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The new global nomads: Youth travel in a globalizing world

Greg Richards*

Academy for Leisure, NHTV Breda, Archimedesstraat 17, Breda, BA, 4816 The Netherlands

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Increasing youth travel has led to young people being labelled as ‘nomads’. This paper examines the phenomenon of youth nomadism in the tourism literature as well as examining recent empirical evidence. A review of the literature around youth nomadism identifies two major themes: analyses of the growth and development of youth travel niches, such as backpacking, volunteer tourism and educational exchange, and broader approaches linked to the rise of the mobilities paradigm. A major global survey of youth travel (34,000 respondents) indicates three major travel styles related to different forms of ‘nomadism’: the backpacker, the flashpacker and the global nomad. The traditional backpacker can be seen as a form of ‘neo-tribe’, gathering in self-sufficient enclaves. In contrast, the flashpacker, or ‘digital nomad’, utilizes existing digital and logistic infrastructure to maintain a fluid, individualized lifestyle. The global nomad, or ‘location independent traveller’, tries to integrate with the local community, while trying to avoid the strictures of ‘system’.

Keywords: youth travel; nomadism; backpacking; digital nomads; global nomads; flashpackers; mobilities

Introduction

In recent years, research on youth travel has revealed a growing amount of mobility among young people worldwide (Hannam & Ateljevic, 2008; Richards & Wilson, 2004a). The number of youth travellers has grown steadily as the volume of tourism in general has expanded, and young people in many regions of the world have attained more purchasing power.

However, the growth of youth travel, as in the case of other tourism markets, has also led to increasing diversification and fragmentation. The classic figure of the backpacker has been joined by a host of other young traveller types: the traveller, the tourist, the volunteer, the language student, the exchange student and the intern. This growth and fragmentation of youth travel has produced a divergence between two levels of analysis – the more specific consideration of emerging youth travel niches and the more general analysis of mobility. At the more specific level, there has been a rapid increase in attention for different youth travel niches, including studies of backpacking (Richards & Wilson, 2004a), volunteer tourism (TRAM, 2008;

Wearing, 2001), student travel (Morgan & Xua, 2009), student exchange (Brown & Holloway, 2008), students as pioneers of inner-city accommodation (Russo & Arias Sans, 2009), internships (Van’t Klooster, Van Wijk, Go, & Van Rekom, 2008) and language travel (Laborda, 2007).

In recent years, youth travel has also started to be considered in a wider mobilities context. In heralding the ‘mobilities turn’, Cresswell (1997) argued that mobility is the ‘order of the day’, in a world where nomads, migrants, travellers and explorers exemplified the new fluidity. Urry (2000) then argued that growing global movement was leading to a view of the ‘social as mobility’ (2000, p. 2). Not surprisingly, this new paradigm was rapidly picked up by tourism researchers, and in particular by youth travel researchers, who have long been familiar with the ‘nomad’ metaphor. A call by Hannam and Ateljevic (2008) for a mobilities perspective on backpacker travel was rapidly followed by others, including studies of backpackers in Sydney (Allon, Anderson, & Bushell, 2008), educational exchange (Frändberg,

*Email: richards.g@nhtv.nl

2009) and mass youth tourism (Knox, 2009). Hannam (2009) heralded the 'end of tourism' with a shift to 'nomadology' and the mobilities paradigm. The volume entitled *Beyond Backpacker Tourism* (Hannam & Diekmann, 2010) began to underpin this shift with empirical evidence, through considerations of how backpacking was being transformed into virtual mobility (Paris, 2010) as well as the emergence of 'flashpackers' (which Hannam & Diekmann, 2010 defined as older backpackers with larger budgets and a predilection for expensive electronic equipment).

In this proliferation of research on youth travel niches and mobilities (Hannam, 2009), the nomad has served as a regular metaphor for movement and fluidity, but also of change, as the 'nomad' became a postmodern hyphenated category, encompassing many different travel styles related to the diversity of mobility in a globalizing world. This review looks at some of the main strands of youth travel research over the past 40 years, in order to trace the roots/routes of nomadic ideas of youth mobility and nomadic styles of youth travel. These ideas are then matched empirically against a recent major study of global youth travel.

Changing views of mobility

The rise of youth travel is one marker of the general increase in mobility that has accompanied globalization. The growth of youth travel has been particularly evident in recent decades as advances in technology have facilitated physical mobility, and more recently the growth of information and communication technology has created more widespread social relations, which has strengthened the tendency towards mobility still further.

Forty years ago, youth mobility began to take off as a result of rising living standards, the loosening of social structures such as the family and the rise of air travel. From the late 1960s through the 1970s there was an 'explosion' in youth travel and hostelling (HiHostels, 2014). Young people began to 'look for themselves' and seek meaning in the cultures of others through extensive travelling and backpacking (Cohen, 1979). The image of the drifter as a lone individual at the fringes of sedentary society was one of the early representations of modern nomadism. The nomad was invoked by writers such as Bruce Chatwin, who saw them as leading an ideal existence, arguing that they are 'closer to being good than settled

peoples' (quoted in Chatwin, 2008, p. 12). Chatwin's work posed the question, 'why do men wander rather than sit still?' (Edwards, 2013), seeing nomadism as a type of primal state to which people want to return. The romanticism espoused by Chatwin reflected earlier nomad anthropologies such as Thesiger's (1964) study of the Marsh Arabs of Iraq.

