

A supplier side view of digital nomadism: The case of destination Gran Canaria

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ABSTRACT

Digital nomadism is a rapidly growing lifestyle for living and working. Despite its potential transformative effect on destinations, little attention has been paid to destination communities in which digital nomads reside. This paper aims to examine the interface between the destination communities and digital nomadism: how the stakeholders in a destination community perceive and accommodate digital nomads. The case study comes from a popular European destination, the island of Gran Canaria, Spain. The study proposes an original supply side framework to theoretically inform the phenomenon of digital nomadism. Stakeholder theory is also applied to examine the interface between the local communities and the phenomenon. Applying the proposed conceptual framework, the results reveal a novel perspective on digital nomads, which is “new locals”. The results show that the accommodative strategies of local stakeholders correlate strongly with the stakeholder’s specializations, and include strategies such as: *provider*, *communicator*, *integrator*, and *embracer*.

1. Introduction

Digital nomadism is a rapidly growing lifestyle for living and working. The central subject of this phenomenon is the “digital nomad”, referring to “a category of mobile professionals, who perform their work remotely from anywhere in the world, utilizing digital technologies”. Digital nomadism refers to “the lifestyle that is developed by these highly mobile location independent professionals” (Hannonen, 2020). While digital nomadism was rapidly developing before the pandemic, the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic has accelerated the development of this lifestyle trend in a major way (Almeida & Belezas, 2022; Cook, 2020b; Ehn et al., 2022). The mandate to work from home has turned many traditional employees into location independent professionals normalizing remote working. The State of Independence in America survey (2022) suggests that in the US alone 16.9 million American workers describe themselves as digital nomads with a 131% increase from 2019, the pre-pandemic year. A recent EU27 survey shows that over 60% of employees would like to work remotely at least several times a month (Eurofound, 2022). Being remote creates fruitful grounds for further growth of digital nomadism.

Already before Covid-19, and even more since the pandemic, tourism

destinations and industries have started to promote themselves as ideal locations for digital nomads (Almeida & Belezas, 2022; Hannonen, 2020, 2022; Situmorang & Karthana, 2021). A variety of products and programs geared specifically towards this consumer segment include co-living and co-working spaces, leisure programs and services, healthcare, conferences, and retreats. Numerous countries have introduced special taxation, visa-free stays, and digital nomad visa schemes to attract more temporary residents and digital nomads (Chevtaeva & Denizci-Guillet, 2021). However, there is much more to understand about the phenomenon of digital nomadism. Despite its potential transformative effect on destinations, the literature on digital nomadism has paid little attention to the destination communities in which digital nomads reside. There has been insufficient research on how destination communities perceive and interact with this phenomenon. To date, academic literature has focused on examining digital nomadism from the demand side: digital nomadism as a lifestyle (Green, 2020; Hall et al., 2019; Mancinelli, 2020; Nash et al., 2018; Reichenberger, 2018; Thompson, 2018, 2019a). A few studies have looked at relationships between nomads and societies from the nomads’ perspective (e.g., Kannisto, 2016; Thompson, 2018; Woldoff & Litchfield, 2021), and one study covered two individual stakeholders’ perspectives on digital

Abbreviations: GC, Gran Canaria.

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nomadism (Almeida & Belezas, 2022). In contrast to this background, our research attempts to bring attention to the supply side of digital nomadism.

The aim of this paper is to examine the interface between the destination communities and digital nomadism: how the various stakeholders in a destination community view digital nomadism, and how they accommodate the needs of the digital nomads. We do this through the prism of an original conceptual framework that is elaborated by the authors to theoretically inform the phenomenon of digital nomadism from the perspective of the destination community. A case study approach is utilized: Gran Canaria, Spain, a popular European destination for digital nomads being the location of the selected case. Since 2015, the island of Gran Canaria (GC) has been hosting the Nomad City – a joint digital nomads' conference and coworking development, to address the emerging movement of remote workers to the island (Almeida & Belezas, 2022). There has been a boom in digital nomadism on the island during and since the pandemic, and the number of remote workers in the region has risen 10% a month since autumn 2020 (Vega, 2021). GC has embraced the digital nomad market as an effective means of tourism development at a time when other traveler segments were hampered by the onset of the pandemic (Gran Canaria 2021–2025). Gran Canaria, therefore, provides an excellent context in which to examine the destination communities' perspectives towards the rapidly developing remote work phenomenon of digital nomadism. In order to synthesize existing literature and examine our research case, we developed a model to account for the supply side view of digital nomadism and the accommodative strategies employed. The developed model has theoretical and practical ramifications beyond a specific location. By these means, the study contributes to the further conceptualization of the phenomenon of digital nomadism in travel and tourism research.

The next section of the paper discusses the theoretical perspectives on digital nomadism and stakeholders, which we used to elaborate on the original supply-side framework for digital nomadism. This framework provides a theory-based lens to reveal the supply perspective.

2. Conceptualizing digital nomadism

2.1. Approaches to digital nomadism

International mobility, driven by a personal desire for a change in lifestyle, freedom of choice and self-fulfillment, has taken several forms including, but is not limited to, second home/residential tourism, seasonal and lifestyle migration, global/neo-nomadism, backpacking, flashpacking, bohemian lifestyle migration, worldschooling and digital nomadism (Cohen et al., 2015; D'Andrea, 2016; Hannonen, 2020; Kannisto, 2016; Korpela, 2019; Molz, 2021; Thompson, 2018). While these categories overlap and are sometimes treated synonymously, several major differences between them are related to the recurrence of visits, duration of travel, return or non-return home, use of digital technologies and performance of work duties during travel (Hannonen, 2020). These categories of tourists are treated differently by local service providers and destination management organizations due to their respective needs and characteristics, as can be seen from the destination Gran Canaria (see the GC Tourism Marketing Plan, Gran Canaria 2021–2025). In the case of digital nomads, they use digital technology and internet connectivity to combine work, leisure and travel, and spend longer periods of time at destinations (Green, 2020; Reichenberger, 2018; Thompson, 2018, 2019a).

The pandemic outbreak has not only encouraged the speed of growth for digital nomadism, it has also facilitated the growth of various other remote work and travel lifestyles, such as domestic digital nomadism or *remote work travel* (Hannonen 2021a, 2021b) and *workcation* – “a trip to a tourist location while still working” (Cook, 2020b, p. 160). These pandemic-driven modes of remote work and travel are not implemented on an ongoing basis and can be categorized as sub-categories of digital nomadism, contributing to the popularization of this lifestyle. Thus,

there is no specific timeframe to define someone as a digital nomad.

Despite the pandemic-induced upsurge in digital nomadism and its growing importance to the tourism industry, it is still an under-theorized phenomenon in contemporary travel and tourism research (Chevtaeva & Denizci-Guillet, 2021; Hannonen, 2020). Researchers define digital nomads as a type of location independent workforce (Orel, 2019; Wang et al., 2018), a leisure activity (Reichenberger, 2018), a form of slow tourism (Putra & Agirachman, 2016) and a new economic activity and a cultural phenomenon (Wang et al., 2018). Thematically, the existing studies have focused on explaining digital nomadism from the perspective of work-life balance (Cook, 2020a; Reichenberger, 2018; Thompson, 2019a), working conditions (Cook, 2020a; Liegl, 2014; Orel, 2019), employment and relationships (Hall et al., 2019; Thompson, 2018, 2019b), mobility and travel (Green, 2020), and most recently from the perspective of Covid-19's impact on the phenomenon (De Almeida et al., 2021; Ehn et al., 2022). In tourism research, attempts to conceptually frame the phenomenon were focused on distinguishing digital nomads from other related travel phenomena (Cook, 2020a; Hannonen, 2020).

2.2. Identity components of digital nomadism

Most recently, Luise (2022) notes that digital nomadism is undergoing an identity construction process that falls between liminal work and liminal consumption. He defines the digital nomad identity through the reconstruction of work identities and non-material and experiential consumption. In a similar vein, most approaches to the digital nomad identity are built around a work phenomenon – digital nomads as highly mobile professionals, or lifestyle – digital nomads as lifestyle travelers (Hannonen, 2020; Luise, 2022). Building on these recent conceptual propositions, we argue that digital nomadism is a complex construct; it has a multiplicity of dimensions that are not limited to a work and lifestyle identity. This study extends these identity conceptualizations by uncovering additional facets of the phenomenon and depicting how these multiple facets intersect with the existing societal fabric of a destination community.

Digital nomads have a strong identity associated with lifestyle. While there is no unified definition of digital nomadism as a *lifestyle phenomenon*, there is a set of components that individually and collectively define such a lifestyle. Its central features include extensive travel based on leisure and lifestyle expectations, an escape from conventional work conditions, detachment from a fixed place of residence and/or location independence (McElroy, 2019; Thompson, 2018). As suggested by Green (2020), digital nomadism represents an attempt at ‘escaping the cubicle’. These individuals create “individualized and innovative life course and lifestyle pathways which defy sedentist commitment to a life and career in place” (Green, 2020, p. 2). It has also been noted that “they have a deep desire to escape Western cultures that they view as pathological to the pursuit of their life and work aims” (Woldoff & Litchfield, 2021, p. 8). Further, digital nomadic lifestyle is characterized by “comprehensive freedom” (Reichenberger, 2018, p. 364) as characterized by a freedom of choice, freedom of mobility and freedom from conventional social arrangements. The manner and extent to which these forms of freedom are exercised is subjective. Overall, as a lifestyle, digital nomadism can be seen as a personal life (style) project that involves voluntary alternative life arrangements in different locations around the world.

