

Aleksandra Sztuk

ORCID: 0000-0002-1845-0363

Wrocław University of Economics and Business

aleksandra.sztuk@ue.wroc.pl

Essential elements of a city offer addressed to digital nomads: The perspective of territorial marketing

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Abstract

The digital nomad lifestyle has become one of the fastest-growing trends in the labor market in recent years. Digital nomads, people settling in a city as its residents for several months before changing their location again, are active consumers of the city's offer, which profits the host territorial unit. This specific group of customers requires designing a separate communication of the city offer, increasing the probability of choosing a given city as the next destination. The article aims to identify the significant elements of the city's offer from the perspective of digital nomads. These data were collected based on the literature (scoping review method) and then summarized. The author identified key aspects related to the expectations of nomads towards the destination and the barriers encountered during the stay.

1. Introduction

The changes in the modern world resulting from globalization, related to the development and availability of means of transport and digital technologies, have affected the popularity of a new trend in the labor market, which is digital nomadism (Fibingier, 2021). Individual issues also influence the growing popularity of digital nomadism: internal desire for higher individualization and the autonomy of action (Hannonen, 2020). Digital nomads are one of the newest and, at the same time, rapidly expanding external groups of city users who are active consumers of the city's offers while staying in a given destination. Nowadays, territorial units

compete by developing infrastructure, technology, acquiring various resources and stakeholders who invest their capital in the city. Therefore, a local government trying to attract nomads as customers and designing an offer to meet their expectations may increase the city's profitability and competitiveness. By settling in a given territorial unit, digital nomads share their knowledge and experience, support the tourism industry, can be one of the indicators for the development of the city, and additionally affect the reputation of the place because they spread the value and image of the city in the world among others, thus increasing awareness (Mladenović, 2016). As the latest research implies, digital nomads are exceptionally active on social media, promoting this lifestyle and thus popularizing the destinations they visit (Bonneau and Aroles, 2021).

Due to the relatively new but rapidly developing phenomenon of digital nomadism, it is necessary to identify and summarize the essential requirements and expectations of digital nomads toward destinations. Data on this subject can significantly increase the efficiency in designing and communicating the city's offer, influencing the decisions of digital nomads regarding the choice of the destination city.

In this paper, based on the review and summary of research, the author answers the question: What information should cities contain in their offers to increase the interest of digital nomads? In order to address this question, two additional should be answered: What are the expectations and needs of digital nomads regarding the destination, and what barriers do they face in destination cities? The explored phenomenon is referred to cities in the paper because research among digital nomads shows that the vast majority of them (95%) prefer cities to rural areas as their destination (Sztuk, 2023).

Remote work mode is not only one of the labor market trends, but also the future of the global labor market (Vagena, 2021), and the group of digital nomads is another target segment of the city that affects its profitability and development. It is predicted that within ten years, the number of digital nomads will exceed one billion (Hatalaska, 2017). The COVID-19 pandemic has particularly stimulated the interest and popularity of testing the digital nomad lifestyle (De Almeida et al., 2021). The trend of remote and nomadic work is projected to increase in the post-pandemic period (Sztuk, 2022).

2. Theoretical framework of the research

Due to the relatively sudden but constantly rising growth of the phenomenon of digital nomadism, this group has aroused interest among scientists, who started researching various aspects of this lifestyle but ignored the issues supporting the development of host places (Gurvičius, 2021). Previous empirical research conducted in this community concerned, among others, identifying motivators to remain a digital nomad and adapting to destinations (Reichenberger, 2017), ethnographic

research on identity (Prester, Cecez-Kecmanovic, and Schlagwein, 2019), activities in the visited place (Thompson, 2019), and much on nomad lifestyle practices, e.g. (Green, 2020). Few studies focus on the typical marketing perspective of nomads as consumers of a territorial unit and on activities aimed at increasing interest in a given city. Nevertheless, some scientists have already identified empirical factors influencing the choice of location (Lhakard, 2022) or the choice due to the favorable environment for carrying out professional duties (Mladenović, 2016). In one of the latest scientific articles, the authors argue the need to implement messages useful for digital nomads into the branding strategy of cities (Silvanto, Ryan, 2023).

