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Between work and leisure: The digital nomads' profile and drivers to choose Ericeira

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Master's degree in Economics and Public Policies

Dissertation Advisor:

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October, 2024



CIÊNCIAS SOCIAIS  
E HUMANAS

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Department of Political Economy

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## Resumo

O número de nómadas digitais no mundo aumentou significativamente nos últimos anos e espera-se que continue a aumentar. Particularmente desde a pandemia, o nomadismo digital ganhou notoriedade e, vários autores têm-se focado neste tópico. No entanto, faltam na literatura estudos que abordem os fatores que influenciam a escolha dos destinos. Este estudo pretende contribuir para essa lacuna, descrevendo o perfil dos nómadas digitais e explorando a sua perceção sobre os fatores de atração do destino. Para isso, utilizando um método qualitativo, foram realizadas 25 entrevistas semiestruturadas em profundidade com nómadas digitais atualmente estabelecidos no local da pesquisa, a Ericeira, Portugal. Os dados foram analisados por meio de análise de conteúdo qualitativa, e categorização de dados dedutiva e indutiva, apoiada no software Nvivo 15 para o Windows. Os resultados mostraram que os nómadas digitais são jovens profissionais altamente qualificados, que trabalham de forma totalmente remota, em diversas áreas de negócio e viajam para diferentes destinos por períodos de tempo. Em relação aos fatores locais, os nómadas digitais tendem a escolher os seus destinos de acordo com as necessidades do seu estilo de vida, especialmente pelo clima e natureza, atividades de lazer, a presença de uma comunidade de nómadas digitais e o custo de vida. No entanto, eles precisam de infraestruturas de alta qualidade para realizarem as suas atividades profissionais. Os resultados deste estudo corroboram a premissa de que os nómadas digitais podem ser uma oportunidade para o desenvolvimento regional e ajudam os responsáveis políticos, especialmente a nível regional, a projetar e implementar estratégias adequadas para atrair nómadas digitais.

**Palavras-chave:** Desenvolvimento local; Destino; Fatores de atração; Nómadas digitais



## Abstract

The number of digital nomads worldwide has expanded massively over the last years and it is expected that it will continue to increase. Particularly since the pandemic, the digital nomadism gained notoriety, and several authors have focused on this topic. However, studies focusing on the factors that influence the choice of destination are missing in literature. This study intends to contribute to this gap, describing the digital nomads' profile and exploring their perception on the attractive factors of the destination. To this end, using a qualitative method, 25 semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted to digital nomads currently settled in the research site, Ericeira, Portugal. Data was analysed using qualitative content analysis, and deductive and inductive categorization data, which was supported by the software NVivo 15 for Windows. The results showed that digital nomads are young and high skilled professionals who work fully remote in a diversity of business areas and travel to different destinations during periods of time. Regarding the local drivers, digital nomads tend to choose their destinations according to their lifestyle needs, especially because of climate and nature, leisure activities, the presence of digital nomad community and living costs. Nevertheless, they need high quality infrastructure to perform their daily professional activities. The results of this study substantiate the premise that digital nomads can be an opportunity for regional development and help policy makers, especially at regional level, to design and implement appropriate strategies and initiatives to attract digital nomads.

**Keywords:** Destination; Digital nomads; Local development; Pull factors





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## **List of Abbreviations**

DN - Digital Nomad

EU – European Union

ICTs – Information and Communication Technologies

INE – National Institute of Statistics

OECD – Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development



# Introduction

Although remote work has been available since the 1970s (Nilles, 1975), over the years, especially since the pandemic in 2020, it has become a common type of work arrangement around the world. In particular, the evolution of information and communication technologies (ICTs) has allowed changes in living and working patterns.

From the 1980s onwards, international mobility, both for personal and professional reasons, also became a trend (Hannonen, 2020). Its increase has been due to various factors (e.g., globalization, advances in transportation systems and improvement in communication technologies [Hannonen, 2020]). The digitalization and growth of international mobility have resulted in various mobile lifestyles. One of the most recent lifestyles that combines mobility and remote work is digital nomadism. The term was first introduced by Makimoto and Manners (1997) and it is defined as a “category of mobile professional who perform their work remotely from anywhere in the world, utilizing digital technologies” (Hannonen, 2020, p. 2). Digital nomads are known for their desire for travel and they are described as workers who live in a semi-permanent basis (Thompson, 2018).

The number of digital nomads worldwide has expanded massively over the last years and it is expected that it will continue to increase as the number of regular teleworkers is also growing (Hermann & Paris, 2020). However, studies focusing on the factors that influence the choice of destination are missing in literature (Hannonen et al., 2023). This research intends to contribute to this gap, exploring the attractive and repelling factors in the perception of digital nomads.

This phenomenon benefits the international business because digital nomads are an expanding market niche, which causes an economic impact on destinations (Demaj et al., 2021) for two main reasons: (a) digital nomads are considered highly skilled remote workers whose income is comparable to that of more expensive countries (Bonneau & Aroles, 2021); and (b) it is expected that they spend a considerable part of their income locally (Garcez et al., 2024; Poulaki et al., 2023).

Although there are some negative impacts associated with this new type of remote workers (mainly the widespread increase in prices), the potential for transformation of destinations is huge and it offers new opportunities for both core and peripheral destinations (Zhou et al.,

2024). The remote work can decentralize the work opportunities, allowing workers to complete their professional activity from rural or peripheral areas (Vilhelmson & Thulin, 2016).

In order to take advantage of this opportunity, local authorities must understand the profile of digital nomads and the critical factors that drive them to choose their destination. Consequently, studies focusing the needs and preferences of this important market niche will allow the design of appropriate strategies for creating or promoting the destination attractiveness factors in the perspective of the given group (Sztuk, 2023).

Some destinations are developing strategies to become digital nomads friendly and local authorities can assist destinations by establishing institutional and governmental actions (Zhou et al., 2024). For example, in Portugal and Spain, initiatives like “Digital Nomad Madeira Islands” (2021) and “Nomad City Gran Canaria” (2024) have emerged to transform these destinations into digital nomad hubs.

Despite the increase of digital nomadism phenomenon and its potential transformative effect on destinations, there is a lack of significant literature on destinations chosen by digital nomads to live (Hannonen et al., 2023). In this sequence, this study addresses the following main research question: What influences the digital nomads’ decision to move for a specific location? Therefore, the main objective of this study was to identify the critical drivers that influence digital nomads choosing their destination. For its operationalization, two specific goals were defined as follows: (i) describe the digital nomads’ profile, both sociodemographic characteristics and their work and travel dimension; and (ii) examine how those characteristics affect the perception of the critical factors that influence digital nomads’ destination choice. The findings will help policy makers, especially at regional level, to design and implement appropriate strategies and initiatives to attract digital nomads.

The research study is divided as follows: Chapter 1 presents the literature review carried out in order to explore previous studies about the digital nomad phenomenon. The goal is to identify its different dimensions as well as the pull factors affecting their destination’s choice, and the potential impacts on the regional development. Chapter 2 describes the methodology adopted for the empirical analysis, i.e., case study, research design, procedure and data collection, data analysis, while the Chapter 3 presents the results from the interviews, categorized according to the research specific objectives. The discussion of the study’s findings is the content of Chapter 4, and, finally, Chapter 5 addresses the conclusions, limitations and



suggestions for future research. It includes some policy recommendations to address the digital nomadism to implement a win-win strategy.