More recently, 'nomadic thinking' has been espoused by a growing number of postmodern thinkers, such as Grisoni (1976), Deleuze and Guattari (1980), Baudrillard (1988) and Braidotti (1994). For them, the nomad became a symbol of flux, hybridity and mobility in a globalizing world. Kaplan's (1996) analysis of postmodern nomadic philosophy argued that the nomadic deterritorialization is used by academics to challenge disciplinary limits and academic hegemony:

Deterritorialization and nomadic subjects appeared to open up the discourse of textual production and reception in ways that signalled postmodern critical practices, meeting the emergent multicultural and feminist interest in hybrid identities and cosmopolitan, diasporic communities. (Kaplan, 1996, p. 93)

In Kaplan's view, the nomad is resistant to the strictures of the nation-state and bourgeois society. Therefore, it is not surprising that nomad philosophy and literature, and particularly the early nomadic travel writers, such as Bruce Chatwin and Jack Kerouac, provided the model for many later youth travellers, projecting an image of freedom that became an aspiration for many (Richards & Wilson, 2004b). For example, Tony Wheeler based his *Lonely Planet* guidebooks on his own nomadic wanderings in Asia, and these later became the 'bible' for backpackers across the globe (Welk, 2004). Of course, the irony was that *Lonely Planet* and similar guides were designed to take backpackers 'off the beaten track', but in fact they ended up creating new beaten tracks for the travellers and tourists who followed in the wake of the backpackers. The enclaves created by backpackers evolved into major tourist centres, where other tourists and also locals came to gaze upon the backpackers as a leisure attraction (Richards & Wilson, 2004a). Arguably, backpackers acted as pioneers of tourism, bringing development and mass tourism in their wake. This process spread around the globe as the backpackers attempted to escape from the very developments that they themselves had a role in creating.

The rise in youth travel helped backpacking itself to also become part of mainstream tourism. As travel became more accessible through the 1980s and 1990s, growing numbers of young travellers began to support a ‘backpacker industry’ of hostels, guest houses, transport companies, Internet cafes, bars and restaurants. Nomadism was now an industry, no longer an alternative to the tourism industry. However, like many academic concepts, the backpacking phenomenon began to disappear almost at the same moment it was identified. As soon as the backpacking industry was big enough to be visible and backpacker research became an academic industry itself, it was clear that the ‘real backpackers’ of old were fast disappearing from the scene. Instead, there was the rise of the ‘Flashpacker’ (Jarvis & Peel, 2010), budget hotels moving into the hostel market (STAY WYSE, 2012) and travel companies packaging adventure holidays and volunteer experiences for young people (TRAM, 2008).

The metaphorical nomad

In a similar way to the backpacker’s conscription into first mass tourism and then general mobility, the nomad has also been hauled from the margins of sedentary society to become a metaphorical marker of fluidity and mobility.

The original idea of nomads as a spatially peripheral and threatened group began to be changed by the attachment of the ‘nomad’ label to emerging lifestyles from the late 1960s onwards. In particular, there was a spatial inversion of nomadism, with new groups of nomads being studied in the centres of modern cities. For example, Gropper (1967) analyzed the ‘gypsies of New York City’, who she referred to as ‘urban nomads’. Spradley (1970) used the same term to refer to groups of itinerant drunks in North American cities. These studies of urban nomadism reflect the consolidation of urban anthropology as a field of study during the 1960s and 1970s.

The nomad metaphor was further updated by Makimoto and Manners (1997) in their study *Digital Nomad*, which predicted that the rise of digital technology would herald a new ‘nomadic age’ in which people would be free to roam the globe virtually. Meyrowitz (2003) also argued that society was witnessing a return to early nomadism:

as we are moving swiftly into a new era of globalization and wireless communication, we are also

spiralling backward, in some key ways, to the earliest form of human association: nomadic hunting and gathering. We are, in short becoming, ‘global nomads’. (p. 91)

Since then, the rise of urban nomadism has been supplemented by new forms of nomadism, particularly those related to tourism. D’Andrea (2007) brought the new age and tourism streams of nomadism together in his analysis of ‘global nomads’ in Ibiza and Goa. He identified the features of the nomads in these new age enclaves as including:

- (1) Rejection of original homelands and evasion of state-market-morality regimes.
- (2) Partaking in a cosmopolitan culture of expressive individualism linked to new age culture and techno music.
- (3) Integrating leisure, labour and spirituality into a holistic lifestyle that romanticizes non-Western culture.
- (4) Overlapping with a cultural-artistic elite that relates to tourism, entertainment, wellness and media.
- (5) Engagement with practices of mobility that are pivotal in reproducing the other features (those listed above).