This paper aims to identify the information that should be included in their offers by destinations wishing to increase the likelihood of interest and acquisition of the target group of digital nomads. The author assumes that based on the analysis of more advanced research among nomads, it is possible to specify the characteristics of the place that they particularly desire, as well as the barriers in achieving goals related to the use of the city's offer and exploration of local culture. This procedure may allow for developing proposals for the necessary information a given territorial unit may use in communication. Also, it may positively impact its perception and, ultimately, the digital nomad's choice as the next destination. The paper describes the research method and the data collection technique. Next, digital nomads were characterized as consumers of the city's offer, also their expectations and possible barriers to using destinations' offer. Based on the literature review, essential information on destinations from the perspective of digital nomads was indicated.

3. Research methodology

In order to answer the research questions, the scoping review method was used. This type of literature review is recommended for new or newly developed research areas, especially when the descriptions in publications for the researched problem are dispersed (Ćwiklicki, 2020), which is the case of digital nomads in the context of place marketing. At various stages of the literature review, the paper's author noted new aspects relating to the requirements or barriers of destinations from the perspective of nomads, and the analysis of these threads was deepened, which is possible using the scoping review methodology.

In order to collect the research material in the form of secondary data, quantitative and qualitative research, and literature reviews, Scopus, Web of Science reviewed literature databases and the Google Scholar browser were used. The language of papers was limited to English and Polish, in the fields of sociology, geography, management, economics, and tourism, without applying the criterion of the year of publication. At the first stage of the scoping review consisting of collecting materials, the keyword "digital nomads" was used at the TITLE-ABS-KEY level, which brought 176 results in the database; 32 articles were selected after reviewing the abstracts. These were mainly ethnographic studies and research

defining the concepts of digital nomadism and nomad. Then, to cover the scope of the researched issues, the following keywords were used: “digital nomads place/city,” giving 28 results in WoS and 22 in Scopus. Finally, the search was narrowed down to the following keywords: “digital nomads branding/place marketing,” which gave only two results in WoS. Then, studies were reviewed in which digital nomads carried out activities in the destination, lifestyles, and difficulties were identified and described. Gradually, the researched literature was extended again with issues concerning such aspects as co-working places, establishing and maintaining social relations, residence permits, and work-life balance in the context of digital nomadism.

Articles were qualified for review based on the content of the abstract. Including materials from Google Scholar, 58 scientific papers were analyzed and two master’s theses. Based on the synthesis of the collected data, chronologically progressing research in the literature on the digital nomads’ requirements towards the features of the city was tabulated, and the most frequently appearing barriers related to the achievement of their own goals, presented by this group in empirical research, were listed. The scoping review ended with presenting the collected materials and a narrative proposal of crucial information about the city’s offer addressed to digital nomads.

4. Digital nomads as consumers of the city’s offer

4.1. Characteristics of digital nomads

To properly design the city’s offer and present it using the proper communication channels, it is necessary to segment the recipients at the beginning properly: define and characterize individual groups.

According to the literature, digital nomads are a group of employees that is independent of location due to the opportunities related to flexibility and mobility offered by digital technologies (Jarrahi et al., 2019). Digital nomads constantly change their residence, living on the income obtained by working remotely. One of the most characteristic features of nomads is constant movement and change of location, where they stay on average for about 1–3 months (Tagliaferri, 2022). Because nomads do not inhabit a given location for an extended period (Schlagwein, 2018), it is not easy to estimate how many there are in the world. According to data, it is about 35 million (Tagliaferri, 2022).

