and it’s super cheap to live. It is also safe to invest, and I meet many cool people who do the same thing - getting out of US and starting a business here.”*

Shane (26 yrs. British): *“I started travelling in India, then came to South America, where I met my current girlfriend in Medellin. I also met people who taught me how to make money online. Then went to Peru, Bolivia and Brazil, then went back to UK and then came back to Medellin. I had a long-distance relationship for half of the time. We’re planning to travel together someday, but she is now studying and working in a bank.”*

DNs initially would arrive as tourists, so they were constrained by visa limitations. However, quite a few were considering staying.

Cohen (26 yrs. American): *“Honestly, I want to stay indefinitely. Maybe one day I’ll wake up and decide to check something, for example, Bogota, or there might be some opportunities in Argentina. However, no next destination, I’m a bad nomad”.*

Ronda (48 yrs. German-American): *“As long as visa allows, I can imagine having a homebase here. But it’s a bit too early because of the tax situation and residency. I plan to come back again when visa allows me to come next year.”*

When it comes to the purpose of stay, not all respondents could clearly answer why they are staying in Medellin. Respondents were brought here by various life circumstances.

Mantas (26 yrs. American-Lithuanian): *“Originally I came to work and focus on my startup but after two weeks I quit. I was burned out from before. So now I’m reassessing my life, basically looking for a new opportunity.”*

John (25 yrs. American-Dutch): *“Language, getting ‘self-sorted out’ professionally. Only now I have the whole system set in place (calendar, to-do, etc.) and automated as much as I can. I’m not planning to come back because I will probably not know anyone here after a year.”*

Others had a clear answer, such as a relationship or business.

Ada (35 yrs. Slovakian-Australian): *“To learn Spanish and culture and, by the way, to get to know my boyfriend. Also, I always wanted to do some volunteering work, and there are opportunities here. “*

Angel (31yrs. American-Colombian): *“To work on my business, either as a consultant for government or on my company.”.*

Overall, it seemed that there was a clear distinction between those who chose to come to Medellin to do something specific or to be with a loved one and those who just wanted to figure things out or to test out the DN lifestyle. For the latter, Medellin was somewhat of a 'transition' place.

Tim (37, Dutch mechanical engineer): "Mainly to figure out if I want to continue doing this or go back to a fixed job. I will probably go back to The Netherlands and will choose there. Next time I will go to a new country only if someone really wants me there; otherwise, I'll probably stick to stability."

On top of it all, it seems that the 2nd passport pursuits would invariably affect the mobility trajectory and the priority for the country to be based in. Among already mentioned respondents who were planning to get a 2nd passport (Emanuel and John), Mantas recently received his 2nd passport as an American.

Mantas: "I also lived in Sri-Lanka, because I needed to leave the EU before I got my Lithuanian passport. Then my American coworker couldn't get a visa for Lithuania, so I went to Berlin and then to Barranquilla (Colombia). Barranquilla sucked, so when I quit my work, I came to Medellin because of all the nice stories. But I am not going to stay here, I would love to come back but I would rather go back to Lithuania because I have an inherited apartment there."

Ultimately, 7 of the respondents returned to Medellin for at least a second time, and another 3 considered coming back. Out of these 10 cases, 3 were already residents, 1 was on a migrant visa (potentially leading to residency), 2 wanted to get a permanent visa, and 3 were weighing their options. Each time a DN would come back to Medellin, his ties with the place would grow a bit stronger, which would increase the likelihood of settling down for more extended periods.

DN Lifestyle & Stages

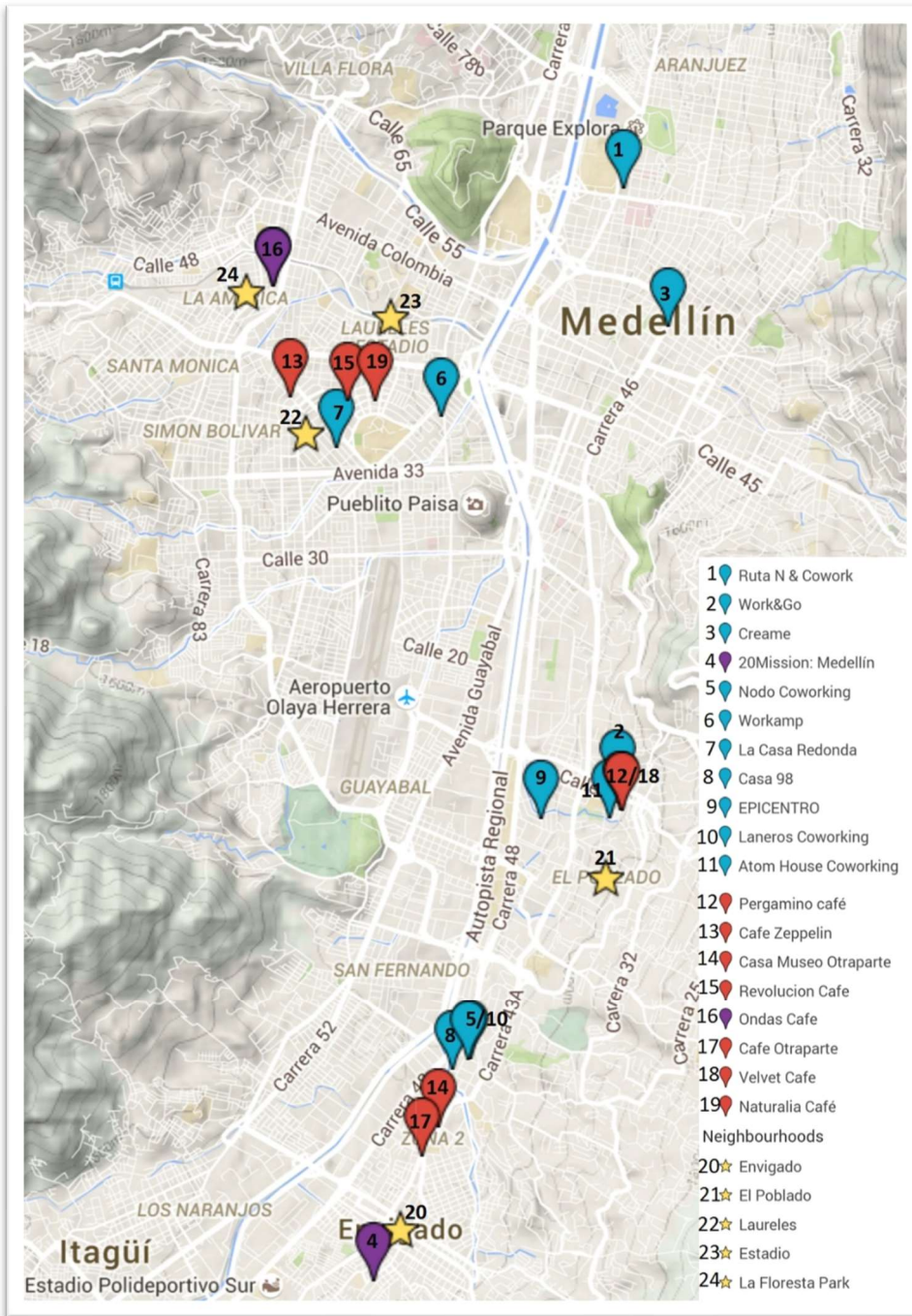
Interviewees were asked to describe their lifestyle and the positive and negative things they are dealing with. Those who were early in their DN lifestyle pursuits were frequently emphasizing the freedom they gained, such as working from anywhere while travelling the world, being their own boss, having more flexibility about how to use their time, and having less work-related stress. However, more experienced nomads were focused on stability, such as the importance of community, routine, and long-term thinking. Travelling for too long can destabilize long-term relationships and cause emotional swings and loneliness, which affect productivity and the ability to enjoy life in general. New nomads overlook these factors by focusing too much on the freedom and novelty aspects of the lifestyle. Thus, there seemed to be a correlation between the length of travelling without settling down and the willingness to have a (semi)permanent home base.

DNs lifestyle is full of daily uncertainties (e.g., internet issues, cultural unfamiliarities, local crime etc.) as well as long-term planning challenges, such as visa bureaucracies, legal constraints and grey areas in work and taxation, costly health insurance, unclear or no social security. Many freelancers are financially vulnerable due to the nature of gig work (e.g., losing a client who received a better offer from a competitor). Startup owners often struggle to make their business profitable and tend to overwork. Being alone in an unfamiliar environment can cause constant pressure, especially without an established social support group in physical proximity. On the other hand, some DNs also mentioned that they experience social pressure to fit in. Their family members and non-DN friends tend to think that they are on a permanent vacation. This can lead to situations when a DN needs to accompany unexpected visitors despite the need to work, making struggles with self-discipline and productivity another widespread DN issue.

DN Infrastructure

In this chapter, we aim to understand the physical infrastructure used by DNs in Medellín. A map (Figure 14) was created to paint a better picture of the city from a DN perspective by pinpointing the locations where ‘nomads’ tend to work and connect with others. Nineteen places were identified: ten coworking spaces (marked in blue), seven informal working spots – cafes (in red), and two co-living areas purple.

