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### ► To cite this version:

Florence Gourlay, Claire Mahéo, Julie Pasquer-Jeanne, Clément Marinos, Christine Petr. Les nouvelles situations d'intermédiation territoriale : l'exemple des quart-lieux périphériques (espaces de coworkation). *Géographie, Économie, Société*, 2021, 23 (1), pp.31-52. hal-03517290

**HAL Id: hal-03517290**

**<https://uco.hal.science/hal-03517290v1>**

Submitted on 1 Dec 2023

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# New Territorial Intermediation Situations: The Example of Peripheral "Fourth Places" (Coworkation Spaces)

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This article is an author version translated in English. It was originally published in "Géographie, économie, société". To cite it: Gourlay, Florence, et al. "New situations of territorial intermediation: The example of "fourth places"(coworking spaces)." *Geographie, économie, société* 23.1 (2021): 31-52.

## Abstract

As a large part of their work is done outside the designated timetable and physical space of their companies, a growing number of knowledge workers are being freed from geographical constraints. Digital nomads have a lifestyle which is disconnected from a place of production (their activities do not depend on physical location). Third places (coworking spaces, fab-labs), offering an in-between individual space and workspace, have met this occupational phenomenon and are often chosen by digital nomads. Fourth places have recently developed, which specify in hosting digital nomads from around the world who join them for short-term periods of residential mobility. Offered to independent location workers and based on digital independence from intermediaries, those places might favor a form of going back to territorial integration/re-territorialisation. Gathering activities mixing « work - home life - tourism », those spaces give birth to new practices catalysing economic activities and seem to enhance territorial dynamics (social innovation, local development of territories). Under these schemes, territories do not escape a potential exploitation on the part of fourth-places managers and users. The places under study here are found in territories remote from big cities and benefitting from tourist attractions. They represent an array of territorial intermediation on the intraterritorial level: by favoring exchanges between digital nomads and the territory, by connecting digital nomads and fourth places to a cultural and digital community and by entering international global logics.

**Keywords:** intermediation, four-places, digital nomades, territories.

## Introduction

A growing number of individuals, knowledge workers, are becoming geo-independent, meaning they are independent of the employer's, client's, or contractor's location. A significant part of their activity takes place outside the usual time and space reference, namely the "office" and regular working hours. Referred to as digital nomads (DN) or nomadic workers, some of these workers adopt a lifestyle free from geographical constraints associated with a production location (Kuzheleva-Sagan, Nosova, 2017). Their activities are, a priori, non-territorial. The freedom chosen

by the digital nomad imposes, as a necessary counterpart to the acquired autonomy, the creation of conditions that allow a balance between work performance and personal fulfillment. It is to address this unique professional situation and the demand for productivity and creativity (Bouquillon, Miège, Moeglin, 2014) that third places (Jeffres et al., 2009), emphasizing the intermediation between individual space and workspace, are often chosen by digital workers (Suire, 2016).

In addition to third places that temporarily host many of them, another type of place has been developing in recent years, which could be called "fourth-places" (Aelbrecht, 2016; Marinos, 2018; Morrison, 2019). The idea behind these new workplaces is that integrating a classic third place, such as a coworking space in a large, even foreign and distant city, is no longer sufficient. Fourth places are places that, while having the attributes of third places (Oldenburg, 1989; Moriset, 2014), are primarily dedicated to these digital nomads, in other words, telecommuters, entrepreneurs, and independent workers, coming from elsewhere and settling there to work during a temporary residential mobility.

In doing so, these places can be designated as coworkation spaces, a term combining coworking + vacation. The actors of this practice define the concept of coworkation as a stay combining coworking and leisure activities, relaxation, and discovery, in a setting different from the ordinary. Added to this is a collaborative and community spirit based on sharing experiences, knowledge, skills, ideas, contacts, and other information that, according to those who experience it, makes it an essential distinctive element (see the stories told by these coworkationners).

Based on digital disintermediation and offered to mobile and presumably deterritorialized workers, fourth places would promote a specific form of reterritorialization by offering examples of original territorial intermediation at several levels: intermediation between members of the digital nomad community, intermediation between the places and the territorial ecosystem where they are located, and intermediation between the fourth-places themselves, sometimes constituted as a network. Among the coworkation spaces dedicated to welcoming digital nomads, those that specifically interest us are located in relatively distant territories and on the margins of the major global metropolitan centers of the urbanized system. While often benefiting from tourist attractions (Gagnon, 2007), these territories nonetheless constitute peripheries, more or less integrated according to Reynaud's nomenclature (1981). Requiring an extended travel time, these fourth places leverage their geographical distance from major urban centers as an additional attraction and justification for their intrinsic values. That is their fundamental characteristic.

The purpose of this article is to analyze these new situations of territorial intermediation allowed by these coworkation spaces whose attendance and use are situated in a travel context. Considering the case of these work and leisure spaces located in territories far from metropolitan decision centers, our analysis reveals the plurality of forms and levels of territorial intermediation in a context of strong peripherality. After specifying the state of research on digital nomads (DN) and third places, we present the methodological framework of our reflection. Then, in a second step, we describe the intermediation configurations that fourth places reveal. Finally, we discuss the results and suggest that fourth places more generally question the link between individuals and the territory they invest in.

## **1. From third Place to fourth place: A New Dimension in Territorial Intermediation**

According to Nadou (2013), territorial intermediation consists of a set of tools mobilized for the production and revelation of interactions among actors, aiming to create norms, learning processes,

shared action visions, and innovations. The production of territorial intermediation arises from horizontal relationships among local actors and invites an exploration of the conditions for dialogue among actors in more or less organized places or spaces. This perspective is relevant for the analysis of third places and coworkation spaces.

