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The potential of **digital nomadism** for **tourism development** in Alentejo: A preliminary insight

O potencial do **nomadismo digital** para o **desenvolvimento turístico** do Alentejo: Um "olhar" preliminar

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Abstract | The concept of digital nomad became popular with the work of Makimoto and Manners (1997), who started the (scientific) discussion about new lifestyles in which professionals move freely, without having geographically fixed spaces and workplaces. The emergence of conceptualising digital nomads is associated with a set of societal changes arising from the phenomenon of globalisation, and the digital economy (Jacobs & Gussekloo, 2016), the consequent generalisation of new technologies, the public and private scope of the social experience of individuals and the expansion of connectivity resulting from the evolution of the digital era itself (Castro & Gosling, 2022). These changes have brought a paradigm shift compared to traditional work practices, allowing workers to work remotely and migrate from home-office to work-office (Castro & Gosling, 2022). Digital nomads have thus become quite important for some destinations (and for their development) and are presented as a new type of visitor-resident. The purpose of this study is to contribute to a better understanding of digital

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nomadism, exploring Alentejo, as a rural destination with the potential to accommodate this type of visitors. The preliminary findings from the visual data analysis interconnect place design to tourism experiences and suggest that future research near stakeholders is warranted to further explore the opportunities and challenges for digital nomadism in rural regions (such as Alentejo), outside the mainstream tourism places to actively attract this growing segment of travellers.

Keywords | tourism, digital nomadism, rural areas, visual data, Alentejo

Resumo | O conceito de nómada digital tornou-se conhecido com o trabalho de Makimoto e Manners (1997), que iniciaram a discussão científica sobre novos estilos de vida nos quais os profissionais se movem livremente, sem terem espaços e locais de trabalho geograficamente fixos. O conceito do indivíduo nómada digital está associado a um conjunto de mudanças sociais decorrentes do fenómeno da globalização e da economia digital (Jacobs & Gussekloo, 2016), à consequente generalização de novas tecnologias no domínio público e privado que altera a experiência social dos indivíduos e ao aumento da conectividade resultante da evolução da era digital em si mesma (Castro & Gosling, 2022). Estas alterações trouxeram uma mudança de paradigma em comparação com as práticas de trabalho tradicionais, permitindo que os trabalhadores trabalhem remotamente e se movam do escritório em casa para o escritório de trabalho (Castro & Gosling, 2022). O nomadismo digital veio a tornar-se bastante relevante para alguns destinos (e para o seu desenvolvimento) e estes indivíduos aparecem apresentados como um novo tipo de visitante-residente. O objetivo deste estudo é contribuir para uma melhor compreensão do nomadismo digital, explorando o Alentejo, como um destino rural com potencial para acomodar este tipo de visitantes. Os resultados preliminares da análise de dados visuais interligam o design do lugar às experiências turísticas e sugerem uma necessidade de aprofundar a investigação junto de agentes do território para que se explore mais profundamente as oportunidades e desafios deste fenómeno social para os territórios rurais da região (como o caso do Alentejo), fora dos lugares turísticos convencionais, atraindo ativamente este crescente segmento de viajantes.

Palavras-chave | turismo, nómadas digitais, áreas rurais, dados visuais, Alentejo

1. Introduction

Digital nomadism, as a traveling behaviour, has been connected to two types of spaces and landscapes. On one hand, the literature has early mentioned, urban spaces within the idea of startup-cities and cities with a creative vibe (Florida, 2003; Merkel, 2015), and on the other, paradisiac islands where the scenery of sea and sun epitomised the lifestyle idea of Tim Feriss´four-hour work week (Ferriss, 2007). Since the last decade, international networks (e.g. ECHN) and coworking operators (e.g. Selina Group) have explored the interconnections of the leisure-work continuum to nurture working communities through leisure experiences connected to place-making. In Portugal, the entrepreneurial discourse focusing the potential of rural areas to attract digital working travellers, only passed to the sphere of tourism amid the covid pandemic lockdowns. The aftermath of covid introduced new ways of working, as an opportunity to the development of low density populated rural areas, embodying a future smart countryside that mixes technological to social elements (Bosworth et al., 2023).

There is a growing interest in exploring the potential of digital nomadism in the rural areas of the Alentejo region, which hosts various creative and artistic retreats and more recently coworking spaces (Rodrigues, Amaral & Albino, 2023). These retreats, emerging in a globally connected society (Castells, 2004), exhibit a complex relationship. On one hand, they align with the tourism image of the destination and the allure it holds for visitors. On the other hand, they strive to maintain a distinct separation from the notion of their participants transitioning into traditional tourists (Albino & Alcobia, 2021). The purpose of this exploratory study, the first stage of an ongoing research, is to contribute to a better understanding of this audience, exploring the potential of Alentejo region as a destination.

Visual data, through the analysis of photos and videos that shows, was the method's approach used in this stage aiming to extract the main features which are very relevant to attract and accommodate the needs of this target group. The exploratory findings suggested a relation of digital nomadism as a target in place design and narrative of tourism destination images. Still, future research is needed to further explore and assess the possibilities of accommodating digital nomadism in small towns of the region and to actively attract this segment of travellers.