Digital nomadism can also be viewed as a *work phenomenon*. As a work phenomenon, digital nomadism refers to a novel type of location independent workers and co-working space users (Müller, 2016; Orel, 2019; Wang et al., 2018). Digital nomads, as location independent professionals, have been placed between digital, nomadic, freelance, and global adventure travelers, as they combine features of all these related phenomena (Hannonen, 2020; Nash et al., 2018; Wang et al., 2018). Digital nomadism is even advertised as an “employee perk” (McElroy, 2019, p. 3083), and has been referred to as “non-location

based employment” (Thompson, 2018).

In addition to work and lifestyle identities, digital nomads have also been noted as “global travelers with a passion for continuously visiting new places” (Nash et al., 2018, p. 3). Several studies attempt to conceptualize digital nomadism as a leisure activity (Reichenberger, 2018) and a form of slow tourism (Putra & Agirachman, 2016). Individuals, who practice digital nomadism, are sometimes termed digital nomad tourists (Situmorang & Karthana, 2021, p. 2). Digital nomads long for exotic locations that have attractive leisure features and ideal areas for hobbies (Hall et al., 2019; Nash et al., 2018; Reichenberger, 2018). They “select their location choice based on leisure and lifestyle expectations, not work” (Thompson, 2018, p. 3). Reichenberger (2018) sees leisure as an essential part of digital nomadism. She states that digital nomads bring leisure elements, such as enjoyment and self-control, into their working environments and can even perceive work as leisure. Thus, we can identify another identity facet of digital nomadism - a *touristic/leisure phenomenon*.

Digital nomads can be seen as a *digital* and/or an *online phenomenon*. Online work constitutes an essential component of this identity. Online communication tools are utilized to carry out work-related contacts with colleagues, employees, or clients (Müller, 2016; Nash et al., 2018). Online talent marketplaces are becoming sales channels. Social media is used to develop an online presence and a professional reputation, both of which aid job/client seeking (State of Independence in America, 2022). Green (2020) emphasizes that digital nomads select locations that can support their daily working needs, among which the most essential is a stable bandwidth. Additionally, online communities are an important space for digital nomads to share experiences and seek advice/information. They capture and share experiences on online platforms, promote their lifestyle through online blogs, e-books and video courses (Nash et al., 2018; Thompson, 2019b). Additionally, “the online marketplace of dating” is a highly consumable item among digital nomads as online relationships are one of the distinct features of digital nomadism (Thompson, 2019b). The growing popularity of applications and websites that are designed to connect and assist digital nomads speak to the digital identity of the phenomenon (Amineh & Asl, 2015).

There is a social aspect to digital nomadism. As a social phenomenon, digital nomads are characterized by independence and individualism, new methods and forms of sociability and social bonding, and detachment from a permanent place of residence. By introducing the term digital nomad, Makimoto and Manners (1997) predicted a departure from nationality-based bonding that would then be replaced by other connections. The development of co-spaces that serve digital nomads as a community for both accommodation facilities and working patterns have become increasingly popular (Orel, 2019; Situmorang & Karthana, 2021). The so-called digital nomad hubs are destinations and locations where one can connect with like-minded others, share personal experiences and exchange support (Woldoff & Litchfield, 2021). Regular meetings and offline gathering bring a “sense of belonging to a movement,” the “feeling of being acknowledged and accepted” (Mancinelli, 2020, p. 432). Co-working spaces, joint nomadic conferences, cruises and other activities can be regarded as examples of lifestyle-based social bonding that have replaced conventional ones, such as residential neighborhoods, a traditional workplace community, and even nation states (Hannonen, 2020). These features collectively construct the social identity of digital nomadism.

The defined facets of the phenomenon – work, lifestyle, touristic, digital and social identities condition the various needs and complex interactions that local stakeholders face in the interface between a destination community and digital nomads. These various identity aspects therefore become a theoretical referencing framework for this case study.

2.3. Stakeholders

Local communities and local infrastructures play a central role in the

everyday practices of digital nomads and the forms of their interaction with the both the social and physical local environment (Green, 2020). Accommodating travelers needs through services and experiences at a destination involves various stakeholders on site. In terms of accommodating the needs of a new customer segment such as the digital nomads at a local level, the stakeholder theory provides a suitable explanatory perspective from which to examine this multifaceted process. It helps to identify the important facets of the interface and interaction between local stakeholders and a specific customer segment. In this study, we adopt a broad intake on stakeholders, defining them as “those entities which can and are making their actual stakes (sometimes called “voice”) known, and, on the other end, by those which are or might be influenced by, or are or potentially are influencers of, some organization or another” (Starik, 1994, p. 90). Thus, stakeholders may include businesses that cater to tourism (e.g., hotels, restaurants, attractions, petrol stations, event organizers, retail stores), chambers of commerce, local government officials, environmentalists, transportation companies, airlines, landowners and residents of host communities (Bricker & Donohoe, 2015; Chase et al., 2011; Sheehan & Ritchie, 2005; Tkaczynski et al., 2010). Our emphasis is on uncovering insights on digital nomads from the perspective of the destination and the local community. The chosen research site, the island of Gran Canaria is a sand-and-sea destination with a large cosmopolitan capital, attracting a wide range of digital nomads with various demands and profiles; thus making it suitable for assessing the supple side viewpoints.

Most of the studies on destination stakeholders in relation to tourism development has been devoted to stakeholder identification, collaboration, and modes of cooperation in order to reach certain development goals at the destination (Alonso & Nyanjom, 2017; Fyall et al., 2012; Kimbu & Ngoasong, 2013). One of the more recent conceptual developments in the stakeholder theory is concerned with the conviviality development of stakeholder relationships (Lehto et al., 2020). This approach includes visitors as stakeholders and advocates for a convivial relationship between the visitors and the destination hosts that is characterized by well-being mutuality and hospitality mutuality. In other words, the relationship between the visitors and a host community can be coalitional.

Various stakeholders’ cooperation strategies and performances can be broadly placed on a continuum stretching from active to passive. Examples include reactive, defensive, accommodative, or proactive stakeholders (Clarkson, 1995; Sheehan & Ritchie, 2005) as well as supportive, marginal (not particularly cooperative), non-supportive and mixed blessing (both supportive and non-supportive) stakeholders (Savage et al., 1991). Other context specific classifications, for example, in relation to the responsible marketing of tourism, divide stakeholders into inactive, reactive, proactive and exploitive (Hudson & Miller, 2004). In relation to sustainable development, other researchers classify stakeholders into tourism advocates, brand developers, reluctant followers, and conservative residents (Alonso & Nyanjom, 2017). Based on the degree of involvement, stakeholders can be divided into those with a low and high degrees of involvement (Savage et al., 1991; Sheehan & Ritchie, 2005).

These categorizations are useful for understanding the perspective of the destination stakeholders and their actions in relation to the growing customer segment – the digital nomads. Utilizing the some of the above categories we adopt an inductive approach when examining local stakeholders in Gran Canaria. For our study, we adopted two main perspectives: the intensity of interaction (high vs low) and the level and form of acceptance (varying from proactive to inactive). By doing this we were not restricted by the pre-set categories, but rather, could elaborate both on the existing categorizations and the evidence that emerged from the case data. Regarding intensity and contact, we focused on three levels of stakeholders (see section 3 for more details). Moreover, unlike previous classifications, we categorized stakeholders based on their interface with the new customer segment of digital nomads.

2.4. A supply side framework towards understanding digital nomadism

The previous sections demonstrated the building of a theoretical foundation pertaining to digital nomadism from the perspective of the supply side. Our endeavor was to construct a conceptual structure of digital nomadism in travel and tourism that is supported by a multi-disciplinary perspective (Fig. 1). The identities revealed for digital nomadism – work, lifestyle, touristic, digital and social – served as guiding parameters for the subsequent case study and provided a base structure for the stakeholders' perspectives on the phenomenon in the analysis. The accommodating strategies and intensity of interactions with digital nomads helped to create the categorizations of the stakeholders.

3. Methodology

3.1. The research site: Gran Canaria

The case study was carried out in Gran Canaria, Spain. Gran Canaria is a popular tourism destination in Europe, receiving both short-term and long-term visitors. The island is located to the southwest of the mainland of Spain in the Macaronesian area. The local population of the island is 870,000 inhabitants (ISTAC, 2020), with 381,223 people living in the capital city of Las Palmas de Gran Canaria. Since the 1960s, tourism has been the primary source of income on the island, making it one of the most popular tourist destinations in the world. In 2019, Gran Canaria received more than four million tourists. One of the most recent tourism development trends for the island is the rapid growth of its digital nomad market. According to the Canary Association of Coworking Spaces, in 2021 the archipelago hosted around 8000 remote workers from a wide range of countries such as Germany, France, the United Kingdom and increasingly from the United States (Vega, 2021).