### **1.1 Third places and Territorial Intermediation**

The term "tiers-lieu" originates from the concept of the "third place" defined by the American sociologist Ray Oldenburg (1989). By this term, he sought to characterize a desocialization of American society associated with a form of individualization (suburban expansion, individual transport, dematerialized means of communication). According to the author, the society of that time lacked third places that foster informal gatherings and the exchange of non-market services, in other words, places where people could meet outside of home (first place) and work (second place).

Since then, many authors from the social sciences have continued reflections on third places (Scaillerez, Tremblay, 2017). The emergence of collaborative spaces such as coworking spaces and fablabs in the 2000s has fueled numerous research works, mainly in management, economics, sociology, and geography-urbanism. Some of them emphasize their potential for collaborative innovation in territories (Suire, 2013; Le Nadant et al., 2018), while others insist on the broader issues they raise in terms of local development (Besson, 2017; Moriset, 2017), even though the third place is defined less by a physical location than by the social configuration it offers (Burret, 2017; Fredriksson et Duriaux, 2018).

The third place is distinguished by several characteristics: informal meetings, social interactions, flexibility, conviviality, a crossroads of communities, initiative, project... and openness to its territory. The third place can thus be considered as a territorial intermediary, akin to a mediation platform contributing to the development of new nodes and activating social relations (Fabbri, Charue-Duboc, 2016) and proximities (Le Nadant et al., 2018). By combining knowledge and bringing forth projects, it generates positive externalities for actors and the territory (Ferchaud, 2017). Bococ et al. (2014) argue that socialization in third places precisely stems from four stages: co-presence in a place (1), affinities among members (2), mutual assistance and resource sharing (3), and cooperation and project development (4). According to Liefoghe (2018), the third place is even a new tool for the development of creative territories due to its position as a middle ground (Cohendet et al., 2013), that is, situated at the crossroads between a productive world, composed of recognized and large-scale actors, and a diversity of actors at the margin, a diversity qualified as "abundant and exploratory." Although these spaces initially emerged in urban centralities hosting an ecosystem of digital and innovation (Suire, 2013), they are increasingly found in so-called peripheral territories (Marinos, Krauss, 2017). This constitutes an expansion of their geographical area but also a diversification of the uses and practices of territories, including for the young nomadic professionals<sup>2</sup> addressed in this research.

### **1.2. The Digital Nomads (DN), Their Mobility Practices, and the Connection to the Territory**

Makimoto and Manners (1997) predicted that the rise of digital technology heralded a new nomadic era. Twenty years later, as critically pointed out by Pascal Lardellier (2017), 'mobility, elevated to the cardinal value of nomadic society, now relies on an arsenal of technologies (new and inevitably progressive), infrastructures (cf. the exponential development of the transport industry, highway, rail, air), political discourses, hyper-valuing mobility.' From an ontological standpoint, 'nomadic thought' has indeed been adopted by an increasing number of postmodern philosophers, such as Grisoni (1976), Deleuze and Guattari (1980), Baudrillard (1993), and Braidotti (1994). The nomad has become a symbol of flow, hybridity, and mobility in a world undergoing globalization. As

highlighted by Mattelart (2017), 'the general hypothesis is that the so-called global dimension contributes to the reconfiguration of identities, to the construction of new imaginaries within people's mental work.' New landscapes (scapes), according to the Indian anthropologist Arjun Appadurai (1996), are emerging, sweeping across all spheres of society: 'ethnoscapes, mediascapes, technoscapes, financescapes, ideoscapes.' For instance, the ethnoscapes is reshaped by migrations, whether forced or voluntary, giving rise to new types of transnationals 'imagined communities,' organized into 'diasporic public spheres,' irreducible to a single state, even when claiming allegiance to a nation (Mattelart, 2017).

While this mobility is primarily professional and emerged with economic globalization, it is also migratory and, in addition, tourist. Indeed, research focusing on the travels of younger generations (Generations Y and Z) shows a significant increase in the types of mobility (Richards, Wilson, 2004). Hannam and Ateljevi (2008) even herald the end of tourism with the shift towards 'nomadology' and the paradigm of mobility, although these statements need to be nuanced today, especially with the persistence of classic tourist mobilities worldwide. Therefore, it is not surprising that the number of DNs is constantly increasing.

At first, these are mainly inhabitants of megacities connected to wireless networks. These individualistic nomads take their work with them by temporarily settling in places with attractive lifestyles and leisure activities (Richards, 2015). According to Aude Lenoir<sup>3</sup>, 'their work does not require them to travel, but it also does not constrain them to stay in the same place. Through their use of information technologies, these digital nomads, also called technomads, have created a new way of working. They choose to travel for a few months, a few years, or even their entire lives, all while working from their computers and maintaining professional relationships established in their place of origin.

In their literature review on digital nomads, Wang et al. (2018) define these individuals as mobile workers, traveling without an end date to multiple destinations, while continuing to engage in professional activities related to and involving digital technologies. The authors distinguish three dimensions that have been analyzed:

1. The cultural dimension considers digital nomadism as part of the 'lifehacking' trend;
2. The economic dimension questions the traditional dichotomy between production factors;
3. The technological dimension focuses on the impact of technological constraints, including telecommunications infrastructure and the configuration of computerized communication platforms.