For D’Andrea (2007, p. 14), the global nomad represents a ‘negative diaspora’ – a ‘trans-ethnic dispersion of people who despise home-centred identities’. This group seems to link closely to the ‘existential tourist’ type identified by Cohen (1979), who also exhibit alienation from their own culture and seek immersion in other cultures. However, the existential tourist of Cohen is mixed here with the ‘neo-tribe’ ideal of Maffesoli (1996), as these groups share a fellowship of lifestyle that goes far beyond carrying a backpack. This type of ‘Global Nomad’ represents a reconfiguring of identities under the deterritorialization of globalization, reflected in the rise of many ‘nomadic’ groups, such as the ‘grey nomads’ (Onyx & Leonard, 2005), RV tribes (Simpson, 2008) and the urban nomad (Hannam, 2009).

The term ‘global nomads’ was also applied more specifically to youth tourists in the development of the Backpacker Research Group of the Association for Tourism and Leisure Education and Research (ATLAS) in 2000. This group was established in order to analyze the growing popularity of youth

travel, particularly the phenomenon of backpackers and other long-term travellers. In early work by the group, Richards and Wilson (2003) referred to contemporary youth travellers as ‘tomorrow’s global nomads’, suggesting a trajectory towards increased youth mobility, and the diversification of youth travel into more long-term forms of dwelling in different countries (educational travel, long-term backpacking, etc.). Richards and Wilson (2004a) later applied the same term more specifically to the emerging backpacker research field, again reflecting an emerging diversity of youth mobility around the globe. The name of the ATLAS research group was later changed to the ‘Independent Travel Research Group’, to match the increasing diversity of travel styles among young people, and the broadening academic concern with the study of mobility in general (Hannam & Diekmann, 2010).

A more specific use of the term ‘global nomad’ emerged recently in the work of Kannisto and Kannisto (2012) and Kannisto (2014). In these studies, global nomads are individuals who engage in long-term mobility, travelling for three years or more between different countries. Kannisto sees the ideology of these contemporary nomads as diametrically opposed to that of sedentary society, which tries to impose limitations on the movement of these long-term travellers, for example, through visa regulations. This echoes Creswell’s (1997) dichotomy between nomads and settlers, a division also later applied to backpackers in Maoz’s (2004) analysis of Israeli ‘settlers’ and ‘conquerors’.

However, recent work on the ‘digital nomad’ outlines a group that is neither driven by opposition to settled communities or by the need to form tribes. The increased blurring of the boundaries of work and leisure allied to the growth of digital technology has given this group the freedom to work anywhere they can connect to the Internet. These individualistic nomads take their work with them, often settling temporarily in places with attractive leisure lifestyles. As Sørensen (2002) noted:

The issue of a mobile society, mobile computing, or other aspects prefixed with the terms mobile, ubiquitous or pervasive, is not only linked to human movement, it is intrinsically associated with the recent years’ explosive mobilisation and fluidisation of interaction. (p. 1)

He went on to add that, ‘The years to come will undoubtedly reveal interesting patterns of digital

nomads employing a range of mobile information services supporting them in order to maintain fluid mobile work practices’ (p. 5). In travel terms, one interesting effect of this phenomenon is that the hierarchy of place attractiveness has shifted:

One of the most important factors for any digital nomad in choosing destinations is access to the internet. I know some digital nomads who lived in Bangalore for a few months. Why Bangalore, I asked? Because it has the fastest internet in India, they replied. (Nomadic Samuel, 2014)

These ‘location independent travellers’, as they often call themselves, find inventive ways to support themselves, including selling the secrets of maintaining their lifestyles to other aspiring digital nomads. For example, Slade and Dix (2013) have produced a guide called *Be a Digital Nomad*, and the Digital Nomad Academy offers courses and support for digital nomads wanting to start up their own business (<http://digitalnomadacademy.com/>).

At first glance it may seem that these new applications of the ‘nomad’ label simply relate to different aspects of mobility. However, a closer look reveals that it is not just the mobility itself, but the reflexive response to mobility and the development of mobile practices that are important. The original nomad was nomadic in response to the external environment (often a harsh one, as in the case of the Bedouin or the Marsh Arabs) – an adaptation to cyclical scarcity and abundance. Meyrowitz (2003) argued that in the contemporary ‘digital veldt’ (or flat virtual landscape of digital communications) people tend to gather information and then leave it where they find it (by bookmarking, for example), and that this somehow mirrors the hunter gather practice of leaving herds of game and clusters of berry bushes in their natural habitat to be harvested when needed. Reflections of such practices can also be seen in the way that new nomadic travel styles produce resource clusters of their own – the backpacker enclave, the New Age settlement, the Full Moon Party (Cohen, 2004) or people travelling for long periods in mobile homes in forms of ‘RV urbanism’ (Simpson, 2008). What is important is the lifestyle and the practices that underpin it, as the website ‘Become Nomad’ (2014) outlines:

The nomadic lifestyle is more important than anything else, including career, relationship, or assets.

Once this is not the case, it is not a sustainable life-style since it is quite hard to maintain.

This review suggests that the nomad label therefore seems to have been attached to many different forms of youth mobility, among the most prevalent of which are:

Backpackers

Backpackers can be seen as ‘Tribal nomads’, congregating in specific enclaves to share the stories that form the shared culture of the tribe (Noy, 2004).