In the case of digital nomads, the habit of traveling and a nomadic lifestyle is often so strong that they cannot imagine staying in a permanent place of settlement (Fibingier, 2021). The most common jobs performed by digital nomads (primarily freelancers) include programming, consulting, marketing, translation, and teaching. Many digital nomads are higher-income Westerners (Bonneau and Aroles, 2021). Most often, these are highly educated people (Green, 2020). The gender

division of digital nomads is proportional, and statistics show that nearly half of all nomads are people aged 30–39 (Digital Nomad Statistics, 2023). The results of empirical studies show that nearly 60% of nomads travel alone, and only 5% of them travel with a family member (Sztuk, 2023). Digital nomads are a community characterized by high entrepreneurship (Jarrahi et al., 2019). Digital nomads maintain relationships and close contact primarily with people who prefer a similar lifestyle, have similar priorities, and understand the need for freedom and discovery (Hannonen, 2020). Below (Figure 1) is a diagram presenting the distinguishing features that identify the segment of digital nomads.

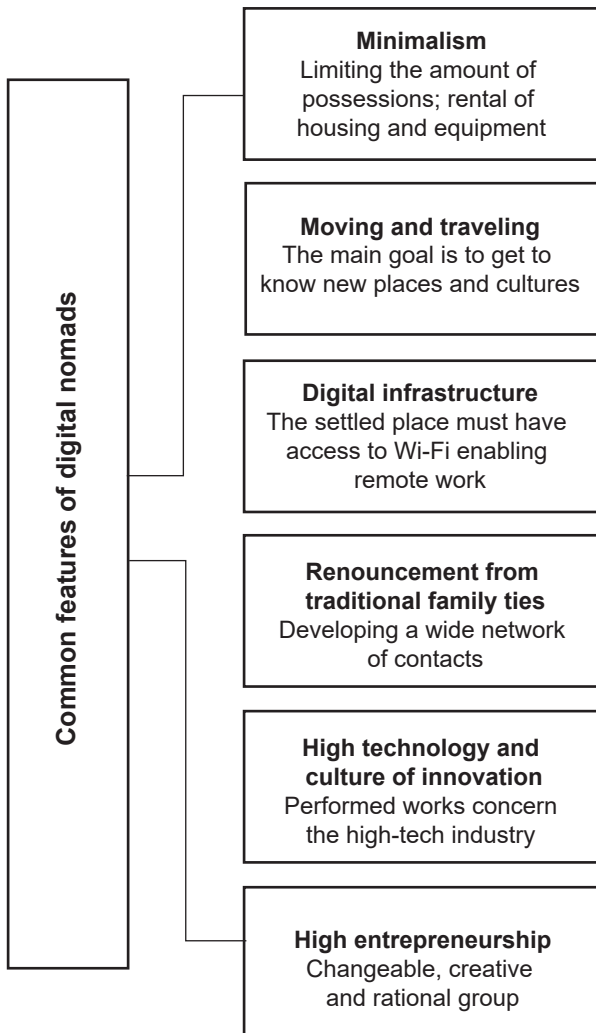


Figure 1. Common features of digital nomads

Source: own elaboration based on: Fibingier, 2021; Bartosik Purgat, 2018; Thompson, 2019.

Depending on the field studied, digital nomadism can be considered a cultural phenomenon, a new type of activity, a type of tourism, a mode of work, but most often, is perceived as a whole lifestyle (Hannonen, 2020; Reichenberger, 2017). Digital nomads can be incorrectly associated with tourists, remote workers, or expatriate workers. In terms of these groups and digital nomads, there are some similarities but also significant differences, so they should not be identified with the above three groups that use the city's resources differently. This is important from the perspective of further verification of their requirements and needs about the place and then designing separate marketing messages. The main difference between tourists and digital nomads is that tourists set specific dates for traveling (Nash et al., 2018) and are usually free from work. Digital nomads also see themselves as more "serious" and engaged in exploring visitors than traditional tourists. Digital nomads are distinguished from average remote workers by the unique value given to global travel, independence from the employer, and extreme mobility (Prester et al., 2019). When choosing a destination, they are not guided by political or economic reasons, as is the case with typical emigrant workers. Digital nomads choose a place based on issues related to getting to know but also rest, not because of the labor market (Müller, 2016).