The relationship of digital nomads to the territory does not formally appear among the research themes. However, the need for geographical anchoring and physical places continues to exist among digital nomads, but in more mobile and flexible forms (O'Brien, 2011). They use their freedom of movement to frequent territories that are often 'exotic' from a Western perspective and are characterized by a lifestyle where the boundaries between work, travel, and leisure are porous (Reichenberger, 2018). For Trimoldi (2018), the specific mobilities of digital nomads make them a distinct category of travelers trying to integrate into the local community while avoiding the constraints of the 'system' (Richards, 2015). The nomad is not the opposite of the resident but can become a periodic resident in different places, depending on the quality of the Internet connection, the weather, and the people encountered along the way (Richards, 2015). This last point is interesting in understanding the role of territorial intermediation played by the welcoming places of digital nomads or fourth places.

The question of places and territories for these digital nomads is primarily addressed from the perspective of the political response and the economic impacts caused by their presence in the relevant territories. For example, they have contributed to changing the economy of the village of

Ubud on the Indonesian island of Bali, turning it from a small tourist village into an international city with relatively diversified economic activities within a few years (MacRae, 2016). Local authorities have accompanied this opportunity by installing fiber optics in the area. Gradually, these new activities are integrated into the regional economy with the arrival of travelpreneurs taking advantage of acceleration and mentoring programs offered by local structures (Hart, 2015). In the same perspective, other non-metropolitan territories such as the cities of Byron Bay and Southern Tablelands in Australia have seen their economic fabric strongly impacted by the arrival of digital nomads (D'Andrea, 2006, Black, 2018).

Guided by the cost of living, heliotropism, leisure offerings, or the intensity of cultural life, digital nomads prefer certain territories and spaces. The island of Bali and the city of Chiang Mai in Thailand have thus become digital nomad capitals in a matter of years. In 2019, they hosted dozens of coworkation spaces offering coworking and coliving services (Schlagwein, 2018).

Despite the numerous studies focusing on digital nomads, few have delved into the specific places they frequent and their characteristics. Yet, much like third places, they could be revealing of contemporary transformations in the economy and employment (Liefoghe, 2018). According to Thompson (2018), it is the places frequented by digital nomads and their specificities that should be studied. This is what we propose in this article through the analysis of their connections to the territory and their roles in intermediation.

### **1.3. From the third place to the fourth place**

The term 'fourth place' was proposed by Morrison (2019), who considers, in a metropolitan context, these as spaces where the boundaries between social and private dynamics, work and leisure, networking and social interactions, collaboration and competition are porous. The author argues that the fourth place constitutes a hybrid form between the first place (home), the second place (work), and the third place in its broadest sense, as defined by Oldenburg (1989), i.e., places where people meet and enjoy each other's company, such as bars, cafes, and libraries. In our approach, we distance ourselves from this definition, which we find too restrictive, and propose to define the fourth place as a third place outside the usual living territory of its users or outside the original territory for completely deterritorialized digital nomads (i.e., those who no longer have a permanent residence).

Fourth places exhibit the characteristics of traditional third places, with an additional dimension. Like third places, they are defined by a blurring of personal and professional time, high-speed internet connection enabling instant global exchanges, informal exchanges facilitated among the users of the place, and an individualization of their digital professional practices. However, what distinguishes them from traditional coworking spaces is that they take into account the hypermobility specific to digital nomads in their operation and layout, and they integrate the tourist dimension of the territory on which they are located.

The unique positioning of fourth place involves combining coworking and coliving while emphasizing the inspiring aspects of the site and the specificities of the territory. It suggests the idea of a creative and productive stay but also the opportunity to enjoy the tourist and recreational dimensions unique to their territory. Thus, these coworkation spaces that bring together activities involving 'work – home – tourism' contribute to the emergence of new practices. These practices catalyze new economic and social activities for the territories concerned. While they can accentuate territorial dynamics such as social innovations and local development, they can also be subject to a certain instrumentalization of the territories by the managers of these places and their users (cf. part 2).

This tourist dimension, responding to the mobility of digital nomads, gives the fourth places its distinctive character. Considering that these places are located 'outside the usual place of residence' of digital nomads, their accessibility and visibility constitute a challenge. This challenge can be an opportunity for a reevaluation of the territory's position by the actors of the fourth place. Thus, these places are built and argued for other centralities: professional and geographical.

The globalization of destinations, including the most peripheral ones, represented by fourth places (cf. Map 1), follows the logics linked to the economic imperialism of Western countries. The users and most managers of these places mainly come from Northern countries (Duhamel, Kadri, 2011). Similarly, as these places represent a model of tourism development and a potential source of profit, traditional actors in business tourism tend to copy the models of these fourth places for organizing classic trips or incentives (such as the agencies Restation or Wolfhouse).

However, in constituting the typology of these places, it is evident that many forms exist, some leaning towards classic models of business tourism, others towards much more original hybrid forms that we will analyze below.

#### **1.4. Fourth places distant and located on the periphery: New situations of territorial intermediation?**

Among the coworking spaces dedicated to hosting digital nomads, those of specific interest to us are located in peripheral territories. The periphery encompasses diverse situations but always defined in relation to a dependence on a center (Reynaud, 1981). In these peripheral fourth places, globally connected and hypermobile workers (Cohen, Gössling, 2015) find a form of local anchoring through their daily activities: meetings with local actors, immersion in local cultural communities, adoption of cultural practices (gastronomy, for example). Fourth places represent emerging social environments of a new type within territories. Acting as vectors for the valorization and promotion of the territory where animators and creators have chosen to implant them, these places allow users to establish relationships that go beyond work-related interactions, evolving into more conventional socialization processes, initially among themselves (cf. Part 2.1) but also with local actors in the immediate environment (cf. Part 2.2).