2. Theoretical contextualization

2.1. Digital Nomadism: concept and profile

There are different definitions of the digital nomad in sociological terms, but technology-enabled mobility has become the common denominator. Digital nomads have been defined in the research literature, as Internet-enabled remote workers, who maintain a focus on connectivity and productivity even in leisure (Bozzi, 2020). According to Bloomberg (cited in Vagena, 2021), the term 'digital nomad' was first used to refer to a generation of millennials travelling around the world based on technologies such as smartphones or laptops. Today, the concept is more accurate, and it is known as global nomads, including people who work independently, from their laptops, without a specific location, which means they can work or study from home or anywhere - if they have a good Wi-Fi connection (Vagena, 2021).

Digital nomads represent a modern "knowmad" society whose boundaries between leisure, travel, and work appear blurred (Orel 2019). Nevertheless, despite the fact, that travel is a key element of digital nomadism, limited attempts have been made to understand the dynamics of digital nomadism and tourism (Chevtaeva & Guillet, 2021).

According to Reichenberger (2017), the representation of this lifestyle is based on constant travel, and technology became a contributor to the harmonisation of tourism and leisure with the work sphere in daily life. In this perspective, work does not have a negative connotation in the lifestyle of individuals, and, at the same time, leisure is a motivating activity.

Digital nomadism is a relatively recent tourism segment and had an increased notoriety and relevance with the COVID-19 pandemic (Garcez, Correia & Carvalho, 2022). Many of those digital nomads are on a constant search to slow down from the daily grind (Viaggio Magazine, 2024). Digital nomadism has also brought upon a new form of creative tourism that highlights the involvement of those in the creative life of the destination and interaction with local communities by exchanging skill sets and ideas in a synergetic way by using local coworking spaces (Richards & Marques, 2012 cited in Orel, 2019) and co-living in creative hubs and retreats (Albino & Alcobia, 2021).

It is not easy to strictly define the digital nomad concept. The literature presents the following aspects: Free-moving professionals without a fixed office-space who enjoy an alternative lifestyle (Makimoto and Manners, 1997, Ferriss, 2007); Mostly freelance workers from the creative milieu and technology related professions with strong social networks (Thompson,

2019); Traditionally part of the group of free-moving people who have been able to work digitally, in foreign, exotic places (Reichenberger, 2017; Richards, 2015).

Various recurring elements of digital nomadism have been identified. To better understand their potential profile it can be identified characteristics such as: work remotely and depend on digital technologies; digital work and jobs that can be conducted fully online (e.g. digital marketing; web design; software engineering); employees of large companies (remote employment); usage of social media sites for their own benefit (e.g. to sell a product); in "location independent" and opportunity of having holidays without living work assignments; flexibility (e.g. flexibilization of the workplace and schedule); mobility; identity and community (social spaces); lifestyle; the necessity of work-leisure balance; coexistence of a traditional digital nomad (which works in areas such as technology, web design) and present nomads (such as writers, translators, social media managers, social entrepreneurs, bloggers, analysts, consultants); appreciation for gaining new experiences, especially through travel and becoming excited by the idea of travelling the world while still employed (Orel, 2019; Thompson, 2018; Green & Lomanno, 2016 and HBR 2020 cited by Vagena, 2021; Mouratidis 2018 cited by Prabawa et al., 2020).

A current characterization of digital nomads identifies as digital nomads, remote workers, freelancers, location-independent workers, and online entrepreneurs (Nash, Jaharri, Sutherland & Phillips, 2018).

To better understand their characteristics, some dimensions can also be included such as: travel planning (e.g. use of booking platforms); socio demographic characteristics (transversal to different ages groups); work characteristics (e.g. from entrepreneurs to employees; distinction between traditional and new professions); identification of popular world destinations; benefits for both digital nomads (balance between work, personal life and travel); hosting local communities (contributions for economic development and environment).

So, according to Nash et al. (2018, pp. 3-4), there are four key-elements that constitute the work of digital nomads: digital work (is entwined with location-independent work practices and enables the accomplishment of work while visiting different cities and countries), freelancing (work as independent contractors with flexible work arrangements on demand), nomadic work (most conspicuous aspect of this lifestyle is its constant movement, not only from country to country, but also from workspace to workspace), and adventure and global travel (global travellers with a passion for continuously visiting new places).

Through the literature research, some of the main characteristics pointed to Digital Nomads were summarized (see table 1).

Table 1. Some references to digital nomads 'characteristics according to literature

Digital Nomads	Characteristics
Work characteristics Thompson (2018) (Green & Lomanno, 2016 cited by Vagena, 2021) (HBR 2020 cited by Vagena, 2021)	✓ Digital Work ✓ Remote Work ✓ Traditional job areas (technology, web Design) ✓ Recent job areas (writers, translators, social media managers, social entrepreneurs, analysts, consultants. ✓ Network online ✓ Entrepreneurs; self-employed or Employees ✓ Flexible schedule
Travel organisation planning. WYSE Travel Confederation (2017)	**Digital nomads manage their location independence by:** ✓ making extensive use of Airbnb (56% used on their last main trip) ✓ book air travel online (85%) ✓ use OTAs to book accommodation (55%)
Socio demographic characteristics (HBR 2020 cited by Vagena, 2021)	**It can include several generations:** ✓ Millennials 20 to 35 years old ✓ Generation X between 35 to 50 years old ✓ Baby Boomers who turned 50 years old
Tourism destinations (Hart 2015; Spinks, 2015; Cook, 2020 all cited by Vagena, 2021)	Destinations that offer lower living costs (e.g. Chi-Ang Mai in Thailand; Bali in Indonesia; Medellin in Colombia; Europe - Lisbon, Amsterdam)
Benefits – Digital Nomad life (Sousa, 2022)	✓ Possibility of travelling constantly ✓ Management between personal and professional life ✓ Time and expenses saved daily in travelling to the workplace ✓ Availability for other personal and family enrichment activities
Benefits for environment, economy and population (Sousa, 2022)	✓ Less traffic and energy consumption within large cities ✓ Temporary settlement of digital nomads in inland areas it is possible to have greater investment in these areas ✓ Combats desertification and stimulates previously stopped regions

Source: Authors´ elaboration based on the literature review.

