Digital Nomadism as a New Flexible Working Approach: Making Tirana the Next European Hotspot for Digital Nomads

Esmir Demaj, Alba Hasimja, and Amela Rahimi

Abstract In the last two decades, working environments have undergone significant waves of change in terms of flexibility of working conditions, thus challenging the traditional working contexts. Driven by increased employee demands, many companies offer nowadays the possibility of remote working to ensure higher employee job satisfaction, eventually leading to enhanced organizational performance. The nonnecessity of being physically present during the usual shifts combined with the desire of continuous traveling has led to the emergence of the phenomena of *digital nomadism*.

This term describes especially young professionals or freelancers who have shifted from working in a conventional office to working solely in online environment and traveling without a clear destination with a lifestyle where the boundaries between work, leisure, and travel appear blurred.

The purpose of this research is twofold, initially it is aimed to analyze the relevant literature and depict factors considered as driving factors for digital nomads to select their next destinations, and later on, while understanding the lifestyle of digital nomads, the researchers aim to analyze what Tirana, the capital city of Albania, could offer to this category of people by identifying advantages and opportunities for digital nomads in selecting it as their next destination. Suggestions and recommendations for improvement have been identified. To achieve the objectives of this exploratory research, a qualitative approach designed as a case study, using interview techniques with relevant digital nomads, has been selected. It is aimed that this research produces results and propositions that could help policy makers in any city in developing countries to implement policies for attracting more digital nomads to their cities, thus making them hotspots for digital nomads that could positively impact their local economies.

Keywords Digital nomadism · Travel · Lifestyle · Tirana · Economic impact

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Introduction

Nomadic movement has accompanied the human civilization since its genesis (Richards 2015). It originated as a necessity of survival (Schlagwein 2018) and as centuries went by its purpose shifted toward more recreational outcomes. The pursuit of traveling for pure exploration purposes during 1960s by youngsters of those times (Richards 2015) resurrected the concept of nomadism in a modern typology, which developed to its contemporary stage during the recent decades in the form of digital nomadism. Makimoto and Manners (1997) merged for the first time traveling, work, and technological connection while defining digital nomadism.

Flexibility of working policies and the rapid development of Information and Communication Technologies (Dery et al. 2014; Müller 2016; Haking 2017; Nash et al. 2018) and Cloud services (Valenduc and Vendramin 2017; Nash et al. 2018) has facilitated the nomadic working lifestyle. Driven by the need for personal growth (Schlagwein 2017), achievement of numerous dimensions of freedom (Reichenberger 2017), deeper collaboration with like-minded individuals (Schlagwein 2017), and economic factors (Ferriss 2011; Schlagwein 2017; Haking 2017), digital nomads relocate frequently, thus inevitably affecting local economies and societies. They positively contribute by knowledge transfer (Gast et al. 2017), promoting tourism (Wiranatha et al. 2020), and by paying for the services and facilities they exploit (Richards 2015; Schalgwein et al. 2019).

In this study, a special attention is given to factors that are considered as appealing for digital nomads when picking future destinations. These factors vary between housing alternatives (Liu and Lin 2017), low cost of living (Thompson 2018a), fertile environment for professional collaboration and networking (Bloom 2018), social and natural characteristics (Beeching 2019), and internet connectivity (Richards 2015; Haking 2017; Setlak 2018; McElroy 2019; Green 2020).

The first half of this chapter is dedicated to a comprehensive literature review upon the phenomenon of digital nomadism. Throughout this section, some online platforms widely used by digital nomads are mentioned, in order to pursue even a closer practical approach to their life beyond the academic research conducted. The literature review in the present study provides a general picture and a current status about the digital nomadism concept, as well as it tries to explain the difference with the remote working concept.

This research has been conceived as an exploratory qualitative case study, focusing also in the potential of Tirana, the capital city of Albania, to become an important European hub for digital nomads. Data collected by the semi-structured interviews conducted with digital nomads reinforced knowledge from literature review over various aspects such as lifestyle, self-discipline, destination choice, motivations, socialization, and impact on local societies. Despite the diverse responses that emerged from the interviews, it was possible to draw a clear mapping of the perception that digital nomads have for their ongoing experience. This information was processed and utilized in the last section of the study in providing recommendations and suggestions for possible improvement to be further implemented in Tirana.

Who Is a Digital Nomad? Definition and Historical Development

During the last two decades, working environments have been under a significant wave of change in terms of flexibility. Driven by increased employee demands, many companies nowadays offer the possibility of remote working to ensure higher job satisfaction, leading to enhanced performance, widening the possibility of attracting adequate employees and increase the level of staff retention (Burnford 2019; Orel 2019) and decrease overhead costs for companies (Thompson 2018a). The nonnecessity of being physically present during the shift has led to new trends streaming from remote working. Movarec (2013) introduces the term of "know-madic knowledge worker" in his book *Knowmad Society*, referring to creative individuals that may work in several and unpredictable settlements, without interfering their performance. He divides the large category of knowmadic society in several subcategories such as: neo-nomadism, creative class, 1099 workers, digital nomads, etc. Nevertheless, this study will focus solely on the phenomenon of digital nomadism.

The idea of remote working combined with continuous traveling was initially coined in 1997 by Makimoto and Manners in their famous "Digital Nomad" book. There is no definite answer about what a digital nomad exactly is; nevertheless, experts identify them as generally young individuals who combine virtual working with frequent traveling, motivated by exploration (Formica 2013). The phenomenon seems to be gaining importance and is transforming into a significant movement, not anymore limited to sporadic individuals. The concept of "nomadism" is closely related to the term "digitization," since people are capable of working while moving from one place to another just by having one mobile device/phone and internet connection. This has blurred the frontiers between work and leisure, staying at home and traveling, or isolating and socializing. Digital nomads emerge as a combination of both a tourist and a workaholic, and interesting enough they seem to be able to play both roles simultaneously. These people do not have a permanent home, and their office is not located in a designated area but on the internet. Digital Nomads have changed the definition of what we call a good living, since they do not need to wait for the next paycheck to travel, or they do not wake up every day, being stuck in the traffic for hours only to go to work (O'Brien 2019).

The majority of identified digital nomads are Millennials[1] (Wiranatha et al. 2020) and Gen Z youngsters, holding a university degree (Reichenberger 2017) and mostly independent workers. The participation of this age range might be explained with the lack of important family commitments and great energy to allocate to traveling and working simultaneously (Reichenberger 2017). Another factor that correlates these generations and digital nomadism is their relationship with the use of Information and Communication Technologies. Both these generations have experienced a smoother approach toward ICT and technological devices compared with

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[1] Also referred as Gen Y.

earlier generations (ibid). This advantage facilitates working while in movement, ensuring rapid and uninterrupted connectivity (Dery et al. 2014; Haking 2017; Nash et al. 2018) and use of Cloud services (Valenduc and Vendramin 2017; Nash et al. 2018).