Figure 14 - Map of Medellín with initial Hubs of Connectedness



Note. Own creation, data from the field (2016)

The table below (figure 15) provides a brief description of the neighborhoods of Medellin where DNs are inclined to reside: El Poblado, Envigado, Laureles, and La Floresta. Most of the respondents (7) lived in El Poblado, Laureles came second with 5 DNs living there, La Floresta was home to 4, and Envigado to 1.

Figure 15 - Medellin Neighborhoods where Respondents Live

Part of Medellin Metropolitan	Neighbourhood (residing respondents)	More Details
North	Laureles (5)	Laureles is quickly becoming very popular with travellers and more permanent location-independent workers (Tabeler, 2016). This middle-class neighborhood is flat and easy to walk between all the social and workplaces (La Casa Redonda coworking among them). It is also home to a big UPB University campus, making it a youthful and active area. Numerous restaurants and coffee shops are catering for all tastes. There is also a local nightlife and salsa dancing area at “La 70” street as an alternative to all the buzz of El Poblado.
	La Floresta (4)	Very quiet, cheap, and ‘local’ neighborhood bordering Laureles. It is slowly becoming popular with DNs who seek a more authentic experience (and lower living costs). Ondas coworking seems to significantly contribute towards attracting foreigners here.
South	El Poblado (7)	The economic and touristic centre of the city, Poblado, is the most common (and sometimes the only) stop for many short-term visitors to Medellin. Most of the upscale places (restaurants, hotels, condominiums with rooftop pools) are in this area, thus has the highest living costs and is exclusive to those who can afford it. It also has the highest concentration of coworking spaces (including AtomHouse).
	Envigado (1)	Home to 20Mission co-living, Envigado is a town on its own but still part of the Medellin Metropolitan area. It is bordering El Poblado and is preferred by those who want to be close to the city’s nightlife but in a quiet residential area. Envigado has high living standards and hosts top-rated restaurants in an area called “Zona de Buena Mesa” (the zone of good food).

Note. Own creation, data from the field (2016)

Hubs of Connectedness

This section will provide more details about the most popular physical places with DNs and observations about them. They are basically of two types: (1) co-spaces, which consist of both coworking and co-living spaces, and (2) public places. Whether by design or chance, they attract both the DNs and the locals; thus, we call them the ‘hubs of connectedness’.

Co-living Spaces

Co-living is a new way of distinguishing simple shared housing. A proper co-living place aims to attract residents with a common interest and provide the space to facilitate the knowledge exchange (e.g. for

startups and remote workers). There are no clear criteria for what the co-living premises should entail, so we will present and compare two of these spaces in Medellin: Ondas and 20Mission.

Ondas Cafe

Let us start with Ondas, described as the “International Place of Gathering” by the Australian founder who single-handedly created this innovative and evolving co-living & coworking place. It also has a coffee shop downstairs and a rooftop hosting events and yoga classes (in collaboration with Flying Tree Yoga, mentioned in section “Other”).

Ken (28yrs. Ondas founder): “I came to Colombia not with an idea to make money, but more for a challenge as an entrepreneur. My favourite places in Melbourne are hidden behind a dumpster or something, so you must look for them. Ondas is a good example of that.

The initial idea was different, but then I've heard about the coworking concept from some Americans and just put it out in June 2015, first few people were Shane and a Dutch guy. They just showed up. Then café was opened in Dec 2015 and boom - 10 coworkers in a week. Everyone liked the space. Now people are coming here because of the community aspect. In summary: it's a café, a coworking, a co-living, and events. Rooms helped to cover the rent of the building, but I had filtered people to create this environment.”

Established in an off-beaten track of La Floresta (close to Laureles), it is a spark of creativity thanks to local artists whom the owner invited to paint the murals. Ondas attracts many foreigners to otherwise a domestic neighbourhood. The establishment is well perceived by the locals, who are open and happy to meet new people here. Various events were hosted here, such as DN meetups, themed parties, movie nights, regular bi-weekly language exchange groups (Intercambios de Idiomas – see section “Other”). Occasionally, Colombians would rent the whole place to celebrate a birthday or other family festivity.

Five people (all foreigners) are sharing the co-living premises (compared to eight at 20Mission). Residents can use the coworking free of charge, while outside members pay daily, weekly or monthly membership rates. About 20 people were coworking members, and everybody used commonly shared ‘hot/flex’ desks (first come, first serve). There were no private desks - the opposite of what La Casa Redonda coworking (see more in “Coworking Spaces”) offered. All the coworkers were foreigners, many of whom were also beginners to the DN lifestyle, and Ondas was a hub where they could further develop their skills and work practices (more in “Connectedness & Communities” section).

20Mission

Based in a standard building in Envigado, 20Mission offered rooms in two separate apartments located on different floors. Contrary to Ondas, this co-living had less shared space, no regular events and no catering services. The basement was the only common area where yoga classes were offered sometimes. Technically the basement was also a coworking, but it was not marketed as such and since the premises were very basic with a lack of seats and desks (not to mention daylight or coffee), which is why rarely did anybody use it.

Craig (26yrs, American web developer): “I don't like to work in coffeeshops, so I come to 20Mission sometimes. A lot of tech people are here. I also worked at Epicento and liked it. If I would be working full time, then proper coworking would be more appealing. Because it's all remote work, I can get work done at home. Sometimes I stay at home for 3 days straight.”

20Mission collaborates with a Spanish school, “Colombia Immersion”, around the corner, offering intensive Spanish lessons in a package with co-living rent. This was probably the most appealing aspect of the co-living because both communities are overlapping, and the school nearby is doing great in connecting locals with foreigners (see “Spending Free Time with Locals” section), offering activities and events.

The place is managed by an American team and hosts mainly Americans, thus becoming a bit of an American enclave. Original 20Mission co-living was started in San Francisco as one of the first co-living places in the World. It is promoted as a startup community for art and technology creators with well-connected Silicon Valley entrepreneurs as permanent residents (20Mission, 2016) (). As a branch of 20Mission, this Medellin co-living mainly attracts Americans. It is probably also the reason why rental prices were so high (in comparison to the alternatives in the area and Ondas) – for someone coming from San Francisco, they are still a tiny fraction of the usual.

Another interesting fact is that a microbrewery was established at the administrative premises, where the founder and his colleague produced a small quantity of craft beer as a hobby. Colombia had an inferior craft beer selection at the time, so it is quite an innovative concept, which later grew into a successful business on its own. Two years later, not only is “20Mission Cerveza” selling beer for delivery, but the new brand also opened a big warehouse-like bar and restaurant on the outskirts of El Poblado, in a secluded industrial area (with no prior nightlife). The place is now one of the top-ranked Medellin bars & restaurants and hosts frequent events, concerts, meetups, and gatherings, including the biggest monthly one for expats (*Medellin Guru*, 2019).

Overall, 20Mission was less popular with DNs than Ondas. Lack of proper coworking facilities and higher costs of living might have played a role in that. On top of that, Ondas is a spacious building with a visually appealing layout full of common areas decorated with plants, artistic furniture, hammocks, couches, and seats made of recycled car tires, among other things. This setup makes it natural and easy to “hang out” with others. Whereas living in 20Mission, one is limited to the premises of the apartment of choice.

Coworking Spaces

The considerable amount of coworking spaces in Medellin coworking (about 20 in Spring 2016) made it seem like a new one opening every week. As a matter of fact, the coworking business model was a new trend in the city, and coworking owners were still figuring out how to manage and market their services. Every coworking would position themselves a bit differently based on their location, the size of the premises, the type of users they wanted to attract and so forth. However, most of them were simple office spaces with private desks, shared workstations and meeting rooms for rent. Some were hosting groups of employees of a few companies long-term and were open for “outsiders” to fully utilize the unused areas. Usually, small companies would have their headquarters at these shared office spaces, and some local freelancers would use them too. However, rarely were these places used by DNs, thus simple office rent places are not the focus of this research.

The other type of coworking spaces were community focused and made an extra effort to create bonding between its members by attracting the ‘right kind’ of members, organizing regular and themed events, helping to facilitate networking opportunities. These were a minority among all the Medellin coworking spaces. For example, Impact Hub Medellin had a unique approach by screening their applicants to accept purpose-driven (social entrepreneurs) members exclusively. Unfortunately, Impact Hub Medellin was closed during the fieldwork, so there were no insights gained if DNs would use such a space. Nevertheless,

a few other coworking spaces stood out as those that were proactively facilitating connectedness. These coworking spaces offer a strong community and exciting events (sometimes open to the public). Also, the biggest asset such coworking place can have, is a passionate community manager who brings coworkers together and helps them connect based on their personal needs and interests.

Let us start with the places which the respondents used. The usage of coworking spaces was quite common - 9 of them had active (paid) memberships: 7 at Ondas, 1 at AtomHouse, and 1 at 20Mission. From those who do not use a coworking in Medellin, 3 did use a coworking at some point in other countries during their travels, while 5 did not. So about two-thirds of DNs were occasional coworking users. Since two of the above-mentioned coworking spaces (Ondas & 20Mission) were also co-living spaces, we will now compare two other coworking spaces, which were often mentioned in formal and informal interactions with DNs: La Casa Redonda and AtomHouse.