Therefore, the issue of our research is to identify to what extent fourth places, frequented by hypermobile and presumably deterritorialized users, produce unprecedented situations of territorial intermediation.

To answer this, the research focuses on the case of remote fourth places. Our empirical analysis relies on a census and an in-depth study of the websites of fourth places, which we have complemented with four field surveys.

In total, seventy fourth places have been identified and selected based on the criterion of peripherality, meaning geographical distance from major metropolises and/or economic networks. Islands constitute a privileged field, as fourth places in island situations represent almost half of the identified places (49%). Bali is an emblematic example, with no less than twelve structures. Half of the sites (48%) are located in rural areas (less than 20,000 inhabitants). The distribution by zone is as follows: 44% of the sites are in Europe, 35% in Asia, and 23% in Latin America. However, if the places are isolated, they are still often accessible within a few hours from the nearest airport, and accessibility to digital networks remains a highlighted element.

It should be noted that the managers of the places identify their places as coworking spaces through self-referencing on websites dedicated to places for digital nomads, considering that these places do

not fit into existing categories (neither truly tourist accommodation nor truly coworking space). The collected data focus on three themes: the characteristics of the place (type of place, project type, whether accommodation is provided or rented); its operation and the services offered (professional, daily life, leisure); and the environment in which it is located (geographical location, accessibility, tourist attractions), with particular attention given to content expressing relationships with the territory.

The methodological choice of analyzing websites (Barats, 2013) is justified because these structures primarily communicate through digital devices (websites, social networks), aiming to be visible to a geographically dispersed audience and to compensate for their peripherality through digital proximity (Loillier, 2010). Their presence on the web is therefore intrinsically linked to the nature and objectives of their activities. Digital devices also represent a form of intermediation between digital nomads and territories (cf. Part 2.2).

The material related to websites is complemented by four field surveys conducted in peripheral and ultra-peripheral territories (in the sense of the European Union): Tenerife (Canary Islands), Azores (Portugal), Sagres (Portugal), and Audierne (France), carried out between November 2018 and April 2019. Fifteen semi-directive interviews with an average duration of one hour were conducted with users of the places (8) and their managers and animators (7). As with the selected websites, the choice of fieldwork is primarily justified by their peripheral positioning but is also the result of methodological opportunism (Girin, 1984), with some place managers being hesitant about our proposed meeting.

The fieldwork was carried out by all the authors, from different disciplines (geography, economics, information and communication sciences, management sciences). They all used the same data collection tools (interview guide, site analysis grids) and investigation protocols (during visits to the fourth places). This multi-angle approach from different disciplines enriched the reading and interpretations of the results.

## **2. Unique Places of Territorial Intermediation in a Globalization Context**

By examining the relationship that these places, through their manager-animators and users, maintain with the territory and its various stakeholders (local authorities and actors, residents, and communities), we identified two main situations of intermediation, each operating at multiple levels. The first relates to the emerging connection within the territory through these places: these are the intermediations we have referred to as intra-territorial. The second situation concerns the relationship between the global scale and the local scale: these are the inter-territorial intermediations.

The different situations involve informational exchanges, communicative actions, as well as individual and social relationships that occur among the four protagonists involved in the existence of the fourth place (Figure 1). The principle is that these intermediation relationships occur between actors who interact two by two, through similarities and affiliations (Maffesoli, 1988), or via effective mobilities. Presented in the form of double-headed arrows between two types of interlocutors, these intermediations operate tangentially to the territory of the fourth place, leaving it outside their exchanges.

All possible intermediations facilitated by the fourth place, whether intra or inter-territorial, are represented in Figure 1. We posit that it is the hybridization (Gwiadzinski, 2016) to which these places refer that constructs original situations of territorial intermediation. These correspond to the different relationships established on the territory and in direct interaction with the fourth place.