The Canary Islands regional government has recognized the importance of the digital nomad segment. In 2021, they announced a €500,000-plan to attract 30,000 digital nomad professionals by 2031 (Vega, 2021). Interestingly, this goal was met far ahead of schedule, as in the first six months of 2022, 34,500 remote workers visited the island (Gobierno de Canarias, 2022). On Gran Canaria, the accommodating the needs of this new consumer segment has largely come from independent grassroots initiatives, as there has been “no direct support from the government” (Almeida & Belezas, 2022, p. 187).

In the world's ranking of digital nomad destinations (nomadlist.com), Las Palmas, the capital city of Gran Canaria, is currently ranked among the top ten destinations in the world. The number of co-working and co-living spaces on the island has rapidly grown: from 11 co-working spaces in 2018 to 50 co-working and co-living spaces available in 2022. Las Palmas has four-time been the departure point for the Nomad Cruise, a skill-sharing digital nomad conference at sea (c.f. nomadcruise.com). Las Palmas also hosts the annual digital nomad

conference “Repeople” in Gran Canaria. Concisely, the magnitude and the rapidly evolving patterns of its digital nomad market make Gran Canaria an ideal case study location for this research.

3.2. Data collection and analysis

We applied weak social constructivism to our research. Weak constructivism acknowledges the traditional epistemology concerning knowledge, but also knowledge representations and interpretations by individuals. It relies on both brute (basic, elemental) facts and institutional (social conventional) facts to construct reality (Searle, 1995). Weak constructionism is suitable for the purpose of our study because weak constructionism assumes that individuals construct their own understandings and perceptions of a set of objective facts (such as visits by digital nomads to local services); it also allows for institutional facts created by social conventions (such as the market trends and social norms) to constitute reality.

We used a personal interview method, without any pre-given context, to discover the subjective character of respondents in their interaction with spaces (Crouch, 2005). This approach suited our study purpose and allowed respondents to freely express their experiences and attitudes. The majority of the interviews (N = 15) occurred during the pre-/early stage of the pandemic period (June 2019–June 2020). As the rapidly changing scenarios of digital nomadism caused by the Covid-19 pandemic has become a major impact factor for digital nomadism practices, we followed up with eight additional interviews in June–July and October 2022 (Table 1). One respondent- Stakeholder #1- was interviewed twice (2019 and 2022) to allow us to gain a better understanding of post-Covid-19 changes in digital nomadism. In practice, the service provision has undergone significant modifications in Gran Canaria during the past few years. Our timeframe design for the interviews allowed us to obtain a better grasp of these changes and to provide an up-to-date depiction of the interface between the local community and digital nomadism. The length of the interviews ranged from 30 min to 45 min. All interviews were transcribed verbatim. The lead author analyzed the interview data, and the themes and patterns were verified by the other two researchers. Whenever necessary, the researchers resolved through discussion any divergent data interpretations.

The sampling process followed the adopted broad intake on stakeholders which include businesses that cater tourism, or in our case – digital nomadism, as well as local officials, services and residents (Bricker & Donohoe, 2015; Chase et al., 2011; Sheehan & Ritchie, 2005; Tkaczynski et al., 2010). Regarding intensity and contact, three levels of stakeholders were included: 1) Basic services for everyday-living needs (e.g., restaurants, hospitals, legal and fiscal services, etc.); 2) organizations with services that cater to visitors (e.g., surf school, co-working and co-living service providers; local DMO and the Nomad City conference organizer); 3) individuals, who come into contact with the phenomenon in their daily lives (local residents & local location-independent entrepreneurs) (Table 1). Prior to the interviews and data collection, a broad list of stakeholders was made to reflect these three levels. The second round of the data collection included those stakeholders in the original list who could not be reached during the first round. Some of the planned interviews, such as interviews with local police and international schools, could not be conducted due to logistic and other reasons. We recruited the respondents through local professional networks and personal connections as well as utilizing a snowballing technique. Table 1 describes the interviewees' demographic background, residence history, business affiliation, and manner of interfacing with digital nomads.

The semi-structured interviews included topics about 1) general business/service structure; 2) the perceptions of the interviewees as regards the profiles of digital nomads, including their motivations and needs; 3) opportunities, challenges, and potential issues as well as the future of their business model; 4) encounters and experiences with

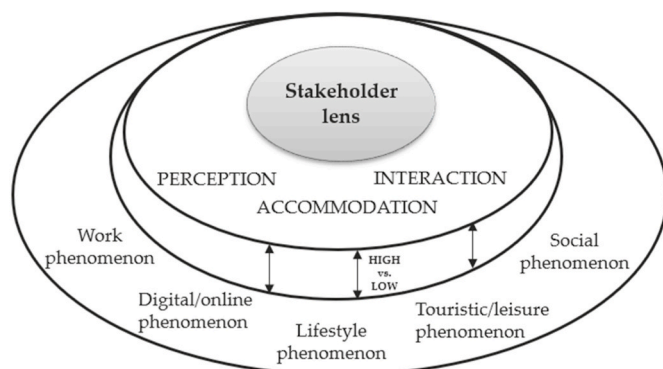


Fig. 1. A framework for understanding the supply side of digital nomadism.

Table 1
Interviewees in the study.

Alias/ profession	Age	Gender (M/F)	Established (year)	Duration of residence	Services
Pre/early pandemic interviews (2019 & 2020)					
#1 CEO, Digital Nomad Conference	46	M	2016	local	Marketing, networking, conference, co-working
#2 Co-working	42	F	2015	local	Coworking spaces and spaces for events
#3 Co-working	40	M	2012	since 2010	Co-working space and an art gallery/ space for events
#4 Co-working	33	M	N/A	local	Co-working space
#5 Co-working	39	M	N/A	local	Co-working space
#6 Co-working	45	M	N/A	local	Co-working space
#7 Co-working, co-living	32	F	2016	since 2015	Co-working and co-living space
#8 Hairdresser	32	F	2015	local	Hairdresser services
#9 Restaurant/ bar	47	M	2012	local	Food and beverage, weekly concerts
#10 Surf school	47	M	2005	since 2005	Surfing lessons
#11 Gran Canaria Tourist Board, DMO	50	M	employed	local	Marketing
#12 Local inhabitant	72	M	retired	local	Local encounters
#13 Local inhabitant	55	M	employed	local	Personal advices
#14 Local inhabitant	46	M	employed	local	Local encounters
#15 Location independent entrepreneur	N/A	M	employed	since 2018	Local encounters
Post-pandemic interviews (2022)					
#1 CEO, Digital Nomad Conference	48	M	2016	local	Expansion of office space
#16 Co-working, co-living	N/A	M	2019	since 2015	Co-working and co-living, food and beverage
#17 Local hotel, events & co-working manager	N/A	M	2021	local	Co-working, food and beverage, hotel amenities
#18 Promotur (Public organization responsible for the promotion of the Canary Islands)	N/A	M, F, M	N/A	local	Information, marketing
#19 Surf school	N/A	M	2010	local	Surf school and surf camp
#20 Healthcare client service advisor	55	F	2017	seasonal resident	Client service advisor for healthcare and insurance

Table 1 (continued)

Alias/ profession	Age	Gender (M/F)	Established (year)	Duration of residence	Services
#21 Local inhabitant/ mobile app developer	42	F	2019	since 2010	policies, interpreter Digital mediator between local services and foreign customers
#22 Law and fiscal company manager	46	M	2002	local	Tax-related advice and services

digital nomads. Appendix 1 shows how the interview protocol corresponds with the research aims. In addition to the interviews, other data sources included local websites (governmental, business, social networks) and the strategic marketing plan of the local tourism authority and other documents.

The data was analyzed thematically (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis has flexible theoretical conjunctions, and it aims at “identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (items) within data” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 79). We approached the data set using three areas of investigation based on the conceptual framework which we had elaborated on and the stakeholder’s theory perspective (Fig. 1): 1) perspectives on digital nomads; 2) stakeholder’s accommodative strategies; 3) intensity of interactions with digital nomads. The area of ‘perspectives on digital nomads’ was referenced to our elaborated conceptual framework of five digital nomad identities (Fig. 1): lifestyle, work, touristic, digital and social phenomena. Data points that did not fit into these pre-set categories were organized into new subthemes based on the nature of the information.

Data points related to accommodative strategies were organized based on data content and created four emerging themes. Based on the acceptance and accommodative strategies for digital nomads, the emerging themes were categorized into four stakeholder roles: providers, communicators, integrators, and embracers. Providers are characterized by a passive acceptance of a new customer segment, offering existing services without any modifications (e.g., a barber shop). Communicators focus on the marketing of a destination, providing information about the destination and its lifestyle (e.g., a DMO, Promotur). Integrators provide services that are specifically crafted to accommodate the needs of a new customer segment (e.g., a co-working space business). Embracers actively accept and/or are involved in service provision and integration of digital nomads at the destination (e.g., a local resident).

The following section provides further discussion on the results of the analyses – how the identified identity facets of digital nomads intersect with perspectives on digital nomads by local stakeholders. This is followed by the categorization of stakeholders based on their accommodative strategies and intensity of interaction. Illustrative examples of the process of data coding are shown in Table 2.