Flashpackers

Flashpackers, with their love of communication devices (Jarvis & Peel, 2010) can be related to the Digital nomads described by Sørensen (2002).

Global nomads

The ‘global nomads’ described by Kannisto (2014) are location independent travellers who stay away from ‘home’ for long periods of time, and who generally reject the ideology of settled society.

These different nomadic types emerge from the academic and literary discourse on nomadism in recent decades. The following section presents an empirical analysis to examine the extent to which these nomadic forms of mobility can be recognized among contemporary youth.

In search of the contemporary nomad

The New Horizons Research Programme was initially developed by the ATLAS Backpacker Research Group (ATLAS BRG, 2014) and the World Youth Student Educational Travel Confederation (WYSE – <http://wysetc.org>), following the establishment of the BRG in 2000. The first wave of survey research for the New Horizons Research Programme was undertaken in 2002 and repeated in 2007 and 2012 (Richards & Wilson, 2003, 2004a; WYSE Travel Confederation, 2013). These surveys followed a consistent methodology, so that comparisons of youth travel behaviour can also be made over time. The survey questions were developed initially through expert consultations with academics and practitioners within the ATLAS BRG, and subsequently refined through different editions of the survey (Richards & Wilson, 2003). The survey instrument covers a number of key areas of youth travel behaviour, including previous travel experience, travel style, details of the last main trip undertaken in the previous 12 months (destinations, travel modes, accommodation,

information gathering), travel purpose and motivations, attitudinal data and perceived benefits of travel. Surveys were distributed to young travellers via email with a link to a web survey programme (in the most recent edition, SurveyMonkey). The email addresses were collected from major youth travel companies in different countries. In the 2012 survey, approximately 34,000 responses were collected, a significant increase on previous surveys. These responses covered all major world regions, and included young people from 140 countries. One of the major limitations of this strategy of data collection is that it tends to target young people who have travelled and who have purchased travel products via commercial travel providers (Figure 1).

More information on the survey programme and methodology is available from the different reports produced by the programme (Richards & Wilson, 2003; WYSE Travel Confederation, 2013). For the purposes of the current review, a few key aspects relating to identity and travel style, travel motivations and travel activities have been extracted from the data in order to illustrate different aspects of ‘nomadic’ behaviour, particularly those related to the three styles of nomadism outlined above. The travel style of young people was elicited via a self-classification question, which was designed to reveal how young people characterize themselves. In turn, this can be related to their actual travel behaviour, such as the countries and places visited, length of travel and type of accommodation used, in order to examine how far their travel patterns exhibit ‘nomadic’ characteristics. Their activities in the destination are also analyzed to explore the gap between nomadic ideology and practice. The New Horizons research provides a picture of what the contemporary young ‘nomads’ are doing: where they are travelling, where they are staying and why they chose particular places to dwell.

Of course, this quantitative approach has a number of limitations. First, unlike qualitative research, it cannot examine the motivations and behaviour of young travellers in as much depth. The data have also been purposively collected in order to maximize the number of young travellers surveyed, but this does not necessarily give a representative picture of all young travellers worldwide. The survey was also not specifically designed to analyze ‘nomadic’ behaviour, and the data presented here must therefore be seen as indicative of travel behaviours and mobilities that might be generally related to contemporary youth nomadism.

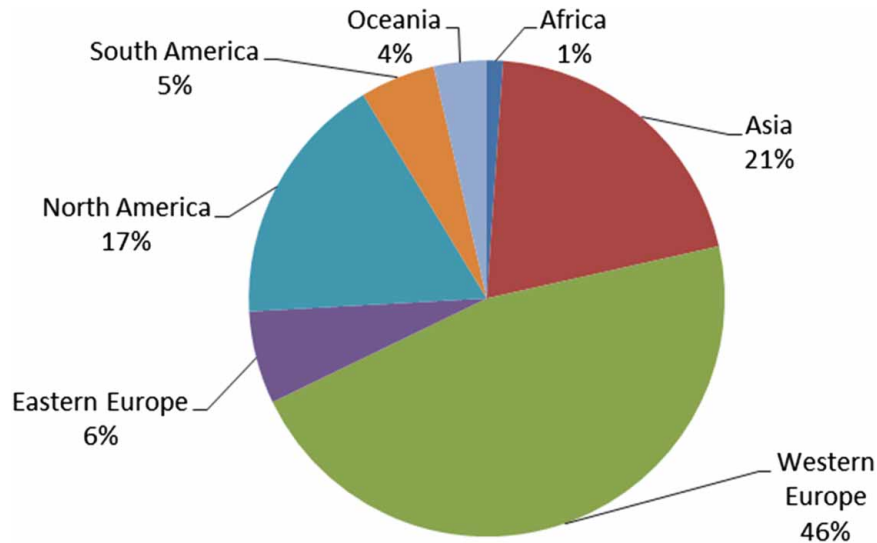


Figure 1. Respondents to the 2012 New Horizons survey by world region.