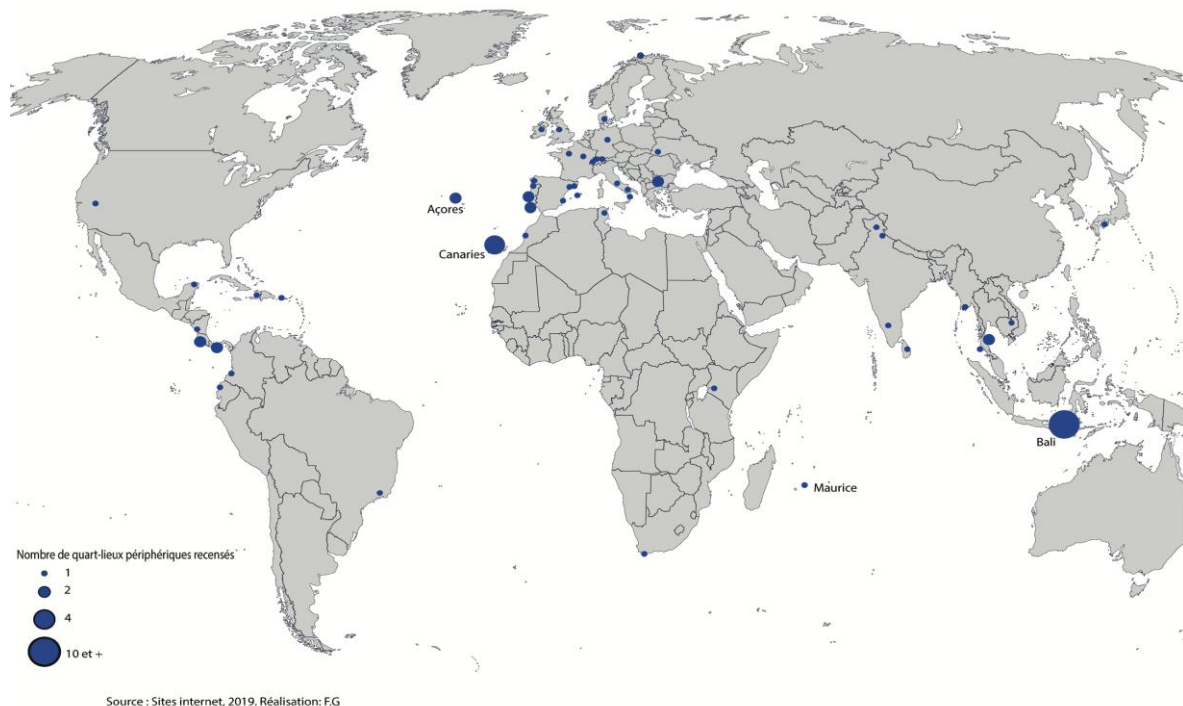
These are situations where intermediation is territorial because it operates with and on the territory where the fourth place is located. The intermediation between digital nomads and the territory goes through the fourth place and its stakeholders (managers, animators, and other digital nomads). It serves as a necessary passage and an entry point to the territory, explaining its central position in Figure 1. Territorial intermediation situations are schematized by two arrows that go to and from the fourth place to the four main protagonists of it, which are: 1) local actors, 2) digital nomads who are temporarily settled in the fourth place and who act both individually and as a temporary community, 3) the global community of digital nomads, and 4) other fourth places and territories that exist on a global scale.

## **2.1. Intra-territorial intermediation situations: the fourth place as a necessary passage**

The situations of intra-territorial intermediation that we have identified unfold along two major axes. Firstly, the fourth place acts as a mediator between the digital nomad community and the territory and its stakeholders. Secondly, the fourth place serves as a mediator between all the digital nomads temporarily installed there and the ephemeral community they represent (Figure 2).

### **2.1.1. Intraterritorial intermediation situation #1: DN/Territory**

If we consider the relationships of digital nomads (DN) with the stakeholders of the territory, the fourth place is the gateway to access the territory and its inhabitants. The opportunities for interactions with the local population are emphasized in the discourses of fourth places as distinctive elements, compared to traditional hospitality. Therefore, residing in a fourth place would allow one to "live like a local." This positioning is important as the users of these places do not see themselves as tourists. There is a need for distinction expressed by digital nomads who do not perceive themselves as expatriates, tourists, or backpackers (Trimoldi, 2018). Following this logic, R., a French nomad accustomed to fourth places, testifies to his pleasure in frequenting local places (local cafes, beaches, etc.) and adopting their rhythm during his travels.



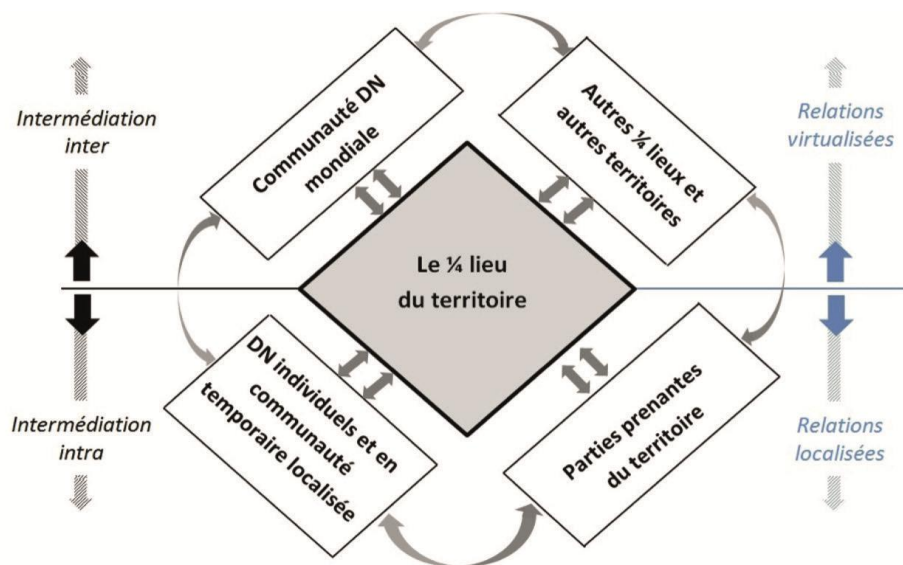
**Figure 1:** The archipelago of peripheral fourth places

The explicit discourse of the founders of some fourth places reveals that the motivation for moving to the destination can be as much about the fame of the fourth place as the representations and imagery that the destination and local culture convey. For example, Arctic Coworking Lodge, in the extreme environment of the Lofoten archipelago in Norway, attracts an international population in search of a change of scenery and nature, with "still virgin surf spots" and "breathtaking views from the top of the fjords," but also in search of authenticity in the relationship with the locals. The website promises to "do its best to integrate its guests into the local community of the small fishing village of Tangstad." In this intermediation relationship, the managers of fourth places act as intermediaries with the territory. This responsibility is regularly emphasized by the manager-animators. Thus, the founder of the Coworksurf network, a network of coworking places, confirms that: "it is important to be connected with the local community, digital nomads are looking for that."