The rapid change on the mindset of businesses related with the workplace flexibility is a serious facilitator even for employees to pursue their career on the road. Further research regarding the background of digital nomads is needed, in order to clearly understand whether it is more independent workers or employees benefiting from flexible policies of their organizations that make up what we call digital nomads. Nevertheless, freelancers exercising professions such as IT specialists, translators, or any other similar jobs constitute an important portion of digital nomad community (Thompson 2018a; Pofeldt 2018).

Nomadic lifestyle is not a new trend, it has been present throughout the history of humanity, with human beings behaving as nomadic species. In early ages, people used to move in order to find food, transferring their livestock to pastoral places, or getting involved in trading (Schlagwein 2018). This constant movement was significantly slowed down by the development of what is today called agriculture. This enabled the birth of first sedentary tribes which later developed into civilizations.

The nomad figure has always been unchangeably linked to mobility, challenging fixed settlements, and often tinted with romantic colors (Engebrigtsen 2017). Young generations approached seriously to the wanderlust lifestyle during the 1960s due to the improvement of living conditions, accessible air travel and more liberal families (Richards 2015). Based on Richard's (2015) interpretation of the Chatwin's dilemma on why people feel the urge to take the road, it can be said that nomadism is rooted in human nature since prehistoric times.

Toward the end of 1970s and on, the term "nomad" became the successor of the term "tribalism," which probably inspired Deleuze et al. (1986) to define "digital nomadism" as the "new tribalism" in their work. Later, such developments inspired Jacques Attali (1991) to use the term "nomadism" as the starting point of developing a new theory and a new system that in the future would be called capitalism, in his famous book "Millenium: Winners and Losers of the New World Order."

It was in 1997 that Makimoto and Manners brought together the idea of travelers, workers, and worldwide connection, predicting the upcoming rise of digital nomads. The use of internet services became more and more affordable during these last two decades, facilitating the interaction of people placed in distant geographic areas (Müller 2016). The combination of technology and continuous displacement marked the rise of the new term digital nomadism.

Contemporary opinions consider digital nomads not necessarily as the other side of the coin of settlement, rather as a short-time settler (Richards 2015).

Categorization of Digital Nomads

Considering the fact that digital nomadism is a relatively new concept, it is difficult to find a proper categorization based on special traits participants share. Although they might have common characteristics, digital nomads change from each other. Categorizing digital nomads has imposed a challenge among scholars. They tend to classify digital nomads based on their own criteria such as source of income (Setlak 2018), frequency of traveling (Lee 2018), solo or accompanied movements (Reichenberger 2017), etc. The variety of categorizations is wide and almost impossible to make a connection and build a sole path; however, it is in such a mosaic that the peculiarity of digital nomadism world lies.

Nina (2017), author of thingsnomadsdo.com blog, categorizes digital nomads into four types. Among these, the Perpetual Wanderer stands for individuals who are at the beginning of their path as digital nomads, led by energy, eagerness, and adventure, and characterized by high mobility. The Casual Globetrotter stands for individuals who love to discover everything in the places they visit, usually by making small trips but then, they need the urge to move on to another destination. The Occasional Traveler stands for digital nomads who have a home base. They travel to different places periodically, but always return to their home base which can also change very few times per year. The Flexible Expat stands for individuals who can stay in one place for up to 1 year. They fully adapt to the local culture, learn the local language, and make a lot of new friends, which has turned them to be considered as "slow travelers" or "expats" more than "nomads" (Nina 2017).

Setlak (2018, p. 12) introduces the terms of "sponsored," "novice," and "niche" nomads to categorize digital nomads into three types based on their income source. She makes use of the "sponsored nomad" term to describe people that fuel their revenues by becoming promoters of products, services, or experiences from several brands. Meanwhile, the term "novice nomad" is attributed to a rare group of individuals, who become digital nomads and thanks to promotional programs by companies where such individuals are selected more or less as representatives of a market segment, with the duty to create content for the campaigns directed to this target market. "Niche nomads" instead are those individuals who generate income via self-branding, mainly by inviting followers on adapting certain lifestyles (Setlak 2018).

Lee (2018), author at www.theonlysocial.com blog, based on her own experiences with digital nomads and their frequency of traveling, classifies them into four different groups. Thus, she begins with the "domestic nomads" who make just a few trips and works remotely. The second type is the "short-lived nomad," which includes freelancers and other remote workers that try digital nomadism only for a short period of time. The "sabbatical nomad" is introduced as the nomad who loves to travel but gets homesick too fast. The "restless nomad" instead represents the true nomads, those addicted to digital nomadism for a decade or more, that are always traveling and could be perfectly described by words like adventures, instability, and intensity (Lee 2018).

Other researchers also identify digital nomads who travel alone, and others who are continuously accompanied by their partner (Reichenberger 2017; Nash et al. 2018; Thompson 2018a) along the difficulties the couple/group traveling poses throughout the experience.

Remote Working Versus Digital Nomadism

Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD 2020) defines the concept of flexible working as "a type of working arrangement which gives a degree or flexibility on how long, where, when and at what time employees work." Flexibility is estimated to decrease negative job-to-home spillover effects (White et al. 2003). This type of working modality includes remote working (Felstead and Henseke 2017) and digital nomadism among other subcategories. In many cases, these two concepts are confused and give rise to erroneous impressions (Liu 2020), this is why it is crucial to make a clear distinction between them, and in this regard, digital nomadism is to be considered as a subset of remote working (Aroles et al. 2020), and remote working instead is to be considered as a subcategory of flexible working. It is important to highlight that digital nomads are not the only professionals that work remotely; other individuals work remotely too, but there is a difference as the latter move from one place to another only because forced by their superiors or by the nature of their work and tasks. In such a category, one could mention freelancers, who are remote workers that do not pursue a lifestyle based on continuous traveling, which distinguishes them from digital nomads (Papastergiadis 2000). Even though it is challenging to list all the reasons why several remote workers decide to switch toward digital nomadism, several of them decide to leave behind their "daily obligations" such as chores and reach to a further stage of personal or professional development (Reichenberger 2017).

Many scholars identify the rapid and significant technological advances and digital developments too as a facilitator and enabler of pursuing a digital nomadic career (Haking 2017; Setlak 2018). Such individuals that are easily adaptable to remote working usually hold a high-tech professional background and are not affected by volatilities that might jeopardize their lifestyle. Their income remains unchanged from the one received while working on-site, because they become part of a "work-on-demand" market considered as gig economy, which enables them to find fully flexible tasks performed online with the aid of internet (Nash et al. 2018; Thompson 2018b; Richter and Richter 2020), based on projects and task-related compensation rather than working duration compensation (Stewart and Stanford 2017).