La Casa Redonda

This coworking opened in February 2016 and was the latest hype in Laureles neighbourhood as the first coworking there. It is a collective work of 9 young Colombian creative professionals (architects, engineers, designers, journalists, etc.) who came up with the idea of sharing work premises with other independent creators. As soon as the coworking opened, it was fully booked, indicating the need for such a special kind of coworking.

Julia (26yrs. co-founder of La Casa Redonda): "We are 39 coworkers - full house, it's 16 offices and 8 hot desks. All of them are mainly long term, we also have 11 foreigners. We do not have specific criteria (for membership), but our main philosophy is to share knowledge and ideas. We want everybody to talk about their projects to make synergy. It's all organic, but also potluck lunch, dinners (BBQ, burgers). We make events, workshops, art expositions, all the artists contribute. We have a makerspace area where for example, wedding planners go and work together with the toymakers. We don't want to be just an office, we want a community where we can grow together."

Since the only membership plan offered was long-term (no daily or weekly plan), it was not a suitable option for 'passer-by' type of DNs, who wanted short-term access to a workplace. Nevertheless, location-independent foreigners, including a few members of Dynamite Circle (see "Online Communities"), were committed to working at La Casa Redonda. Many more DNs were joining the community events as they were open to the public. Despite being a Colombian initiative, La Casa Redonda actively promoted itself on various English-speaking DN and expat Facebook groups, thus inviting them to collaborate and interact at their premises.

AtomHouse

Based in El Poblado, this spacious coworking space is mainly oriented toward startups and software developers. White walls and fluorescent lights give it a bit more of a corporate feeling, which contrasts with the colourful La Casa Redonda. AtomHouse mobilizes software developing 'hobbyists' by helping them to become established businesses. They sponsor some workplaces, are involved with many projects and offer a vast network of organizations. For example, one of these projects is Coderise.org - a non-profit teaching kids from low-income families to code (learn programming languages). This program started in 2012 and has expanded outside Medellin to many other cities in Latin America. The first kids who attended this program are already employed by startups based in AtomHouse. This "ecosystem" is enabled through "Socialatom Group" – a US-owned and managed Venture Capital (VC) Fund which established this particular coworking. This VC promotes Medellin as the 'tech hub' and attracts startup founders worldwide.

For example, in one of the DN meetups, an Estonian DN shared how he came to Medellin as a startup founder with a successful track record. He said he “fell for online marketing of the AtomHouse coworking by reading a blog post about how awesome Medellin is”. Socialatom Group identified an opportunity and offered to fund his latest startup. Furthermore, he received help in hiring a few Colombian software developers. Another similar story was by Peter who was the first DN to be interviewed in Medellin for this research. He arrived in Medellin to do an internship at AtomHouse as an International Business student.

Peter (23yrs, French): “I wanted to become a DN and learned many necessary skills as an intern (e.g., digital marketing and coding). After I finished the internship, where I learned a lot about how to not fail as a startup, I was encouraged to start my own company. Social Atom Group sponsored me and provided a work desk and valuable connections.”

When comparing AtomHouse with La Casa Redonda, few things stand out. Both coworking spaces have their own ‘philosophy’ and motives behind creating a physical community, even though their manners of accomplishing that are pretty different; La Casa Redonda employs a grassroots approach with limited funds, whereas AtomHouse is a well-funded corporation with a top-down strategy. The approach reflects how these places were established and how they are managed. Nevertheless, both places attract DNs, who are usually of different ‘kinds’: the former attracts creative professionals, and the latter software developers and startup founders looking for funding.

Public Places

Co-spaces were not for everyone, and some DNs mentioned that it is quite easy to meet other fellow DNs in informal workplaces. These places are mainly coffee shops, such as: Revolucion Café, Pergamino Café, Velve Café. Besides the advantage of good coffee and stable Wi-Fi connection, what makes these places appealing to DNs is the fact that there are always others working on their laptops as well, so it does not look out of the context to be working there. Some of these places are foreign-owned. As an example, the management of Revolución is Canadian/Hungarian, which makes it a part of the expat community and attracts similar clientele.

When speaking with DNs, many mentioned that they need a quiet place to focus, and a coffee shop was not the most suitable place to get work done. They would come to a café only if they had some minor tasks to do and if they wanted to meet others like them. Another reason was to change their environment after spending too much time indoors (e.g. 1-2 times a week would go to a coffee shop instead of working from home or coworking). On the contrary, some DNs loved the background noise and could work without any issue, while others used noise-cancelling headphones as a coping strategy. Many of the DNs could not justify the price of a coworking membership by saying that they are not earning enough, and this is why they choose public places or living places to work from.

Furthermore, some of the respondents used public and university libraries to get work done. However, this strategy was mainly for those with the lowest budget and with sufficient Spanish proficiency. Even though libraries are free to use, they require a basic Spanish level to pass the security checkpoint and figure out how to connect to the internet. A drawback is that DNs are not able to have voice calls in these quiet places.

John (25yrs. American): “I love Parque Biblioteca Bellen. It’s a famous development project and part of Urbanismo Social - social urbanism. This library is also a community centre, a daycare and provides job

training. The local government made a drastic statement to overinvest in slums. I like going there sometimes to get some work done, it makes me feel like a part of something special.”

Other

Apart from working places, we have also identified popular public places used by DNs for specific activities. We are going to describe them briefly.

- Intercambio de Idiomas (language exchange events) is a prevalent concept in Medellin, bringing together locals who want to practice English and foreigners who want to practice Spanish so that nobody feels uncomfortable. Usually, this type of language exchange happens weekly in an informal setting (a well-known local bar or coffee shop) where it is easy to establish and maintain new connections. Ondas Eventos (the coworking events brand) was an excellent example as a facilitator and online promoter of these events, thus growing their community in exchange for the consumption of drinks in their premises.
- Salsa Clubs & Schools - There are numerous places one can come to dance salsa regularly in Medellin. Many nomads were keen to learn salsa, which is such a cultural offering in Colombia. Through practising Latin American dances, people from different walks of life are establishing new relationships.
- Yoga Studios - yoga is mainly trendy with foreigners in Medellin (few Colombians attend the classes, which are pretty expensive for local standards). The prominent place in Laureles was Flying Tree Yoga, where several DNs were encountered. Both owners of this yoga studio and Ondas Café were expat friends, which explains their cross-promotion and overlapping communities. During the interview with the manager of La Casa Redonda, we have discovered that Flying Tree Yoga was in talks of hosting yoga classes at La Casa Redonda, indicating further connectedness between locals and expats.
- Sports facilities –Medellin has high-quality public facilities that emphasize the interaction between its users. Outdoor gyms and sports stadiums are among them as they are free to use and attract fitness enthusiasts from all walks of life. It is quite common to see locals interacting with foreigners in this setting.

Connectedness & Communities

This section will further explore how DNs in Medellin are connected to the local community and the local setting. We can distinguish three main ways DNs are connected: online communities, co-places, and DN events.

When interviewees were asked about the communities and organizations they belong to (both local & global), there were a few commonly mentioned groups and web platforms (ranging from free, open to the public, to paid but isolated). These online communities were DNs gatekeepers to valuable knowledge, activities and experiences. On top of that, half of the respondents were members of co-places, which acted as physical bridges between DNs and their needs.

Online communities

Most respondents were members of “Digital Nomads Medellin, ” one of the biggest and fastest-growing local DN groups on Facebook. Anyone could join, participate in public discussions or become Facebook friends with each other and continue relevant communication directly. DNs who were not yet in Medellin but were thinking of visiting would often ask questions related to logistics and lifestyle to better prepare for their arrival. For those who were in the city, the group administrators were organizing gatherings bi-weekly. Often, they were hosted at Ondas coworking premises, but not exclusively. Usually, about 20-50 people would come, and more than half of the respondents attended at least one of these meetups (see DN Events for observations).

Shane (26yrs. British entrepreneur): “I wrote a DN guide and started a group (this was about six months ago). It started growing only about 3 months ago. It gained a lot of interest. Meetups got started. This is important to meet people, and sharing knowledge is important. You cannot make it all about drinking, so it must be something that everybody has a common interest in. Things like how to improve your blog or visa policies.”

The greater part of DNs were also using locally ‘based’ English expat-oriented communities and resources, such as blogs (medellinliving.com and medellinguru.com), Facebook Groups (“Medellin Entrepreneurs Society”, “Medellin Expat & Tourist Info”, “GringoPaisa (Americans in Medellin)”). These online communities had no regular events during the fieldwork period, but some members occasionally suggested meeting in the ‘real world’. These small-scale meetups would emerge organically based on shared interests (e.g., to watch a game of some sport). Members could also promote (with the approval of the group admins) some products or services, which could lead to physical interactions (e.g., a workshop on eCommerce, a spiritual retreat outside the city, or a guided tour).