Destinations and travel intensity

The New Horizons research has consistently shown an expansion of the number, variety and geographical extent of the destinations visited by young people over time. The number of international trips taken by young travellers shows a steady increase over the three survey waves, indicating a growing frequency of travel. In 2002, the average number of lifetime international trips was six, rising to eight in 2007 and 10 in 2012. Not only are young people travelling more, but they are also venturing further afield as they grow older.

For example, the 2012 data show a considerable expansion in long-haul travel compared with previous years. The proportion of young travellers to North America (15%) more than doubled compared with 2007, and backpackers in particular seemed to be striking out more for relatively exotic destinations, such as Brazil, Japan, Chile and South Korea. These data also seem to support the general idea that young people will travel to more long-haul destinations as they grow older and as they gain more travel experience (see also Akatay, Çakici, & Harman, 2013).

Travel style

Arguably, the travel style adopted by young people reflects their lifestyle and identity (Wearing, Stevenson, & Young, 2010). In recent years, the identification with the 'backpacker' travel style seems to have declined worldwide. In 2002, just under one-

third of New Horizons respondents self-identified themselves as backpackers, but this proportion had halved by 2012. Although this fall is undoubtedly related to the expansion of youth travel in areas such as Asia (where familiarity with the backpacking culture is lower because backpacking is a relatively new travel style there), this fall is also evident within long-established backpacker source markets as well.

In the 2007 survey, there was a noticeable growth in the number of people selecting the 'other' category in the travel style question. The subsequent open question on travel style revealed a wide variety of travel styles, including many volunteers and hybrid forms of travel style, such as traveller/tourist or tourist/backpacker. Additional response categories were therefore added to the main question in 2012, including the categories 'flashpacker' and 'global nomad', which were used by some respondents in the 2007 survey. The 2012 survey indicated that 3% of respondents saw themselves as flashpackers and 2% preferred to characterize themselves as 'global nomads'. Although these nascent categories of youth traveller are not as important in numerical terms, one might argue (as does Kannisto, 2014) that these groups often function as aspirational role models and opinion leaders for other travellers who seek to emulate their travel style or behaviour (Wolfram & Burnill-Maier, 2012).

Clear differences are observable between those who characterize themselves as 'backpackers', 'flashpackers' and 'global nomads' in terms of their profile

Table 1. Profile of young travellers by travel style.

Variable		Backpackers	Flashpackers	Global nomads	Statistics
Age	% over 25	38.2	44.3	37.1	X^2 200.6**
Student	% full-time students	54.7	42.8	53.5	X^2 9.9**
Trip length	days	76.7	61.6	69.7	f 3.48**
Expenditure	euros	3236	3866	2562	f 7.58**
Accommodation	% using hotels	23.2	47.2	18.5	X^2 121.9**

**Significant at 0.05 level.

Source: WYSE Travel Confederation Survey (2013).

and travel behaviour (Table 1). On average, backpacker respondents were aged 25, flashpackers 26 and global nomads were notably older at an average of 28 years. Flashpackers had the highest incomes on average, and were least likely to be unemployed. In contrast, global nomads had the highest level of unemployment (15%).

Backpackers tended to be travelling longer, with their last main trip covering an average of 77 days, while global nomads spent 70 days travelling and flashpackers 62 days. All groups had a relatively high travel intensity, with global nomads having taken an average of seven long (more than seven days) international trips in the past five years, compared with five for backpackers and four for those who saw themselves as flashpackers. Global nomads were also more likely to use peer-to-peer hospitality websites such as Couchsurfing (www.couchsurfing.com) than other travellers and less likely to use hotels than either backpackers or flashpackers.

In terms of travel motivation, global nomads were most likely to be travelling to experience other cultures, to increase their knowledge, interact with local people and experience everyday life. In general, they seem to be far more interested in 'relational' forms of tourism (such as hospitality exchange or staying in locally-owned apartments – see Richards, 2014) than other young travellers, but also more concerned to develop themselves through travel, for example, by learning a new language or acquiring new skills. In contrast, flashpackers were much less concerned with engaging with local culture or people, and more orientated towards relaxation (Figure 2).

Behaviour

There was also a marked increase in the proportion of people taking longer trips of 60 days or more in 2012. This may be related to rising youth

unemployment in the global economic crisis, which often stimulates young people to delay entering the job market and seeking to increase their skills through travel. Therefore, this may not be so much a case of 'leisure nomadism' (Simpson, 2008) but rather of work-related nomadism. Perhaps not surprisingly, the unemployed young travellers spent longer on the road during their last main trip (99 days on average, compared with 67 days for other travellers).

The growing tendency to stay in touch with those back home as well as fellow travellers is observable across the three survey waves. In the 2012 survey, one-third of flashpackers indicated that they accessed social media websites every day while travelling, compared with 26% of global nomads and 21% of backpackers. This seems to confirm the link between flashpackers and the 'digital nomad' concept. However, global nomads spent more of their travel budget on communication. This was related to a higher incidence of email communication, more mobile phone use and more texts. This may be because global nomads are more integrated into destination communities, and therefore are more likely to be using local mobile services. This seems to be confirmed by the fact that 35% of global nomads were living abroad at the time of the survey, compared with 21% of backpackers and only 18% of flashpackers.