## CHAPTER 1

### **Literature Review**

The concept of telework was introduced by Nilles (1975) through the term “telecommuting”, in the context of the 1970s oil crisis. According to the author, during this period, the lack of resources and the high pollution in cities (mainly associated with commuting from home to work) were two major concerns that could be overcome with the aid of ICTs. Thereby, telecommuting consists in the use of ICTs to enable employees to work in other spaces besides the company office (Nilles, 1975). However, up until 2020, the evolution of ICTs alone did not lead to a significant increase in the number of teleworkers (López-Igual & Rodríguez-Modroño, 2020).

The need to remain isolated, starting from March 2020, as a consequence of the pandemic context, propelled a sharp growth of remote work (Cook, 2023). In the European space, between 2017 and 2020, the population regularly working from home increased from 5% to 37% (Eurofound, 2020). Although less pronounced, this trend was also observed in Portugal, as in 2019, only 6,5% of Portuguese employees worked remotely in Portugal, while in 2020, this percentage increased to 15,6% (Tomaz et al., 2023). According to Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2021a), during lockdowns in Australia, 47% of employees worked remotely, while in Japan, although there wasn't a nationwide lockdown, teleworking increased from 10% to 28% between 2019 and 2020. The imposition of teleworking, during this period, demonstrated the benefits of telework both for companies and employees.

After the pandemic, despite teleworking rates decreasing across Europe, several workers continued to work from home, regularly or occasionally, and the trend doesn't seem to be disappearing. In 2022, Eurofound (2023) conducted a survey whose results showed that around 60% of the employed population would like to work remotely, at least a few days per month. Globally, this desire is also observed, as revealed by the study developed by Boogard and Moller (2020), identifying that, after Covid-19, 82% of the 5000 respondents preferred to work from home a day a week or more. In Portugal, this working culture appears to be settled up nowadays. According to the Portuguese Institute of Statistics (INE, 2023), in the last trimester of 2023, 16,6% of the Portuguese employed population teleworked at least once a week, but the average was 3 times *per week*.

In recent years, the sudden and unexpected rising of remote work has altered the usual patterns, culture and norms of the work-life model. Since this work model is a prerequisite for digital nomadism, this lifestyle has also gained greater adherence after the pandemic and several workers have begun to identify themselves as digital nomads (Cook, 2023).

### **1.1. Digital nomadism: The phenomenon**

The term digital nomadism was first introduced by Makimoto and Manners (1997) as a result of various technological advances on the personal and professional people lives. Even though the proliferation of articles about digital nomads, most of the studies have been focused in different perspectives of their lifestyle and it does not exist a coherent and consensual definition of digital nomadism (Garcez et al., 2024).

As stressed by Hannonen et al. (2023), digital nomad is a “complex construct” (p. 2). Some authors (Cook, 2020; Hannonen, 2020; Reichenberger, 2018; Thompson, 2018) have connected three central components to the definition of digital nomadism, namely, remote work, travel and leisure. In this perspective, digital nomads can be defined as mobile professionals (Hannonen, 2020; Orel, 2019; Thompson, 2018) who perform their work through digital technologies (Hannonen, 2020; Liegl, 2014; Nash et al., 2018) while travelling in semi permanently basis (Hannonen, 2020; Thompson, 2018).

Since the first time the term was mentioned, Makimoto and Manners (1997) established two necessary requirements for the characterization of digital nomadism: (1) remote work; and (2) a strong desire for traveling. Remote work has allowed breaking down temporal and location barriers (Makimoto, 2013), thus enabling the worker, from a device connected to the internet, to work from anywhere in the world, regardless the time zone (Hannonen, 2020). As argued by Putra and Agirachman (2016), digital nomadism is also considered a tourist phenomenon, since the desire to travel is fundamental and the main differentiator between a digital nomad and other digital lifestyles (e.g., remote workers).

However, there is a main contradiction which lies in the travel's requirement between the authors. As highlighted by Reichenberg (2018), a worker can self-identify as a digital nomad without necessarily having to travel, but focused on the possibility and freedom to do it; from this perspective, the author advanced a new definition of digital nomads divided into three levels, in which the zero level is the prerequisite and the other three levels are hierarchized “based on the commitment to travel” (Reichenberg, 2018, p. 370): (a) digital nomads are

location independent workers by conducting their work in an online setting (level 0); (b) extending this independence to mobility by working in different spaces besides a personal office (level 1) (c) however, leveraging the opportunity to work and travel simultaneously (level 2); and (d) to the point where there is no permanent residence (level 3).

Despite some misunderstanding between the concepts of teleworkers and digital nomads, these are two distinct definitions: to be a digital nomad, the remote work is a prerequisite (Cook, 2023); nevertheless, a remote worker does not need to be a digital nomad. Also, the digital nomadism has been considered an extension of remote work (Thompson, 2018).

A significant and increasingly larger percentage of those working remotely is composed by digital nomads (Zerva et al., 2023). According to the report published by the American job platform MBO Partners (2023), the count of digital nomads in the United States increased from 7.3 million in 2019 to 17.3 million in 2023, which also highlights that the most significant increase occurred during the pandemic.

The pandemic Covid-19 revolutionized the way of working, and the imposition of teleworking was an opportunity for traditional workers to experience digital nomadism (De Almeida et al., 2021). This growth of traditional workers who are performing their professional activity fully remote interested in experiencing this lifestyle changed the digital nomad ecosystem (De Almeida et al., 2023). Many formal professions that previously take place in offices can now be carried out from any mobile device, and therefore, the diversity of modalities within digital nomadism and the profile of digital nomad has increased (De Almeida et al., 2023).

During the recent years, other extensions of digital nomadism have been appearing, which vary in the travel frequency dimension, i.e., workation and slowmadism (De Almeida et al., 2023); according to these authors, similar to digital nomadism, these two new modalities are the combination between remote work and travel, but they differ from each other in the length of stay at each destination. Workation is the combination of work and leisure, since tourists travel but continue performing their professional activities with the support of digital technologies (Pecsek, 2018). In comparison to common digital nomads, workationers spend less time in each destination, usually, less than one month (Bassiyouny & Wilkesmann, 2023). On the contrary, slowmads prefer to spend more time in each destination than usual digital nomads, travelling as slow movers (De Almeida et al., 2023).

Demographically, digital nomads are described in the literature as young professionals, aged between 20 and 39 years old (Chevtaeva & Denizci-Guillet, 2021; Garcez et al., 2024; Mariati et al., 2023; Reichenberger, 2018; Sztuk, 2023). According to Nomad List, a website created to share information about and for digital nomads, the average age of a digital nomad is 35 years old (The 2024 State of Digital Nomads, 2024). This age range is explained by two potential facts (Reichenberger, 2018): (i) the lack of family responsibilities (i.e., young professionals who normally do not have children, and if they have a partner, they can embrace this lifestyle together); and (ii) the familiarity since childhood with ICTs. Despite this average age, more and more digital nomads are arriving at destinations with their families (Hannonen et al., 2023).

Additionally, these workers are characterized as:

- a. Being highly skilled, the majority completed, at least, a bachelor's degree. (Garcez et al., 2024; Prabawa & Pertiwi, 2020; Reichenberger, 2018; Thompson, 2018).
- b. Working in the gig economy, as software developing, marketing, data science, designer, and freelancers (Thompson, 2018).
- c. Earning high wages: the 2024 State of Digital Nomads (2024) shows that the average annual income is \$122,820. It should be noted that this level of income is much higher than that presented by the same website in 2022, i.e., \$77,000 (Glaeser, 2022).