The stakeholders of the territory on which the fourth place is located include local leaders and actors, inhabitants, and local communities. For the latter, the fourth place provides access to communities of digital nomads. In this sense, the local development potential they represent offers a unique intermediation situation.

While digital nomads appreciate interactions with the local community, the stakeholders of the territory and the local population can also benefit from these exchanges. Located on the San Cristobal islands in Panama, the discourse of the fourth place CocoVivo emphasizes maintaining "strong relationships with the local community of Tierra Oscura by offering job opportunities and outlets for local products." The ambition of this connection is to "support regional development" and "improve the standard of living," even to change the world: "Are you interested in changing the world for the better? Making the world a more habitable place for everyone? Connect with people interested in this change." Going further, various structures adopt a stance that we qualify as militant, converging with the logic of responsible tourism and its mythology (Cousin, 2016). For example, the fourth place Angkor Hub provides digital nomads staying there with the opportunity to be members of a volunteer program and takes care of connecting them with local NGOs. The American platform Numundo offers a selection of fourth places worldwide oriented towards sustainable and solidarity-driven development.

However, the activity of fourth places is sometimes poorly understood by the stakeholders of the territory. Even if they offer accommodation and/or catering services and organize or facilitate activities related to local economic actors, the managers of fourth places claim a singularity in relation to "classic" tourism actors. Local actors and decision-makers often do not know or recognize these hybrid places well. This is notably the case in the Azores, where K., co-founder of a fourth place, explains that he could not obtain financial assistance for installation. The reason is the non-recognition of his activity: neither a youth hostel nor a bed and breakfast. In the Canary Islands, A., the manager of the fourth place Nine Coliving, also wants not to be classified as a player in the hotel industry but rather through the specificity of her hybrid activity. She advocates for this with local institutional actors to establish a certification specific to coworking activities. From the perspective of local actors, the challenge would be to integrate fourth places into their territorial offer and their economic and tourist attractiveness strategy.



**Figure 2:** Fourth place and situations of territorial intermediation

### 2.1.2. Situation of Intraterritorial Intermediation #2: DN/DN

The fourth place also acts as a mediator between the digitally nomadic individuals located temporarily and the ephemeral community they represent on-site. The term "bromads," derived from "brother" and "nomad," refers to the peers encountered by digital nomads during their travels. This term reflects the strong bonds among digital nomads and signals their belonging to a

community. Although the concept of community is challenging to apply due to its diverse realities and numerous relevant domains, it seems to be de facto essential for effectively identifying and characterizing these social actors.

On a more individual level, the coworking space acts as an intermediary to connect the digital nomads who frequent it. In their stay offerings, the manager-animators strive to deliver the promise of rich professional encounters. For example, the fourth place Home for Creativity, located in the small town of Montalto Uffigo in Italy, ensures that its space "creates an inspiring environment conducive to sharing knowledge and ideas." To meet the demands of performative creativity, fourth places strive to reassure about the return on investment of time spent together in the coworking space. Discourses around this idea abound: "dinners that linger sometimes lead to innovative ideas and strategic partnerships," announces the fourth place Sende located in a small hamlet in the Galician countryside in Spain; "we offer you a quiet space and the necessary facilities for you to reach the peak of your productivity. Stay in touch with your clients, maintain your sales, and meet your colleagues from around the world," says Sundesk, a fourth place located in the seaside resort of Taghazout in Morocco. In the same logic, fourth places construct their service offerings, animations, and services to be associated with the imaginary of high-performance professional spaces that offer optimal conditions for connecting with other digital nomads, with all forms of exchange likely to be carriers of innovation and/or opportunities. These discourses suggesting success emphasize that the support for connecting the digital nomad with other digital nomads through the fourth place exists at all stages of the professional and personal project: "we help our guests prototype their business ideas, exchange skills and services," assures the fourth place Casa Natural located in Matera in southern Italy. In the same perspective, the fourth place WorkationX, located in the Indian Himalayas, explains that it works to "encourage digital nomads, freelancers, and entrepreneurs to create synergies among themselves and find solutions to their problems through collaborative practices." The argument about the advantages of this random connection of the digital nomad with other digital nomads, during a temporary stay, highlights that the fourth place functions well as an accelerator of serendipity, akin to coworking spaces (Moriset, 2017). This linking and networking of co-located digital nomads in the fourth place are consistently valued, as evidenced by the recurrence of content such as "interact with other creative minds and [...] enjoy the pleasure of sharing." In the discourse of fourth places, the emphasis is placed on the fact that each of the digital nomad's present can showcase their ability to offer useful connections through simple exchanges or in the form of conferences and workshops.

However, it is necessary to qualify. These two situations of intraterritorial intermediation (DN/Territory and DN/DN) are not always self-evident. Some fourth places insist that they also offer stay configurations close to the "bubble" and the "nest." It is then a matter of emphasizing that there is no obligation to interact with the outside and local communities. One can choose to reside in the fourth place without seeking interaction, with the goal of introspection and retreat. Moreover, the processes of socialization promote the formation of ephemeral communities that generate a clear sense of exclusivity. For example, the fourth place Novovento organizes "life coaching" sessions offering its guests a stay focused on reflection and reorientation, both personally and professionally. In contrast to the somewhat critical perspective of Thompson (2018), who describes this approach from the angle of the inability to escape social constraints, the manager-animators present these offers in a positive light. Thus, not only is this dimension displayed very explicitly but also in a very positive way. Referring to "the good vibes necessary for exchanges in our small community of individuals who share common interests," the goal is to provide interested digital nomads with "tools and ideas specific to life design." In this case, the fourth place positions itself as a reassuring and protective refuge where territorial intermediation does not or very little come into play; it might even be disowned. As Thompson (2018) explains, digital nomads seeking to integrate these communities live in isolation, enclosing themselves in a bubble, carrying with them their Western

middle-class environment anywhere in the world, while excluding the local population and cultural contexts.