The pull and push factors motivation theory applied to this phenomenon indicated that push factors such as: escape, relaxation, prestige, health, and adventure were intrinsic motivators; and that the pull factors were connected to the propensity to travel and therefore were linked to the attractiveness of a destination (e.g. tangible resources and travellers' perceptions and expectations) (Uysal & Jurowski, 1994).

To better understand what motivates digital nomads, the literature review pointed to dimensions related to pull factors. These were related to: decision making and the attractivity of destinations; affordable living expenditure; availability of suitable amenities and weekly events (see table 2).

But it can also be pointed out the influence of push factors mainly related with: social interaction (e.g. "place to socialize"; "fight loneliness"; "friendly community"; "supportive atmosphere"); relaxation (e.g. " spend time at work"); lifelong learning; using time without restraint; sense and need of freedom (professional, spatial and personal freedom are inextricably connected, and one cannot be fulfilled without the others); self-actualization and autonomy.

Table 2. References to motivational elements of digital nomadism in the literature review.

Digital Nomads	**Understanding Motivations**
Intrinsic factors (Mouratidis 2018 cited by Prabawa et al., 2020) (Muller 2016, cited by Wang et al., 2018)	✓ Fight loneliness ✓ Flexibility ✓ Make it easy ✓ Get the ears out ✓ Self-actualization and autonomy
Attracting factors in destination (extrinsic factors) (Thalass 2017 cited by Prabawa et al., 2020); Green (2020 cited by Vagena, 2021, p.2)	- Affordable living expenditure - Availability of suitable amenities - Friendly community - Various weekly events

Factors considered to decide for destination´s place. Rowland (2011 ced by Prabawa et al., 2020); Rito (Selina Group in Publituris, 2020); Become Nomad (2015, cited by Prabawa et al., 2020)	✓ Homey place ✓ Easy access ✓ Internet connectivity ✓ Place to socialise and where they can share knowledge, ideas ✓ Supportive atmosphere ✓ Inspiring workplace	
Freedom Individual reasons behind adapting a location independent lifestyle through online-based work. (Reichenberger, 2017)	**Professional freedom** - motivation to select and structure work related tasks in a self-imposed manner	Desire to escape the structures of a traditional location dependent working style. Need of 'freedom' - within paid employment, freedom relating to location independence and freedom to pursue self-development.
	Spatial freedom	To live and work in a variety of places and inextricably connected with freedom to learn and experience Exposure to different cultures, ways of life, values, norms, lifestyles and opinions that can be accessed through travel
	Personal freedom (Beneficial for productivity, creativity, and most importantly self-development.)	The autonomy over both spatial movements and professional activities

Source: Authors´ elaboration based on the literature review.

Tourism behaviour can be related with motivations (see table 3), as digital nomads have been portrayed, to stay longer in places and prefer less popular destinations; they like to mingle with the community and enjoy the local natural and cultural heritage.

Table 3. Some references to digital nomads' behaviour according to literature

Behaviour at the destination *Rito (Selina Group in Publituris, 2020); TravelB4Seatle (in Publituris 2020) Justtravelling, (2016 cited by Prabawa et al 2020)*
✓ Average stay for Digital Nomad tourist is longer than stay for the Traditional tourist ✓ Stay between 1 to 3 months ✓ Chose less popular destinations and without too much concentration ✓ Like to consume local products and traditional gastronomy (it is important to create dynamic activities in the territory) ✓ Often rents out their own apartment ✓ Works at night as a freelancer to pay for their travel expenses ✓ During the day, learns local language

Source: Authors´ elaboration based on the literature review.

2.2. Digital Nomads in Portugal and Alentejo: an insight

Portugal has a great potential for digital nomadism and since a decade ago this trend has been gravitating towards the cities of Lisbon and Oporto, as part of public strategies to attract entrepreneurs. Portuguese legislation has also been adapted to accommodate this group, by introducing a temporary stay residence visa for overseas individuals who wanted to work in Portugal remotely. Another important event was the creation of the Portuguese Association Digital Nomads Association Portugal (DNA), in August 2022. It is important to point out several projects which were developed related to co-working (ex. *Second Home* Lisboa); co-working & co-living (*Remote Haven*, Madeira Island); *SameSameLiving*, a creative co-living space in Lisboa; websites and digital platforms (e.g. *Digital Nomad World*; *Rural Digital Nomads*; *Lagos Digital Nomads*; *Portugal Residency Advisors – a guide).* In Portugal, the first hotel for digital nomads was created in 2018, in Oporto, but there's others in places such as: Gerês, Ericeira, Vila Nova de Milfontes, Peniche and Lisboa.

One of the examples is the Selina group. Selina is one of the world's fastest-growing hospitality brands, blending beautifully designed accommodation with coworking, recreation, wellness, and local experiences. It was born in Central America and has expanded its business to Europe. Selina´s group is based on the concept of Travel & Work and is custom-built for today's nomadic traveler providing guests with a global infrastructure to travel and work abroad seamlessly.