## **1.2. Relocation of digital nomads: Critical factors to choose the destination**

The digital nomadism is a travel and work phenomenon, and therefore, it is a particular market niche with very specific characteristics (Prabawa & Pertiwi, 2020). Their motivations to embrace this lifestyle differ from the majority travel workers (e.g., International Business Travellers and Qualified Immigrants) which is reflected in the choice of destination. Digital nomads select their destination according to recreational and lifestyle preferences, rather than work or employment opportunities (Thompson, 2018). Even though, it is essential to choose a place with the necessary infrastructure to continue carrying out their work (Hannonen, 2020).

According to the Push and Pull Theory (Dann, 1977), the decision to travel is the combination of the internal factors that prompt individuals to travel, and the external factors which are related to the characteristics of the destination that attract the individual. In this way, the main pull factors influencing the destination choice of a digital nomad are:

- a. Cost of living: the research conducted by Bonneau and Aroles (2021) indicates that most digital nomads are embracing a lifestyle of geoarbitrage. This means they are leveraging the wage rates of expensive locations while choosing destinations with lower costs of living. Many studies (Garcez et al., 2024; Lee et al., 2019; Mancinelli, 2020; Poulaki et al., 2023; Reichenberger, 2018; Sztuk, 2023; Thompson, 2018; Zhou et al., 2024) point to accessible cost of living as an important variable in destination choice, highlighting affordable accommodation.
- b. Nature and climate: these two factors are very emphasized by various authors (Garcez et al., 2024; Green, 2020; Hannonen et al., 2023; Lhakard, 2022; Zhou et al., 2024). Digital nomads often choose warm and beautiful places (Lee et al., 2019; Poulaki et al., 2023; Thompson, 2018) where they can perform outdoor activities (Lee et al., 2019).
- c. Tourism and leisure activities: since digital nomads choose their location according to leisure motivations, they will select places that follow their lifestyle needs (Hannonen, 2020; Thompson, 2018). The city's culture is a key factor because this market segment looks for authentic places (Sztuk, 2023). As they spend long stays in the destination, they seek places to perform their hobbies or discover new ones (Lee et al., 2019; Prabawa & Pertiwi, 2020).
- d. Local and work infrastructure: although the choice of destination is made independently of professional activity, digital nomads continue to work while traveling. Therefore, the key factors in choosing their next stop are also based on the infrastructure required to carry out their work tasks (e.g., available and high-quality internet; coworking spaces [Chevtaeva & Denizci-Guillet, 2021; Lee et al., 2019; Orel, 2019; Poulaki et al., 2023; Prabawa & Pertiwi, 2020; Sztuk, 2023; Zhou et al., 2024]).
- e. Safety: some studies (Garcez et al., 2022; Lee et al., 2019; Lhakard, 2022; Sánchez-Vergara et al., 2023; Sztuk, 2023) have highlighted that digital nomads choose countries where they feel safe. Safety was referenced by 42% of the 209 respondents in the study developed by Sztuk (2023) and it was hardly correlated with low crime rate.
- f. Visa system: since digital nomads will be visiting the host country during long stays and will perform their work there, they meticulously research the necessary regulations (e.g., visa requirements; taxation [Holleran & Notting, 2023]). Some researchers (Hannonen, 2020; Mancinelli, 2020) have emphasized the visa as one of the most important factors that determines the length of their stay.

- g. Digital nomad community: in order to overcome potential loneliness feeling produced by this lifestyle, Lee (2019) argues that digital nomads commonly choose destinations with a large digital nomad community with similar sociodemographic characteristics and the same lifestyle mindset (Thompson, 2018).

### **1.3. Digital nomad as a market niche in peripheral regions**

As mentioned previously, both remote work and digital nomadism are phenomena that have grown exponentially, and this trend is expected to continue. Consequently, this represents a market segment with significant potential, attracting the interest of several countries (Prabawa & Pertiwi, 2020). Particularly, since the outset of the pandemic, some countries have been implementing measures to become “digital-nomad friendly” (Hannonen, 2020, p. 13). The creation of special visas for digital nomads were the primary instrument showcasing political initiative to attract this niche (Zhou et al., 2024).

Due to the closure of country borders worldwide and travel restrictions, Covid-19 caused a negative impact on the global economy, largely affecting the tourism sector (Segal & Gerstel, 2020). Especially peripheral and rural territories, heavily reliant on tourism to boost their local economy, faced challenging situations during the pandemic (Almeida & Belezas, 2022). These areas suffer from structural problems such as a high percentage of an aging population, and consequently, a lack of young and skilled labour, and limited private and public investment, due to the centralization of services and job opportunities in major urban areas (Freitas & Kitson, 2018). To overcome these constraints, tourism has been the adopted strategy over the years to attract population and entrepreneurial projects to peripheral areas.

The unique characteristics of rural and peripheral regions (e.g., nature, landscapes and low population density) provided opportunities to design innovative strategies that differentiate this type of destination from urban tourist spots (Almeida & Belezas, 2022; Garcez et al., 2022). Distinct from the typical tourists, remote workers and digital nomads can constitute a significant market segment to be attracted, and preferably retained, by these regions (Almeida & Belezas, 2022). According OECD (2021b) telework could impact, negatively and positively, the low-density areas. In terms of opportunities, the remote work promotes new work opportunities for human resources who live in peripheral or rural areas and need to move to urban centres to have more available jobs. For that reason, remote work could repopulate low-density regions. More populated areas require more services, and therefore, the public and private investment in these



areas will increase as well, improving regional cohesion. Nevertheless, as also stressed by OECD (2021b), the promotion of telework may have consequences for the regions: initially, the services are not prepared for more people; the low-density regions are not so well digitally prepared as urban areas and the living costs, mainly the rent price, could increase exponentially.

Two of the main differentiators between high and low development regions are qualified labour and technological development which are fundamental elements of digital nomadism (Ünal, 2024). Digital nomads stay longer periods in the destinations and experience the local culture and lifestyle. Because they are constantly on the move, digital nomads can affect economically, socially and culturally the regional development of the destination (Ünal, 2024). Economically, it's expected that digital nomads spend part of their income in the destination (Garcez et al., 2024; Poulaki et al., 2023). This could be a booster of investment in the region, since their specific needs create opportunities for new business models (i.e., accommodation, leisure activities and coworking spaces). Socially, the digital nomads can “transfer their knowledge and know-how” (Ünal, 2024, p. 377) to local human resources. The coworking spaces, closely linked to the growth of digital nomadism (Chevtaeva & Denizci-Guillet, 2021), could be an opportunity to stimulate the knowledge share between digital nomads and local entrepreneurs, business owners or company's employees, and therefore, promoting local development (Jamal, 2018).

In this way, the attraction of digital nomads could be a strategy to stimulate the regional development in small and mid-size cities, as long as local actors realize investments according to the potential and characteristics of the region, which simultaneously, meet the preferences and the needs of the market niche.

### **1.3.1. Local authority perspective: Strategies to attract digital nomads**

Some destinations invested in projects to attract digital nomads. In the case of the Iberian Peninsula, two strategies were created for this purpose: “Digital Nomad Madeira” (Portugal) and “Nomad City Gran Canaria” (Spain).