Global nomads were much more likely to be travelling off the beaten track (58%) than backpackers (40%) or flashpackers (30%). However, they were even more likely to visit major cities and gateways (33%) than backpackers or flashpackers (both 30%). This underlines the point made by Kannisto (2014) that even global nomads, who seek to avoid the constraints on movement imposed by nation states and the structures of the travel industry, often fail in these 'escape attempts'. As one of her global nomad respondent's remarks:

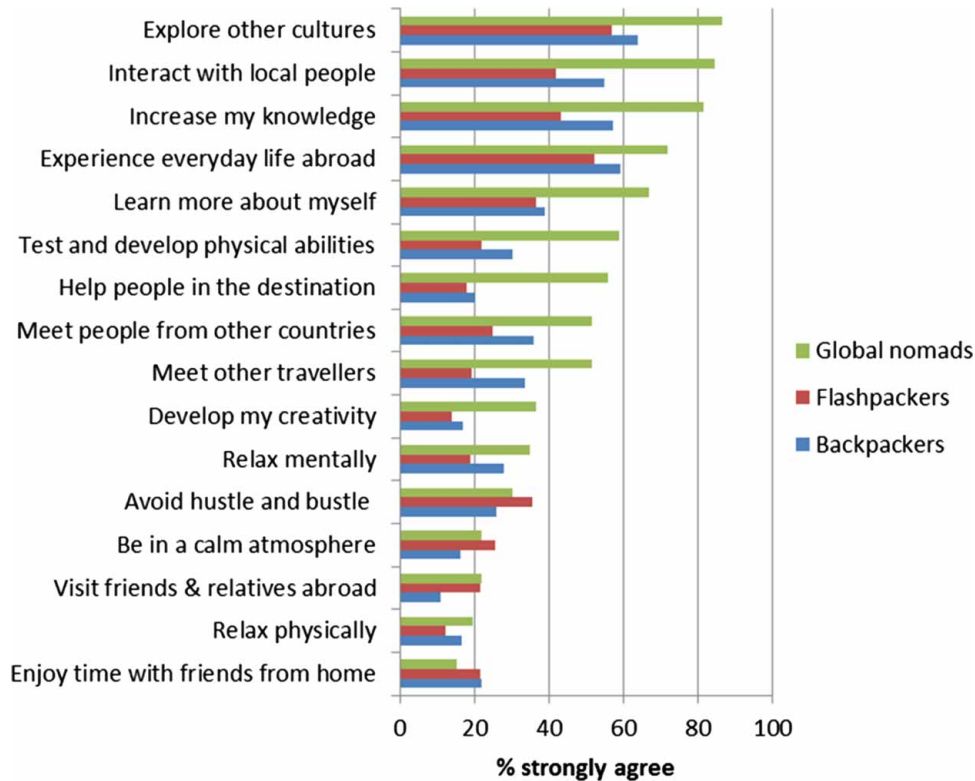


Figure 2. Travel motivations by travel style (% strongly agree).
Source: WYSE Travel Confederation Survey (2013).

Hey, look at the Atlas, figure out what makes the most sense in terms of travelling. I decided to go to Morocco but I couldn't find a reasonable flight so I flew to Spain thinking that I was going to take the boat back to Morocco but once I got to Spain, I was contacted by some friends in India who were all living in Pisa and so we were all living in a squat in Pisa. I just follow my gut.

Aspirations

Nomads are often seen as being diametrically opposed to settled society and antithetic to the norms of traditional life. When asked about how they saw their ideal future life, most of the modern nomads also rejected the idea of following a 'logical' career path from study to work, family and retirement. This was an idea much more attractive to those who saw themselves as 'tourists'. The nomads were more likely to want a life of travel, and, in particular, flashpackers and global nomads were attracted by the idea of changing continuously between study, work and travel during the course of their lives (Figure 3).

The New Horizons survey has consistently shown over the past decade that the major benefit that young

travellers see from their trips is acquiring a thirst for more travel. Although all three 'nomad' groups agree with this idea, backpackers and flashpackers are more likely to acquire a thirst for travel (70% strongly agree) than global nomads (61%). Arguably, this may reflect the desire of global nomads to settle, even temporarily, and make contact with local communities. Because they tend to travel alone, they also tend to seek companionship while travelling, even though this may complicate their nomadic lifestyle (Kannisto, 2014).

Discussion

Large-scale surveys such as the New Horizons research are crude tools for approaching questions such as the rise of nomadic travel behaviour. However, the analysis here does at least provide some interesting indications about the emergence of different types of nomadic mobility that could be followed up in future studies.