4. Stakeholder perspectives on digital nomadism

4.1. Digital nomads as a lifestyle phenomenon

Business and lifestyle magazines, as well as social media channels have been promoting digital nomadism as a perfect lifestyle for working and living. Pictures of nomads working on beaches, in scenic cafes and on balconies that overview rice fields in Bali are among the public images of the digital nomad phenomenon. Not surprisingly, people, who engage with digital nomads expect this lifestyle to become a reality, as illustrated by the following comment:

Table 2
Examples of data coding.

Data point	Coding Unit – subtheme
Perspectives on digital nomads	
“... places are shared ... they enjoy good experiences, and they feel that they can be not only productive but also feel that they are surrounded by the right people.”	Social phenomenon
“Our customers are very digital, and we have been very digital in our approaches since we started.”	Digital phenomenon
“Actually, in our company we have been contracting work to digital nomads that are staying with us. We just saw that there were amazing professionals.”	Work Phenomenon
Accommodative strategies	
“We thought that it would be easier [for digital nomads] if we offer local foods from Canary Islands with local recipes, a zero-kilometer food ...”	Integrator
“We reach them through our campaigns, our content [...] They land on our page [...] they have huge consumer information: content, recreational content, audio-visual content is provided on that website.”	Communicator
Intensity of interaction	
“I’ve built relationships with most of my customers. I tried to do that proactively ...”	High

“You know, you can imagine a luxury resort with a pretty balcony to work from, and a massive terrace to work from, then an ocean view. That would be ideal. And obviously, all of this with an amazing design! That would be an ideal place for a digital nomad because everything should be instagrammable” (Co-working and co-living, Stakeholder #7, June 2019).

Local service providers have understood the importance of location to attract this segment: “They like the lively music at front sea view. We are strategically placed just besides the sea” (Restaurant/bar, Stakeholder #9, June 2020). Location is frequently mentioned as a key aspect of meeting the demands:

“In our case, all of our properties are less than 50 m from the beach, and so they can get in the water in 30 seconds [...] We have in the property the accommodation and a co-working space, and so they can just go up and down as many times as they want” (Co-working, co-living, Stakeholder #16, June 2022).

In addition to the location, co-working spaces attract digital nomads with additional bonus services that project an atmosphere of luxury lifestyle living:

“We are not a common coworking space. We are a coworking space inside a five star hotel. So, we have the reception open 24 hours a day. We have a big swimming pool. They can use the towels just like any other guest of the hotel. They can use the gym. So, they are very comfortable with the services” (Local hotel, events & co-working manager, Stakeholder #17, June 2022)”.

In addition to catering to the lifestyle identity of digital nomads through scenic locations and services, local co-working spaces also support their social life and hobbies: “We also provide different offers of surf schools, events, etc., and maybe that’s one of the reasons that they choose us” (Co-working, Stakeholder #6, March 2020). Catering to this aspect of their lifestyle is also reflected in the marketing strategy of the Gran Canarian Tourism Board:

“Our strategy is based on the climate; we communicate to them that they can work and also live an outdoor life with good weather all around the year. They have outdoor hobbies like surf, trekking, and cycling. And they like fun and night leisure so they like to choose lively cities to live in” (DMO, Stakeholder #11, May 2020).

The CEO of the annual digital nomad conference (Stakeholder #1, May 2020) stated that local services should not be limited to lodging, workstation, and recreation facilities. They should include visa support,

community involvement, and even schooling:

“Temporary visa should be provided by the regional government in order to increase the destination attractiveness to this segment [...] Community involvement programs are super important. Digital nomads and remote workers go to a place that has a community and follows the same lifestyle [...] They want to connect with other digital nomads or with locals. Locals are inclusive and friendly. Schools, there are international schools to attend to digital nomads’ needs” (CEO, digital nomad conference, Stakeholder #1, May 2020).

The interviews supported the idea that digital nomads should be treated as long-term visitors not just tourists. Along with the rapid growth in size of the digital nomad market in Gran Canaria is the fact that the demographic profile of digital nomads to the island is diversifying, including a growing flow of families with children. This suggests there are diversified needs to be catered to. For example, educational projects to address the needs of digital nomad families were seen as specifically important. According to the CEO of the Digital Nomad Conference (Stakeholder #1), this is a crucial step towards removing the main obstacle for relocation, as children’s education anchors families to one place of residence. If children’s educational needs are met, the number of digital nomad families is anticipated to grow. The excerpt below is illustrative of the recognition of the need to cater to family needs of digital nomads:

“There are also other interesting projects that are catering families and that include a new layer of the educational systems that is a bit of alternative to what we understand as a traditional one. We need a good educational system so that they can actually cater to these families by creating a network of schools around different parts of the world that will admit those students at any point in time during the year” (CEO, digital nomad conference, Stakeholder #1, June 2022).

As suggested by the literature, there are several components of digital nomadism as a lifestyle phenomenon, including the detachment from a fixed place of residence, escape from traditional work settings, and freedom of choice and mobility (McElroy, 2019; Thompson, 2018). Our data supports the escape and freedom aspects of digital nomadism as a lifestyle: freedom to choose a comfortable style and place of working, and freedom to relocate to places following specific lifestyle needs, such as hobbies or climate. It is apparent that our interviewees recognized the necessity to consider the various manifested lifestyle needs related to the digital nomad market segment, including solutions that would enable better integration and increase long-term stays at the destination.

4.2. Digital nomads as a work phenomenon

The upsurge of co-working spaces in a mature tourism destination such as Gran Canaria indicates that digital nomads are recognized as a work phenomenon. Some stakeholders defined digital nomads as primarily remote workers:

“I have a lot of experience of travelling and working remotely. So, previously I had no idea that the term “digital nomad” existed, so I would call everyone just “remote workers” (Co-working and co-living, Stakeholder #7, June 2019).

“I saw that there were many people working remotely, I found a suitable place and decided to open a co-working space” (Co-working, Stakeholder #4, March 2020).

Co-working businesses also recognized the substantial changes in contemporary employment relationships and working cultures, and foresee considerable potential in this phenomenon:

“It is growing, the new millennials try to work on projects and do not mind travelling. The business does not want to pay for an office for

their remote workers, they just pay for a table and some services” (Co-working, Stakeholder #2, January 2020).

All the co-working space owners in this study focused on the needs of digital nomadism as a remote work phenomenon, thus they were providers of the required office infrastructure, a stable bandwidth and other office services:

“We have the coworking space: a typical coworking space, desks with Wi-Fi and all the [work-related] services. And we have meeting rooms for up to eight people” (Local hotel, events & co-working manager, Stakeholder #17, June 2022).

Among the most recent changes in accommodating the work needs of digital nomads has been providing access to co-working space facilities 24/7 and all-inclusive catering options by a local hotel (Local hotel, events & co-working manager, Stakeholder #17, June 2022):

“Some years ago [...] you can only go to the place for several hours, several days, and now the business is growing, and every place is open 24 hours because people work with people in other countries and in other time [zones]”.

Other local service providers have also adapted their services to meet the needs of digital nomads as a work phenomenon:

“They like our flexibility; we adapt to their availability depending on their work time tables. Sometimes I change my timetable and start at eight for them to be able to come to my business” (Surf school, Stakeholder #10, June 2020).

The perspectives of Gran Canaria’s stakeholders on digital nomads as a work phenomenon corroborate the literature which depicts them as being remote workers and location independent professionals (Müller, 2016; Orel, 2019; Thompson, 2018; Wang et al., 2018). As noted, in Gran Canaria, some of the businesses were established as a direct result of the strong work identity of digital nomads. Other businesses, while catering to a broader set of customers, are quickly adapting to visitors that are not on a holiday, but on a work schedule.

4.3. Digital nomads as a touristic/leisure phenomenon

Digital nomads have been described as a growing tourism segment. The Gran Canarian Strategic Tourism Plan and Tourism Marketing Plan defines long-term travelers as a to-be-explored segment due to its growth during recent years and especially in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic: “It is a segment in which Gran Canaria could be quite competitive” (Gran Canaria 2021–2025, 11). The local DMO, Gran Canarian Tourism Board and some of the service providers also treat digital nomads as a separate group of tourists with specific needs:

“It is completely different to other segments as their needs at the destination are totally different, they don’t come for holidays, they don’t want to spend two weeks at the destination. Some want to live for several months or sometimes even a year at our destination” (DMO, Stakeholder #11, May 2020).

A longer stay at a destination differentiates digital nomads from other holidaymakers. Another stakeholder further pinpoints the specifics of this segment:

“This is for me a new segment of tourism. [...] There are more young people that are willing to move to any place on the planet where they feel comfortable. With good weather, with good internet access, high internet speed [...] the branch of services that they need, then they feel comfortable” (Law and fiscal company manager, Stakeholder #22, October 2022).

Another distinctive feature of digital nomads is that “They are not part of international travel or tourism fair events [meaning they do not attend travel fairs to look for vacation destinations]. They are part of a

community of digital nomads” (CEO, digital nomad conference, Stakeholder #1, May 2020). To access this specific segment, local stakeholders adopt specifically crafted marketing strategies. They reach out to digital nomads’ communities by means of digital channels. This targeted marketing strategy also attests to the digital identity of digital nomadism (c.f. section 4.4. for details). Several stakeholders suggested that they rely on the community word-of-mouth:

“We don’t really do any paid ads because it is not productive. Because it is such a small group of people [...] everybody knows each other” (Co-working, co-living, Stakeholder #7, June 2019).