Besides the considerable flexibility that characterizes both remote workers and digital nomads, they are also challenged by the difficulty of balancing their on-off work time. Many scholars talk about an increased need of self-discipline and extended commitment in order to achieve the abovementioned balance (Nash et al. 2018; Mouratidis 2018; Thompson 2018a; Schalgwein et al. 2019).

If remote workers try to find an equilibrium between work and family, on the other hand, digital nomads strive to find an equilibrium between work and "serious

leisure" (Thompson 2018a, b), the latter a term first coined by Robert Stebbins to stand for the "systematic pursuit of an amateur, hobbyist, or volunteer core activity that is highly substantial, interesting, and fulfilling and where, in the typical case, participants find a career in acquiring and expressing a combination of its special skills, knowledge, and experience" (Stebbins 1992, p. 3).

Various scholars have studied leisure and its components and they conclude that in the case of digital nomads where total independence is always present, it is more difficult to separate work from leisure (Mokhtarian et al. 2006) and it is up to the individual who determines whether a specific activity is considered as "leisure" or "work" (Beatty and Torbert 2003). Apparently, whether something is considered as work or leisure depends on how individuals experience it, and leisure should not necessarily be positioned outside the world of employment.

Socio-economic Impact of Digital Nomads to Local Economies

Even though one cannot find absolute agreement among scholars on whether the impact of digital nomads in host countries is positive or negative, generally speaking, it is agreed that the presence of digital nomads positively affects local economies with their innovative ideas, network, consumption, and publicity.

Entrepreneurial digital nomads often find workforce in the places they visit (Haking 2017) and find proper ground to implement their social business ideas, thus supporting local people and local economies. Schalgwein et al. (2019) show that digital nomads they interviewed in their study claim to have performed their work (e.g., website/marketing) free of charge to help businesses in these countries through co-giving programs several times. Such connections are facilitated by the use of coworking spaces, which serve as a common touch point between communities and digital nomads (Richards 2015; Schalgwein et al. 2019) for which digital nomads additionally pay daily or monthly rent contributing to the local economy (Schalgwein et al. 2019). Some scholars consider even the limited personal consumption and/or local mobile communication services exploited by digital nomads to be positively affected economically (Richards 2015; Schalgwein et al. 2019). Furthermore, digital nomads promote their favorite places, serving as tourism ambassadors for them, alongside becoming a special tourist market segment for local economies (Wiranatha et al. 2020).

Motivations That Drive People to Become Digital Nomads

People tend to mix working with frequent traveling for several reasons. Having an actual office and a fixed working schedule seems to limit people from doing what they really like to do. Usually, standard employees work around 40 h a week, which results in not having enough time for themselves, digital nomads instead may work

longer hours on projects they are fond of and still find enough time for socializing and meeting with new people.

Differently from the trend born during the 1960s when youngsters pursued nomadism to understand the meaning of life, nowadays digital nomads are driven mainly by the freedom factor (Reichenberger 2017; Haking 2017). Reichenberger (2017) classifies different types of perceived freedom by digital nomads as spatial, professional, and personal. Digital nomads are strongly affected by the opportunity to select their working location without being limited by employers or contractors and the independence of determining their work structure, such a combination creates personal freedom (ibid.). Research shows that increased flexibility and autonomy inspire professionals and enhances their productivity (Orel 2019).

Schlagwein (2017), inspired by the conventions theory as developed by Luc Boltanski and Thevenot (1999), suggests that motivators behind pursuing a digital nomadic path could be categorized based on levels of worth through which individuals validate their actions. These three orders of worth are defined as *inspirational*, *civic*, and *market* orders. In this context, referring to the *inspirational* order of worth, the attention is focused on their personal growth, need for change, and new experiences (Schlagwein 2017). In analogy with Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Maslow 1943), such individuals have reached the peak of their needs (i.e., self-actualization) and are unrestricted to become "self-starters" (Worth 2009). After the hard work for such achievements, because of job burnout, some individuals decide to cut off significant revenue streams, in order to reach a better work-leisure balance and reduce the unnecessary consumptions (Etzioni 1998; Juniu 2000; Tan 2000). Such decisions are explained by scholars through the concept of downshifting (Hamilton and Mail 2003) and by the perception of work as an enriching activity intrinsically motivated (Reichenberger 2017).

While talking about the *civic* order of worth, Schlagwein (2017) identifies the need for interaction and learning from other people as a key motivator for individuals to become digital nomads. Even if the industry of digital nomads is considered as fragmented (Setlak 2018), efforts to provide a connecting point with the purpose of sharing experiences, improving ideas, and developing their networks are made by organizations such as Digital Nomad Festival (DNX).[2] Nevertheless, similar events hold a secondary importance when it comes to the daily activities of digital nomads which rely on dedicated coworking spaces identified as hubs, created with the main purpose of gathering as many of them in coworking spaces.

Haking (2017) talks about the importance of hubs on smoothing and bringing together digital nomads despite major differences among them, with the purpose of leading to possible fruitful collaborations. Even though such collaboration is highly facilitated using Information and Communication Technologies, the physical gathering plays a critical role on initiating such collaboration (Valenduc and Vendramin 2017). Considering the fact that many digital nomads are ex-employees,

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[2] DNX movement started in 2012 and aims to connect and support digital nomads through events and online platforms. DNX Festival. (n.d.). Retrieved May 23, 2020, from DNX Festival website: https://www.dnxfestival.com/

it is understandable that they possess both tacit and explicit knowledge related with their former job that is easily transferable to other digital nomads during collaborations in coworking/hub spaces, thus contributing to knowledge spillover (Gast et al. 2017). In several studies and testimonials, digital nomads appear to suffer from loneliness, which decreases their motivation (Green 2020; Nash et al. 2018). Dedicated coworking spaces help digital nomads socialize among them (Orel 2019), and by frequenting such hubs, they satisfy their interest in interacting with and learning from "interesting people" and self-identify with a community (Schlagwein 2017) as well as co-living with other nomads (Thompson 2018b).

The logic behind the *market* order of worth, as used by Schlagwein (2017), stands for the wide belief that such people find it more convenient to travel constantly than to settle in their home country. This phenomenon, entitled as "geoarbitrage" (Ferriss 2011), describes people earning the same amount of income or making use of savings/retirement payments but deciding to locate in countries with a lower cost of living, mainly in developing countries (Ferriss 2011; Schlagwein 2017; Haking 2017), which practically provides for a relatively better life, not to say luxurious life, in a place with lower costs of living meanwhile getting paid according to the income standards of the country where their employer is located.