The Digital Nomads Madeira was created in 2021, and it is supported by Madeira's Regional Government and by Start-up Madeira. According to Almeida and Belezas (2022), the project started in Ponta do Sol aiming to turn this village into a digital nomad hub entitled “Digital Nomad Village”. The motivations of the initiative were very clear: to attract digital nomads and other remote workers to establish in Madeira for a period of one to six months,

setting up the destination as one of the premier places to work remotely. The primary short-term goal of this project was improving the local economy: the mentioned entities invested in infrastructure focused in digital nomads' necessities, as well as leisure and recreational activities. In addition to this initiative positively and directly contributing to the local economy, for the long-term, it is expected that the new visitors will become residents and start paying local taxes (Almeida & Belezas, 2022). Since the beginning of this project, 18,944 digital nomads from 141 countries registered to stay in the "Digital Nomad Village", and it is estimated that 11,200 visited Madeira between 2020 and 2024 (Digital Nomads Madeira Islands, 2021).

In turn, the Nomad City Gran Canaria was launched in 2015 as a yearly international conference organized by the island in order to respond to the growing movement of remote workers settling on the island for extended periods of time. Since this project was designed before the boom of digital nomads' trend, the Nomad City Gran Canaria lacks of clearly objectives (Almeida & Belezas, 2022).

According to Almeida and Belezas (2022), the support of local governments was crucial for the success of both initiatives. The local authorities should not design this type of strategies alone, since the necessary infrastructure and business involve many stakeholders: new suppliers to the specific needs of this new niche (e.g., coworking spaces), and the hospitality sector requires to adapt their products and services (Zhou et al., 2024). The involvement of different members of the local community is essential to attain the goals designed by the local government. Hence, local authorities should communicate to stakeholders the advantages of creating strategies to attract digital nomads and enhance the importance of their contribution (Sztuk, 2023).

## CHAPTER 2

### **Methodology**

#### **2.1. The research site: Ericeira**

This research is focused on the village of Ericeira for varying reasons. The municipality of Mafra is part of the Lisbon Metropolitan Area, encompassing a total of 11 villages, which occupies an area of 291,65 km<sup>2</sup> and includes the coastal village of Ericeira. Ericeira is one of the most famous touristic destinations in Portugal, and in particular, it is a surf destination. In 2011, this village was declared the first Surf World Reserve in Europe, second worldwide, by the non-governmental organization Save The Waves Coalition (Save The Waves Coalition, nd).

The population of the municipality of Mafra has been increasing all over the years. According to the Portuguese population statistics (INE, 2022), Mafra had 86,359 residents in 2021, and recorded the highest growth rate (i.e., around 13%) in the Lisbon Metropolitan Area between 2011 and 2021. In the period of time, Ericeira had an increasing rate of almost 21%, totaling 12,359 residents in 2021. It is the second most populous village in the municipality of Mafra, only slightly surpassed by the village of Mafra (i.e., 20,781 residents). In particular, Ericeira had 1,356 residents of foreign nationalities in 2021, representing 11% of its population, higher than the village of Mafra, where foreign residents accounted less than 7% (Appendix A).

#### **2.2. Research design, procedure and data collection**

The present study adopted the case study as its research strategy (Yin, 2018) in order to perform a qualitative analysis of the digital nomad phenomenon. This research study was based on semi-structured in-depth interviews with digital nomads who moved to Ericeira guided by a predetermined set of open-ended questions, which were conceived according to the framed literature review, and supplemented by the flexibility to explore other topics based on the respondent's answers (Patton, 2015).

The interview guide (Appendix B) is divided into two parts. The first part respects to the profile of digital nomads currently settled in Ericeira, including questions about sociodemographic characteristics and exploring their digital nomad identity; and the second part comprises the drivers that influence the digital nomads' destination choice, alongside their

personal experiences in previous locations, in addition to the specific reasons why digital nomads choose Ericeira as a destination.

Initially, the sample used two methods. First, social media platforms were utilized, specifically two Facebook groups - (i) “Ericeira Freelancers and Digital Nomads”; and (ii) “Lisbon Digital Nomads and Expats” - through which the researcher connected with the first group of participants. Following this, from the insights of the previous participants, the researcher travelled to Ericeira to find more digital nomads at a local co-working space, i.e., “The Kelp Coworking Space Ericeira”, and also, a co-living space, i.e., “The Selina Boavista Ericeira Surf and School”. In this sequence, the remaining participants were collected by snowballing. This method involves contacting a small group of individuals relevant to the study, in this case digital nomads residing in Ericeira, who referred other individuals who met the sample criteria (Bryman, 2012).

The interviews took place between June and July 2024 and were conducted in English, since all the participants were proficient in the language. The majority of interviews (n=23) were held online using the Zoom platform, and the others (n=2) were held in the co-living space “The Selina Boavista Ericeira Surf and School”.

The study included 25 participants aged between 27 and 47 years old who are digital nomads currently settling in Ericeira. In this research, the participants were targeted according to the following criteria: (1) to be a foreign citizen; (2) who is working remotely with digital technologies; (3) who settled in Ericeira by choice and not by professional requirement; and (4) who intends to live and work temporarily in different countries (Ferreira, 2023).

The individuals who were interested in participating in the study were fully informed about the nature and the purpose of the research. All the participants consented the recording of the interview, and although the researcher presented the free and informed consent form, they only opted for oral consent.

To guarantee the participant’s confidentiality and anonymity, a code was attributed to each one. The participants are identified during the research with the letters “DN” for digital nomad, followed by a number corresponding to the alphabetical order of their first name and surnames.

### **2.3. Data Analysis**

The interviews were fully transcribed, and analysed using qualitative content analysis and deductive categorization data (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). The software NVivo 15 for Windows was used for organizing and categorizing the qualitative data. The codification was based on the study's objectives, the literature review and the structure of the interview guide (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003). Consequently, four categorizations were created in order to respond to the research objectives:

1. "Sociodemographic information" in order to describe if the participant's characteristics were in line with the ones referred in the literature review;
2. "Digital nomad identity" with the purpose of explore the two main dimensions of the digital nomadism phenomenon: work and travel;
3. "Drivers for the relocation of digital nomads" in order to deepen the critical factors that drive digital nomads to choose a specific destination;
4. "Relocation of digital nomads to Ericeira" for exploring the reasons to choose Ericeira as a digital nomad destination.

The second step was to analyse each category through inductive categorization data (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005) creating more specific codes and new categories according to similarities stated by the participants.



## CHAPTER 3

### Results

#### 3.1. Sociodemographic and digital nomadism features

To describe sociodemographic characteristics (Table 1), the following variables were used: gender, age, country of birth, education, occupation field. The sample is made of 25 participants with 12 different origins, and 64% of them are female.

The participants are aged between 27 and 47 years old ( $M=32,8$ ,  $SD=4,54$ ), but the majority of them are aged between 27 and 35 years old ( $n=18$ ). Among the interviewees, 14 (56%) has a bachelor's degree, 9 (36%) has a master's degree, and only 2 (8%) have not completed more than the high school. The professional occupations are very diversified, including several fields: business and management, marketing and sales, design and creative, finance and accounting, internship, education and coaching, customer service and support, and media and communication. Among the participants, 16 travelled alone to Ericeira, five travelled with their partner, and 4 travelled with friends. When considering the country of origin, the individuals are predominantly from Europe (i.e., Germany [36%] and Netherlands [16%]), United States of America (2%) and Brazil (2%).