“Internet marketplace is where they find their information. They have this sort of [...] forums, where they share information and experiences. We have been recognized in some of these (online) places and naturally it has brought a lot of clients to us. We have also participated in some digital nomad conferences explaining tax issues that we have in the Canary Islands” (Law and fiscal company manager, Stakeholder #22, October 2022).

Gran Canaria stakeholders noted that the most effective marketing strategy is to gain access to the local and/or global communities of digital nomads both online and offline. To do this, the local marketing organization launched a campaign with 21 members of the WiFi Tribe, the world’s leading co-working and co-living company, who have now become ambassadors for the Canary Islands in order to attract the consumer segment of remote workers or digital nomads (Promotur, Stakeholder #18, June 2022; see also Turismo de Islas Canarias, 2020). The right communities and their social influencers seem to work very well for Gran Canaria, as the marketing organization Promotur, summarizes:

“We reach them through our campaigns – our contents. It is spread all around the world, all around the markets. They land on our page that has all that kind of content. That’s the point. Then they land, they have huge consumer information: contents, recreational contents, audio-visual content is provided on that website” (Promotur, Stakeholder #18, June 2022).

Despite a number of distinct features as a distinct tourism segment, the travel patterns of digital nomads share some similarities with other tourists in Gran Canaria:

“You would think that nomads would have absolutely different travel patterns; this is not the case. Nomads come exactly when tourists would arrive – our high season from September through April or March. And that is when we would be booked and overbooked, and the rest of the year, like summer months [...] occupancy rates would be lower” (Co-working and co-living, Stakeholder #7, June 2019).

Seasonality is a distinct feature of Gran Canarian tourism. Although digital nomads follow a similar pattern of seasonality as to when they visit the island, they develop a longer relationship with the destination both in terms of length of stay and use of local services and infrastructures. As is suggested by the initial studies all digital nomads long for scenic locations with a well-developed tourism infrastructure (Green, 2020; Nash et al., 2018; Thompson, 2018), in which case Gran Canaria, as a mature tourism destination, fulfills all the requirements in terms of location and a wide range of options for active leisure. While sharing some similarities with tourists, digital nomads are regarded as a separate niche segment by local stakeholders specifically with regard to destination marketing.

4.4. Digital nomads as a digital/online phenomenon

Digital nomadism is a digitalization induced phenomenon. The term itself includes the word ‘digital’, emphasizing the importance of this identity component. Recognizing the digital nature of digital nomadism, businesses such as those run by the restaurant owner (Stakeholder #9)

and the surf school (#10) owner share the fact that they must maintain an active presence on social media to reach potential digital nomad customers: “We have publicity in Instagram, Facebook and on our own web page. We have a person responsible for the social media” (Surf school, Stakeholder #10, June 2020). Importantly, digital nomads require technological resources and online connectivity to accomplish their professional duties and support their social and personal lives. Gran Canaria DMO strongly emphasizes the technological infrastructure in the destination as an essential feature for this segment: “It is especially important to have digital and good technological resources on the island for them to perform their work. For them, high-speed Wi-Fi is essential” (DMO, Stakeholder #11, May 2020). To meet technological needs of digital nomads, co-working spaces on the island are all equipped with high-speed wireless networks. A stable bandwidth is one of the essential features to support the professional and personal lives of digital nomads (Green, 2020; Müller, 2016; Nash et al., 2018). This has been set as a strategic goal of the Gran Canarian DMO.

The use of digital channels to accomplish professional duties, travel reservations and other personal life arrangements require strong online capabilities from service providers. Local stakeholders understand and strive to accommodate this need:

“We would need to go more digital. Also, the services. Not only that nomad work is digital, we have lots of possibilities to provide more (digital) infrastructure and permanent services [digitally]” (Health-care client service advisor, Stakeholder #20, October 2022).

A strong online presence by local service providers directly caters to the digital/online side of digital nomadism. Businesses have actively built connections and consume products and services online. The online communities of digital nomads in the form of local Facebook groups are well aligned with the digital/online component of the phenomenon. Digital nomads are actively utilizing digital platforms to connect with the destination and with the services they need. The island’s digital nomad online communities have thousands of members. For example, the “Gran Canaria digital nomads” Facebook group has over 19 thousand members and the “Accommodation for Digital Nomads in Gran Canarias” group has over three thousand members. These online communities are seen by the local business owners as one of the primary opportunities to understand digital nomads’ needs and provide hospitality services on demand and build longer term relationships with digital nomads:

“When we were doing research and checking Facebook groups for the nomads [...] we saw that digital nomads are using app-based services that would help them make things faster and easier, like, delivery. Find something, and book something” (Local inhabitant/mobile app developer, Stakeholder #21, October 2022).

The digital entity is well understood by the DMO and public marketing organization of the Canary Islands, Promotur, as they reach this segment and introduce the destination through digital channels as described in the previous section (see section 4.3.).

Digital nomads as a digital/online phenomenon includes several components that are related to information search, communication, dating and accomplishing work duties (Amineh & Asl, 2015; Müller, 2016; Nash et al., 2018; Thompson, 2019b). Our results show that these diverse digital needs are acknowledged by the local stakeholders. The Gran Canaria DMO, the Promotur and the local businesses all suggest that their community’s interface with the digital nomads have a prominent and sophisticated digital/online component.

4.5. Digital nomads as a social life phenomenon

Digital nomads comprise a community of like-minded travellers. At the global level, they congregate in geographical hot-spots, and at the local level they join co-living and/or co-working spaces. This connects them both with the global community of digital nomads and with the

local community where they temporarily reside. To strength their sense of community on the island, there is a local coffee shop that runs a networking event for digital nomads:

“There is a networking coffee shop. [...] They come every week and one of them presents, like a 30-minute short presentation to the group about what they do, their businesses, about their life, or maybe any topic that is interesting to them (Local inhabitant/ mobile app developer, Stakeholder #21, October 2022).

The local co-working and co-living spaces in GC are a good example of recognizing the social needs of digital nomads and meeting their needs as a global community. Examples of the design of co-working spaces include areas for rest and cafeterias that provide an opportunity for digital nomads to informally connect with each other: “having a room where they can disconnect and socialize at the same time” (Co-working, Stakeholder #4, March 2020). Connection with the destination is another recognized aspect of digital nomads, thus some of the local service providers build a community bridging locals and digital nomads:

“We really just have the community and flexibility. And we prioritize customer in all senses, so, like we go an extra mile to make sure people feel at home. [...] our community also has a lot of local expats, so they also joining the co-working and events, and help us to keep the community alive” (Co-working and co-living, Stakeholder #7, June 2019).

The DMO understands that connection with the local community is an important aspect of digital nomadism: “They like to develop their social life connected to the local community, so then you offer permanent incentives for them to know that they can work and live in a very attractive place” (DMO, Stakeholder #11, May 2020). It seems that connection with the destination and the local community encourages digital nomads to return:

“We have got a lot of returning customers. [...] They would already be familiar with the area, and they would find, for example, a long-term accommodation. [...] So they would not stay in co-living, they would just rent an apartment, but they would still be a part of our community, and they would be joining a co-working space for example, for this period” (Co-working and co-living, Stakeholder #7, June 2019).

To support the community spirit, some of the co-working spaces offer after-work activities such as get-together events, distribute e-mail newsletters, offer discounts in local restaurants (e.g., co-working and co-living, Stakeholder #7, #16, Surf school, Stakeholder #19), and offer other alternative workstations when spaces are short (Co-working, Stakeholder #3):

“We always try to offer different activities: we go to the island, and we visit different spots. It is easy to work with them because they say “yes” to everything, because half of the time they want to enjoy” (Surf school, Stakeholder #19, July 2022).

“Every Christmas we send our tenants [...] a Christmas gift [...]. We make sure we are very personal with them. We know everybody by name, we have a community wall here [...] with pictures of each and every resident that stayed at ours. People really like that as well. [...] These are some little things (illustrative) of the community spirit” (Co-working and co-living, Stakeholder #7, June 2019).

The growing number of co-working spaces plays an important role in the effort to specifically cater to the social needs of digital nomads. Our results support our earlier elaboration on the importance of the sense of togetherness and belonging to this group of like-minded individuals (Orel, 2019; Situmorang & Karthana, 2021; Woldoff & Litchfield, 2021). The services and design of local co-working and co-living spaces on Grand Canaria are illustrative of their function as nodes connecting digital nomads with the local community and each other.

4.6. Digital nomads as “new locals”/part of local social landscape

Previous studies on digital nomads have not addressed the phenomenon of recognizing digital nomads as a part of a host community. On the contrary, researchers claim that digital nomads are detached from local communities both socially and economically (Thompson, 2018, 2019a; Woldoff & Litchfield, 2021). Driven by touristic motivations and mobile lifestyle, they have not regarded themselves as a part of a host destination. Our results, however, provide a different perspective. The stakeholders regard digital nomads as part of the local societal fabric. As the owner of a restaurant stated:

“We treat them as locals, we have a close relationship with them, we speak with them every day, and if they come twice, they become friends. I am the public relations in my restaurant, and I want to know about their life, why they came here, what they do in their origin country, what they like from our city, and I like to talk to them and show interest in their lives” (Restaurant/bar, Stakeholder #9, June 2020).