InterNations came second as the most mentioned online community platform by interviewed DNs. It is a global expat-uniting (4.2 million to be precise) platform with local “chapters” in 420 cities and is focused on “the Global Minds” (InterNations, 2021), who are all foreigners. Monthly gatherings are hosted in Medellin, and DNs occasionally attend them to make new connections even if they consider themselves short-term visitors, not expats or migrants. InterNations are facilitating connectedness on both professional and personal levels. However, a few respondents mentioned that it is not appealing to DNs because online work and entrepreneurship are rare among the members (most of whom are full-time employees for foreign companies or NGOs).

Dynamite Circle is also worth mentioning, even though only one respondent (Emanuel) was their member. Dynamite Circle is an “exclusive” community, which is not easily accessible to an average DN. It is a global

community of online entrepreneurs with a proven track record and financial success (minimum business revenue of \$5000 a month for the past 2 years). Despite the membership fee of \$499/year, all members saw it as a small price to pay to access the wealth of knowledge and expertise on optimizing and growing their remote businesses (e.g. e-commerce, search engine optimization, IT support). Annual global conferences in Austin, Texas and Bangkok, Thailand gathering hundreds of members would provide in-person networking opportunities for potential partnerships. Quite a few cities worldwide, including Medellin, would host regular events due to the sizeable local community. Among them was Dynamite Circle Junto (which means “together” in Spanish) monthly gathering (see “DN events” further), which is open to non-members to get a glimpse of opportunities Dynamite Circle can offer. During this event, there were numerous informal interactions with a group of members. It came to light that there are about 20 Members based in Medellin (May 2016) - 16 more or less permanently, and 4 who travel frequently. These members hire and train local talent (such as software developers, IT specialists or data analysts), which is usually less expensive than in their home countries and the markets of operation (i.e. US, Canada, Australia).

Although online communities were considered important by many DNs, not all respondents made use of these communities - a few respondents said they travel too often, thus do not have time to engage with local communities. These were only those who were in Medellin for up to a month. A few DNs were not that open nor interested in the local context and culture - someone even mentioned that they get quickly bored with the locals, thus always prefer international communities. On the other side of the spectrum were a few DNs who deliberately did not want to be part of any foreign group and preferred to interact with locals-only (especially if improving Spanish proficiency was the priority).

Apart from the above-mentioned online communities that aim to connect DNs in professional and social terms, some DNs mentioned CouchSurfing. This is a global hospitality exchange service that connects local hosts with travellers. Uniting millions of members, it is the second biggest hospitality exchange platform after AirBnB (a few DNs also emphasized they were lucky to meet interesting local people through Airbnb). However, it is very different due to its “gift economy” model, where hosts are not allowed to charge for accommodation (instead, they want to interact with their guests). This altruistic community philosophy fosters non-financial motives among the members. It came to the surface that DNs were using this platform to get to know people via various local discussions and initiatives. Among them were initiatives to teach English to kids from low-income families.

Ada (35yrs. Slovakian): “The first thing was to find where to do it (volunteering), and I found it through some CouchSurfing group where was a post about something with kids. I first volunteered to teach, then I found another organization and started to teach locals. It was so rewarding because the locals really want to learn English. It is also good for my Spanish. It’s a nice feeling to be more involved.”

Another specific form of an ‘online community’ was membership of dating apps and websites (e.g. Tinder, Colombian Cupid). Since most DNs are single, all of them were using one or more of these platforms to meet local romantic partners during their visit (no matter how short). Online dating is rather common in Colombia, thus making it easy and fast to organize dates. Some DNs even pre-arranged dates before arriving in Medellin. More traditional approaches in meeting local people were still used by many DNs, such as: going to intercambios de idiomas (language exchanges), bars, and salsa dancing clubs. However, many respondents acknowledged that dating apps were their only way to meet with locals.

Role of Co-spaces

Co-spaces are a second way to engage with the local community. We have already provided details on co-spaces in Medellin and their communities in the “Hubs of Connectedness” section. However, we want to emphasize further that DNs who used coworking spaces mentioned that the main reason they joined was to be part of the community and to get to know other people with similar backgrounds and professional activities. It was also essential to come to a place specifically to work and separate the working environment from the living environment. Coworkers mentioned that there are fewer distractions than at home, where it is difficult to maintain structure. Coworking users would spend most of their working hours at these places and would also attend various events hosted there. The most popular places with our respondents were: Ondas, AtomHouse and La Casa Redonda.

Albert (28yrs. American): “I work mainly in Ondas - 4 days a week and like to try out a new place once a week. I knew that I wanted to be surrounded by people who also work. I’m pretty focused here (no Youtube), appreciate the community and workshops. But now the community is not that important when I know what I’m working on. A reason to join coworking was to have internet buddies who know how to do things. The role is significant, it is like a nexus—common working goals, good to look for ideas and talk to people.”

Some DNs who were working from home were not in favour of joining a coworking. They argued that they get less work done when there are people around with whom they can interact. Usually, these comments were made by experienced DNs with already established social and professional networks.

Emanuel (30yrs, Brazilian entrepreneur): “For me, coworking is a place to meet people but not to work. It’s more for people who need to feel like they are in the office. I like my routine at home, like putting work clothes on. But I cannot work in the same room where I can see my bed. I tried coworking, and networking was tremendous, but work suffered, maybe I’m too social [laughs]. That’s why I find all these digital communities great - I just go online and talk about what I feel like talking about.”

The role of co-spaces in providing structure and community for DNs cannot be neglected. All Ondas coworking members indicated that the coworker community was the core one of all they belonged to, especially those who lived in one.

Natron (26yrs. German software developer): “It’s easy to find the motivation to work in Ondas where I also live - it is the centre of my life which helps to get the motivation started, this works better than back at home. I like my daily life more here.”

DN Events

Finally, a third way to engage with the local community is by visiting events. Few key observations came to light when attending DN events. All the meetups took place in different locations and environments. It would always be hosted in an informal setting with drinks and food provided by the venue (café, bar, restaurant, or a co-place). Unless a specific topic of discussion was announced in advance, there would be no presentation and no agenda, just a simple gathering that looked more like a party. For example, the Dynamite Circle Junto event would be very informal with pizza and beer, where establishing personal connections would be the priority. It would last for a few hours in the evening, and interactions would happen organically (sometimes sitting in a circle would be encouraged). Similar faces, including a few *paisas regulars* (Colombians from Medellin and Antioquia region are called “paisas”), would show up. The location would not be a limiting factor to attend an event (DNs living in Laureles would come to Poblado, those living in Envigado would go across Medellin to come to Floresta and so on). Brainstorming, sharing knowledge, and connections would be the norm. All attendees would share their references and

experiences both on professional and personal matters. The main focus would always be to get to know each other better. Personal branding seemed to play an important role, especially for those targeting fellow DNs as their potential clients.

In case of a thematic meeting, prior discussion online would be encouraged so that people willing to make a presentation or contribute in any other way could come forward. Often the topic of discussion would be someone's expertise, so the presenter(s) could provide some knowledge and answer all the questions from the audience. The event would potentially lead to the presenter(s) selling services afterwards (e.g. a consultation, an online course, an ebook) or would be approached by other attendants to collaborate on a specific project (e.g. online marketing campaign, copywriting or similar).

Figure 16 provides an overview of some DN events organized in Spring 2016. The data shows that most events are relatively small scale and that male DNs dominate. Dynamite Circle gatherings were the most male-dominated, with only about one-quarter of female attendants representing a higher ratio in men as members. Other DN meetups were inclined towards about one-third female presence. In comparison, an interesting observation emerged from the Nomad Cruise DN-event in June 2016. The ratio of men to women increased to about 60:40. Maybe it had to do with the different context of the event (a vacation type of cruise), which was also a bit higher scale (around 200 DNs).

Figure 16 - Number of attendees in Medellin DN events, according to gender, in abs numbers and %

Date	Event		Total	Percentage
16-Apr-16	Nomad Cruise Meet Up Medellin	Went	17	
		Male	12	70.6%
		Female	5	29.4%
3-Apr-16	Digital Nomads Medellin Meetup	Went	27	
		Male	17	62.96%
		Female	10	37.04%
17-Mar-16	Dynamite Circle Junto	Went	34	
		Male	26	76.5%
		Female	8	23.5%
6-Mar-16	Digital Nomads Medellin Meetup	Went	38	
		Male	26	68.4%
		Female	12	31.6%
4-Feb-16	Digital Nomads Medellin Meetup	Went	22	
		Male	15	68.2%
		Female	7	31.8%
		Avg. total	136	
		Male	94	69.2%
		Female	42	30.8%

Note. Own creation, data about attendance from Facebook events (2016)

Social Networks & Activities

Next to linking up with the community in professional terms, there were also social network types of links. There were differences among the DNs, with some having a network mainly consisting of foreigners, while others had a network in which locals dominated.

For DNs who were the most active and present in DN events, the ratio could be up to 90% foreigners. It seemed this was because they were still relatively new in Medellin and looked for like-minded people to mingle with. These were also DNs who stated that the language barrier was a problem for interacting with the locals fully. A few DNs stated that they consciously tried to maintain about a 50/50 ratio of locals to foreigners because everyone agreed that it is effortless to be surrounded only by foreign friends and live in a “bubble”. Thus, some focused on more profound connections with the locals by having Colombian housemates, romantic and business partners. For these DNs, the percentage of foreigners in their social network would be as little as 10%. They had more established long-term connections related to local business partnerships or extended family members. Needless to say, their Spanish proficiency was of the highest level. However, in general, DNs showed an inclination towards interacting and maintaining social ties with foreigners from similar socio-demographic backgrounds like themselves, with an average ratio of 30/70 locals to foreigners.