**Table 1.** *Participants' sociodemographic characteristics*

Participant	Gender	Age	Country of Birth	Education Level	Professional Occupation
DN1	M	36	Poland	Master's Degree	Product Manager
DN2	F	32	United States	Bachelor's Degree	Digital Marketeer
DN3	M	33	Scotland	Bachelor's Degree	Designer
DN4	F	32	Germany	Bachelor's Degree	Designer
DN5	F	47	Brazil	Bachelor's Degree	Operational Manager
DN6	F	31	Brazil	Master's Degree	Account Manager
DN7	F	27	Germany	Bachelor's Degree	Intern
DN8	F	30	Germany	Master's Degree	Solutions Consultant
DN9	F	35	Lithuania	Bachelor's Degree	Designer
DN10	M	30	United States	High School Level	Business Owner
DN11	M	37	Netherlands	Bachelor's Degree	Entrepreneur
DN12	F	34	Germany	Master's Degree	Mindset Coach
DN13	F	38	Germany	Bachelor's Degree	Online Teacher
DN14	M	33	Italy	Master's Degree	Business Owner
DN15	F	27	Germany	Bachelor's Degree	Accountant
DN16	F	27	Germany	Bachelor's Degree	Customer Service

<b>DN17</b>	F	29	Germany	Bachelor's Degree	Account Manager
<b>DN18</b>	M	36	Peru	Master's Degree	Forex Trader
<b>DN19</b>	F	32	Netherlands	Bachelor's Degree	Business Developer
<b>DN20</b>	M	38	Netherlands	Master's Degree	Consultant
<b>DN21</b>	M	29	Austria	High School Level	Mindset Coach
<b>DN22</b>	M	38	Germany	Master's Degree	Entrepreneur
<b>DN23</b>	F	32	Netherlands	Master's Degree	Social Media Manager
<b>DN24</b>	F	28	Bulgaria	Bachelor's Degree	Online Teacher
<b>DN25</b>	F	29	Ukraine	Bachelor's Degree	Human Resources Manager

*Note: M - Male; F – Female*

The Table 2 consists of four subcategories: “Perception of the term Digital Nomad”, “Work Dimension”, “Travel Frequency” and “The Beginning”.

**Table 2.** *Digital nomad identity*

		Participants (N=25)
<b>Perception of the term digital nomad</b>	Negative connotation	3
	Don't know the term	3
	Slowmad	2
	Entrepreneur	2
<b>Work dimension</b>	Work Remotely	17
	Work Anywhere	9
	Start freelancing or create their own job	4
	Switch for a job that allows to work remotely	3
<b>Travel frequency</b>	One to six months	16
	One to four weeks	8
	Six months to one year	4
	More than one year	1
<b>The beginning</b>	During Covid-19	11
	Post Covid-19	11
	Pre Covid-19	3



The subcategory “Perception of the term digital nomad” corresponds to what participants associate with the term of their lifestyle. Some participants (n=3) assumed they didn’t know the definition of digital nomad, as stated by DN 1: “There am I a digital nomad? I don't know what's the definition, like an official one, but yeah, I like to check out different places from time to time”, and asked by DN15: “What is the overall definition of digital nomad?”.

Even when considered themselves as digital nomads, some participants associate negative connotations with the term and don’t like to be associated with it, due to the people’s opinion about this lifestyle, as declared by DN11:

“So, I like the nomadic lifestyle, and my work is online, but I feel too limited. Like some people, they say *“I’m a digital nomad. I have a cocktail on the beach”* but I don't want to show myself like that to the world”.

The same concern is stated by DN14: “I think digital nomad has negative connotations for some people because it represents someone who is somehow detached from the local reality”. Other participant, DN6, showed concern about the association of the term with the gentrification effect on the destination: “I don't really like the term because I also see it from the other side, a little bit the negative side of digital nomad, which is the increase in basically gentrification. But, in practice, I am [a digital nomad]”.

Among the interviewees, two respondents referred that the term is very associated with entrepreneurs and freelancers and other two consider themselves as slowmads instead of digital nomads.

In the subcategory “Work dimension” participants mainly mentioned working remotely (n=17) and working anywhere (n=9), started freelancing activity or created their own company (n=4), and switched for a job that allows to work remotely (n=3). As noted by DN16: “Officially? I’m a social worker (...) But I work in a company in Germany with customer service, because social work is with people a lot and it’s not possible to do online”.

The purpose of the subcategory “Travel frequency” is to understand the participants’ frequency of relocation and how much time they spend at each destination. The frequency of travelling varies among participants, since some of them describes themselves as slow-movers and spend more time at the location (months or even years) and others are more fast-pacers and prefer to stay just a few weeks at the location. Additionally, this is even verified for the same participant, as stated by DN11: “Between one and four months, like in a place. But if you look

at sometimes two nights, sometimes a week, sometimes a month or depends. So, I've been moving quite a lot". Also, as mentioned by DN5, there are changes in travelling frequency for the same participant:

"Lately it's been an average of two years, every two years we move, but when I lived on the bus, I spent three years on the bus and I ended up moving and we moved places every two months". (DN5)

The last subcategory, i.e., "The beginning", allows to understand when the participants started this lifestyle. Twenty-two out of twenty-five participants started the digital nomadism lifestyle during Covid-19 (n=11) or after the pandemic (n=11). Their major motivation was the possibility to work fully remotely, as declared by DN24: "Initially when I started doing it was when the pandemic started, the coronavirus pandemic. Back in 2020, all my classes moved online because of the pandemic"; or started to work as self-employed, as stated by DN22: "I started work remotely and as an entrepreneur in 2020. Before that I worked in a company in Germany".

### 3.2. Drivers for the relocation of digital nomads

The Table 3 contains the results respecting the drivers for the destination choice.

**Table 3.** *Drivers for the relocation of digital nomads*

	Participants (N=25)
Climate and nature	21
Local and work infrastructure	17
Tourism and leisure activities	16
Digital nomad community	11
Location and city-size	10
Cost of living	8
Safety	3

The participants valued "the nature, temperature and climate" (DN4) and "very open natural landscape" (DN3). The proximity to nature is mostly linked with nature-based sports, as mentioned by DN14: "Access to nature, seaside mountain sports linked to nature - hiking,

mountain biking, surfing, climbing, rock climbing, beach volleyball. There is something that makes the destination unique from nature and sports”.

Surfing was the most nature-based sport referred by the digital nomads (n=12), and for some of them, the critical reason to choose the destination or even to pursue this lifestyle, as the case of DN4: “Surfing is a big one for me. So, the whole point for me of becoming a digital nomad was driven by surf. I'm looking for destinations where I can surf, where I'm close by the sea”; and DN6: “I always choose places that I can surf! It's kind of the main filter that I use, a place where I can surf and that's not cold”.

Many participants (n=17) also highlighted the importance of local facilities (e.g., transports, work infrastructure), mainly because they continue to carry out their professional activity while travelling. Furthermore, the majority of participants don't work alone. They work for clients or companies and need to spend many hours of the day in online meetings:

“I need to know in advance where I will find a good spot to take a call. Where I can talk for an hour uninterrupted. That's the hardest thing about being a digital nomad and working as a consultant. Nomads spend a long time on phone calls because we work in teams”.  
(DN14)

The co-working spaces were also highlighted as a space to socialize by DN1: “It's cool if the place has some kind of a coworking space that you can go and do your work, maybe, meet people and don't stay in your accommodation all the time”.

In the subcategory “Tourism and leisure activities” two aspects are covered: (i) local culture, including touristic attractions, local amenities (e.g., restaurants) and local people; and (ii) hobbies, mainly related to outdoor activities, as mentioned previously.