In 2007, Selina´s co-founders, Rafael Museri and Daniel Rudasevski were living in Pedasí (Panama), and they began to build a tight-knit social circle comprised of locals and travellers alike and, the first Selina was born in Venao, a surf town near Pedasí in 2014. Since then, Selina has grown and is still growing and is spread all over the world within Central America, Europe, South America and USA and Mexico (Selina, 2024).

Selina provides guests with very attractive places to stay, travel, and work abroad indefinitely and it can be in the heart of urban cities, but also in the depth of the Amazon Jungle. The experience of implementation of this group in very diverse territories, brings knowhow to the development of projects in rural and remote places (Selina, 2024).

The Project "Digital Nomad in Madeira" resulted from a partnership between the Regional Government of Madeira, Startup Madeira and Gonçalo Hall (a digital nomad and remote work consultant). It is estimated to have important economic, environmental, and sociocultural impacts for the region and community related to urban regeneration and economic return to local businesses.

The initial purpose was to bring remote workers to Madeira and Porto Santo Islands, since Madeira region has conditions to attract digital nomads: natural resources; climate; nature and cultural activities; reduced taxation; adequate infrastructures; competitive operational costs safety and quality of life; fast internet (Madeira Corporate Services, 2024).

This project also promoted events to celebrate its community, such as: Porto Santo Nomad Experience (November 2023); Porto Santo Nomad Fest23 (May-June 2023); 2nd NomadHer Women's Digital Nomad Camp 10th-15th June 2023; Digital Nomads Conference, February 2023 (Digital Nomads, 2024).

The competitive factors and main activities of digital nomads hotels and resorts in Portugal have in common: attention to amenities with customized comfort; cultural activities; dynamic calendar, locally-inspired, and unique to each location; high-quality food and gastronomy;

wellness activities; local adventures with local guides; co-work in an inspirational environment with high speed Wi-Fi; art (inspiring surroundings and decors); accommodation packages (month-by-month rental program with accommodation, use of co-work, wellness and Food and Beverage [F&B] discounts).

Various aspects brought the focus of digital nomadism to the Alentejo region since 2021. The Covid-19 pandemic brought attention to rural territories as retreats for social distancing and open spaces. The gentrification and overtourism effects affecting the two most popular digital nomad destinations in Portugal, Lisbon and Oporto also played a role. The governmental focus within a national strategy targeting digital nomadism as an opportunity for regional development (Turismo de Portugal, 2020) had repercussions in various Portuguese regional agencies' plans. Alentejo, as the biggest region in Portugal in terms of territorial expanse and with the lowest population density, started to be an attractive destination for digital nomadism and nomads who can find in the territory some of the renowned resources such as landscape, sea, tranquillity, gastronomy, affordable accommodation, and friendly people.

Some starting projects can also be pointed out, such as the example of Southwest Coast Digital Nomads, which aims to create a community of digital nomads on the Alentejo coast through which they can cross-reference and exchange information relevant to the community, mainly via social networks, and endeavour to satisfy their needs, while at the same time helping to develop the local and regional economy (Sousa, Diário do Alentejo, 2022).

Recently, Alentejo Tourism Board announced the start of a digital nomadism project for the region, as a result of the loss of attractiveness of Lisbon Capital due to the high living costs. According to José Santos, President of Alentejo's Tourism Board, this is a growing segment, and the territory is positioning itself to bring digital nomads to the region since it offers "unique" advantages at attractive prices, which is an added value when it comes to convincing foreigners. The plan defines the creation of five hubs in each sub-region - Alto Alentejo, Alentejo Central, Baixo Alentejo, Alentejo Litoral and Ribatejo. At this stage, there are already several interested municipalities that are currently being assessed to see if they meet the conditions to host the centres (Simão, 2024, Dinheiro Vivo).

For decision-makers, Alentejo will benefit from this product segment: one of the advantages is combating the seasonality that affects the tourism sector in these regions (Cimal, 2023); it has the potential to boost the local economy and help less populated municipalities (Tribuna

Alentejo, 2024). We can see from these examples, that digital nomadism has become a growing niche touching the edges of the tourism hospitality sector and destination branding.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Framework and Research Questions

The main objective of this study is to explore digital nomadism as a new market for tourism and to reflect upon the potential of the Alentejo region as a destination. For now, based on an exploratory and preliminary study, main characteristics and dimensions were identified that could be incorporated into a product and brand in the future. The general objective is reflected in the following research question: "What type of characteristics, dimensions and meanings are involved by the supply perspective in digital nomadism as a tourism product that can help in developing a brand in the future?".

3.2. Analytic Framework

There is a worldwide recognition of the potential use of social media for marketing purposes, and it is important to highlight that tourism is an experiential industry that is unequivocally visual (Garrod, 2009).

Qualitative research projects can embrace visual data such as photography or video and other forms of visual data (Pink, 2004): analysis of visual data (photos, videos, cartoons, mind maps, etc.), adoption of photographs and videos to trigger discussions and conduct interviews on certain subjects or the production of photographs or videos as elements of study by the researcher or participant himself. With the rise of the internet, social media, and visual contents, a new form of image has appeared, one that focuses on visual analysis of photos and videos to express the experience that tourists might have at the destination.