Overall, the far majority of our respondents was satisfied with their social network in Medellin and acknowledged that it is easy to find people with similar interests willing to cooperate on various endeavours.

Emanuel (30yrs, Brazilian): “Network-wise [Medellin is] one of the best cities for my field, very strong digital community. Another comparable city is Chiang Mai, but it’s more for beginners and not as much for actual entrepreneurs. I consider myself an entrepreneur who started a long time ago, so Chiang Mai is not that appealing anymore. I am trying to be close to people who are making way more money than myself, so Medellin is a very good place to learn from these people.”

When asked about embeddedness and integrating into local society, 100% of the respondents said they would never be fully embedded - “*even if one feels like a local, he still looks like a gringo*” was a standard answer. Many shared the sentiment of mixed feelings about not fully belonging and not being needed here. Though with time and effort, this is changing towards being more integrated and welcomed.

Emanuel (30yrs, Brazilian entrepreneur): “Having a lot of friends makes me feel embedded, it feels like home. Being alone, I would not [feel embedded]. The connections here are not that temporary anymore, because, for example, Dynamite Circle empowers to meet up in different places around the world (now Medellin, next time Barcelona).”

Apart from temporary living in Medellin and working online, interviewees were also active in other types of activities locally, such as teaching, volunteering, investing, and offering some products or services. We will further elaborate upon them.

Spending Free Time with Locals

Quite a few DNs also expressed particular interest in attending events and activities aligned with their hobbies, such as Latin dances, yoga, sports, playing music, hiking and others. DNs would engage in these activities for a limited (i.e., doing a yoga teacher internship for a month). Despite being constrained by the period of stay in a country, DNs could still easily find and join regular local activities (not explicitly aimed at DNs) and establish friendships with the hosts and fellow participants.

Figure 17 - Billboard with optional activities at the “Colombia Immersion”



Note. Own photo (2016)

aimed at DNs. The school facilitates many activities with the locals (e.g. volunteering, playing local outdoor games, doing other cultural activities or simply going to the park and starting random conversations). The billboard picture (figure 17) gives an impression of how connectedness is facilitated via this language school. Here, some non-profit “fundaciones” get exposure to their local volunteering programs and attract foreigners (including DNs).

Social Activities Linked to Professional Life

For DNs, professional or work-related activities would often overlap with activities traditionally perceived as leisure. For example, socializing at a DN event could lead to a profitable ‘gig’ (as emphasized by the gig economy in the Theoretic Framework). Alternatively, a sightseeing trip on the weekend could be used as material for creating online content, which would increase engagement and visibility of the DNs’ personal brand (e.g., images for a travel blog, a video for an Instagram story or YouTube channel). DNs selling products online emphasize the “call to action” – a marketing technique to make their social media followers buy something from them. Appealing lifestyle scenery and interactions with the local environment often contribute to this strategy.

From an entrepreneurship and investment point of view, Marco was probably the most established locally. His case demonstrates a DN who is successfully monetizing his expertise locally – contributing to local development overlap with his professional goals.

Marco (32yrs American day-trader): "I invest in real estate, own a local stock trading business and am setting up a non-profit for underprivileged Colombians. My target group is people who can afford trading and are 18-35, they usually get money from their parents. Colombians don't have an advanced view of financial markets; Thus, I offer 3-9-month programs for groups of 50-60 people. Latins are very in-person people, so online is not enough. I give classes, train and then employ teachers. Latin America now is about 10-30% of whole income. Diversification was the reason for moving to Medellin."

For the DNs involved in a local startup community, Medellin is a good place to minimize expenses and hire local workforce. American owned AtomHouse, with its Venture Capital (VC) arm, is helping these entrepreneurs. During informal interactions, an Estonian DN mentioned that the same VC firm funded his startup, which led him to hire a few local software developers. It is just one example of many online entrepreneurs coming to Medellin. Conversations with Dynamite Circle members attested to that.

Peter (23yrs, French entrepreneur): "I have local partners, startup co-founder and some workers. To raise local funds, we need a local business entity. Medellin has a pool of talent affordable and qualified. Since my venture is a very risky thing, this enables me to reduce the costs. The network is here, and it's easy just because of the American mindset, not self-centred as in Europe. As long as you want to do something here, you will find people willing to join or cooperate."

DNs are also using their skills to identify a niche and create a product or a service that they can sell locally. For example, Shane used his search engine optimization (SEO) skills to get leads online and sell private airport shuttle services. He partnered up with local drivers and split his profits by providing a stream of clients who want to pre-arrange airport pick up when they arrive or leave Medellin.

Figure 18 - Tripstigator case for connecting DNs with the locals

Tripstigator expands horizons one connection at a time. The Identity: We help talented yet disconnected locals market their goods and services on our eCommerce marketplace, while providing the world with authentic and reliable cultural contents, gifts, and products. The Struggle: We recognize the importance of eCommerce. Many talented people are getting left behind. A Collaborative Solution: We recruit Global Connectivity Mentors dedicated to empowering locals with eCommerce. These mentors identify and partner with locals bridging digital cost, skill, or relevance barriers. Together they create and market unique goods and services on our marketplace. The Results: Profits are then split between the local, the mentor, and Tripstigator encouraging new forms of empowerment and human connection while breaking down digital inclusion barriers.

Note. From: tripstigator.com (2016)

Many informal conversations led to similar cases of foreigners facilitating connectedness between locals and DNs by bringing new businesses to Medellin. An interesting case in professional activity is Cody, who was encountered in the GEC 2016. During an informal conversation, he explained how he created Tripstigator – an online platform that connects DNs with Colombians to empower them to sell goods & services online (see figure on the left). Another case is Larry (also encountered at GEC 2016), who was often present at DN meetups, he is the founder of Colombia Immersion Spanish school in Medellin, which was mentioned previously. Additionally, he created nomadplayground.com, where online jobs and income opportunities are listed and reviewed.

'Doing good' or 'Giving back.'

Respondents were also asked to what extent is their local involvement development-oriented. Almost everyone indicated that they would love to contribute more at some point. Few even indicated that they are ashamed of their privileged status and feel an obligation to contribute somehow. 5 out of 17 tried to

find more information online about the opportunities to do so, but everybody agreed that it is very challenging to find something. Nevertheless, 3 of them were teaching English as volunteers (either through CouchSurfing or a language school, as mentioned before).

There were also some DNs for whom the non-profit sector was the main activity in Medellin. With years of experience in the US non-profit sector, Angel had her own idea to do something related in Colombia. In October 2015, she co-founded “Assistive Labs”, a not-for-profit company focused on providing disability and assistive devices.

Angel (31yrs, American-Colombian): “I would like a second base in Colombia as a non-profit and take Ivy league interns for my projects. In Colombia, it’s very difficult to set up something like that. The government is trying to stimulate more work here, but there is very limited potential to grow here. I’m also getting together with other entrepreneurial women for a MasterMind to help each other (it’s a very San Francisco thing). Grateful for this opportunity to teach each other. Judy from AtomHouse is also part of it, there is something to being a women role model to young girls. Here is a macho society so women don’t have role models.”

Master Minds are regular events where a small group (up to about ten people) come together to help each other with their goals and aspirations. It is an activity to keep each other accountable and to share knowledge and network. Anyone can start a mastermind, and it is an effective way of accelerating the progress of individual projects and combining the participants’ social networks.

DN Perspective from Locals

Considering regional context (see “Regional Context” chapter), it is interesting to understand how locals perceive DNs in their environment. This section is based on interviews with 3 Colombians, which to a limited degree helps to understand (un)familiarity of what foreigners are doing in Medellin. Three observations can be made in this regard.

First of all, the locals are observing a recent phenomenon of an increasing number of foreigners coming to Medellin not only as tourist but also as settlers. Maria, who hosts DN retreats among many other “On-Board” events, shared her opinion.

Maria (26yrs. entrepreneur): “Nobody was coming to Medellin 3-5 years ago to work and do business. It’s great that people come not as tourists only and the government doesn’t understand that. Locals and the city don’t realize why there are so many foreigners, and it can become something big in the future. People chose Medellin as their home, buying properties and starting businesses. Foreigners are bringing innovation, such as coworking.”

Secondly, this phenomenon is happening ‘apart’ from other local communities, in an almost invisible way.

Christina (32 yrs. trade negotiator): “For locals, it’s difficult to notice the increase in foreigners, because I’m just in work and home with family so noticing foreigners only in El Poblado partying. But after attending the DN meetup, I realized how many foreigners are here doing their own thing! Now it’s also in Laureles, Floresta, Envigado. I was not aware of 20Mission and Colombia Immersion Spanish School in my own neighbourhood! Because of DN influence, I realized that Colombians are more than they think they are. For me knowing that they come to Medellin is very cool. For example, if a local wants to meet a foreigner, he or she needs to go to Poblado to party and dance salsa. Locals don’t know that foreigners

do volunteering in comunas or do all kinds of activities here outside the Poblado area. Nobody is talking about it locally, there is no way to know that.”