## **2.2. Situations of Interterritorial Intermediation: Tensions between the Local and the Global**

The fourth place reflects a process of glocalization, understood as the local-scale internationalization of globalized logics and practices. In this sense, it questions the relationship between local and global scales.

### **2.2.1. Interterritorial Intermediation Situation #1: Peripheral Territory/Globalized Economic Logic**

The development of digital nomad practices contributes to (re)evaluating certain territories considered on the margins of major flows in the knowledge economy and global centralities. Through coworking spaces like fourth place, these territories connect to globalization flows and gradually integrate into international value chains. While digital nomads are mobile, they always conduct their professional activities in a specific location. Therefore, the development of coworking spaces reshapes the cards in the "market of places" (Dollfus, 2007) produced by globalization, by putting locations and territories in competition where the more peripheral ones seemed naturally disadvantaged.

This "glocal" positioning is also reflected in the websites' emphasis on the profiles of individuals frequenting these coworking spaces. For example, Sende's website mentions the presence of employees from multinational companies such as Disney, The Guardian, Marvel, Wordpress, Booking, Cartoon Network, Boeing. "Creatives, engineers, lawyers from major multinationals love to come and work at Sende!" In the same vein, employees from Google or Mozilla who frequent and coordinate their teams remotely from Sun and Co, in Javea, contribute to making the small Spanish town visible on the world map. The Azores and the Canary Islands are interesting in this regard. Their central geographical locations in terms of time zones are highlighted by coworking spaces. Working with partners located in Europe, North or South America, and even Asia is easy. It's a real comparative advantage emphasized by the coworking space UnOffice (Punta Delgada, Azores): "Direct flights make it easy for teams from around the world to meet in one central location." The site specifies that the location is a 4-hour direct flight from Boston or London. M., its manager, emphasizes its location 4 hours from New York and 2 hours from Lisbon. It's not surprising that the company "Doist" chose the archipelago in 2019 to organize its annual retreat, bringing together all its employees located around the globe. In other words, there's no longer a need to be in London, Paris, or New York to host a population of digital workers.

While peripherality remains a relative notion, it is interesting to highlight how it is sometimes recomposed or tamed on the websites of the studied structures. Distance is also managed and negotiated by the managers of these spaces. The goal is to transform and recompose a peripheral situation into a new centrality. These places bring peripherality and network connectivity together, combining geographical distance with connection to the internet and the digital nomad community network. While geographical remoteness is necessary and part of the offering, peripherality is tamed and, in a sense, normalized.

Furthermore, the fourth place serves as a virtual gateway to the territory in the sense that digital nomads first apprehend it through digital communication, highlighting and promoting it on social networks—a strategy more or less targeted toward the digital nomad community. For example, N., a web developer from Siberia encountered in the Azores, admits to choosing Novovento by browsing Instagram. The place seemed appealing to her based on the image portrayed on the social network.

Since her installation, she has become acquainted with the village merchants and enjoys immersing herself in the local culture.

For the intermediation situation to work, there also needs to be a certain correspondence between the social working hours of the digital nomad and those with whom they interact in the context of their work. In other words, locating oneself in a time zone that is too far away creates a distortion between working hours and, consequently, forces the digital nomad to defer their leisure time. It is essential to work within a time zone compatible with that of collaborators to make the most of the leisure time of the fourth place. An Australian digital nomad may favor Bali, but it may be more challenging for a European if their professional partners are mostly on the old continent. Thus, N. can work from 5 am in the Azores with Russia and enjoy her afternoons exploring the surroundings. Similarly, A., the manager of Nine Coliving in the Canary Islands, states that it is easy for Americans to come to this part of Europe.

In summary, the status of digital nomads allows for the creation of bridges between territories that were previously weakly connected and that, through this intermediary, enter a logic of globalized flows. The constraints associated with geographical peripherality seem to diminish with the presence of digital nomads.

### 2.2.2. Interterritorial intermediation situation #2: the fourth place in a global network of places

The networking of fourth placex unfolds in two ways. Firstly, it results from a choice by managers to join or create a network of places, and secondly, it is built from the digital and mobility practices specific to digital nomads.

We distinguish several cases. Sites can, for example, be affiliated with the same structure (Outsite, Coworkite, Tribe Theory Startup Hostels, Coworksurf, etc.) Coworksurf brings together six structures, logically located in countries where surf culture is very present (Portugal, Norway, Sri Lanka). Believing that the number of DNs attached to this practice is significant, J., its London-based founder met in Sagrès, Portugal, wishes to develop a global network of places where surf enthusiasts gather to practice their passion while working. On the other hand, the fourth place Coconat, located in a rural area about a hundred kilometers from Berlin, displays partnerships with eleven coworking and coworkation spaces, including Mutinerie Village in the French Perche. Another configuration is that independent fourth placex choose to be referenced by platforms that display common values and objectives. This is the example of Numundo, an association headquartered in San Francisco, which builds a "decentralized network" of dozens of coworking places oriented towards exchanging experiences around alternative modes of personal and/or economic development (social and solidarity economy, permaculture, life design, etc.).