4.2. Destination expectations

Although digital nomads, as typical consumers of the city's offer, are a poorly recognized problem from the marketing perspective, based on the research, it is possible to distinguish certain aspects relating to various spheres of their activity in the place of destination. The table below (Table 1) presents the attributes of a place presented by scientists as necessary from the perspective of digital nomads.

Analyzing the attributes of a place, which are necessary from the point of view of digital nomads, presented in the literature over the years, it can be seen that the development of research on the issue has contributed to better and broader recognition of their needs. From being perceived as a group of remote workers traveling the world, they have become a group of city users who also need a sense of belonging and security, and a community actively strengthening their identity.

In the majority of scientific papers devoted to the issue of digital nomadism, there is an aspect referring to the infrastructure of the work environment necessary to perform professional duties. Digital nomads often separate their workplaces from their residences, using dining facilities or coworking spaces. In some locations, an increased number of people of various origins working, e.g., in cafes with Wi-Fi access, can be observed (Rakhmadi, 2021). A places frequently used by digital nomads during their stay in a given destination are coworking spaces, which have been evolving for several years and now have a robust segment of potential users (Rakhmadi, 2021). Coworking spaces are fully and modernly equipped office

Table 1. Necessary features of the place from the perspective of a digital nomad

Author	Aim and research method	Place features
Mladenović (2016)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Concept article – Determination of indicators that explain the place as attractive to work from the perspective of a nomad 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Place availability (public transport) – Enables a positive economic result (travel costs, maintenance permits) – IT infrastructure
Müller (2016)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Literature review – Description of digital nomads as a research category 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Tourist offer – Cultural offer – Aesthetic values – Possibility of recreation and activity
Bartosik-Purgat (2018)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Literature review – Presentation of digital nomadism as a trend on the labor market 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Internet access – Low maintenance costs – Overall attractiveness of the place
Appell (2021)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Literature review – Strategy for the Canadian island towards digital nomads 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Coworking spaces – Developed and fast access to the Wi-Fi – Comfortable and equipped housing – Understandable visa policy
Orel (2021)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Research note on the example of Thailand – Recognizing the hybridization of the hotel industry and adapting the city's infrastructure to digital nomads 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Access to urban space (allowing to discover the city and feel free) – Security (access to different resources) – Workplace infrastructure (spaces that allow to work and gain contacts in a foreign place)
Lhakard (2022)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Qualitative research based on in-depth interviews with 11 nomads – Identifying the factors of migration to the destination city Chiang Mai 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Nature and culture – Workplace infrastructure (coworking spaces, fast Wi-Fi) – Size of the digital nomad community in the city

Source: own elaboration based on literature review.

spaces that enable business duties' free and comfortable performance. The idea behind coworking spaces is to provide high-standard equipment but also counteract the feeling of isolation in the case of work performed from home, help to separate work from home, increase creativity, and provide opportunities to establish interpersonal bonds. With the development of research, where digital nomadism was combined with coworking space, scientists show that this infrastructure is critical for nomads in a social and professional relationships context (Appell, 2021).

Due to the frequent change of location of digital nomads, as mentioned earlier, their possessions are limited to the minimum necessary, and they believe that "everything is temporary and nothing belongs to you" (Alkan Bala, 2021, 339). Therefore, apart from co-working spaces (available and used also by permanent residents of cities), accommodation facilities will play an important role – here, in particular, coliving spaces. What distinguishes these places from traditional rented accommodation is complete equipment, lower costs, shared spaces, and the pres-

ence of a manager who organizes various activities and supports the integration of temporary residents. This helps to minimize the feeling of loneliness; additionally, the presence of other nomads strengthens their sense of identity (von Zumbusch and Lalicic, 2020). Flats of this type are for short-term rentals, which is much easier than traditional rental accommodation and cheaper than short-term rented Airbnb facilities. Coliving offers, due to meeting the needs of both residential and those related to social contact and relationships, are popular among nomads (von Zumbusch and Lalicic, 2020).