Christina, who lives with her parents in Envigado, attended her first DN meetup in Laureles by coincidence in January 2016. Her friend from the same dancing school started a relationship with Ben (a Canadian entrepreneur), who mentioned to Christina that it might be interesting to meet people who do e-commerce. Christina had international trade work experience but knew nothing about selling online. DN meetups opened new doors for her, and she is coming to every event since. She even started importing products from Egypt and Turkey. DNs showed Christina that there is another way of working. The work-life culture in Colombia has very traditional values focused on office and family. Travelling is only business-related or once a year vacation. Nobody in her circle was aware of the remote work concept.

Regarding e-commerce, Amazon.com is already available in Colombia, along with a local version, Mercado Libre, but there is no tradition to buy online. Christina said that Amazon has an association only with books and that there is also a need to hear a bit of advice from a sales assistant. Now that she was selling via Facebook and created a new e-shop, there is much communication, and relationships are more personal than transactional. It is very demanding 1-on-1.

Thirdly, taking all of this into account, the presence of DNs demonstrates the empowerment of locals by spreading tacit knowledge. DNs bring in technology and new knowledge, help locals learn English, and tap into global social networks. Henry saw DNs as an opportunity to learn, he is always present in all DN related events and makes an extra effort to come to them from his home on the city's outskirts.

Henry (34 yrs. social worker): *“Last six years I am connected with the foreigner community. In the beginning, I just wanted to improve my English and started going to intercambios. Medellin is becoming a touristic city, but not as much as Cartagena. This makes locals curious in foreigners, not to take advantage but genuine interest. This city had no tourists for decades. Also, these new technological solutions like meetups.com, couchsurfing.com and warmshower.org help to connect with foreigners on a different level. I keep learning so much from them.”*

Discussion & Conclusions

In this final chapter, we will discuss the findings by answering the research questions. This is done by comparing the findings with the existing literature on DNs. We will also mention the limitations of this research and will suggest topics for further research.

DN Characteristics & Mobility Trajectories

When looking into the sociodemographic characteristics of DNs in Medellin, we can summarize that they are most often male in their early thirties and highly educated. This is in accordance with most of the literature, and we did not observe anything new or different. Their disciplinary background is vast and not limited to computer-related fields of education. More commonly, it was a degree in finance, business, or marketing, which indicates an inclination towards understanding and navigating capitalism from a practical standpoint.

The work DN did was as diverse as their educational backgrounds, many had various income streams by pursuing multiple online business ideas. This insight aligns with Mancinelli (2020) findings of geoarbitrage and the tendency of DNs to undertake new business ideas due to the lower cost of living in the host country (usually, their home country would be more expensive to live at).

We see quite some similarities when comparing respondents' professional situations with Aroles et al. (2020) netnographic (DN online forums) research. The majority of Medellin DNs are either self-employed (freelancers) or entrepreneurs. Our DN sample had a 13% higher self-employed percentage (42% vs 29%), while the entrepreneur share was 3% higher (32% vs 29%). However, contrary to Aroles et al., we did not distinguish DNs with more than one professional activity as a separate group (Aroles et al. DN sample contained 9% of them). Thus, this is probably why the percentage of our self-employed and entrepreneur DNs was higher (some of them, indeed, had more than one professional situation). Apart from that, our remote worker (or employee) proportion of DNs was similar (16% vs 18%), as well as the ratio of unemployed DNs (10% vs 13%).

DNs in Medellin are mainly from Western, advanced capitalist countries with strong passports (mainly the US and Western Europe). They are multilingual (quite fluent in Spanish) since half of them come from multicultural or immigrant families, which leads to multiple citizenships and nationalities. On top of that, the greater part of DN had studied abroad, which might have contributed to widening their cultural backgrounds. In this regard, our DNs seem to be quite different from the lifestyle migrants retirees encountered in literature on gated communities and on second homeowners who rarely spoke the host country's language (MacRae, 2016). Ubud example was emphasizing the gap in culture, languages and wealth. We do see some of those gaps, but in the context of such a big city, Medellin, these gaps do not seem visible at this point in time.

Most DNs are single, half of them living alone, while 38% had Colombian housemates. This finding opposes Thompson's (2019a) statement that DNs interact with places by not engaging in local life or local culture. More than one-third of DNs had local housemates thus could not be completely unengaged in local life. On top of that, we discovered that DNs made a conscious effort to have locals in their social network and were engaged in various local activities. According to Thompson, the large majority of DNs prefer partners based on demographic similarity to theirs instead of merging with locals, but we have discovered that this was not the case in Medellin. Even though only 17% of our respondents had committed relationships, 100% were with Medellin locals (two were Colombians, while one was a Dominican residing in Medellin). It is an interesting finding and could have something to do with the regional context of the research.

Thompsons' respondents were encountered during three major paid DN events (two were aimed at aspiring DNs and one at 'experienced') in Europe (Portugal and Spain) and consisted of attendees and organizers. This sample is quite different from DNs in Medellin, who were mainly encountered in regular DN events and co-places on an average day in their lives (not on a special event).

However, there are similarities with Thompson findings – all her participants were from strong passport countries, which was also the case in Medellin. Even those DNs who had weaker passports often paired them with a stronger one because they had dual passports. Thus, owning and alternating passports while travelling is quite common among DNs. This, again, contributes to the geoarbitrage aspect and taking advantage of their 'privileged' mobility.

The majority of DNs earned much more than an average Colombian, thus contributing even further to their 'privileged' status. Even unemployed DNs usually had savings that served as a financial cushion to enable them to pursue new business ventures and travelling adventures. About half the DNs in Medellin lived in the high-class area (El Poblado), while others lived in the middle-class and more local neighbourhoods. However, DNs were generally quite frugal even in lower-cost environments compared to their home countries. Unlike tourists, DNs in Medellin did not live in hotels or all-inclusive resorts and often opted to share an apartment to reduce living expenses.

When it comes to working hours, DNs choose to work as much as they please. Controlling own schedule is often the case and seems to be an essential part of the DN lifestyle. This is in conjunction with common DN literature. The workplace is also chosen on one's own terms – either a public or private place (depending on personal preferences). Half of our interviewed DNs choose to be members of co-places, and this seems to be the core of their lifestyle for personal and professional interactions.

Leisure time would be often spent attending local events (both professional and social) and doing local activities, such as volunteering, teaching English, playing sports. Sutherland and Jarrahi (2017) talks about work practices, such as professional mentoring and knowledge sharing and others, but this is as close as we get to the activities that DNs are engaging in the literature. So far, we have not seen any research or insights into the 'extra curriculum' (outside of work-related) activities of DNs.

Our DNs were travelling and working simultaneously between 6 months to 3 years. There was no clear path to this lifestyle - some of them learned and applied new skills while travelling while others started from remote work and 'transitioned' into a DN lifestyle. When it comes to the purpose of stay in Medellin, there was a clear distinction between those who chose to come to Medellin to do something specific and those who were still "figuring things out" or "trying and testing". However, each time a DN would come back to Medellin, the ties with the place would get a bit stronger, increasing the likelihood of settling down for more extended periods by getting a permanent visa (i.e., domestic partnership or investor visa). Overall, the willingness to stay and return was high (more than half of the respondents). Thus Medellin seemed to be the perfect place to be based for many DN. The main arguments and criteria for that were: the climate, proximity to nature, cheap domestic flights, wide ranging international ones, the cost and quality of living, the local community, and availability of DN events/infrastructure in general. Nevertheless, mobility trajectories would often be affected by personal circumstances (i.e., health, romantic encounters and break-ups) and the need to maintain family ties (i.e., visiting home for Christmas). At the same time, we identified that getting a 2nd passport is often a priority, and it would always affect the mobility trajectory and choice where to be based.

DN Infrastructure & Connectedness

We have identified that Medellin has a booming coworking industry, but most of them are simple shared office spaces. This is where community-oriented spaces (co-spaces) are of major significance to DNs, whereas simple office spaces often fail to meet their needs. Co-spaces tend to attract DNs to Medellin to collaborate with other creative professionals (e.g., La Casa Redonda) and encourage them to create, fund, and grow their own startups (e.g., AtomHouse coworking and its Socialatom VC arm). These co-spaces made an extra effort to create bonding between its members by attracting the 'right kind' of members, organizing regular and themed events, helping to facilitate networking opportunities and so on.

Two-thirds of DNs in Medellin were occasional coworking users, and half of the interviewed DNs were members of co-spaces. These were mainly less experienced DNs, or those who needed to create clear boundaries between work and leisure through the structures that co-places offered (e.g. Ondas co-living). Many of them were starting new online businesses or growing their projects, thus learning from other community members was of high value. Another category of DNs, which were well established in their professional work, did not need co-spaces. Unlike the beginner DNs, they were financially more successful and driven to get work done from their own environment. Lee et al. (2019) found that places are perceived as either positive or negative by DNs based on one attribute: they either (1) clearly separate the social and professional aspects, or (2) they blend them together. This explains why in our research, we distinguished DNs who either focus on protecting their private space and work productivity or those who focus on balancing their social and work lives. The latter category was also more likely to work from public spaces such as coffee shops where they could mingle with similar DNs.