The analysis was based on visual data composed by still (photos) and moving (videos) images about digital nomadism as a product in tourism (data collected in May/June 2021). The method and criteria for selecting the dataset of photos and videos are based on official sources, such as the Selina official Facebook page and the official videos of Digital Nomads Madeira Islands. The source of photos was the Selina group since, as explained in the previous section, is one of the world's fastest-growing hospitality brands for specifically targeting nomadic traveler providing guests with a global infrastructure to travel and work abroad seamlessly. The photos were collected from the Selina official Facebook webpage (available at

https://www.facebook.com/selinathenomad?_ga=2.116407043.445835762.1635116073-1975574103.1635116073), from the official album with a total of 80 photos for the final visual corpus for content analysis. In what concerns the moving images (videos), three video spots from Digital Nomads Madeira Islands (available at Madeira Startups https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCOy8ZqwWy_VbIVYRvvUZ1Zg) were also considered for analysis uses a well-known case study in digital nomadism (Sardinha, Vieira, de Sousa, & Leite, 2023; Zhou, Buhalis, Fan, Ladkin, & Lian, 2024).

As mentioned, in this study, visual data, such as photos and videos, were the main source used to extract information. The approach in terms of an analytical model for the visual data, although a literature review was undertaken, a more inductive analysis was considered at this level. No category system was pre-defined since the goal was to try to interpret the data and try to examine some underlying ideas from the description of the photos and videos to corroborate (or not) with the literature review. The visual element might inform, elucidate, documents, and add value and meaning to the phenomenon itself (Rodrigues, Ghasemi, Correia & Kozak, 2019) and bring new insights. Thus, the photos and videos are seen as generators of perceptions and a way of extending opportunities for broadening meanings and understandings about the topic, providing new data for analysis. The final goal is to generate self-reflection about conceptual understanding.

In terms of analysis, webQDA (Web Qualitative Data Analysis), software which carries out qualitative data analysis individually or collaboratively, synchronously or asynchronously, was used. Computer-Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS) packages began to offer similar possibilities for qualitative data as had been developed for quantitative data from the mid-1960s (for more information on this see Rodrigues, Costa & Moreira, 2019).

3.2.1. Photo analysis

Browns and Collins (2021), in their paper, provide an overview of some of the key analytical frameworks currently in use for visual data. In this study, two approaches were undertaken on the photo analysis procedure: a more quantitative approach based on a more thematic analysis followed by a more qualitative visual analysis, based on the description of the photos. A mixed interpretative-quantitative perspective of content analysis (Greene, Caracelli, & Graham, 1989) was applied.

The main steps of the analytical framework were the following:

1º: Photo's dataset (Selina Facebook webpage) of 80 photos: Purposeful selection (Rose, 2016) that do not intend to be representative;

2º: Thematic analysis according to the dominant topic of each photo;

3º: Classification of photos according to the defined categories;

4º: Description of each photo and content analysis through code creation.

Regarding the thematic analysis of the photos (1st stage), the procedure was mainly based on Braun and Clarke´s (2006) analytical framework. For them (2006, p. 81), "thematic analysis can be a method that works both to reflect reality and to unpick or unravel the surface of 'reality'" and one of its benefits is precisely flexibility. The steps were the following: (i) Familiarization with the photos; (ii) Generating initial codes; (iii) Searching for themes; (iv) Reviewing themes (across whole data set); (v) Defining and naming themes. In this case, a more inductive approach was done, and themes emerged strongly linked with the data set themselves. This form of thematic analysis is data-driven (Patton, 1990).

In the 2nd stage a more qualitative analysis was done based on content analysis of each photo description based on Lupu, Rodrigues, Stoleriu & Gallarza´s procedure (2021). The analysis strategy was grounded on a more "compositional" approach to photography, based on the elements that make up the image. As Rakić (2011) mentions, a more 'representational reading' of the photos was undertaken since tourism is essentially a "way of seeing" and its pleasure is in the eye. In this case, there was no room for interpretation according to a context; it was mainly a description of the photo. Then, the descriptions were content analysed in a more inductive approach, generating free codes extracted from the photos. Content analysis was used as a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from data to their context (Bardin, 2009; Krippendorff, 1989). From this perspective, "photographs, videotapes, or any other item that can be made into text are amenable to content analysis" (Huberman & Miles, 1994, p. 240). It is important to highlight that content analysis is a method that focuses on the image itself and its composition, not on the contextual information, framed by cultural and social perspective.

3.2.2. Video analysis

The videos were based on the following stages based on Cardoso & Vila (2020): extraction of resources, analysis of the resources and indexation. The first stage consisted of the separation of image and text, i.e., the description of the videos and the main information obtained considering the research question of the study were the corpus considered for the analysis. In the second stage, individual segments with text extracted from the video's descriptions and comments constituted the units of analysis. Finally, the third stage—indexation—corresponds to the coding procedure based on a free coding system.

4. Results

The content analysis of visual data (photos and videos) was conducted separately. Nevertheless, the findings are eminently similar. Methodologically, a complementary approach was applied in this study. First reported are the results of photos analysis, followed by video analysis, after which the discussion brings the observations together.

4.1. Photos Analysis

Regarding the first stage of photo analysis, thematic analysis, Figure 1 shows the results of the thematic description of the entire data set. This first approach gives the reader a sense of the predominant or important themes, since they intend to be an accurate reflection of the content of the entire data set (Braun & Clark, 2006). The results from this approach are particularly interesting for topics that are emerging or are under-researched areas such as digital nomadism. From this thematic analysis that was mainly data-driven, was possible to extract six major themes based on the data set of 80 photos, each one of them capturing something important in relation to the overall research question:

(1) *Theme 1:* Contact with the destination - Photos that highlight the destination attractions and the contact between the tourists and the destination;

(2) *Theme 2:* Regular events and experiences – Photos that show several activities and experiences that tourists can do at the destination and during their stay;

(3) *Theme 3:* Suitable amenities & facilities – Photos that show facilities that add quality to the experience itself;

(4) *Theme 4:* Supportive atmosphere – Photos that exhibit a comfortable and enjoyable atmosphere among tourists in different contexts.