Apparently, digital nomadism has several financial advantages, as digital nomads tend to move from one place with a higher cost of living to another with a lower cost of living. By doing so, expenses are reduced significantly from month to month, and at the end of the day, digital nomads may work less and still pay their debt and cover all their expenses alongside having more time for leisure. Nevertheless, digital nomads are exposed to the income volatility phenomena and generally speaking they rely on gig economy, where usually low paying tasks like translation or design tasks are performed, and in addition to this their high frequency of traveling entails more costs. Therefore, the financial position of digital nomads is not always comfortable.

What Makes a Place "Hotspot" for Digital Nomads

Digital nomads pay much importance to find locations that fulfill their expectations, and they have many criteria that affect their decision in selecting the next destination. Several studies present different yet similar traits of a place that fascinate digital nomads. Online websites such as the popular Nomad List,[3] launched in 2014, provide ranking lists of popular destinations for digital nomads, filtering them based on personal choice of criteria such as cost of living, natural conditions, safety, entertainment, visa restrictions, etc. The span of destinations is continuously enriched together with the frequency of traveling. For many years Chiang Mai in Thailand

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[3] Best places to live and work remotely (n.d.). Retrieved June 1, 2020, from NomadList, https://nomadlist.com/

was considered a leading destination in the Nomad List, years later, it was replaced by Canggu in Bali and Bangkok in Thailand.

Thompson (2018a) argues that digital nomads are very price-sensitive, thus prefer low cost and aesthetic destinations and that they are not directly influenced by their professional activity. The availability of housing alternatives (Liu and Lin 2017) is among the main criteria to decide for the next destination, and AirBnB[4] seems to be among the most popular platform that helps to create a proper idea over this matter for digital nomads (Green 2020). Generally speaking, housing is matched with other living expenses, and several studies show that digital nomads are strongly affected by the cost of living when deciding about their next "pit stop." In most cases, because of the harsh market of gig work, income received by digital nomads is quite low, limiting their budget (Thompson 2018a), which pushes them toward places with a low cost of living.

Locations chosen by digital nomads do not necessarily offer only low costs of living but also opportunities to increase their revenue. Bloom (2018) claims that digital nomads usually look for places where there is already a presence of companies owned by other digital nomads, for the quite simple reason of socializing and networking. The main goal for digital nomads is to find new and touristic areas where they can meet with other people who have the same mindset that could provide them with some facilities in terms of transportation costs and other opportunities to build their new hubs. Usually, such destinations are famous for their stable weather during most of the year, warm temperatures, and with very attractive places, and probably this is the main reason why some destinations gain a hidden advantage over others.

Most researchers of the relevant field have identified and have agreed on the crucial need for stable, reliable, fast, and continuous internet/WiFi connection as an important factor for digital nomads to select various destinations (Richards 2015; Haking 2017; Setlak 2018; McElroy 2019; Green 2020). Internet connection serves as a window or strand for digital nomads to connect with the rest of the world, either communicating with their friends or families, or more importantly with their working collaborators (Nash et al. 2018; Krivstova et al. 2018). Maintaining these relationships is crucial for their income stream. Nevertheless, some professionals such as bloggers do not value the fast internet connection as much as others that usually need to have constant live video interaction such as lecturers or customer service employees.

Other scholars believe that the choice is also affected by the degree that the destination enhances the productivity, inspiration, and supporting work conditions (Nash et al. 2018; Setlak 2018; Orel 2019; Green 2020). Beeching (2019) too talks about factors like culture, climate, crime levels, civil liberties, the local language, air quality, and accessibility to beaches, mountains, or other touristic areas as important factors that influence decision-making of digital nomads.

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[4] https://www.airbnb.com/

In the meantime, different digital nomadism related blogs claim that digital nomads rely a lot on word of mouth while selecting their next destination. They are more willing to welcome suggestions from peer digital nomads and listen to true stories they tell about different destinations rather than other reviews.

Data Collection Methodology

Qualitative research method was determined as the appropriate method for this study; thus, this method was used in order to develop an in-depth understanding and to respond to the research aim of this study. The qualitative research method is an effective approach as it enables the researcher to be closer to the subject under investigation and provides the opportunity to obtain richer and more realistic information. It can be defined as an iterative and interactive process, where all phases are interrelated, requiring the relevant theoretical framework to be considered and allowing the researcher to return to the previous stages throughout the research process.

This study can be classified as an exploratory qualitative case study. In this context, an exploratory study deals with finding out what is happening, asking questions, and assessing phenomena in a new light. A case study is a research strategy which concentrates on perceiving the dynamics present within single settings. In this context, it was aimed to focus on Tirana, the capital city of Albania as a case study and analyze the opportunities Tirana has to become a hub for digital nomads. Tirana was chosen for two reasons, firstly, it is the capital city of a developing country, which fits with the research objective of this study, and secondly, it was awarded as the European Youth Capital of 2022, which has pushed local and central government bodies to initiate policies that support innovation and welcome people of different nationalities to discover its potential.

Data in this study has been obtained through the interview technique, by using a semi-structured interview protocol with open-ended questions. Researchers of this study tried to turn the data collecting process into an informal and usually 1-on-1 chat type conversation. Care has been taken for the questions not to be rigid, but rather flexible enough to allow participants to express their views, emotions, and perceptions freely.

A nonrandom or purposive sampling technique was used for selecting the sample of digital nomads. Among the most important inclusive criteria set forth for the population of this study to voluntarily be part of this study was being an active digital nomad currently staying in Tirana or having visited Tirana at least once during their digital nomadism experience. It is believed that such a purposeful sampling would allow for in-depth examination of individuals who are believed to have rich knowledge about the research topic of this study. All participants were informed in advance about the research purpose, nature of questions based on "informed consent" principles and were asked about whether they agreed to audio/video record the interview process and if they wanted us to preserve their anonymity. Upon

agreement of the study participants, the interviews were audio recorded and later transcribed for further data analysis. Anonymity of participants was preserved and no personal information has been revealed; the information collected from participants has been quoted as "Nomad X" etc.

In this context, the research sample of this study was composed of 14 different digital nomads as shown in Table 1 below. They varied in age from as young as 21–56 years old were homogeneously distributed in terms of gender, and performed a variety of jobs in different countries. The majority of participants held at least a university degree and had a professional office experience background before selecting the "nomadic" life. The process of interviews for this study started in April 2020 and ended in June 2020. Given the extraordinary circumstances of COVID-19 pandemic[5] lockdown,[6] all interviews were held virtually through various online meeting platforms, at participants' free choice of date, time, and meeting platform. In all cases, there was a continuous email correspondence with participants before the actual meetings, which lasted around 40 minutes of effective meeting time.