We have also distinguished that Medellin has plentiful of local DN related events and gatherings. Apart from already mentioned pro-active co-spaces, which act as hosts of events, various online communities facilitate physical meetups through online interactions between DNs. Wang et al. (2018) mentioned that DNs tend to assist one another via online platforms, where communication is often around co-creating a new digital realm. We can attribute the physical meetups and gatherings as an extension of this new digital reality "in real-world" because it is often about the same topics already discussed online. The discussion takes further shape in a face-to-face and informal setting, which can later be 'fed back' into the digital reality again.

When it comes to the expat events and communities, they were often overlapping with the DNs ones, but there did seem to be some segregation. Those identifying themselves as expats were not too keen to make friends with the 'passers-by.' Meanwhile, DNs were not too excited to spend time with expats who were not working online. These examples illustrate the creation of 'communities within communities' mentioned by Hannonen (2020, p. 11) when discussing lifestyle-bonding in DN destinations. Thompson (2018, 2019b) further emphasized the segregation between the local people and DN communities. However, we identified that DNs do, indeed, engage with local communities. Our researched nomads were more likely to speak Spanish. Whereas Thompson's DNs were overwhelmingly English speakers with fewer bilingual speakers than our sample. Our DNs were also highly likely to come back to Medellin. Half of the sample was in the city more than once, and a quarter of the sample already had resident status, while for another 17%, staying in Medellin was just the matter of getting a longer-term visa. Maybe interviewed DN were less 'nomadic' or were in later stages of their DN journey when they felt the need to settle.

To summarize, the way DNs in Medellin engage in local communities: through (1) online platforms, (2) co-spaces, and (3) by visiting events. Most popular online communities were public and free (thus easily accessible to DNs and the locals). However, we also identified an "exclusive" DN community – Dynamite

Circle, which is paid and have high criteria to join. This community is quite impactful because knowledge sharing happens between experienced and financially successful members who often hire local talent. Another specific form of an 'online community' was membership of dating apps and websites, with an overwhelming majority of DNs in Medellin. Thus the likelihood of DN ending up in a long term relationship with a local increased with the prevalence of dating platforms.

Apart from temporary living in Medellin and working online, interviewees were also active in other types of activities locally, such as teaching, volunteering, investing, and offering some products or services. Engaging in local communities were happening through various local activities. Three main groups of these were recognized: (1) spending free time with locals, (2) social activities linked to professional life, (3) 'Doing good' or 'Giving back' (volunteering and via establishing own initiatives).

DNs also had social network links with the locals, and some were very conscious of maintaining those links instead of limiting themselves to the foreigner 'bubble'. Even though, in general, DNs showed an inclination towards interacting and maintain social ties with foreigners of similar socio-demographic backgrounds (an average ratio of 30/70 locals to foreigners).

When it comes to DN perception by the locals, they are starting to become aware of a recent phenomenon of an increasing number of foreigners coming to Medellin as tourists and as settlers. The latter (foreigners as DNs and immigrants) is relatively hidden from other local communities, and very few notice the difference between a DN and a tourist. However, the presence of DNs demonstrates the empowerment of locals by assimilating tacit knowledge. DNs bring technology, new know-how to Medellin as well as help locals learn English and tap into global social networks.

Limitations

When it comes to the limitations of this research, there are a few concerns. The main limitation of this thesis is dated data (five years old). Furthermore, the selection of respondents was entirely subjective thus might not reflect an average sample of DNs in Medellin at the fieldwork time. Also, when it comes to the scope of the research, the initial plan was a bit too ambitious for a person without a hosting organization and with little academic research experience.

Recommendations for Further Research

Many DNs are in the grey area because working from a foreign country while on a tourist visa is technically illegal. At the same time, DNs may not have access to a work visa because it requires a contract or an invitation from a local entity. This is where countries with new visa policies are tapping into the DN workforce. For example, Georgia is inviting DNs by offering just 1% income tax, or Dubai allows remote workers to bring their family members and access services such as schooling without paying any income tax ("PEO Worldwide, " 2021). Meanwhile, Colombia did introduce a freelancer visa, but its name is misleading. Unfortunately, DNs do not qualify for this visa if they work remotely for foreign companies since it allows them to work as freelancers only for Colombian companies (ExpatGroup, 2020). Further research is suggested to look into the implications of 'nomad visas' on regional development and the well-being of DNs who would like to stay in Medellin as online workers.

Since the Covid-19 pandemic severely restricted the freedom of movement of DNs, it is interesting to understand how the respondents' lives were affected. Further research on online and offline community developments is suggested. How are DNs adapting to the conditions where the core of their lifestyle was stripped away?

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Appendices

Appendix 1 - 'Nomad' Interview Questions

General Characteristics

1. Name
2. Sex
3. Age:
4. Nationality(-ies)
5. Nationalities of parents
 - a. Father
 - b. Mother
6. Native language(s)
7. Other spoken languages and levels of fluency
8. Household
 - a. What is your current living place (e.g. hostel, room, studio, apartment)?
 - b. What is the composition of your household?
 - c. In which neighbourhood do you live?
 - d. What are your rental costs?
 - e. Do you have a housekeeper, a gardener or other personnel working in your household?
9. Education
 - a. What is the highest completed education?
 - b. Did you study abroad?
10. Employment
 - a. Could you give a short overview of your employment history?
 - b. What is your experience as an expat?
 - c. What is your current occupation and legal status (e.g. self-employed)?
 - d. How many hours a week do you work on average?
11. Income
 - a. Is your income stable or fluctuating, and how satisfied are you with it?
 - b. How much of your total income is made by working online/remotely?

- c. What is your average monthly/yearly income (in USD or EUR)?
- 12. What is your perception of a 'digital nomad' (e.g. any associations)?
- 13. How would you define a 'digital nomad', and what are other related terms/definitions?
- 14. Do you consider yourself to be a digital nomad, and why?
- 15. How long do you earn money online/remotely?
- 16. How long do you travel full time/live a nomadic life?
- 17. Why were you inspired you to choose this lifestyle?
- 18. What do you think are your core skills/competencies enabling you to earn money online?
- 19. Can you describe your lifestyle?
 - a. What are the main struggles and challenges?
 - b. What about the incentives and rewards?
- 20. Do you associate yourself with any international groups, communities or organizations (e.g. NGO's, non-profits, Facebook groups, online platforms and etc.)

Mobility Trajectories

- 1. How long are you in Medellin?
- 2. Why did you come to Medellin/Colombia?
- 3. Where did you come from, and how long did you stay there?
- 4. What is the purpose of your stay?
- 5. How long will you stay here?
- 6. Where and when are you planning to go afterwards?
- 7. Are you planning to come back to Medellin? When?
- 8. What are the downsides of Medellin?
- 9. What is attractive here?
- 10. What are the main criteria when choosing your next destination?
- 11. What affects your choice? How influential are the following:
 - a. Word of mouth
 - b. Specific online resource(s) (e.g. blog, magazine and etc.)
 - c. Personal invitation

- d. Work-related
- e. Other

Opinion about coworking place

1. Where do you work? Why there?
2. When and where did you hear about the concept of a coworking space?
3. How often do you work in a coworking place? What about other "informal" places?
4. What are the most important factors when choosing a coworking place?
5. What role does it play in your work/life?
6. Which coworking spaces have you used in Medellin? Other countries?

Local connectedness

1. Did you know anyone before coming to Medellin? Colombia?
2. Do you have any relatives/family members in Colombia?
3. With whom do you meet in Medellin? Where? What percentage are foreigners and locals?
4. How satisfied are you with your network / social ties in Medellin?
5. How do you get along with the locals?
6. Who are your closest friends in Medellin (e.g. nationalities, social status and etc.)?
7. How deeply embedded do you consider yourself in the local society?
8. How do you spend your free time? Do you have any hobbies?
9. Do you like going out in Medellin? How often?
10. Are you involved in any local activities (e.g. volunteering, teaching or provide any other product or service)?
11. Would you be willing to contribute to the local development somehow?
12. Do you know whom to approach in order to do that?
13. Do you have any business-related relationships with Colombians? Foreigners? (e.g. customers, partners, investments, etc.)?
14. Would you be willing to invest here, establish a business or be involved in other long-term commitments?

Future aspirations

1. What are you striving to achieve in your personal life?
2. What about your professional career?
3. Are you currently learning a specific skill? In which areas do you want to grow?
4. What motivates you in your everyday life?
5. Do you have a 'bucketlist' (a list of things to do before you die)?
6. Do you feel a need to help people in developing countries?
7. How would you like to contribute /what changes do you want to see in the World?

Appendix 2 – List of the DNs with whom rapport was established

*Respondents highlighted in **bold**.