The three self-identified groups of travellers examined, the backpackers, the flashpackers and the global nomads, seem to bear some resemblance to the

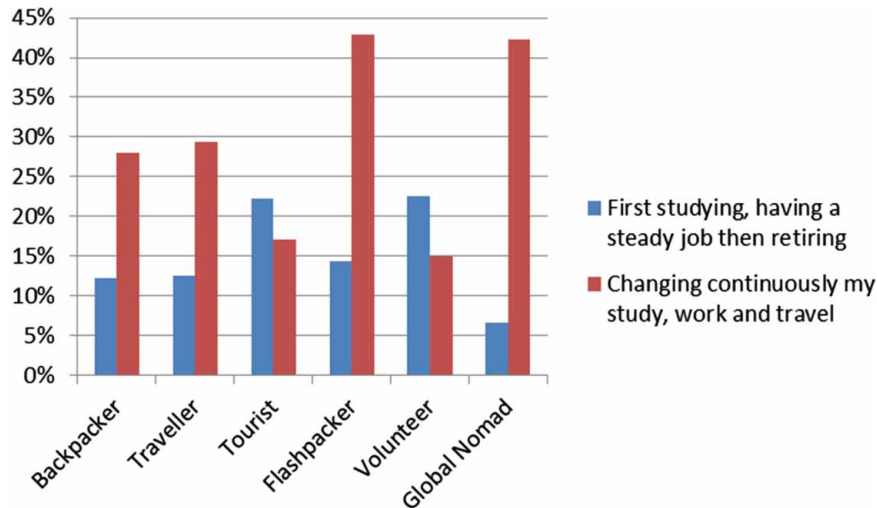


Figure 3. How do you see your ideal future life?
Source: WYSE Travel Confederation Survey (2013).

categories extracted from the literature, namely the tribal nomads, the digital nomad and the global nomad. As tribal nomads who congregate in enclaves, for example, backpackers are most likely to be meeting friends from home when they travel, probably encountering them in the very type of backpacker enclave that their nomadic wanderings have helped to create. These enclaves create opportunities to swap stories and travel tips that help to mark out the position of the individual within the backpacker community (Noy, 2004; Welk, 2004). The digital nomad or flashpacker is the most connected traveller, using social media frequently and also being more likely to mix and blur work and leisure. The flashpacker also has far less contact with the 'local', and is less likely to try and distinguish themselves through the pursuit of 'non-tourist' activities. The global nomad, on the other hand, is the most active in seeking contact with local people and everyday life in the destination. Their stay also seems to be more a form of dwelling, staying in local people's homes and connecting to local communication networks as well as the Internet.

All of these 'nomadic' groups are venturing more frequently and further afield than they did a decade ago. Originally, nomads were people tracing a path through 'a seemingly illogical space' (Kaplan, 1996). However, the paths trodden by the contemporary nomads are only illogical in terms of their own travel aspirations, in so far as the search for freedom and adventure constantly brings them back to the path already beaten by other young travellers. Over time, these paths emerge as the structures for the

worldwide expansion of the mass tourist industry, which many contemporary nomads actively seek to avoid (Welk, 2004).

As Kannisto (2014) suggested, contemporary nomadic wanderings are framed by the dialectic of freedom and constraint. The constraints include lack of money, which limits the time they can spend on the road and also makes it more difficult to enter countries that require travellers to show evidence of their ability to support themselves. The global economic crisis has increased the availability of time to travel for some (the unemployed respondents in the sample travelled longest), but also reduces their ability to pass frontiers or to dwell in foreign countries. Young travellers also constantly seek to overcome their constraints, as backpackers have always done by seeking out the cheapest accommodation to stretch out their travel budgets. However, the Internet is also allowing them to self-organize their travel through peer-to-peer systems, such as Couchsurfing and Airbnb (www.airbnb.com). The backpacker had previously taken the lead in going off the beaten track, but now the contemporary youth traveller is helping to construct the post-tourist-industry landscape of travel. Social media has replaced the authority of the guidebook, hostelling has produced new spaces of relationality and Couchsurfing has (at least temporarily) circumvented the regulation of accommodation.

Another change relative to previous backpacker discourse is the positioning of travel as a *rite of passage* (Cohen, 2004; Turner, 1974). Backpacking

has been posited as a reversal of the everyday, a liminal state that marks the passage of young travellers into adulthood. On their return, they are expected to grow up, settle down and become respectable members of society. However, a growing number of people are postponing this return to 'normality', travelling into later life as 'permanent backpackers' or global nomads. Young people are increasingly less likely to settle down to a 'normal life' on their return, preferring to keep travelling, studying and working on the road (WYSE Travel Confederation, 2013). This is now particularly evident in the emergence of the digital nomad, who can create their own employment in another country thanks to the global connectedness of the Internet. In some ways, therefore, the nomad is no longer the opposite of the settler, but may become a periodic settler in different places, depending on the quality of the Internet connection, the weather and the people met along the way.

Are the traditional structures of youth travel being eroded by the emergence of the digital veldt, as Meyrowitz (2003) suggested? The blurring of work, leisure and travel and different social spheres is certainly evident in the merging of different forms of youth travel, the rise of the working backpacker and the location-independent 'digital nomad'. The rise of youth travel hubs in many cities also mirrors in some ways the idea of a hunter-gatherer pattern of creating clusters of resources in the places they visit. In contrast to the original nomads, however, the contemporary mobile populations deriving from the developed world are also actively sought after by those places, engaged as they are in a competitive struggle for talent, resources and distinction. Modern nomads are attracted by the 'plug and play places' that now abound, particularly in major cities (Richards, 2010). These places also strive to make themselves more 'eventful' (Richards & Palmer, 2010) in order to link global and local networks and to create a reason for young people to dwell, however briefly, in a particular place at a particular time. These places, such as the Khao San Road in Bangkok (Richards & Wilson, 2004a), the Gràcia neighbourhood in Barcelona (Arias Sans & Russo, 2013) or Kings Cross in Sydney (Wilson, Richards, & McDonnell, 2008) are the watering holes where the contemporary nomad gathers their clusters of essential resources (e.g. work, Internet connection, couchsurfing, backpacker cafes, etc.).