Table 1 Descriptive data of participants

	Age	Current destination	Job portfolio	Digital nomad lifestyle
Nomad 1	38	Albania	Blogger, Translator, Social Media Coach, French Tutor	Permanent
Nomad 2	56	Estonia	Web Developer, Virtual assistant, Photo/video Editor	Temporary
Nomad 3	28	Hungary	Social Media Manager	Temporary
Nomad 4	21	Albania	Software Engineer	Temporary
Nomad 5	26	Canada	Bloggier, Life Coach	Permanent
Nomad 6	31	Germany	Article Content Provider and Social Media Manager	Permanent
Nomad 7	28	Germany	Life Coaching	Temporary
Nomad 8	37	Albania	Social Media Marketing, Online Teaching	Temporary
Nomad 9	30	USA	University Admission Consultant	Permanent
Nomad 10	34	India	Market Researcher for International Companies	Temporary
Nomad 11	34	Germany	Lawyer, Film Producer Consultant	Temporary
Nomad 12	33	Germany	Entrepreneur and Manager	Permanent
Nomad 13	27	United Kingdom	Peinture	Temporary
Nomad 14	24	Argentina	Secretary, Marketer, Designer, Assistant, Italian Tutor	Permanent

[5] Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) – Symptoms and causes. Retrieved July 20, 2020, from Mayo Clinic, https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/coronavirus/symptoms-causes/syc-20479963

[6] Albania enforced a national lockdown starting from March 13, 2020 until June 01, 2020. In the meantime, international travel was restricted beyond this date.

    Regarding the questions used during the interviews, a special focus was given to questions that would cover a similar span of research which was conducted through the literature review. In this way, researchers of this study aimed to perform a kind of triangulation of the collected information, to see how much the data collected from digital nomads matched the relevant literature, thus, to be able to generalize findings about the case study on hand. Questions used in the interviews aimed to gather data related to digital nomadic lifestyle, their motivating factors, and challenges in pursuing such a path, their preferred destinations, and what made those places to be preferred, managing leisure/work-life balance, socializing, and the impact digital nomads have on local economies they visit and/or live. Additionally, participants were asked to share their perceptions and actual experience in Tirana, and their opinions and suggestions about transforming Tirana into a digital nomadic hub.

Empirical Findings and Interpretations

Empirical findings from interviews with participant digital nomads of this study widely confirmed the findings from the systematic literature review on most topics studied. One could cluster these findings into various aspects similar to the emerging topics of the literature review like: Driving factors toward a nomadic life, lifestyle of digital nomads, obstacles encountered and difficulties in adapting to new cultures and traditions, work-life and work-leisure balance, budgeting, selecting destinations, and impact on local economies. Table 2 below provides a summary of the findings regarding the abovementioned emerging categories.

    In terms of driving factors that motivate individuals to pursue a digital nomadic career it can be said that among the most important factors is the desire to travel and explore new places, meet different people and cultures, get along with other people (digital nomads) who share the same mindset, the freedom it provides especially after negative memories from previous office jobs, etc. With the advances in technology especially with the use of social media, remote working has become much easier, so traveling addicts could now more than ever be able to merge work with their traveling hobbies. Nomad 1,[7] a digital nomad currently located in Albania says,

> "Suddenly my physical and geographical location did not matter anymore. All I needed was my iPhone/laptop and Wi-Fi connection, So, I continued to travel and live abroad, and it's now 18 years with a mix of living abroad as an expat/immigrant, or living between my birth country and other various countries, and the nomadic life" (Nomad 1).

There seems to be a normal distribution of those who consider themselves as solo travelers willing to pursue their digital nomadic paths alone and blend up with local people only, and others instead who prefer a group digital nomadic experience for

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[7] 'Nomad 1–14' is used to list the 14 digital nomads of the study. It is done so for preserving the anonymity of digital nomads that attended this study.

Table 2 Summary of findings

	Driving factors	Destination factors	Work and leisure balance	Social life	Obstacles	Economy impact	Money-saving
Nomad 1	Travel	Welcoming places, WiFi, hospitality, safety	Work-life blend, Blogging and gaining profits	Adapting with locals by asking random questions about the place	Not being understood by everyone and sometimes being prejudiced	Positive impact; Money spent in the current country	Budgeting, Priorities
Nomad 2	Travel, meet new people	Low living costs, visa issues, places not explored	No strict schedule, Merging work and leisure time	Going to areas that have many locals around and living among them	No additional obstacles	Negative impact if it is short term nomadism	Budgeting
Nomad 3	Travel, start-up ecosystem	Internet speed, nice places, safety, easily socializing	Having clear goals, strict schedule not merging them	Going to popular places	Taxes, insurance, banking	Positive impact; boost the economy, support actors of the start-up ecosystem such as coworking spaces and event spaces.	Charge high for tasks performed
Nomad 4	Socialize	No strict factors	Separate work and leisure time	Extrovert comes naturally	Work-life balance	Positive impact to economic growth	Budgeting and carefully choosing the next destination
Nomad 5	Travel, meet new people	Cost of living, weather, Internet speed	Strict schedule	Asking for areas to visit and based on other opinions of digital nomads	Obstacles regarding the job mostly: getting and keeping clients	Positive impact	Budgeting
Nomad 6	Travel freedom	Safety, standards of living, access to community	Overworking and trying to participate in some activities	Close to minded people and making online friends	Family pressures	Positive impact; healthier and more profitable than tourism.	Priorities

	Driving factors	Destination factors	Work and leisure balance	Social life	Obstacles	Economy impact	Money-saving
Nomad 7	Freedom	No strict factors, intuition followed	Time scheduling everything	Very stressful Hard to adapt	Social component	Positive impact	Having no fixed costs
Nomad 8	Travel, network	Affordability, WiFi, other foreigner communities, time zone	Separate time and strict schedule	Introvert adapting while co-traveling	Being judged and not understood by family	Positive impact; transfer of knowledge shift of perspective and bring money	Budgeting, priorities
Nomad 9	Travel	Accessibility to important events and friends	Merging work and leisure time but traveling more	Difficult finding online friends before visiting a specific place	Being judged and not understood by family	Positive impact; They spend all the money in the place that they currently live Negative impact; Boost rent prices	Budgeting
Nomad 10	Travel	Fulfilling the basic living needs	Having organized and flexible schedules	Mixing with other digital nomads first then with locals	Barriers and cultural discrepancy	Positive impact especially in developing countries	Choosing cities where the living costs are lower
Nomad 11	Travel, Coworking	Communication with other people, coworking spaces, co-living places	Merging work and leisure time	Volunteering to different events organized by local members of many local organizations	No additional obstacles	Negative effect on local economies (boosting rent prices)	Generally looking for free shelter
Nomad 12	Travel, socialize	Opportunity to grow and networking	Strict schedule	Making online friends and visiting their countries	Many uncertainties related with money and family and society	Positive impact; boosts tourism	Cheaper housing alternatives, budgeting

(continued)

Table 2 (continued)

	Driving factors	Destination factors	Work and leisure balance	Social life	Obstacles	Economy impact	Money-saving
Nomad 13	Travel, blogging	Beautiful places, cost-effectiveness, friendly people	No strict schedule inspired by traveling	Socializing very easily and visiting welcoming places	Family pressure mostly	Positive impact; boosts tourism, however it depends mostly on the profession of DN	Budgeting
Nomad 14	Travel	Different cultures, fulfilling basic needs of living	Flexible schedules but very organized and workaholic	Going to welcoming places	Working hours, time zones, project presentation	Positive impact; boosting the local economy, pushing start-up ecosystem	Budgeting, priorities

several reasons like cost-effectiveness, safety, experience sharing, networking, etc. In any case, all digital nomads find and join nomadic groups settled in various destinations they select.