Another aspect that recurs in research on digital nomads is the desire to develop a network of contacts with other nomads, which is aimed at sharing experiences and help, strengthening the sense of belonging and identity, and reducing loneliness. Some participate in conferences, meetings, and events organized for digital nomads, where they exchange experiences and strengthen their belonging to this community (Thompson, 2019). It is surprising to find in one of the latest studies that digital nomads attach more importance to social aspects than to natural and geographical values, looking for contacts of like-minded people in the place of their destination, which gives them a sense of comfort (de Loryn, 2022). Some consider relationships with other nomads as one of the priorities and reasons indirectly explaining the use of co-working spaces (Schlagwein, 2018). In empirical research involving interviews among digital nomads, the cities they inhabit (European and Asian cities were studied) were a good choice precisely because of the large and active group of digital nomads (Beaumont, 2019; Lhakard, 2022).

4.3. Barriers while staying at the destination

The main barrier to the free movement of digital nomads is the issue of stay policy: visas, residence permits, and access to health and education services. These issues before departure cause uncertainty (Cook, 2023). More countries, to attract nomads, are introducing visa facilities directly addressed to this group (Schlagwein, 2018). These changes are introduced due to the economic value that nomads bring with their stay (using touristic, cultural, gastronomic facilities, etc.). Visa policy addressed to digital nomads, specifying the length of legal stay (usually about a year), has already been introduced, among others, in Australia, Croatia, Estonia, Spain, and Indonesia; in other countries, tourist visas are most often used (Svobodová, 2022). Legal and political issues should be understandable, simplifying organizational and reducing the time associated with searching for and analyzing legal provisions regarding residence in a given country.

Another barrier in digital nomad destinations is establishing closer contacts, which is part of the general need to have and maintain entire networks of inter-

personal relationships, as outlined earlier. Attempts to socialize are often noticed with other nomads and locals and less with tourists (Alkan Bala, 2021). However, despite their attempts to delve into the culture of the destination and local community, digital nomads have problems establishing lasting bonds with residents, directly affecting their lack of feeling as part of the city (Beaumont, 2019). Their active attempts to establish contacts with the local community usually consist of casual social contacts, involvement in top-down social and charity campaigns, and even creating events (Mancinelli, 2020). The mode of work and frequent relocation make it challenging to establish lasting bonds, which results in a frequent sense of loneliness among nomads (Mancinelli, 2020); in particular, single nomads emphasize the importance of building relationships with the community in a given destination (Reichenberger, 2017). While destinations can mitigate these feelings by encouraging nomads to participate in various actions or organizing events targeted at nomads, the local community's attitude can be challenging to change, and the benefits in the form of economic development of the city, including local businesses, are not convincing enough. Local can feel the adverse effects of accepting digital nomads, e.g., overpopulation, resource consumption (Perkumiene and Pranskūnienė, 2019), and conflicts resulting from cultural differences (Capocchi et al., 2019).

The next barrier may seem prosaic, but due to the repetition of the problem of the difficulty with maintaining a balance between work and leisure, raised in numerous studies among digital nomads, this aspect will be presented in more detail. Despite changing their location cyclically, the surveyed digital nomads strive for a calm lifestyle while performing their work and having routine activities (Beaumont, 2019). The balance between work and free time is essential to them as a highly autonomous group that values freedom. Among digital nomads, there are internal problems with time management and work-leisure balance (Green, 2020). Some nomads work long hours, depending on the day, and spend the following days as their free time (Bonneau and Aroles, 2021). The work of nomads ensures the continuity of financial resources and thus determines the maintenance of a lifestyle, which is also associated with some pressure. Constantly moving, choosing a destination, and then getting to know the place and adapting to the circumstances negatively affects not only work balance but also eating habits and hobbies, making it difficult to plan and carry out physical activities (von Zumbusch and Lalicic, 2020). Working for clients from different time zones makes it challenging for digital nomads to plan hours for rest while being in a completely new place, and the emotions associated with it negatively affect the focus on work. Daily activities and external services, such as laundry, hairdresser, and commercial facilities, take much more time due to the lack of knowledge of the area (Mouratidis, 2018).