Eleven participants mentioned that they prefer to select destinations with a strong community of digital nomads, and even that it is the main filter in selecting the next destination, as stated by DN10: “Community is number one by far”. The reasons to choose digital nomads spot hubs are related with the high potential for meeting people. DN25 talked about the importance of digital nomad community to socialize:

“The people, I need to know that there are other people like me, other digital nomads, because it can be very lonely. (...) I'm not a tourist, so I want to start and find long term

friends again. So that's why I would say this is my top priority, to know that there are other digital nomads.”

Both DN18 and DN22 emphasized the digital nomad community and coworking spaces to do networking (e.g., share knowledge or to have business opportunities), respectively, “because you can go to co-workings or meet people a lot so you can have, like, business opportunities” and “The community is essential, people with the same lifestyle, entrepreneurs that I can change knowledge and connect”.

Despite this driver was referred as a relevant filter, not all the digital nomads share the same opinion. Two participants stated that they don’t relate with the idea of choosing their next destination according to the presence of a big digital nomad community, for example, DN14 declared “I don’t like that. Only hang out with the digital nomad community itself. So, it's very insular as a group, right. It very much feels like a bubble. The digital community”.

Living costs was declared by eight participants as one of the most important conditions to choose a location as well as the length of stay. All the participants who referred this factor declared to prefer destinations with low living costs, such as assumed by DN18 “The first thing is the cost of the living in the place. It's important to know how many days can you stay there and to define if it is going to be a visit or it's going to be like a stay ”.

Furthermore, the location was also mentioned and the participants highlighted the proximity to the airport or to their origin country. They don’t appreciate highly populated cities and prefer “smaller, like, villages or smaller towns” (DN9). The safety was also mentioned by three female participants (DN12; DN19; DN25):

“Security is very important too because I’m travelling alone. The role of the woman is important because not every country is accepting that a woman is travelling alone or is wearing the clothes she wants to. And so that is actually very important to me”. (DN12)

Since digital nomads work on teams or with their clients, as mentioned above, the importance of being in a country with the same or, at least, a similar time zone, was also quoted (DN1; DN4; DN25).

### **3.3. Relocation of digital nomads to Ericeira**

Table 4 is divided into four subcategories: “How heard about”, “Length of stay”, “Ericeira’s pull factors” and “Constraints of Ericeira”.

**Table 4** - *Relocation of digital nomads to Ericeira*

		Participants (N=25)
<b>How heard about</b>	People	14
	Research	6
	Travel	5
	When moved to Portugal	3
<b>Length of stay</b>	One to six months	13
	Does not know	6
	More than one year	3
	One to four weeks	2
	Six months to one year	1
<b>Why Ericeira</b>	Climate and nature	20
	Tourism and leisure activities	20
	Location and city size	16
	Digital nomad community	12
	Local and work infrastructure	7
	Cost of living	5
	Safety	1
<b>Constraints of Ericeira</b>	Cost of living	12
	Local infrastructure	7
	Seasonality	5

From the results obtained for subcategory “How heard about”, it is possible to observe that the majority of participants (n=14) knew about Ericeira from friends, family or other digital nomads who have been in Ericeira previously, as stated by DN7: “My brother told me about Ericeira a couple of years ago, and he was saying that it likes Uluwatu in Bali”. Other participant discovered Ericeira in the internet, especially while looking for surfing spots:

“Last year, because I was with my best friend and we were looking for a yoga and surf retreat, and somehow when we researched in the Internet, we found a German yoga teacher that offers a trip to Ericeira in a guesthouse there with also the option to book surfing classes. And that's where I heard first about it. I had no idea of Ericeira before. It was pure random coincidence”. (DN8)

Also, some of the interviewees heard about Ericeira while they were travelling as digital nomads in other places, and other participants when they moved to Portugal.

The objective of the subcategory “Length of stay” is to understand how much time digital nomads are planning to stay in Ericeira. The most common answer was between one and six months, often justified by the arrival of winter. Other participants did not know, as affirmed by DN13: “I don’t know yet, until another place calls me”. Three digital nomads said that they would be staying for more than one year.

The “Why Ericeira” subcategory explores the reasons that driven digital nomads to relocate in Ericeira. The two most referred factors (n=20) were the climate and nature, and the leisure activities. These two reasons complemented each other in most cases, as participants mentioned surfing, among other outdoor sports, several times as the main reason for choosing Ericeira as their destination:

“I chose Ericeira for, obviously, proximity to the sea and the options for surfing here and also because of the balance of open space and nature around the city centre. Incredible nature and landscape surrounding the city, incredible beaches and lots of choice of beaches”. (DN24)

The tourism and leisure activities also included local culture of Ericeira. The digital nomads considered Ericeira “a clean and beautiful town, with buildings and architecture” (DN8).

Many participants (n=16) referred the location and the size of Ericeira, primarily because it is “a small town close to Lisbon and airport” (DN8) and with a similar time zone of the country for which they work.

Ericeira is known by the participants as a digital nomad hub, and for sixteen of them, this was one of the critical reasons to choose Ericeira as a destination. They mentioned the facility to do networking with the same type of people and they appreciate the events planned for the community, as mentioned by DN19: “They organize a lot of events for digital nomads”.

The local infrastructures were also mentioned, mainly because of the stability of internet and good places to work, such as co-working spaces and coffee shops. Five participants talked about living costs as a good aspect in Ericeira since “(...) it's cheaper than other European countries or cities” (DN19). Ericeira is also considered a safety destination to stay, as stressed by DN14: “So, to add to the list of good things, it's very safe [here]”.

The “Constraints of Ericeira” subcategory is to know the negative aspects of the territory in the perspective of digital nomads. The most mentioned constraint was the cost of living (n=12) because they considered Ericeira “(...) not as cheap as you'd expect Portugal to be” (DN6), with the greatest focus on the rental price of houses, Airbnb's and co-livings, as stated by DN14: “Rentals are really expensive in Ericeira. Like, when I moved here, I guess I was paying the same in London, and I was paid here”.

The local infrastructures were also mentioned by digital nomads, especially because the quality of buildings “(...) is lower than most European cities. There's mold, there's no heating, so the winters are really cold, especially indoors” (DN14). Other negative aspect very mentioned was the poor quality or inexistence of transports to other parts of Portugal from Ericeira, as declared by DN19: “That is not super well connected, like with public transportation. So, you would necessarily need a car or a scooter or some sort of private transportation”.

Some of them also alluded to the seasonality problem of Ericeira since the town has a lot of activities, especially outdoor sports, and events to attend during summer, but, in the winter, the offer decreases substantially. DN3 considered that “In the winter, if you don't surf, it can be very long and you're quite often refined to indoors if you have long periods of bad weather. Yeah, it's quite a seasonal town”.





## CHAPTER 4

### Discussion

This study mainly pursued two objectives, specifically the: (i) profile of digital nomads, regarding their sociodemographic characteristics and key digital nomadism dimensions (i.e., work and travel frequency); and (ii) critical factors that drive digital nomads to choose a particular destination to live for a certain period of time.

The results corroborate existing literature about digital nomads who relocate to other destinations while work remotely through digital technologies (Hannonen, 2020).

Regarding the sociodemographic characteristics, the results are in the line with the findings of previous studies (Garcez et al., 2024; Reichenberger, 2018; Sztuk, 2023; Thompson, 2018). Thus, the digital nomads are young and skilled professionals aged between 20s and 30s years old with higher education degree and working fully remote in a variety of occupations. The majority of digital nomads travelled alone to Ericeira, although a few of them embrace this lifestyle with their partner or friends. Despite the previous findings about more and more digital nomads arriving at destinations with their families (Hannonen et. al., 2023), none of the digital nomads participating in this research has children or travelled to Ericeira with other family members. This result leads to question the motivation of these nomads that seems to be a combination of work and leisure, notably the nature-based sports such as surfing.