Digital nomads face a lot of challenges and obstacles regarding their lifestyle. Besides the administrative and bureaucratic challenges that come along with switching destinations on a regular basis, it results that not many people can easily understand their alternative lifestyle too, especially friends and family members, because what the latter ask is a stable home and a permanent job, which is refused by digital nomads. Digital nomads admit that besides job problems that life throws, they have to handle the pressure that comes from their families. "When will you start your real life?" is the question that Nomad 12 has to face every time she talks with her parents. Nomad 8, another participant claims that it is difficult for families to understand how you can make a living as a digital nomad and also "being a woman makes people more anxious about your safety."

Another challenge that digital nomads face is the difficulty in properly balancing work to life and work to leisure. Digital nomads try to blend rather than balance their work with life by integrating the purpose and intentions they have in life with the work they do. When it comes to leisure, some digital nomads prefer to separate work from leisure so that they can focus more on work tasks; however, it is difficult not to be distracted by the desire to explore an interesting destination, even though this could be compensated with working longer hours when the destination is not so appealing.

What is to be stressed is the unconventionality way of doing things that digital nomadism entails. They are free to structure and personalize their own schedules regarding their work, life, and leisure commitments. Nomad 1, with over 18 years of experience as a digital nomad states that,

> "On Monday you could go to the beach and enjoy yourself, and Saturday mornings you could be working. Or your work hours could start from 4 pm or start and end at any time you decide, and based on where your clients are in the world. You might need to unlearn that you don't need to save and wait until retirement to do the things you always wanted to do, but you can do them now. You can travel while you work, you can raise kids and travel, you can be single and travel the world, or you can be newly married and still be nomads" (Nomad 1).

Another emerging common feature of digital nomads seems to be the care they show to budgeting and expenses. They don't get attached to material possessions, but value more meaningful intangible things like various experiences, love, and living life to their full potential and with purpose. Nomad 4, the youngest participant brings out the advantage that digital nomads have to "leverage travel and work arbitrage" by working where they get paid more and living where costs are lower. If

Airbnb[8] or other sites boost rents prices in some countries, they try to find free shelter or expand their social network to stay at their friend's houses. When it comes to discovering new places, they restrict themselves from some moments of fun and entertainment in order to save additional money. They opt for cheap housing and vacation deals and not buy things in touristic areas because they are quite expensive. Nomad 13, another young digital nomad who participated in this study suggests, "not to have a lot of money with when visiting a new place because you tend to spend them there. Instead, this serves as a motivator to work more and earn more to finance some other dream trips." Nomad 10, another digital nomad who traveled in 20 countries during her nomadic experience would state in this context that, "the income has to be pleasant [to finance the traveling] but not opting for big things [because in this case you should work harder and won't enjoy the rest]."

Nevertheless, the fact that they can work remotely for big companies without the obligation to be physically in office prevails as a comparative advantage of being a digital nomad in this regard. Thus, they select to live in places with a low cost of living and work for places where income is higher. This view is also confirmed by the fact that digital nomads interviewed for this study generally performed information technology-related (ICT) jobs that can be performed remotely via a smart device through internet connection.

When selecting their next destination, various digital nomads consider several factors that may affect their decision on the next destination because no two people feel the same interests and have the same experience when visiting one place. They claim that there are actually many overrated destinations that raise challenges. Some pick their next destination depending on the work they do, personal interests, and their personality which affects how easy they adapt culturally. Others decide based on the cost affordability of the destination, access to internet connection, local communities, communities of other foreigners, and time zone differences with their employers. Some digital nomads pay importance to the bureaucratic and legal procedures applied to foreigners, thus they opt for countries that have good diplomatic relations with their country of origin, and that are welcoming to foreigners and pose no safety problems so that they can stay longer.

Nomad 9, a US-based digital nomad, states that she selects her next destination based on "the events I want to attend and meeting up with friends, but local community is also important." Nomad 11, another digital nomad part of this study, picks her next destination based on "how I will be living there as I am fond of co-living and co-working spaces and communicating with other people." Nomad 1, encourages to "definitely go to where one has always wanted to go, but make sure there's good internet connection no matter where one goes, and that the place has good flight connections in case one wants to leave earlier or go later."

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[8]Airbnb is an online marketplace which lets people rent out their properties or spare rooms to guests, https://www.airbnb.com/

Digital nomads compare their impact to local economies with the impact conventional tourists have on the economy of a place with an additional advantage that digital nomads stay longer in a place, thus increasing the positive impact. Digital nomads spend their money in the country they are currently living and not supposedly in the country of their employer. They spend in any country they visit, by renting housing for accommodation and consuming food and everything else they need to live. They also exploit the local facilities such as transport, postal services, delivery services, gyms, hairdressers, doctors, dentists, and more.

Moreover, they may positively affect the economy of a place by transferring knowledge, money, and know-how to local actors of the start-up ecosystem of that specific destination. They create a demand for coworking spaces and event spaces. They may also contribute to local economies by paying taxes in the cases when they stay longer in a place. The impact of digital nomadism to local economies may be summarized by the sentence of Nomad 1 below, "Digital nomads take no jobs, or no money from the countries they visit, they only take photos, make memories, and broaden their perspective e on the world we live in."

Nevertheless, some digital nomads claim that especially short-term nomadism can rather have a negative impact on local economies because as digital nomads usually outspend local residents, they can cause an increase in general prices in the area, and especially they may cause a boost in rent prices and therefore push locals out of the housing market.

Table 3 below summarizes as direct quotes some advices participants of this study gave for new digital nomads, their comments, and opinions about Albania and driving factors to digital nomadism.

Case of Tirana: The Next European Hotspot for Digital Nomads

Tirana is the capital city of Albania located in the center of the country. Its strategic geographical position gives the city a Mediterranean climate with hot, dry summers and cool, wet winters with stable temperatures throughout the year. By default, this provides a wide range of opportunities for many industries.