We see a set of networks of fourth placex emerging, and by extension, networked territories. In this regard, networking involves more informal flows of DNs. Contacts and meetings during stays and via social media frequented by DNs produce and maintain links between fourth placex. Thus, D. has been traveling to European fourth placex for almost two years and regularly meets DNs previously encountered during previous stays. He believes that these interrelations play a significant role in his destination choices. This intermediation situation refers to a form of networking of DNs with other spaces and host territories on a global scale. Thus, DNs are recommended their next fourth place by word of mouth. It is essential to inquire before staying there. The DN, who must anticipate and plan his future stays and mobilities, consults with other DNs present and discusses with the managers-animateurs about other fourth placex to help with their selection. This suggests that there would be a form of progressive path between certain fourth placex and countries. Although they are almost invisible, these intermediations between territories and fourth placex suggest that there are informal

"world routes" of fourth place, akin to the "Grand Tour" of young English nobles who were pioneers of tourism development in the 18th century.

In contrast, even if the digital nomad wishes to move freely, his itinerary remains limited and punctuated by the validity of his tourist visa. This singularity has led Estonia to create a special visa, alongside the tourist visa, which allows residence for one year in the Schengen area. Since it is about working everywhere with a simple tourist visa, fourth place, as new spaces of intermediation, question the anchoring to the territory.

Far from the often-praised libertarian ideology of DNs, the question of their fiscal anchoring also arises. Here we reach the limits of an imagined free use of the world territory by the DN: the latter is always preparing for his future mobility, with a departure sometimes imposed by the duration of the visa depending on his current destination-residence. Consequently, the network territory of fourth place is still shaped by national borders and the "power" to circulate that his passport grants him.

### **3. Discussion and Conclusion: Toward Augmented Territorial Intermediation by fourth place**

In this concluding section, we explore this form of territorial complexification through the emergence of fourth place and the practices of their users. Digital nomads shape a usage of the world that is both unique and normative through the fourth place they frequent, their itineraries, and their spatial practices. The places we have presented all share the characteristic of being located in peripheral territories, far from the economic centralities of major global metropolises. By analyzing the discourse of the managers of these places and the digital nomads, we observe a form of instrumentalization of peripherality, manifested in a desire to relativize the distance while preserving its specificities. This ambivalence between proximity and distance reveals a dual positioning: a well-affirmed physical presence in the located territory and, at the same time, a global influence accentuated by digital networks.

#### **3.1. Fourth places in an expanded/augmented territory.**

These networks, based notably on the forms taken by communication via the Internet (websites, digital social networks, forums) and on new models of production (open-source software), information (wikis), and distribution (e-commerce), revolve around cooperation within communities with evolving boundaries (Benghozi, 2006). This circulation of knowledge, consisting of discourses, codes, and practices, produced, and reappropriated by the digital community, not only asserts a permeability of social life domains such as work and leisure but more broadly signifies a unique way of thinking about the world. These operations, cultures, and even ideologies, intrinsic to digital nomads and their digital practices, as fourth places are part of their universe, consequently, lead to the creation of a supra level of territorial intermediation, forming a territory that could be termed as augmented.

Indeed, the digital nomad community narrates spatialities in a unique way, "describing [...] a relationship between the inhabitant and his territory through the places he talks about and whose properties he virtually expresses in communities of connected users" (Benghozi, 2006). Using digital platforms extensively for communication, digital nomads and their fourth places thus generate data (geo-referenced comments and photographs) providing a singular interpretation of territories. The analysis of online practices contributes to enriching the notion of territory,

considering, for example, the digital social network Facebook as an "original territorial descriptor, complementary to traditional spatial analysis tools" (Vienne et al., 2017).

Consequently, representing a unique usage of the world, the digital practices of users in these fourth places question the notions of time and space at the scale of territories. These real locations could thus partly resemble heterotopias ('other' locations) that 'have the curious property of being in relation to all other locations, but in such a way that they suspend, neutralize, or invert all the relations that are designated, reflected, or reflected by them' (Foucault, 2001 [1984])

### **3.2. The circulation of fourth places through digital means**

Finally, through the constant circulation of these discourses on social media networks, these fourth places thus exist on expanded and diffuse territories, both physical and digital. They can be considered as cultural entities in themselves (Jeanneret, 2008). Understood in this way, they are constructed through the circulation of their forms. Indeed, beyond their physical materiality (physical and geo-located places), these fourth places exist through social processes of knowledge and representation production, actively animated by this community (websites, forums, social networks). The constant production of these digital discourses creates a multitude of virtual representations of the territories where the fourth places are located. Due to their specificities, these representations are coded symbols in which digital nomads recognize themselves. They allow, for example, the selection of future fourth places and, thereby, future destinations, confirming their belonging to the same community.

If this unique mediatization of fourth places leads to a convergence towards a common promise, it interacts at the level of the real territory in multiple ways, like any media discourse. It can, for example, by bringing certain territories into visibility that were previously preserved from mass tourism, generate a trend and act on the attractiveness of the places concerned. Let's not forget that digital nomads themselves, through their roles and professions (including influencers), can be considered as opinion leaders for their communities and clientele.

This initiated process of tourist normalization can also eventually downgrade the interest of the destination and its attractiveness. As evidence, the mass tourism experienced by Bali is a factor that threatens its position on the map of digital nomad destinations, who may prefer to shift their choices to less crowded and more confidential territories.

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