(5) *Theme 5:* Inspiring workplace – Photos that share flexible and relaxing workspaces and fluidity of work.

(6) *Theme 6:* Local community and local products – Photos that show an environment of friendly community and local food products.

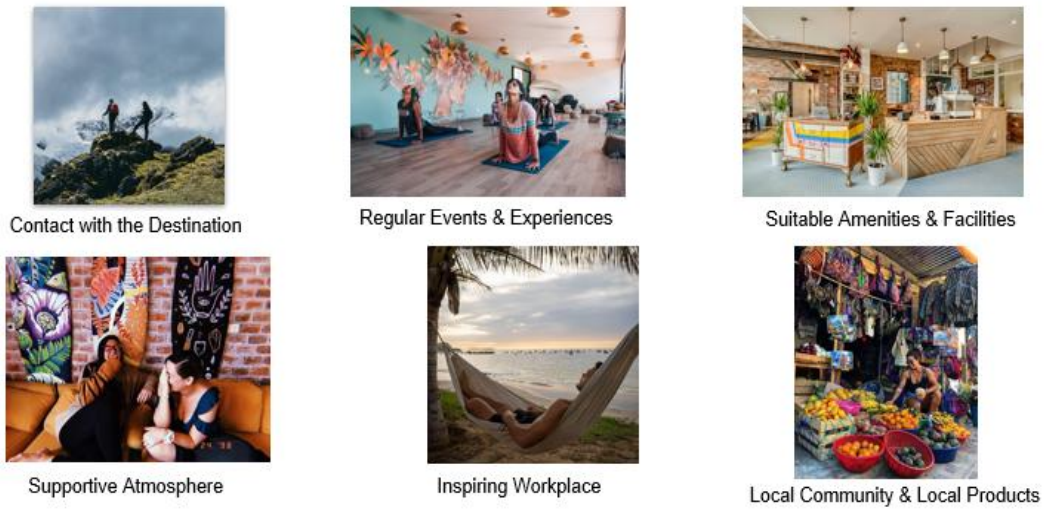


Figure 1: A sample of photo themes extracted from the thematic analysis
Source: Photos extracted from Selina´s Facebook page

These pictorial results show themes related with external factors ("Contact with the destination" and "Local Community & Local Products") and internal factors ("Regular Events & Experiences"; "Inspiring workplace"; "Supportive Atmosphere"; "Suitable Amenities & Facilities").

As Figure 2 exhibits, the theme "Regular Events & Experiences" is the most representative category that demonstrates the need for moments to socialise and keep active (n=33 photos); "Inspiring workplace" is the 2nd most important theme demonstrating the constant need for this segment to mix work with pleasure/leisure ("bleisure") (n=18); the theme "Suitable Amenities

& Facilities" (n=7) highlighting the importance of co-working and social spaces. Finally, themes such as "Contact with the destination" (n=12) and "Local community & local products" (n=5) reinforce a behaviour approach to activate cultural and natural attractions at the destination. In reference to the last theme "Supportive atmosphere" (n=5), pictorial elements highlight a more affective dimension of the experience, based on the need for social spaces in this type of tourism.

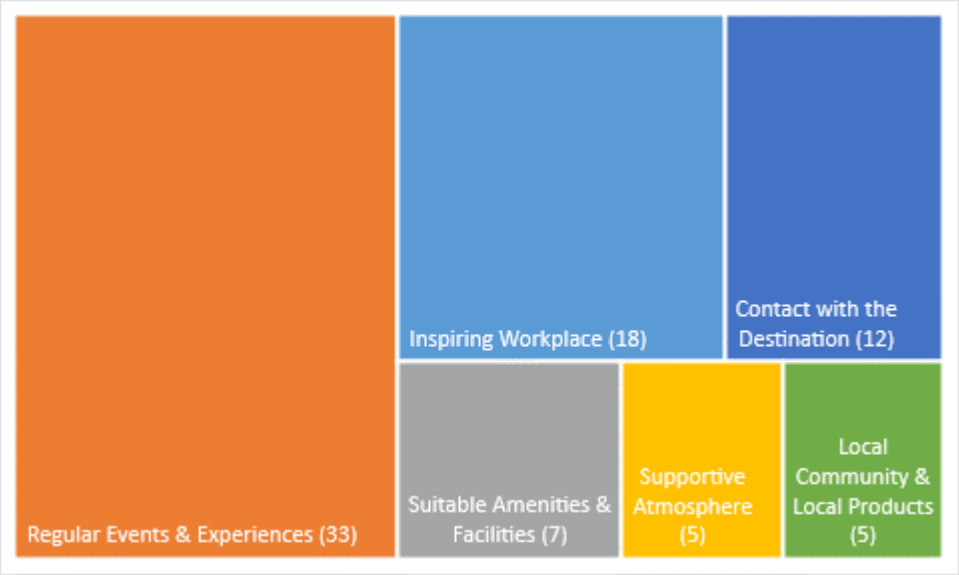


Figure 2: Number of photos classified by main themes

Source: Elaborated by the authors, extracted from the photo's classification, with the help of webQDA.