The impact of the pandemic in the digital nomad phenomenon is also showed (De Almeida et al., 2021, 2023). The results emphasize the increasing of digital nomads during and after Covid-19, since 88% of the digital nomads interviewed in this study just started this lifestyle between 2020 and 2024. The remote work policies designed during the pandemic enabled formal workers (e.g., human resources managers, consultants, accountants) to experiment this lifestyle, as evidenced by the variety of professional occupations presented in this study's results. Also, some digital nomads adopted and switched for jobs that enabled them to pursue the digital nomadism (Hermann & Paris, 2020). Many digital nomads with employment contracts adopted this lifestyle during or after Covid-19, which is not in line with the results of other studies developed before 2020, only associating the digital nomadism with "location independent freelancers, young entrepreneurs, online self-employed persons" (Müller, 2016, p. 344). In the study performed by Reichenberg (2018), there was only one digital nomad of the sample who was not a freelancer or entrepreneur, but a company's employee.

In addition to the changes that occurred in the work dimension, the travel frequency has also changed (De Almeida et al., 2023). The permanence in the destination varies a lot, but the majority of digital nomads desire to stay in the destination longest periods of time than a traditional tourist, normally more than one month (Garcez et al., 2024). This finding can be associated with the new forms of digital nomadism, i.e., slowmadism and workation. Thus, the results of this research verified that the slowmadism is a new lifestyle modality in which slowmads prefer to spend more time in each destination than usual digital nomads (De Almeida et al., 2023). Additionally, other digital nomads are fast pacers and stay between one and four weeks in the destination.

The perception of digital nomads about the term resulted from the inductive categorization data (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Although the absence of other studies addressing this topic, the findings of this research show that some digital nomads do not appreciate to use this term to describe themselves and their lifestyle, because they associate negative connotations to “digital nomadism”. The gentrification and the increase in living costs prices are pointed as two burdens that digital nomads can cause on destinations (De Almeida et al., 2021; Holleran, 2022). However, some digital nomads perceived it the same way, and for that reason they do not like to identify themselves as that type of digital nomads, especially those who do not consider that they have the same budget as most digital nomads. In this study, other negative connotation with this lifestyle is the perception of the others. Some digital nomads think that people have the wrong idea about them and their lifestyles, and so they do not want to be associated with the term. The difficulty to define digital nomads is also noticeable in this study’s results. Even though some digital nomads correspond to the criteria, they do not know the definition of “digital nomad” (Hannonen, 2020).

Other results showed what digital nomads desire when choosing their next destinations, and in particular, what made them choose Ericeira and how has been their experience.

It is verified that the findings matched the ones of other studies regarding nature, climate and outdoor activities (Garcez et al., 2024; Hannonen et al., 2023; Lee et al., 2019; Lhakard, 2022; Thompson, 2018; Zhou et al., 2024). Digital nomads are looking for destinations surrounded by nature, especially a location closed to the ocean where they can perform outdoor activities and nature-based sports. Surfing is the most mentioned nature-base sport in this study, even more when the digital nomads refer to the critical factors to choose Ericeira. Thus, not only the opportunity to practice surf in Ericeira is highly mentioned, but also the surfing

subculture in the town, such as the events, activities and people in Ericeira, both international and local residents. Ericeira is known, nationally and internationally, as a surf tourism destination, and mainly since it was declared as the first world surfing reserve in Europe, this sport has been fundamental for the regional development of the region (Santos, 2013). Also, international surf tourism events have been hosted in Ericeira over the years, which benefits the local economy (Mascarenhas et al., 2024).

The digital nomads choose their next destination mainly on basis of lifestyle preferences (Müller, 2016; Thompson, 2018), since they do not travel for work related motives (Reichenberger, 2018). Beyond outdoor sports, digital nomads also mentioned other touristic and leisure factors to choose the destination: authentic and historic places, local culture and friendly people (Ferreira, 2023; Sztuk, 2023). Nevertheless, the digital nomadism is also a work phenomenon (Hannonen, 2020) and this type of remote workers also need to continue their work while they are in the destinations. Digital nomads use digital technologies to complete their professional activities (Hannonen, 2020; Liegl, 2014; Nash et al., 2018), and for that reason, high quality infrastructures (e.g., internet availability, accommodation, coworking spaces [Cook, 2020; Sánchez-Vergara et al., 2023]) are fundamental. The coworking spaces are a phenomenon that have also increased with the digital nomadism (Chevtaeva & Denizci-Guillet, 2021). The coworking spaces can be described as spaces that promote the knowledge share between professionals who have different specializations and professional occupations (Jamal, 2018). These spaces can target both local people and foreign visitors. The digital nomads, high skilled professionals, prefer to work in coworking spaces, not only because it is a focused work environment, but also it is a space where they can socialize and do networking (Orel, 2019; Reichenberger, 2018). This necessity for socialization is also fulfilled by the choice's preference for digital nomads' spot hubs, such as Bali, in Indonesia and Chiang Mai, in Thailand (Lee et al., 2019; Thompson, 2019). As stressed by Mariotti et al. (2017) and Jamal (2018), the coworking spaces can also be an opportunity to promote regional development in the peripheral and rural areas. Thus, digital nomads prefer to choose middle-sized or small cities rather than big ones, as argued by Sztuk (2023). These smaller cities started to have more attention from digital nomads during the pandemic, since they wanted to escape from the effects and restrictions of Covid-19 in the bigger urban areas (Tomeljenović et al., 2023). In 2023, the Portugal government, in order to promote social cohesion, created several coworking spaces, disposable to national and foreign people, in different interior regions in Portugal, as showed in Appendix 4 (República Portuguesa, 2023).

Digital nomads seek the geoarbitrage lifestyle, earning salaries from expensive countries while choosing destination with lower living costs (Bonneau & Aroles, 2021). The sample in this study indicates that the majority (52%) of digital nomads in Ericeira are from Germany and Netherlands. Thompson (2019) also emphasized the large German digital community in his study, since the event of DNX, with the purpose of create a digital nomad community, is hosted in two languages, English and German. As showed in the quantitative research study of Sztuk (2023), one of the main drivers to choose a particular destination is the living cost, especially in accommodation. According to Eurostat (2024), the price level indices have been much higher in Netherlands and Germany than in Portugal, as shown in the Appendix C. In addition, when the average of the level price indices of the 27 European Union (EU) is the base value, the level prices in Portugal are below this value.

Safety has also been highlighted by other authors (Garcez et al., 2022; Lee et al., 2019; Sánchez-Vergara et al., 2023; Sztuk, 2023). Thus, security in the country was also mentioned in this study as a critical factor to choose the destination, but only by women who travel alone.

Although previous studies (Hannonen et al., 2023; Mancinelli, 2020) emphasize the importance of visa systems and special taxations for digital nomads as one of the main drivers to choose their destination, none of the digital nomad who participated in this study mentioned the visa requirement as an influencing factor for choosing Ericeira. However, Portugal adopted a digital nomad visa in 2022 (Calado & Borges, 2022), known as D8 Visa, for the remote workers who do not belong to EU, European Economic Area or Switzerland, want to stay temporarily in Portugal, and prove, in the last three months, an average remuneration equivalent to four minimum Portuguese remunerations – 3280 euros at the time – through the Act no. 18/2022. As stressed by Thompson (2019), this finding can be explained by the fact that the majority of digital nomads in this study are from Europe and from other countries with strong passports that do not need specific visas to enter in several countries.