Cafes and restaurants are known for becoming temporary offices for remote workers. However, none of the previous studies have shown that this integrates digital nomads into the landscape of the local community. Local residents in our study shared strong emotional bonds with digital nomads. A local 72-year-old retired man regards digital nomads as visitors, who, however, have become an enjoyable part of his life:

“The experiences are incredibly positive. I like to see them walking in the sea avenue, visiting my favourite café, and some of them have even lived in my building. For me it is a pleasure to know that they choose Las Palmas de Gran Canaria as a place to live” (Local resident, Stakeholder #12, June 2020).

Some Gran Canaria residents go so far as classifying digital nomads as locals: “I see them as locals that live here for a while. They adapt very well to the way of living here” says a 55-year-old economist (male, Stakeholder #13, June 2020). Another local resident, a 46-year-old engineer, who has first-hand experiences with nomads, states: “I perceive them as locals [...]. I even consider them as part of my best friends” (male, Stakeholder #14, June 2020). Passive encounters are a common feature of salient interactions between the locals and the digital nomads. In some cases, friendly social interactions and conversations take place naturally (Restaurant/bar, Stakeholder #9, June 2020). The conversation topics can range from advising on local services and travel (Local resident, male, 55 years old, Stakeholder #13, June 2020) to sharing life experiences (Local resident, male, 46 years old, Stakeholder #14, June 2020). A Promotur manager, when sharing experiences about encountering nomads in private life, exclaimed: “They look like locals. They live as locals” (Stakeholder #18, June 2022).

What is worth noting is the fact that local businesses increasingly see digital nomads as locally available human resources. This new local segment provides an additionally highly skilled workforce. Two stakeholders mentioned that they on occasion hired their digital nomad clients for their businesses. One shared that:

“In our company we have been contracting digital nomads that are being staying with us. We just saw that they were amazing professionals. I am talking, for example, about our graphic designer, he comes from Italy. We really liked him, he was working at our place, and he was sleeping at our place [...] he just came out and we said: ‘Hey, we need to give you a job. Would you like to work 100% with us?’” (Co-working, co-living, Stakeholder #16, June 2022).

This new local human capital is seen as incredibly positive, benefiting the development and future well-being of Gran Canaria as a community. Several stakeholders consider it strategically important for Gran Canaria to keep digital nomads on the island and turn them into new locals:

“The other part [of digital nomads] is remote working. I don’t see them as tourists, but as a new segment of population that can be established here in Gran Canaria [...] This group of people can provide to our society talents in a wider range of industries due to [...] their knowledge in these sectors that have not been developed in Canary Islands [...] We can attract people that will pay taxes here. They will consume. They will ask for high quality services. So, I think this is something that can boost our society” (Law and fiscal company manager, Stakeholder #22, October 2022).

The importance of retaining digital nomads on Gran Canaria through wider service provision, international schooling and visa support has been expressed by the CEO of the digital nomad conference (Stakeholder #1, May and June 2022; see section 4.1.). Such a presence of a talent pool on the island has been increasingly embraced as benefiting local knowledge exchange and learning:

“I was attending some events at coworking spaces for personal growth and for professional growth. They [digital nomads] put out this announcement: every week they present some kind of business or idea. This opens your mind and bring your knowledge about what is happening in the world. Another reason for me is to build personal connections [...] for professional education and self-growth” (Local inhabitant/ mobile app developer, Stakeholder #21, October 2022).

The diverse backgrounds of digital nomads are viewed as an important cultural asset for the local community on the island:

“In the end when you mixed with this type of people that are coming from many parts of the world, the only thing that you can get is a positive thing [...] You can share, and they can share experiences with you. They are willing to know people from Gran Canaria, to see how they think, how they feel about lots of topics. So, if this thing can only give you a richer cultural view and cultural position [...] You will get a richer cultural profile. You are getting this here because these people are coming to your hometown. So, I think it is a very positive thing. (Law and fiscal company manager, Stakeholder #22, October 2022).

Overall, the presence of digital nomads on Gran Canaria is viewed positively by the local community; whether it is a local resident who shares the same coffee shop or a walking route with a digital nomad, or a local resident who purposefully goes to digital nomad centers to learn and be inspired, or a local service provider, who see the talent resource developing trend via the digital nomad population. In addition to recognizing digital nomads as new locals, the local community sees them as important residents – valuable assets for community development.

4.7. Accommodative strategies

The interface of the destination communities with digital nomadism is examined from two perspectives: the intensity of interaction (Hudson & Miller, 2004; Savage et al., 1991; Sheehan & Ritchie, 2005) and the level and form of acceptance (Alonso & Nyanjom, 2017; Hudson & Miller, 2004). As explained in the methods section, based on the emerging subthemes in the analysis of the stakeholders’ interface with the digital nomad entities, we developed a digital nomad accommodation typology; this was to explicate the level and intensity of interaction and accommodative strategies of local stakeholders in relation to digital nomads. Based on the patterns of the acceptance and accommodative strategies for the digital nomads, the stakeholders were assigned four roles: *providers*, *communicators*, *integrators*, and *embracers* (Fig. 2).

All four stakeholder roles exist in Gran Canaria although, there are no clear-cut boundaries between the four roles. For example, some of the *providers*, such as the surf school in this case, made minor changes in their opening schedule to better cater to digital nomads (Surf school,

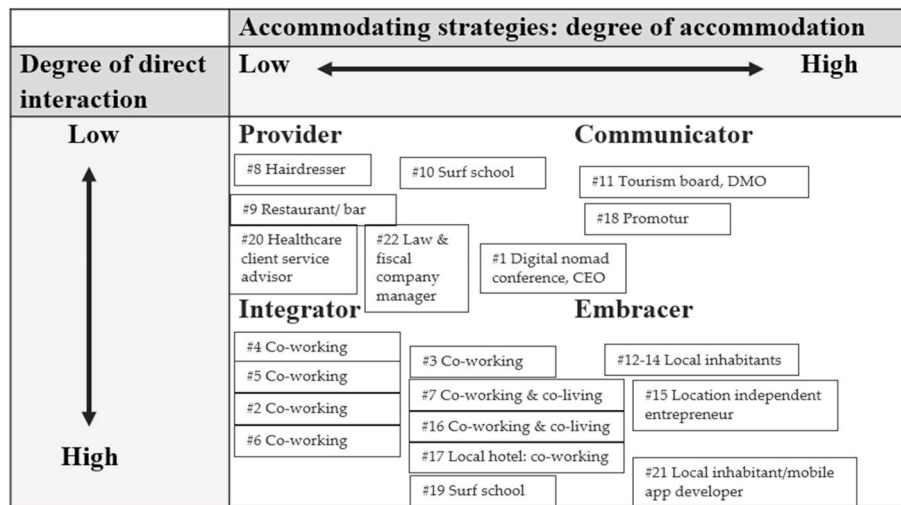


Fig. 2. Local stakeholder accommodation role typology.

Stakeholder #10). Thus, the local surf school is located towards the High-end of the degree of accommodation in the *provider*'s cell (Fig. 2).

The *integrators* category concerns specifically designed service solutions for digital nomads and has a higher direct interaction with the digital nomad segment. Thus, naturally all the co-working and co-living spaces in this study belong to the *integrator* category as well as a hotel that offers hot desks and workstations (Fig. 2). Local co-working and co-living spaces accommodate the needs of digital nomads as a social, work, and digital phenomenon. However, the level of interaction and the scope of services vary within this group of stakeholders. Some of the co-working spaces have gone further in their accommodative strategies, offering social activities, newsletters, catering packages, access to hotel amenities and alternative workspace solutions. These attempts to meet various needs of digital nomads is summarized by an owner of a co-working and co-living space, he stated that being a digital nomad in Gran Canaria "is the best of what can happen to them, and if we make their life easier, we will have more of them" (Co-working and co-living, Stakeholder #16, June 2022). Thus, some of the co-working and co-living spaces (Stakeholder #3, #7, #16 & #17) have been placed towards the middle of the accommodation continuum, emphasizing greater involvement and additional personalised solutions (Fig. 2).

The *Communicators* category presumes high acceptance of digital nomads, though without or with very limited direct encounters, as it focuses on the marketing of the destination and providing information about the destination. Gran Canarian Tourism Board (Stakeholder #11), Promotur (Stakeholder #18) and the CEO of the *Digital Nomad Conference* (Stakeholder #1) recognize the specific needs and extensive potential of the digital nomadism phenomenon for the destination. In addition to treating digital nomads as a niche segment with specific technological and lifestyle needs, they strongly consider other services that can and should be extended to this segment – services provided based on their varying roles: from tourists/guests, to temporary residents, and to even possible long-term residents. Such accommodating services include alternative international schooling, healthcare services and visa programs. The CEO of *Digital Nomad Conference* summarizes their strategy that demonstrates an active communicator role:

"Since the very early on, we understood that our role, apart from creating services, was to create an ecosystem, and for us an ecosystem means a pool of providers and services that cater and provide a good experience for those who come" (CEO, *Digital Nomad Conference*, Stakeholder #1, June 2022).