Related with a more qualitative analysis of photos through their descriptions, Table 4 shows the result of the photo coding procedure with some examples of comments about the photos. Considering that, it was possible to do a more inductive content analysis based on more free coding. From here, categories in each theme were extracted:

(a) *Theme 1:* "Contact with the destination" has three categories (contact with nature, contact with the local atmosphere and doing some physical activities). These are ideas extracted from the photos that highlight important elements related to this type of tourism;

(b) *Theme 2: "*Regular events and experiences" have three categories (physical activities, crafts workshops and contact with nature). These categories demonstrate some important types of experiences that tourists enjoy in digital nomadism;

(c) *Theme 3:* "Suitable Amenities & Facilities" has two categories (social and relaxing spaces, co-working and living spaces), corroborating the importance of these type of spaces that the accommodation sector needs to offer to attract digital nomads;

(d) *Theme 4*: "Supportive Atmosphere" has three categories (be in contact with others; meet new people and stay happy), which enhance their importance for identity and the sense of community in this type of tourism;

(e) *Theme 5:* "Inspiring workplace" has two categories (contact with nature and relax environments) showing the relevance of workplaces that stimuli the work –leisure continuum and the flexibilization and fluidity of workplace;

(f) *Theme 6:* "Local community and local products" has one category extracted from the photos (contact with the locals) expressed in the photos based on the visiting local markets or experiences that drive the contact with the local community.

Table 4: Classification and description of the visual corpus (80 photos)

Main Themes	Some examples of photo´s descriptions per theme (N = 80)	ID Photo	Theme (%)	Categories (free coding)
Contact with the destination	People watching waterfalls in a natural setting full of vegetation	67		. Contact with nature
	Landscape with houses in a city with a public garden, some vegetation in a relaxed atmosphere	68		. Contact with the local atmosphere
	Totally natural landscape: sea, waves, beaches, sunset and vegetation with no one	8	15.0%	
	A surfer in the middle of the sea in a sunset setting, surrounded by waves	48		. Doing some physical activities
	A man relaxed, enjoying the moment, eating cotton candy probably in an amusement park	26		
Regular events and experiences	Paddling in a tranquil atmosphere in a sunset setting	80		. Physical activities
	Yoga exercise in group in a beach setting	74,66		
	Participating in outdoor activities	70	41,2%	. Craft Workshops
	Participating in a craft workshop in group	12,29,21		
	Group gym activity outdoor in a beautiful beach setting	64		. Contact with nature
	Skysurfing in a beach in a sunset setting	44,40		
Suitable amenities & facilities	Comfortable and relaxing room with a modern and colorful decoration	16,23,78		. Social and relaxing spaces
	Co-living space in the accomodation: work space, kitchen and social spaces	55	8,7%	. Co-working and living spaces
	Interior of a bar and restaurant with a relaxing ambiance near the beach	53		
Supportive atmosphere	Playing music and singing together in a relaxing atmosphere	69		. Be in contact with others
	Two women laughing and having fun	46,14	6,2%	. Meet new people
	A group working and discussing together	50		. Stay happy
Inspiring workplace	Relaxing in the sun in a water hammock	59		
	Chat in a relaxed bar	56		. Contact with nature
	Working in a relax atmosphere in a co-working space	52,20,15	22,5%	
	A woman drawing in a relaxed bar environment	32		. Relax environments
	A relax meal in a restaurant with a sea view	27		
Local community and local products	Girl shopping at a local market	76		
	Nature observation guided by locals	31	6,2%	. Contact with the locals
	Very colorful food	2,75		

Source: Authors´ elaboration from webQDA outputs

4.2. Video Analysis

Table 5 shows the result of the coding procedure for the three videos spots promoting digital nomadism. Similarly, as in the photo analysis, a more inductive analysis was conducted without a predetermined schema for categorization. The goal was to freely explore the videos and extract main image contents from the video descriptions. After that, a categorization was done based on a free coding procedure.

Table 5: Classification and description of the visual corpus (3 videos spots about digital nomadism)

Main Themes	Videos descriptions (N = 23)	Theme (%)	Categories (free coding)
Contact with the destination	Landscape images; mountains; sea; cycling Good weather; it is all spring year around; being around nature; you have the ocean and mountains I come year for sun; for peace of mind; for good food; for no real lockdown Enjoy this beautiful island, this beautiful nature, the wonderful ocean Landscapes with nature, ocean, beaches, sun and sky	21,7%	. Contact with nature . Contact with the local atmosphere
Regular events and experiences	Group exercise classes surrounded by the sea; yoga classes; walking tours through the nature; nature bike rides; surfing;	4,3%	. Physical activities in nature
Suitable amenities & facilities	I was surprise by the infrastructure; even If I knew that it is part of UE I did not expect to be this good The internet is absolutely fine; so far I used the wifi and did not plug in the cable so far Ponta do Sol, the Nomad Village We have good internet, we have a work in space, we will provide you with the best apartment Co-working spaces with people working together Co-working spaces with a comfortable atmosphere Co-working spaces with space, natural light and cozy You can work in a hub, coffee or pack your bag and do some work from anywhere	34,7%	. Social and relaxing spaces . Digital infrasctructures . Co-working and living spaces
Supportive atmosphere	People working in a relaxed atmosphere group of people on the terrace talking; see the sunset	8,6%	. Be in contact with others . Meet new people
Inspiring workplace	We want you remote workers, digital nomads to come here, to make sure that you enjoy this at Ponta do Sol We have all the community just here for you waiting for you to work in a beautiful place next to the ocean, next to the nature, all year around Social spaces for relaxed moments Beautiful landscapes of nature and ocean surrounding social and co-working spaces Social spaces in a relaxing atmosphere, surrounded by a beautiful landscape People in a meeting discussing indoor and outdoor environment	26.0%	. Contact with nature . Relaxed environments . Co-living spaces
Local community & local products	The people are very welcoming and friendly	4,3%	. Contact with the locals