Tirana has been selected as European Youth Capital for 2022. This is due to the fact that Tirana, now more than ever, has taken a welcoming stance for creativity and innovation by organizing different activities and events with the youth of the city as key actors. In this context, Tirana is welcoming digital nomads and has been facilitating the conditions for remote workers. Tirana offers a lower cost lifestyle for a single person compared to Bali (Numbeo 2020), the latter considered as one of the most favorite destinations for digital nomads. Tirana is listed as one of the cheapest

Table 3 Selected direct quotes of participants

	Direct quotes
Nomad 1	1. *"Being a digital nomad is a matter of freedom: Financial freedom, time freedom, location freedom, Desire of Freedom"*
	2. *"It can be done by anyone, but you need to have a growth mindset and an entrepreneurial spirit. What I mean by this is that you need to be an individual that is fairly adaptable, agile, and creative in thinking out-of-the-box and finding innovative ways to redefine what you know about business"*
	3. *"It is not something that starts or ends, it's more like a lifestyle. A way of living. Similar to if you want to adopt a healthy lifestyle, or if you choose to be a minimalist or some other lifestyle"*
Nomad 2	1. *"Just live, no separation with leisure or working, as working is my leisure. No schedule, I do what I have when I have to"*
	2. *"Nomadism can only help save money, if you can live in a low cost country and earn western standard salary/fees. Travelling as minimalist do not take lots of money itself, if you choose not to"*
Nomad 3	1. *"If you choose to be a digital nomad, I think you have to be comfortable to live a life with lots of uncertainties"*
	2. *"I think it is important to find a structure that allows you to get work done. So staying at very touristy places was sometimes hard for me as everyone around me was on vacation and I always felt bad for having to work. So surrounding yourself with other digital nomads might help"*
	3. *"If you are working for clients from countries with high incomes you can charge high rates for your work but stay in countries where the monthly living costs are relatively low"*
Nomad 4	1. *"Making money as a digital nomad: you should work where is expensive and live where is cheaper"*
	2. *"I think digital nomadism is helping to accelerate countries economy, especially in emerging countries"*
Nomad 5	1. *"Going to a new place always is a little bit of a challenge because there's a different language, you have to set up logistics like a SIM card,* etc. *but it's usually pretty straightforward"*
	2. *"Almost anyone (can be DN). That is, any human can, yes, but not all jobs are able to be done remotely*
	If you can do your job from a computer, it can be done from anywhere with internet"
	3. *"For me it's a lifestyle so it'll be permanent. Age also depends on maturity, when you find the work you'll do as a DN, when you have the financial ability to do so"*
Nomad 6	1. *"Many people do not understand this lifestyle yet. Many think that I am just rich, and always have fun (it is far from true)"*
	2. *"What motivated me? The bad memories of endless battles with myself in order to go to the office. The ability to be with my family and also see the world. When you travel, the brain works to find new solutions, and I guess I am addicted to that now"*
	3. *"Family members accepted it, but it took time. Many people do not understand it yet"*
Nomad 7	1. *"When I first started digital nomadism, the main thing that motivated me was the ultimate freedom"*
	2. *"I don't have a schedule, I just time block everything"*

(continued)

Table 3 (continued)

	Direct quotes
Nomad 8	1. *"You have to maintain contacts with people you meet in different places. Digital nomadism is a real work but with the possibility of traveling"*
	2. *"It's an opportunity for places like Albania to attract more foreigners […] it could also lead to more transfer of knowledge, […] there is a shift of perspective for the local ecosystem as well, if they see as how people from Silicon Valley are structuring their days"*
Nomad 9	1. *"You may find out if DN works for you by doing a short trip. But you just have to try it. It is done by less people that can actually live and want to live as DN"*
	2. *"Community is so important when you are a nomad because it's easy to get very lonely"*
	3. *"For me travel is just so important, like, I could never not have it be a part of my life"*
	4. *"Age is not important. What's important is to have a stable income"*
Nomad 10	1. *"Albania is in my top 3 destinations. I made many friends. Colorful experience and great food"*
	2. *"There is a challenge because stable life has its obvious benefits that we all get used to very quickly […] so called "golden cage""*
	3. *"I was socializing with DN when I was traveling to places that are DN hubs […] but I would say more than half of the time I was experiencing on my own"*
	4. *"DN have bigger influence in developing countries because these are the countries that the majority of DN tend to go [...] actually it depends on how communicated the DN community within the country where it settles. Because there are places where they settle in one village, so the village is impacted, but not the country"*
	5. *"I believe it (DN community) contributes good things when the community cares to contribute good things"*
Nomad 11	1. *"For new digital nomads, Albania is the first country they should visit"*
	2. *"I plan to return to Tirana in April or May because I know that is so much to discover there"*
	3. *"I think what's nice about it is that you can try a lot of different ways of living, traveling and working. So it's really flexible"*
	4. *"For me it's not so much the country, as how I will be living there, because I realized that I do want to live in a place, like, in community with other people. So I think I would choose it (next destination) depending on the project that I find, or maybe there is a nice co-working space, or co-living space with other DN"*
	5. *"I don't just want to be a tourist; I also want to connect"*
Nomad 12	1. *"Being a digital nomad has many obstacles, even from your relatives. Sometimes my mom asks me 'when will you start your real life?!'"*
	2. *"The reason I'm doing this is the flexibility. I just love moving. I love traveling around and not needing to ask for vacations request or speaking to colleagues if I can go in a two week vacation a year. I want the freedom of choice of where I want to go and when"*
	3. *"I think (DN) is the future. It's not only going to be the future, it's already the future because we have the internet in our fingertips, we have knowledge at the speed of light on our hands. And especially the Millennials,[…] my generation and Millennials have a huge possibility and will change the workforce"*
	4. *"It's a cross border communication because you are able to contribute to where your business is registered and at the same time you contribute through your traveling to the local culture"*

(continued)

Table 3 (continued)

	Direct quotes
Nomad 13	1. *"My difficulty doesn't stand on finding new friends, but in missing these friends when I leave their country"*
	2. *"You have to love your work, so you have to love what you're doing. I'm grateful I've got always my drawings with me so I'm never bored and I'm never lost with things to do…"*
	3. *"When you go into the complexities of the cultures there are differences of course but people are still people everywhere you go"*
	4. *"I never travel with too much money and that's actually a good motivator to make me work because it's like "Well, if I want to go here, I have to work""*
Nomad 14	1. *"You should not be lazy, have to learn to manage your time. You have to be productive, organized and workaholic"*
	2. *"I think people adapt and being a DN can be normal, can be exciting, can be lonely. I mean if you are in an exciting moment where you are living your life, moving around […] and you are actually travelling more than working, because your work allows you to do it, I would understand that it would be a shock to return to your house and have to stay there and work there"*

places to live in Europe,[9] and an article in Traveling Balkan's blog[10] ranks it in the top three most affordable places in Europe. The housing alternatives are numerous and listed in Airbnb. Tirana offers an increased number of coworking spaces situated in several areas of the city, easily accessible by public transport or walking, mostly with beautiful views that inspire digital nomads to work. The internet connection is good and reliable, especially improving recently with the introduction of fiber optic cables.