4.4. Essential information about the city's offer addressed to digital nomads

The city's offer and how it communicates with its surroundings are components of visual identification, influencing the perception of the city (Szromnik, 2016). The image (individual perception) is an intangible resource affecting the city's competitiveness (Gosik and Żelazna-Jochim, 2018). Importantly and strategically, from a marketing point of view, the image of a place can be present in the minds of recipients who have never visited a given city (Lynch, 1960). This means that the perception of a place may be influenced by the received and collected information about it and not requires previous physical presence. In addition, the image has a simplifying and supporting function (Łuczak, 2002), which is most often manifested when choosing a city as a destination. Therefore, the offer and its communication are essential in increasing the city's competitiveness.

Although digital nomads are generally perceived as people focused on discovering the culture and identity of the places they visit regularly, the latest literature based on empirical research among nomads implies that they show needs not only related strictly to tourist attributes. The surprising result of the analysis is the socio-psychological aspect, which is the need for real interpersonal relationships with residents and other nomads residing in the place of destination. The desire to stay in touch with the city's residents makes it easier for them to achieve their goal, which is a more profound and better understanding of the culture and specificity of the destination, also giving them a sense of not being isolated from the place where they are staying. Expanding the network of contacts with other nomads results in exchanging experiences, strengthening the identity as a group, and giving support.

It was noticed that individual attributes of a given location could meet various identified needs of digital nomads at the same time, e.g.:

- the presence of coworking/coliving places: they provide digital infrastructure to perform duties and cheaper costs of living, but also allow separating work from home; they can help meet the need for contact;
- city events: introduce people to city culture and provide entertainment while facilitating contact with residents;
- residence regulations: informs about applicable regulations, and if presented transparently and in simple way, it can reduce the feeling of uncertainty;
- the presence of other digital nomads: proves the popularity of the destination and creates the opportunity to establish lasting bonds with people with similar values and priorities;
- city identification system: coherently designed, it is an element of the city's image, facilitates movement, and helps save time in a new location.

The above presented elements are considered vital information about the place from the perspective of digital nomads in light of research. Therefore, it is sug-

gested that cities use messages containing rational and emotional elements in marketing communication with digital nomads. Emotional communication emphasizes values in the message, not just focusing on facts or figures. The purpose of using emotional aspects is to evoke positive emotions and associations about the presented good (Kozłowska, 2012). A skillful combination of rational and emotional content in marketing communication affects the positive result of advertising, i.e., achieving the intended goals in the form of higher consumption (Makowski, 2022).

5. Conclusions

As Bartosik-Purgat (2018) noted a few years ago, along with the growing trend of digital nomadism, their needs, requirements, expectations, and behavior as city customers will evolve. This may be due to the ever-increasing number of digital nomads who create active communities in the place of their destination, striving, among others, to get to know the local culture of the visited place better. Although the two main pillars that describe digital nomads are geographic mobility and work using portable mobile devices (Mancinelli, 2020), there is much more to their needs as a group visiting and residing in the city.

This paper, based on the scoping literature review, collectively presents the main expectations of digital nomads, influencing the choice of a given city as a destination and satisfaction with the stay. As for the theoretical contribution to territorial marketing, only a few studies link the promotion and use of the city's offer with the segment of digital nomads. The juxtaposition of previous research and conclusions allows for systematizing existing knowledge about them in place marketing. As for the practical input, the paper also suggests a two-element message about the city, which may positively influence the willingness to choose a destination. The list of identified requirements concerning the destination allows for the development of an optimal urban offer and the use of more effective marketing communication toward digital nomads. The attractiveness of a given destination compared to other destinations may also manifest itself in marketing messages emphasizing the city's attitude to eliminating barriers to staying in a given place. Cities wishing to attract these specific customers should consider the perception of the city by the digital nomad community, their characteristics, and satisfaction opportunities. The inclusion by local authorities in city strategies to increase customers in the form of digital nomads can bring numerous benefits to the city, especially from the perspective of dynamic development and expansion of this group.

Future research may identify the most effective channels for distributing information about the city and communicating with digital nomads. It would be helpful to identify which sources of information they consider the most reliable and where they most often look for information about the destination.

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