The new nomadism also involves a new relationship with the 'local'. The local, the mundane, the everyday have in many cases become the prize to be sought in travelling, very different from the cultural hierarchy established in the Grand Tour and reflected in the growth of mass cultural tourism (Richards, 2001). Whereas the 'authentic' used to be legitimated by traditional knowledge and power systems, it is now established by direct experience of the local (Richards & Russo, 2014). The interesting effect of this may be that while on a macro level all places seem to be becoming more alike through 'serial reproduction' of culture (Richards & Wilson, 2006), on a micro level more difference is actually being created by the countless permutations of mobile populations visiting and dwelling in them for different lengths of time. This produces not just differences in terms of origin but also increasingly in terms of the length, depth and type of dwelling. As Franquesa (2011) pointed out, the immobility of the 'local' is recursively produced by the mobility of the tourist. However, in fact different types of tourists, or nomads, also produce differing degrees of localness through the different types of mobility they engage in.

Conclusions

The contemporary nomadic landscape of youth travel is criss-crossed by a variety of paths that are no longer quite so 'illogical' (Kaplan, 1996), thanks to the research conducted in recent years. We may be seeing the emergence of different groups of nomads, each driven by their own relationship to mobility and dwelling, but each also with their own internal dynamics.

For example, one could surmise, as Cohen (1974) did in his original conception of the drifter, that the degree of alienation from contemporary society produces important effects on the travel behaviour of young people. The backpacker neo-tribes, for example, are the most self-sufficient and coherent nomadic group, because their travel practices are supported by the regular exchange of information and face-to-face contact with other travellers in backpacker enclaves. In contrast, the contemporary flashpacker is much less in search of contact either with other travellers or with local people. Their connectedness is much more digital, and also therefore more constrained by the quality of Internet connections, which link these 'digital nomads' to their work environment and the disembedded social world.

They are busy using the available infrastructure and travel systems to their own advantage, setting up new 'location independent' businesses in order to support their leisured lifestyle.

In turn, the global nomad tries to avoid contact with 'the system', even if their mobile lifestyle forces them to engage with the apparatus of the state and the market economy. Although their freedom of mobility entails constraints, at least they can choose where to engage with the system. The irony is that although the global nomad aspires to engage in travel as a goal in itself, in fact their practices of travel often involve long periods of dwelling. These are also more necessary for the global nomad in order to make contact with local communities, to alleviate the loneliness of existence on the road (Kanisto, 2014).

Given the complexity of these different forms of nomadism, what is needed is, as Franquesa (2011, p. 1012) suggested, 'a relational approach that understands things as nexuses of multiple determinations'. On this basis, the different types of nomads might be viewed as groups who have adopted different mobility strategies. For the backpacker, often concerned with status positions in the group or tribe, huddling together in the enclave represents a social moment in their travels where the exchange of stories at once confirms status and at the same time the norms of the group. On the other hand, the flash-packer, or digital nomad, is less concerned with the tribe or with the peoples among whom they travel. Their lifestyle is sustained by the Internet, and their sociality is therefore more digital and more dispersed. However, in order to sustain their 'self-contained' existence, they actually become acutely dependent on the local context, which provides a comfortable resting place and, crucially, an Internet connection. In turn, the global nomad rejects the trappings of the system, such as paying for accommodation or working in a full-time job. In some ways they are most like the traditional nomad by being peripheral to society, and yet at the same time they desperately seek to be integrated into the 'local'.

The findings of this research indicate some potential future research directions relating to nomadic youth travel. As this study has been based largely on quantitative data, it is limited in terms of the depth of meaning it can uncover in relation to the travel styles discussed. It would be interesting to develop structured qualitative research examining the motivations, experiences and behaviour of these

different types of young nomads. In particular, the role of economic factors and the blurring of leisure travel and work-related travel (whether to gain qualifications, work experience or to earn money) would reveal the impact of the economic crisis on youth travel. More research is also needed to determine the extent to which new styles of travel, in particular the 'global nomad' and the 'digital nomad', are developing and influencing other young travellers. Similarly, it would be interesting to assess the extent to which the decline noted in traditional backpacking is related to the growing importance of new source markets from Asia or if it also reflects a declining popularity of the backpacker travel style in the existing core markets, such as Europe, North America and Australasia.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

Note on contributor

Greg Richards is Professor of Place making and Events at NHTV Breda University of Applied Sciences and Professor of Leisure Studies at Tilburg University in the Netherlands. His main research interests are cultural and creative tourism, events and youth travel.

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