While all three *communicator* stakeholders promote the destination as an ideal location for digital nomads, they have different degrees of

direct interface with this segment. For example, while promoting the destination, the *Digital Nomad Conference* organizer comes into close contact with digital nomads through further service provision:

"I obviously have been interacting with them for a long time both by just running our business and for me many of our customers are now good, good friends [...] I have built relationships with most of my customers. I tried to do that proactively" (CEO, *Digital Nomad Conference*, Stakeholder #1, June 2022).

This places Stakeholder #1 towards the bottom of the *communicator* cell, emphasizing a higher degree of direct interaction as well as in-between *communicator* and *integrator* due to specific service provision geared toward digital nomads (Fig. 2).

The final category of *embracers* represents active acceptance and/or involvement in service provision and integration in the destination or even purposeful contacts for knowledge exchange. Local residents in this study (Stakeholder #12–14, #21) and a local location independent entrepreneur (Stakeholder #15) fall under this category. Though not providing any services, Gran Canarians perceive digital nomads as locals, as a part of the local community. This represents the highest level of acceptance of digital nomads.

4.8. Digital nomadism going mainstream – post pandemic changes

The outbreak of Covid-19 has altered many traditional employees into location independent professionals, as working from home became a part of the world's strategy to combat the pandemic. It was noted, however, even before the pandemic, that the proliferation of remote work and the emerging digital nomadism had predicted an optimistic outlook for the future of this phenomenon. A local location independent entrepreneur in Gran Canaria evaluated that:

"The project management and general practice management matured in navigating and working with remote teams. This will only continue to grow. The availability of labor pool is phenomenal. The availability of people at a reasonable cost is hard to compete with" (Location independent entrepreneur, Stakeholder #15, June 2019).

With the pandemic outbreak, our interviewees anticipated that digital nomadism would become much more prevalent than before as it was seen as a means of working remotely and living a better life:

"The potential is just going to get better and better. We have seen in the last two weeks, three or four, or five companies with more than four thousand employees having gone fully or almost fully remote.

They allow most of their work force to work remotely forever, it is their choice. More are going to do the same. All those workers, and all those professionals, executives, if they can work remotely, they might not stay where they are, they might not stay in those very expensive cities, where the quality of life is not great unless you really have a lot of money to spend. They can gain a lot of value by relocating to different locations, like what we can offer" (CEO, *Digital Nomad Conference*, Stakeholder #1, May 21, 2020).

The post-pandemic data have validated the optimism of Gran Canaria at the early stage of the pandemic. Since then, digital nomadism has been rapidly growing for Gran Canaria, as the CEO of *Digital Nomad Conference* observed:

"Even during the pandemic, we saw exponential growth in demand of our services. There was a whole new wave of remote workers visiting the Canary Islands and particularly with segments such as what we call *corporate nomads*, which are those individuals who gain the freedom to work flexibly because of the pandemic" (CEO, *Digital Nomad Conference*, Stakeholder #1, June 2022).

Digital nomads were being considered as a distinct customer segment for inclusion in the Canary Islands brand's communication strategy prior to the pandemic. The Covid-19 outbreak was a turning point; it spurred such a decision: "The pandemic started in February, and we have been working seriously for this segment since March, April, and we presented the plan in September–October 2020" (Promotur, Stakeholder #18, June 2022).

In addition to the inflow of foreign digital nomads to a scenic island destination such as GC, local Spanish companies have also started to move to flexible working and use open office spaces on the island for their employees. The changes are visible not just in the number of openings of new and larger co-working spaces to accommodate the growing segment, but also in the transformation of the hospitality sector that have been rushing to meet the needs of digital nomads: "hotels now are really betting on creating co-working, proper co-working spaces inside the hotels" (CEO, *Digital Nomad Conference*, Stakeholder #1, June 2022). A local hotel has even a new manager position responsible for events and co-working. This manager summarizes this trend as follows:

"We have the co-working space after the Covid-19. It's very new [...]. It is in the news and as I walk through the city, I see a lot more [co-working] spaces. Some years ago, I only knew one or two places where people can work" (Local hotel, events & co-working manager, Stakeholder #17, June 2022).

This change follows a recent Spanish Cowotel-trend, which aims at supporting the hotel sector that was hit very hard by the pandemic by providing workcation packs that connect digital nomads and hotels offerings (Guzmán González-Vidaurreta, 2021). In addition to transforming and expanding services at the destination, the pandemic has also diversified digital nomad profiles. In the pre-pandemic interviews, stakeholders categorized nomads as individuals who worked mostly as freelancers and ran their own projects and businesses, or remote workers who worked in marketing, design, software developers, AI and communications. Demographics of such individuals were mainly that they were single or unmarried couples in their 20s, 30s and 40s. Since the pandemic, however, digital nomads in Gran Canaria are now increasingly composed of corporate workers and so-called traditional office employees, as well as families with children:

"There is a new interesting group, what we call the working families. So, families with both parents now have the freedom to work remotely and are now also looking for making use of that freedom and travel or spend specific periods of time in different locations with their kids. So, it's also a very interesting segment" (CEO, *Digital Nomad Conference*, Stakeholder #1, June 2022).

Indeed, pandemic restrictions have driven forward not only remote

work, but also remote schooling and creating suitable conditions for the relocation of whole families. From the point of view of nationality, digital nomads in Gran Canaria are mostly from Western Europe and the US, while a few come from New Zealand/Australia or other parts of the world.

5. Discussion and conclusions

Spurred by technological and social changes, digital nomadism is becoming a permanent societal phenomenon and expanding as a consumer market. Our case-study of a popular European destination brings a present-day view of a rapidly transforming destination both pre and post pandemic due to the inflow of digital nomads. Utilizing Gran Canaria as a case study, this study has addressed a timely but nonetheless underexplored perspective on digital nomadism i.e. the way in which destination communities perceive and interact with this phenomenon. It adds to the growing body of literature on digital nomadism by looking at this trend from a grassroots community perspective. As shown in our case analysis, digital nomads have multiple identities that play different roles in the interface between the various members of the local communities at the receiving destination. This in turn has resulted in different levels of acceptance and different strategies employed by the local stakeholders to accommodate the needs of this sector. While destinations and service providers are beginning to understand the rapidly emerging digital nomad market, it is vital to understand the various facets of the phenomenon and to address this segment's multiple needs. This is especially relevant considering the unprecedented post-pandemic growth of digital nomadism that has fostered service expansion and infrastructure development at destinations.

5.1. Theoretical contribution

This study enriches our conceptual understanding of digital nomadism from the perspective of the destination stakeholders. To the best of our knowledge, this study represents the first thorough investigation of digital nomadism using the supply side perspective. It makes significant theoretical contributions to the literature in several ways. First, we have elaborated on and developed a framework to enhance an understanding of the multifaceted identity roles of digital nomads. No other studies have proposed these dimensions in one framework. In addition to the components of work and lifestyle that were commonly acknowledged in the literature, we have proposed three additional identity components – touristic/leisure, digital/online, and social identities – to be included in the identity components. These three proposed components were not explicitly suggested as identity components in the previous studies on digital nomadism. In addition, our case analysis reveals an emerging and important digital nomad identity component: digital nomads being "the new locals". This emerging identity role reveals an important societal outcome of this rapidly developing phenomenon, the recognition of a talent pool that can be important to attract to a destination because of its importance to the community's economic development. In other words, the digital nomads are not seen as distinct "outsiders" but part of the fabric of the destination community. This attitude towards digital nomads contrasts considerably from earlier perspectives on the detachment of digital nomads from local communities in which they resided (Thompson, 2018; 2019a). In fact, digital nomads are not only viewed as a "new locals" but further viewed as valuable localized human resources that can expand the local human capital reserve. Third, due to the two-phase data collection, our study illustrates the pandemic effect on the development of digital nomadism. To our knowledge there are no studies that have noted a similar pattern of destination development in relation to the digital nomad segment. Forth, our study also provides a useful framework for analyzing the stakeholders' involvement in adapting to and accommodating the needs of digital nomads. The accommodative strategies implemented by local stakeholders have been examined in

accordance with the stakeholder's specialization and role in the community.

The multiple perspectives of local stakeholders emphasize the complexity and multifaceted character of digital nomadism that combines both tourists and local residents in a convivial fashion. As illustrated in Fig. 3, the perspectives on digital nomads are a reflection of the degree of interface with the phenomenon at the local level. From the destination angle, digital nomadism is seen to interface with broad facets of the local community, including the government, private industry, and the local civic society.

The accommodative strategies implemented by local stakeholders correlate strongly with the stakeholder's specialization and role in the community. Stakeholders from the private sector generally have adopted *provider* and *integrator* roles, representatives of the government act as *communicators*, while members of the local civic society are *embracers* of this consumer segment (Fig. 3).

The conceptual approach applied in this study provides a useful analytical tool to understand how destinations perceive and interact with the digital nomad consumer segment. This approach demonstrates what needs and facets of digital nomadism have been addressed, and what demands are yet to be met. In such a manner, our study provides a useful framework for analyzing the stakeholders' involvement when accommodating digital nomads in other destinations.