Source: Authors´ elaboration from webQDA outputs

Here some results are presented:

(i) 8 of the total descriptors (34.7%) were coded for “Suitable Amenities & Facilities” with visual contents related with “social and relaxing spaces", “digital infrastructures” and “co-working and living spaces” (e.g. “co-working spaces with space, natural light and cosy”; “you can work in a hub, coffee or pack your bag and do some work from anywhere). These ideas

extracted from the videos highlight the need for co-working and co-living spaces, digital infrastructures, particularly high-speed Wi-Fi;

(ii) 6 of the total descriptors (26%) were coded for "Inspiring workplace" with visual contents related with "contact with nature", "relaxed environments" and "co-living places" (e.g. "We have all the community just here for you waiting for you to work in a beautiful place next to the ocean, next to the nature, all year around");

(iii) 5 of the total descriptors (21,7%) were coded for "Contact with the destination" with visual contents related with "contact with nature" and "contact with local atmosphere" (e.g. "Enjoy this beautiful island, this beautiful nature, the wonderful ocean"; "Good weather; it is all spring year around; being around nature; you have the ocean and mountains");

5. Conclusion

Being known as a Region with remote places and low density of population, Alentejo's tourism has benefited from COVID as a retreat for home workers and professionals escaping the city for rural tourism farms and resorts, hotels, rural coworks, and creative residencies. The post-Covid-19 economy bundled digitally enabled homeworking and digital nomadism as tourism development trends for this region.

The concept of remote working (homeworking) differs from that of digital nomadism as this encompasses a lifestyle of travelling to explore different places and cultures which enable various things: to build professional networks, to create value, to nurture the mind, and relax.

Our research findings, using the visual data qualitative approach to analyse images and videos from a selection of 80 images from Selina´s Facebook webpage, raised attention to six main themes, which are intertwined and together form a holistic approach to an experiential stay. The visual element allowed us to inform and add meaning to the phenomenon itself (Rodrigues, Ghasemi, Correia & Kozak, 2019) and bring insights that paved the way for future research. The themes were: contact with the destination, local community and local products, regular events and experiences are linked to external factors that are part of the cultural, natural, and human resources of a place. The themes of suitable amenities and facilities, supportive atmosphere, and inspiring workplace are internal factors connected to the design of hospitality facilities and experience according to the lifestyle and needs of its users. It has been found that the domain of lifestyle became pivotal within the matter of place design for digital nomads. The

consumer behaviour associated with these publics is connected to the concept of travelling to explore different places and cultures, as an enabler of different aspects: to build professional networks and create value, to nurture the mind and relax. We can see this aspect not only in the work of Chevtaeva & Guillet (2021) but also more recently in the work of Zhou et al. (2024).

From our study, we point to our preliminary findings emerging from the visual data analysis: four enabling factors relevant to successful digital nomadism destinations. These factors are digital connection infrastructures, community managers, inspiring local amenities, and welcoming local population. As seen both in the scientific literature and in the findings of the visual data analysis, the role of community managers in coworking spaces and resorts designed for digital nomads is pivotal as it interconnects the external factors linked to the construction of place to the internal factors enabling the construction and maintenance of a working community and vibrating environment. The exploratory results from the analysis of the case studies, in conjunction with the literature review, namely the studies of Prabawa et al. (2020), Vagena (2021), and Wang et al. (2018), point out six main features which are very relevant to attract and accommodate the needs of this target group. These are: good internet connectivity infrastructures to allow remote work, easy access to places, affordable living destinations, inspiring and welcoming local culture and landscape, entrepreneurial and networking possibilities, and a friendly supportive environment that helps to fight loneliness. Another important factor which arose from one of the case studies, particularly the Selina Group, has been its contribution to urban regeneration and fostering new local socio-economic dynamics.

In fact, these features lead us to two main challenges of the Alentejo region in terms of territorial planning and attractivity that still constrain this region from the utopia of a "Smart Countryside" (Bosworth et al., 2023). These are the transportation infrastructures (accessible roads and available public transportation connecting urban nodes to less central places) and digital connection infrastructures. The investment in rural digital connectivity becomes pivotal to encourage the movement of freelancers, digital nomads, and remote workers and to enhance destination competitiveness targeting these publics (Zhou et al., 2024; Bosworth et al., 2023). Developing local measures to attract accommodation firms focusing on remote workers is an opportunity for the Alentejo region to become not only more attractive to tourism but to a skilled workforce that could be the promoter of new entrepreneurial opportunities in ageing territories. Nevertheless, the issues of public transportation, health services and digital connectivity

infrastructures are challenges for the remote areas of Alentejo, that affect the attractivity of this territory and the ability to become digital nomads´ hubs on the short-term.

As a first exploratory study focusing on the trend and its relevance for the Alentejo, there are research limitations related to the depth of the findings as it was not made at this stage, a triangulation with primary data sampling taken from interviews with local stakeholders from the public policy sphere and the tourism industry (accommodation, digital nomads' networks, DMOs, and animation companies) as key respondents. In the following phase of this research project, we are addressing questions of governance and stakeholder engagement as part of the process of tourism planning.

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