#	Name	Nationality	Category	Living in	Notes
1	Lenard	Belgian	Entrepreneur	Envigado	Did the 1st nomad cruise last year and will join the 2nd one
2	Craig	USA	Self-employed	Envigado	Website developer willing to get a permanent visa in Colombia
3	Linda	USA	Self-employed	Estadio	Temporary works in Ondas Cafe
4	Antony	USA	Entrepreneur	Laureles	Dynamite Circle member
5	Alonzo	Italian	Self-employed	Laureles	Nomad Cruise Team member
6	Ed & Ronnie	Dutch	Self-employed	Laureles	A couple working in Café Ondas
7	Pamela	Finish	Employed / Remote worker	Laureles	Came for a yoga internship while working remotely fulltime
8	John	USA	Self-employed	Laureles	Working at Café Ondas
9	Nick	German	Self-employed	Laureles	Nomad Cruise Team member
10	Hank	Dutch	Self-employed	Laureles	Married Colombian and has a child. Will take a cruise too
11	Oder	Norwegian	Self-employed	Laureles	Electrical engineer teaching online how to build robots
12	Arnold & Barbara	Canadian	Self-employed	Laureles	Online branding company owners
13	Shane	UK	Self-employed	Laureles	Digital Nomad Medellin Facebook group administrator
14	Mantas	USA/Lithuanian	unemployed	Laureles	Working at Café Ondas
15	Eduardas	Lithuanian	Entrepreneur	Laureles	Owner of digital services company
16	Linas & Rasa	Lithuanian	Self-employed	Laureles	a couple working from home have a 5-month-old baby

1 7	Albert	USA	Self-employed	Laureles	Working at Café Ondas
1 8	Maria	Colombian	Self-employed	Laureles	Co-founder of ON-BOARD, an organization that offers immersion into local culture and learning while travelling
1 9	Ben	Canadian	Entrepreneur	Laureles	Owner of the e-commerce business
2 0	Cindy	French	Self-employed	Laureles	Working in Café Ondas
2 1	Tim	Dutch	Self-employed	Laureles	engineer
2 2	Sandra & Case	USA & Sweden	Self-employed	Poblado	A couple. Sandra will take the nomad cruise
2 3	July & Clark	German & USA	Self-employed	Poblado	Travelling South America and will arrive for the cruise
2 4	Agata	Bulgarian	Self-employed	Poblado	online content creator and podcast owner
2 5	Dona	Swedish	Self-employed	Poblado	Takes nomad cruise
2 6	Laura & Dick	USA	Self-employed	Poblado	A senior nomad couple takes Nomad Cruise
2 7	Sam	German	Self-employed	Poblado	Nomad Cruise Team member
2 8	Ed	Bulgarian	Entrepreneur	Poblado	Takes nomad cruise
2 9	Jonas	German	Entrepreneur	Poblado	Nomad Cruise Team Leader
3 0	Peter	French	Entrepreneur	Poblado	Working at AtomHouse
3 1	Ronda	German	Self-employed	Poblado	Working from home
3 2	Christina	Colombian	Self-employed	Poblado	Colombian very active in the nomad community
3 3	Dovile	USA/Lithuanian	Self-employed	Poblado	Harvard Business School Graduate
3 4	Alena	USA/Russian	Employed	Poblado	Language teacher
3 5	Christopher	USA	Employed	Poblado	Accountant, ex-military

3 6	Laura	Romania	Self-employed	Poblado	marketing specialist
3 7	Ilona	Romania	Self-employed	Poblado	graphic designer
3 8	Ike	UK	Self-employed	Poblado	software developer
3 9	Emanuel	Brazilian	Entrepreneur	Poblado	owns many online businesses
4 0	Bill	USA	Entrepreneur	Poblado	Dynamite Circle member
4 1	Hary	Colombian	Self-employed	Poblado	very present in all the community events
4 2	Tim & Clara	Swiss/USA	Self-employed	Poblado	A family with 3 girls (5, 7 & 9 years old) who have visited 80 countries already
4 3	Kim	USA	unemployed	Poblado	an older expat who is looking for new opportunities, he had a restaurant but sold it
4 4	Paul	USA	Entrepreneur	Poblado	Dynamite Circle member
4 5	Andy	German	Self-employed	Poblado	Co-founder of ON-BOARD, an organization that offers immersion into local culture and learning while travelling
4 6	Kelly	USA	Entrepreneur	Poblado	Healthcare online store owner
4 7	Tristan	USA	Entrepreneur	Poblado	online e-commerce
4 8	Tim	German/UK	Entrepreneur	Poblado	Online marketing
4 9	Kone	US	Entrepreneur	Poblado	online consulting
5 0	William	Dutch	unemployed	Poblado	professional sports betting
5 1	Angel	Colombian/USA	Entrepreneur	Envigado	Social Entrepreneur
5 2	Marco	USA/ITA/Unknown	Entrepreneur	Laureles	High Net-worth Individual

5 3	Cohen	USA	Self-employed	Poblado	Website developer
5 4	Ada	Slovakia	Employed	Laureles	HR Manager
5 5	Natron	German	Self-employed	Floresta	Software Developer
5 6	Tina	USA	Entrepreneur	Poblado	Sustainability Consulting Company

Rapport Built with members of Related Organizations

#	Name	Organization	Details
1	Judy	Atomhouse & Coderise	Works for Atomhouse, but is also a head of the Coderise - a non-profit teaching kids from poor families to program
2	Ken	Café Ondas	Owner of the coworking/coliving/coffeeshop place
3	Ted	20Mission	Head manager of the brewery/coliving place in Envigado
4	Cody	Tripstigator	Founder of online platform which connects digital nomads with locals to empower them to sell good & services online
5	Larry	Colombia Immersion	Founder of Spanish school and facilitator of volunteering for local non-profits
6	Deby	Ruta N	manager at the RutaN - the biggest government owned 'landing place' for foreign businesses
7	Eduard	Socialatomgroup	Venture capital manager, which is part of the Atomhouse and which invests in digital nomad businesses
8	Julia	La Casa Redonda	A manager and one of the founding members of the CW.

Appendix 3 - Online Communities

1. **Facebook Groups** - all the following groups are managed by different administrators but have overlapping members:
 - **"Digital Nomads Medellin"** – the youngest (9 months old) group, but growing rapidly. 381 members (May 2016). The admins were very active and organized gatherings bi-weekly. Usually, about 30-50 people came to them.
 - **"Medellin Entrepreneurs Society"** is the biggest group of foreigners in Medellin with 4,420 members (May 2016), many of whom are supposedly online entrepreneurs.
 - **"Doing Business and Living in Medellin"** - community uniting 2,799 members (May 2016).
 - **"Hustlin' in Medellin"** - 461 members (May 2016), the group administrator is also the owner of the online platform digitalnomadacademy.com, providing business training for aspiring and existing online business owners. He is also managing a few other groups for DNs in Thailand.
 - **"Nomad Cruise - Colombia to Portugal"** – a private group for 171 members who took a 13-day cruise from Cartagena to Lisbon on 28 May 2016. This unique cruise had workshops and other events (Nomad Cruise, 2016). The administrator of this group is also the administrator of one of the biggest and fastest-growing digital nomad Facebook groups - "WebWorkTravel - Digital Nomad Network" with 13,226 members (May 2016).
2. **Meetup.com** – a platform for meeting people based on interest & hobbies (e.g. hiking, writing, poetry, etc.). Includes the biggest JavaScript programmer communities globally, which unite 2,189 programmers in Medellin (May 2016).
3. **WhatsApp groups** - since joining is only possible by invitation, these groups are only growing through word of mouth. Community members use this mobile app for prompt communication. For example, "Medellinsanity" - 256 members (May 2016), a group started by Emanuel, a Brazilian online entrepreneur (one of the respondents). This group mainly unites men, online entrepreneurs who are vouched for by already existing members worldwide. Apart from daily practicalities, they are most inclined to share their dating experiences. Connects people 'on the go': to share a lunch, dinner or go out to a party together.
4. **Hashtagnomads.com** (by nomadlist.com) - Global community of remote working travellers (mainly software developers, but not limited to), uniting 11,772 members - 179 of them in the local channel #Medellin (May 2016). This platform is also part of nomadlist.com, which shares living costs in all cities popular with DNs and helps to keep track of where other nomads are located and where they are planning to go next. At a given time, there were about 8-12 members in Medellin.
5. **Dynamite Circle** - Probably the first global community uniting serious online entrepreneurs since 2007, there are strict requirements to join the community (e.g. minimum revenue of \$5,000/month for the last 2 years). About 20 Dynamite Circle Members are based in Medellin (May 2016) - 16 more or less permanently and 4 who travel frequently.

Apart from these, during the interactions with the DNs, more related communities emerged, such as:

- **Internations.com** is a global expat-focused community with local chapters in most major cities (Medellin, including) organizing meetups. Hosting monthly gatherings and DNs would occasionally attend to make new connections even if they did not consider themselves expats.
- **CouchSurfing.com (CS)** - free accommodation sharing site connecting local hosts with travellers and backpackers. It came to the surface that many DNs were using this platform to get to know people via various local community discussions and initiatives. Among them were initiatives to teach kids from low-income families English, and it was a straightforward process for CS members to commit to as little as once by pre-arranging and coming to teach in poor neighbourhoods.
- **Warmshowers.org** – a global community for cycling tourists and those who support them. For example, one of the co-living mates at 20Mission even brought his bike from the UK to cycle around Colombia.