5.2. Practical implications

Digital nomadism is a rapidly growing phenomenon that is transforming destinations in various parts of the world. Apart from the nomad's expenditure power via consumption of hospitality and leisure services, shared living and workspaces, and other services, they also act as social and lifestyle influencers – i.e., the social currency they can potentially create for tourism destinations (WYSE Travel Confederation, 2018). Some destinations have strategically positioned themselves as the ideal locations for such a location independent workforce. Others have been promoted by digital nomads through online means and social media. Thus, the digital and online nature of the phenomenon, can transform today's remote destinations into nomad hot spots tomorrow. Against this background, our study can provide useful insights for destinations desiring to attract digital nomads.

The growth of the digital nomad market stimulates destinations such as Gran Canaria as it will continue to introduce fresh economic and

social capital to the destination communities. More than ever, it is critical to strategically plan accommodative resources and marketing communication messages in order to capitalize on the potential of this niche market. What is interesting is that our study indicates that our case community in Gran Canaria embraces digital nomadism to a high degree. This is illustrated by the observation that digital nomads are viewed as part of the local landscape and the aim is to try to retain them in the destination as “new locals”. It is necessary for the local DOMs and governmental agencies to plan further services to assist this segment such as healthcare, visa programs, language translation services and multi-lingual schools, etc; this is necessary in light of the diversifying groups joining the digital nomads, such as travelling families.

However, the influx of digital nomads may also potentially lead to transformational changes in the receiving destinations. In this regard, and of utmost importance, the destination governmental agencies along with other stakeholders need to establish a set of goals and a system to optimize the utilization of digital nomadism to enrich the lives of the local inhabitants economically, culturally, and socially. As the size of the digital nomad market grows, ensuring mutuality and reciprocity between digital nomads and the local community is of primal importance in order to achieve guest-host conviviality (Lehto et al., 2020). In other words, it is important to have strategies ready to help the destination community safeguard and develop vibrant local hospitality resources. The factors to be considered include guest-host reciprocity and mutual quality of life, the opportunity to grow and the opportunity for a better way of life, not just for the digital nomads but also for the local residents. Unplanned growth of a market such as digital nomads could potentially introduce social interactions that are not convivial as well as unwanted social fabric changes due to digital nomads being more than just tourists.

The recognition of digital nomads' work needs has fostered new business developments in the form of co-working and co-living spaces, while other businesses have endeavored to adapt their services to meet the working schedules of digital nomads. Among the most notable post pandemic changes is not just in the number of new and larger co-working spaces but the transformation of the hospitality sector to accommodate the working needs of digital nomads within hotel premises.

The informants in this study also suggested that digital nomads as a work phenomenon will instigate greater changes in employment relationships, as remote work becomes more widespread. This will create new opportunities for the receiving destinations to attract digital nomads as a remote workforce and accommodate their work-related needs. The changes that such an anticipated widespread practice can introduce to the receiving destinations can become opportunities in which new forms of business can emerge. For Gran Canaria, the presence of a skilled workforce on the island has resulted in an informal knowledge exchange with the local residents and employment relationship changes between service providers and digital nomads. This again establishes the relevance and transferability of this study in terms of understanding the destination communities' interface with digital nomads. For communities wishing to tap into these growing remote work trends, our case analysis provides an excellent reference point. Looking into the future, it is certain that the potential exists for destination communities develop novel, structurally attractive economic opportunities to complement the existing tourism-dominant economic infrastructure.

This study has also revealed that there is value in systematically integrating digital nomads into the overall marketing schemes and communication strategies of destinations, particularly those communities aiming to attract this consumer segment. Notably, user-generated experiences shared on digital platforms have boosted Gran Canaria's attractiveness even during the global lockdown. Thanks to the increasing remote work trend and Gran Canaria's strategically targeted marketing efforts, the ranking of the capital city of Las Palmas on nomadlist.com has rapidly ascended, becoming one of the world's top destinations. Not unsurprisingly, the number of co-working spaces on the island of Gran Canaria have surged. Thus, understanding the facets of

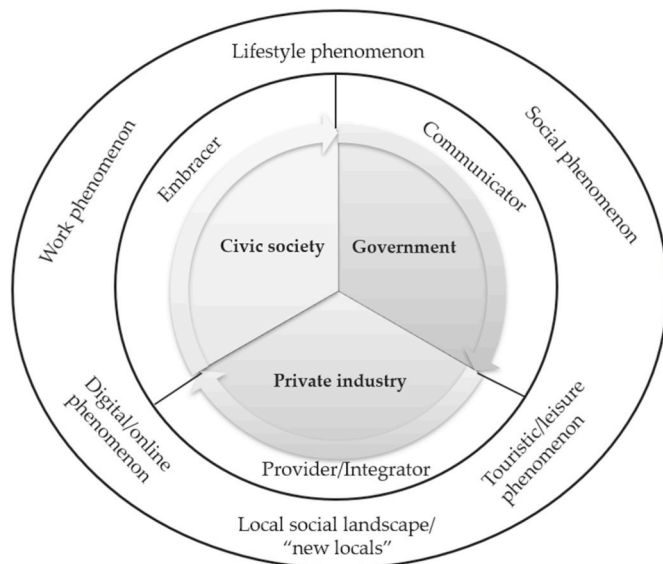


Fig. 3. Digital nomadism: stakeholder perspectives and accommodative strategies.

digital nomadism and accommodating the needs of digital nomads are as important as ever. Different stakeholders in this study have adopted various accommodative strategies that cater to the specific needs of digital nomads in terms of their lifestyle and recreational needs, remote work, and digital services as well social needs. Understanding the multifaceted nature of the phenomenon can help local service providers to effectively serve this segment. These results are beneficial to other communities and destinations that are becoming or aspiring to become popular locations for digital nomads.

5.3. Limitations and future study directions

We acknowledge that the outcomes of this research may be destination specific. However, our study introduces the possibility for the further application of the proposed framework in other destinations which have their own distinct cultural, social, and economic structures.

The current study adds to a growing body of scholarship on digital nomadism by presenting an original conceptual framework and focusing on the stakeholders' perspective. It deepens the understanding of digital nomadism as a multifaceted travel phenomenon in travel and tourism research. Combining the features of both the tourists and the locals, digital nomadism is challenging traditional perspective on tourism; a perspective that assumes the movement of people away from their usual place of residence and work. Thus, digital nomads extend both the practices and understanding of tourism, demonstrating that touristic experiences are increasingly becoming a part of everydayness. The intertwining nature of everydayness and tourism in the case of digital nomadism deserves further dedicated research attention.

Despite the rapid growth of digital nomadism on the island, the issue of long-term stay is yet to be addressed through specific visa and programs for digital nomads that would accommodate the requirements of, for example, families with children and those, who are limited by a tourist visa. Future research can explore such aspects of digital nomadism as broader demographic groups enter the digital nomad market.

Appendix 1. A set of base interview questions for local stakeholders and its interrelation with the research aim

1. How did you come to this business, when and why?	Background information, accommodative strategies
2. What kind of services do you provide?	Background information, accommodative strategies, interaction, perception
3. Could you describe your customers (age, gender, profession, family status)?	Background information, accommodative strategies
4. What are their main motivations?	Perception, accommodative strategies
5. How do they find your service?	Accommodative strategies, interaction
6. What do they need? Why do they choose you/your business (over others)?	Accommodative strategies, interaction, perception
7. What do they like about your business?	Accommodative strategies, interaction
8. How do you see the future for this business model?	Background information, accommodative strategies
9. Do your work/cooperate with the tourism board in marketing Gran Canaria as a preferred location for digital nomads? How?	Accommodative strategies
10. Do you collaborate with similar service providers?	Accommodative strategies
11. Are there challenges and potential issues in this industry?	Accommodative strategies
12. What do you think of digital nomadism (the phenomenon)?	Perception
13. Have you personally interacted with digital nomads? In what settings? Context?	Interaction
14. How are the experiences like? Positive, negative?	Interaction
15. How do you feel about sharing the city/place with digital nomads?	Accommodative strategies, interaction

Credit author statement

Olga Hannonen: Conceptualization, Methodology, Formal Analysis, Writing, Revisions; **Teresa Aguiar Quintana:** Conceptualization, Data curation, Investigation, Revisions; **Xinran Y. Lehto:** Data Curation, Conceptualization, Project Administration, Writing, Revisions.

Impact statement

Digital nomadism is a rapidly evolving phenomenon that transforms destinations globally. Understanding the facets of digital nomadism and how to accommodate the needs of digital nomads is a timely investigation. Our study provides a supply side view of digital nomadism. It defines identity components of digital nomads as being composed of work and lifestyle facets, touristic/leisure, digital/online, and social identities. This case study identifies four stakeholder groups: provider, communicator, integrator, and embracer, each adopting various accommodative strategies to cater to the specific needs of digital nomads. Understanding the multifaceted nature of the phenomenon can help destinations effectively target the growing digital nomad market. This study shows that there is value in strategically integrating digital nomads into the overall destination marketing schemes to capitalize on the potential of this market. In a broader sense, it contributes to the dialogue about the impact on society of remote work and life digitalization.

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