According to one of the most popular blogs[11] listing best cities for digital nomads, Tirana is ranked 26th among the cities ranked for 2019. Various digital nomads that have visited Tirana consider the experience as "once in a lifetime journey," even though usually it is underestimated resulting in less visits by digital nomads. Nevertheless, it has a huge potential to become a European hub for digital nomads coming from all over the world. Currently, there are some digital nomads living and working in Tirana, some of them part of this study too.

Tirana is considered to be a seasonal city where summer is the best season to travel and discover all what Tirana and surrounding areas offer, whereas winter is quieter, offering the opportunity for more concentration to work tasks. The majority of locals are fluent in English, Italian, and other languages thanks to their ability to learn foreign languages relatively quickly. Sunny days, proximity to beaches, and

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[9] The Best Digital Nomad Cities of 2019 (n.d.). Retrieved June 1, 2020, from Local Nomads website: https://localnomads.com/best-digital-nomad-cities-2019/

[10] Living in Albania as a digital nomad (n.d.). Retrieved June 1, 2020 from Travelling Balkans website: https://travellingbalkans.com/living-in-albania-as-a-digital-nomad/

[11] The Best Digital Nomad Cities of 2019 (n.d.). Retrieved June 1, 2020, from Local Nomads website https://localnomads.com/best-digital-nomad-cities-2019/

nature are other factors that give Tirana a comparative advantage to become a destination for digital nomads.

Tirana and surroundings have many interesting places to visit. A nice combination of Illyrian, Roman, and Ottoman empires heritage is present, which is a proof of a very rich history, culture, and art of the country. Furthermore, almost 50 years of a communist dictatorship regime have left many footprints from old museums to specific and small objects, as relics of that time. History is a witness that Albanians are very welcoming people that have preserved with great fanaticism their customs, traditions, and culture. Thus, alongside the touristic and historical spots, digital nomads can enjoy the friendly and very social environment created by both locals and tourists. In many reviews, citizens of Tirana are mentioned for the great treatment of visitors and for their original friendliness. Apart from the fascinating historical spots, Tirana has modern attractions too. Digital nomads can enjoy the view from the cable bar over the city, the colorful buildings, and mixed architecture. Creativity and positivity are reflected in house and flat paintings and graffiti. Tirana offers a wide variety of food too, both traditional and nontraditional food.

Tirana offers various start-up opportunities for entrepreneurs to grow. Digital nomads can participate in many conferences and other activities where many successful businessmen provide job offers and internships especially at a time when Tirana is going through a digitalization process and is supporting innovation and entrepreneurship. New and modern buildings provide space for different local start-ups and for organizing a variety of innovation and entrepreneurship-related events.

Referring to Digital Nomad List,[12] Tirana has a score of 3.47 out of 5, which is considerably high for an emerging country like Albania. This score is approximately the same compared with one of the most famous cities in Europe, Paris (3.54), and higher than the most popular cities in neighboring Italy including Rome (3.02/5), Milan (2.95/5), and Venice (2.92/5). It must be mentioned that Tirana has a considerably higher score than the majority of other Balkan cities. Local authorities and other stakeholders are making efforts to turn Tirana into a destination for many digital nomads through activities that encourage the youth to be involved in this process and give ideas for improvements. Among such activities are Hackathons and Bootcamps,[13] where different university students and other participants come together and brainstorm to find and share ideas about how to transform Tirana into a hotspot for digital nomads.

Digital nomads, part of this study shared their impressions and experience in Tirana in different perspectives. There seems to be agreement on the fact that Tirana must be on the top list of next destinations for digital nomads at any period of the year. They stress on their plan to return and see more at their first chance. According to digital nomads part of this study, among the prevailing features that favor Tirana

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[12] Tirana. (n.d.). Retrieved July 29, 2020, from NomadList website: https://nomadlist.com/tirana

[13] A Hackathon is a 36-h innovation event, where teams of youngsters supported by mentors try to generate ideas and find solutions to real-life problems. A Bootcamp instead is a short-term, intensive program that teaches participants how to make the business model of their idea and other practical skills.

to be a preferred destination one could mention the city being easily accessible, cheap, and safe, having good and young people, great food, enough coworking places, and good Wi-Fi.

Nevertheless, there is still a lot for Tirana to improve further the welcoming atmosphere for foreigners and create opportunities for collaboration. There are currently many issues to be solved in order to have a higher rating score in the nomad list and other mediums. In this perspective, researchers of this study have listed few suggestions that could be taken into consideration. First, Tirana needs to have centralized information on what digital nomads should expect from it and how they can work here. Second, the transportation should be improved because Tirana, contrary to other European capitals has no train transportation means, making taxi, bus, or minibus the main way to move from one area to another. Third, bad traffic and the hassles that associate it are one of the most disadvantageous aspects that damage the image of Tirana which needs to be tackled by local authorities. Fourth, unfortunately, many apartments in Tirana lack proper sound isolation, so sounds from outside can sometimes be unpleasant, especially for digital nomads who are looking for high contraction while working. Local landlords should list noise standards in the properties list when they list their properties in AirBnB etc. Fifth, another suggestion for Tirana is to increase the size of the start-up community. Even though youth is being encouraged to be part of start-ups but since such efforts are taken only lately, the start-up ecosystem is in its initial forming stages.

Concluding Remarks

The aim of this study was to identify the important features of locations that are attractive to digital nomads, with a particular focus on the city of Tirana. To achieve the research objective, the researchers conducted an exploratory qualitative research, in which 14 digital nomads were interviewed via semi-structured interviews. Their insights helped to shed light on daily routines, motivational factors of traveling, and traits that are important in selecting a location for a digital nomad. The collected results supported the theoretical background presented in the literature review section; digital nomads are equipped with a strong self-discipline which helps them balance work-leisure-personal life, and are driven by several reasons to pursue a career on constant traveling and are strongly affected by professional and entertainment possibilities offered in different locations when deciding where they will settle next.

Data collected was elaborated so to offer suggestions about how Tirana could improve particular factors such as public transportation, more centralized information on possible digital nomad communities and activities, as well as lower the acoustic noises. However, recommendations are not to be limited within Tirana's boundaries. The suggestions presented here are applicable to many cities in other developing countries and not only that share similar economical, natural, cultural,

and technological traits with Tirana. These locations need investments whether by local or central governments as well as by private organizations or investors.

Future research may further study particular features of any specific city that is of interest of other researchers, as well as identifying common factors that connect locations that share similar characteristics among them. Reaching a shared map of measures to be considered for different emerging destinations underrated by digital nomads combined with local strategies would lead to an enhanced value-adding process in terms of technological, touristic, and entrepreneurial climate for the respective countries.

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