### **Conclusion, limitations and future research**

The present study contributed to the exploration of the digital nomad phenomenon, confirming and deepening the previous findings about the characteristics of digital nomads and the reasons of destination's choice. Although more authors have studied this phenomenon, the lack of research focused in the pull factors of destinations for digital nomads enhance the importance of the results of the present study.

Regarding the two specific objectives, the study successfully answered them. The finding of this study about the profile of digital nomads mostly corroborates other studies. Thus, digital nomads are young and high skilled professionals in a diversity of business areas. They work fully remote and travel to different destinations during periods of time, usually alone or with their partner. Concerning the second objective, digital nomads tend to choose their destinations according to their lifestyle needs, especially because of climate and nature, and leisure activities. They search for destinations with a strong digital nomad community in order to fulfil their loneliness, connecting with people with the same mindset and high professional expertise. Nevertheless, they need high quality infrastructure to perform their daily professional activities and needs, such as coworking spaces, transport systems, health care and accommodation. These remote workers prefer to choose destinations with lower living costs than their origin countries, and they also tend to choose mid-sized or small cities compared to larger urban areas. Safety is also a verified as a driver, however, only by woman who travelled alone. On contrary to the previous studies, the findings do not evidence visa requirements as a critical factor for digital nomads choosing their destinations, as they are mostly from European Union countries.

From a managerial perspective, this study contributes with important information for policymakers who are responsible for the territorial development and other local stakeholders. Understanding the characteristics of digital nomads and what they want from the destination is extremely important to design strategies to attract this market niche. Not also leisure activities, such as sports and events, are important to stimulate the arrival of digital nomads, but also high-quality local infrastructures, such as coworking spaces, transportation and accommodation, are extremely relevant, since they will stay for long periods of time while performing their professional activities. The investments in high quality infrastructure not also contribute to increase the value of the experience of digital nomads in the destination, but also the life quality

of the local residents, and the promotion of coworking spaces and business events can highly improve the knowledge share between international and national professionals, which also leverages local development. Digital nomads can also be ambassadors for the region who help promote the place for tourism and work purposes.

Despite the potential of qualitative methods to produce a deeper and more detailed analysis, on contrary to quantitative methods, the sample neither represent the population of digital nomads living in Ericeira, nor in Portugal. Therefore, the results cannot be generalized. The snowballing collection constitutes another limitation of this study. As one participant recommended another, they may be within the same social circle, and therefore, they may have similar characteristics and preferences. The lack of institutional quantitative data on digital nomads is an additional limitation of the study. Some digital nomads do not need a specific visa to enter in Portugal, or enter with other type of visas, such as touristic visa. For that reason, there is no quantitative data to know the precise universe this study analyses. Therefore, further studies should explore this topic through quantitative methodology in order to allow a representation of the studied population, aggregating a larger amount of data, and performing correlations, as the study of Sztuk (2023). Also, in order to have deeper understanding about the strategies adopted, or that could be adopted, to attract digital nomads, further studies should conduct interviews with local entities responsible for territorial development, and with other public and private stakeholders in Ericeira, or even in other small towns with similar characteristics (Hannonen et al., 2023).

The results of this study substantiate the premise that digital nomads can be an opportunity for regional development, since they are highly qualified human resources who can create knowledge spill overs in coworking spaces and business events, which can improve the local economy, beyond spending a part of their salaries in the destination.

## **Legislation**

Act no. 18/2022 of Assembleia da República: “Altera o regime jurídico de entrada, permanência, saída e afastamento de estrangeiros do território nacional”. (2022) Republic Diary No. 164/2022, Series 1 of 2022-08-25.





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## Appendixes

### Appendix A – Resident Population of Mafra’s Municipality in 2011 and 2021

Local of Residence (Censos 2011)	2011		
	Total	Portuguese Nationality	Foreign Nationality
Mafra	76 685	72 705	3 980
Carvoeira	2 155	2 026	129
Encarnação	4 798	4 459	339
Ericeira	10 260	9 355	905
Mafra	17 986	17 103	883
Milharado	7 023	6 841	182
Santo Isidoro	3 814	3 665	149
União das freguesias de Azueira e Sobral da Abelheira	4 316	4 160	156
União das freguesias de Enxara do Bispo, Gradil e Vila Franca do Rosário	3 837	3 652	185
União das freguesias de Igreja Nova e Cheleiros	4 384	4 230	154
União das freguesias de Malveira e São Miguel de Alcainça	8 257	7 773	484
União das freguesias de Venda do Pinheiro e Santo Estêvão das Galés	9 855	9 441	414

Local of Residence (Censos 2021)	2021		
	Total	Portuguese Nationality	Foreign Nationality
Mafra	86 515	80 736	5779
Carvoeira	2 848	2 588	260
Encarnação	4 918	4 506	412
Ericeira	12 359	11 003	1356
Mafra	20 781	19 412	1369
Milharado	7 645	7 404	241
Santo Isidoro	4 396	4 034	362
União das freguesias de Azueira e Sobral da Abelheira	4 434	4 227	207
União das freguesias de Enxara do Bispo, Gradil e Vila Franca do Rosário	3 979	3 778	201
União das freguesias de Igreja Nova e Cheleiros	4 693	4 461	232
União das freguesias de Malveira e São Miguel de Alcainça	9 647	8 978	669
União das freguesias de Venda do Pinheiro e Santo Estêvão das Galés	10 815	10 348	467

**Source:** Instituto Nacional de Estatística (INE)

## Appendix B – Interview Guide

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### The profile of digital nomads currently in Ericeira

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<b>Sociodemographic characteristics</b>	1.	How old are you?
	2.	Where were you born?
	3.	What's your nationality?
	4.	What is your gender?
	5.	What is your education level?
	6.	What is your professional occupation?
	7.	Are you travelling alone or with someone else?
<b>The phenomenon of digital nomadism</b>	8.	Do you define yourself as a digital Nomad? Why?
	9.	When did you become a digital nomad?
	10.	Do you relocate regularly? On average, how long do you stay at each destination? Why?

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### Relocation of digital nomads

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<b>Critical factors to choose the destination</b>	11.	What places have you been to previously as a digital nomad? What went well and wrong in those destinations?
	12.	What are the critical attractiveness factors when choosing a destination? And conversely, what are the constraining factors of destinations?
	13.	What is the factor that you consider essential when choosing a destination?
<b>Critical factors to choose Ericeira</b>	14.	Is this your first time in Ericeira? And in Portugal?
	15.	When and how did you hear about Ericeira?
	16.	Why did you choose Ericeira? What are the pros and cons of the territory?
	17.	How long do you plan to stay in Ericeira?
	18.	Have you ever considered to become a permanent resident in Ericeira? Why?
	19.	What would make you leave Ericeira? Why?
	20.	Do you recommend Ericeira to other Digital Nomads? Why?

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## Appendix C – Price Level Indices in Germany, Netherlands and Portugal between 2018 and 2023 (EU27\_2020 =100)

	Years					
	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
<b>EU – 27 countries</b>	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0
<b>Netherlands</b>	117,7	120,9	120,9	121,0	120,7	122,2
<b>Germany</b>	106,2	107,7	108,0	109,0	109,7	109,7
<b>Portugal</b>	85,9	86,8	88,1	87,2	86,3	85,6

Source: Eurostat

## Appendix D – National network of teleworking/coworking spaces in the interior

