

CITIES' ATTRACTIVENESS FACTORS FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF DIGITAL NOMADS

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Purpose: This paper aims to identify the factors of destination attractiveness in the opinion of the digital nomads. The data was obtained through a quantitative research process.

Design/methodology/approach: The study uses a quantitative approach. The author used a method in the form of a diagnostic survey using a questionnaire tool with a proprietary scale provided to respondents on-line (CAWI). A deliberate sample selection was used based on the self-identification criterion of the respondent as a digital nomad with experience or planning a trip in this capacity soon.

Findings: In order to choose a city as a destination, digital nomads are most often guided by the price level prevailing in a given place, the level of safety, and the interesting culture and identity presented by the city. Among the factors influencing the city's attractiveness, the most important were the technological facilities, accessibility, the presence of recreational areas and facilities, and the local community's attitude towards visitors.

Originality/value: This paper focuses on analyzing the specificity and features of cities from the perspective of a relatively new, dynamically growing group of external recipients - digital nomads. The developed conclusions may contribute to formulating the city's marketing messages appropriately and adapting the city's offer to the digital nomad community. In addition, this paper contains the issue of preferences regarding the size of the city and the intention to use coworking spaces.

Keywords: digital nomads, place marketing, cities' attractiveness factors.

Category of the paper: Research paper.

1. Introduction

In recent years, along with the development of technologies and due to the pandemic, which has mainly resulted in digitizing many functions and workplaces, numerous visitors to cities are digital nomads (Orel, 2021). The term "digital nomad" was introduced in the late twentieth century to describe a vision of technological progress for human life and work (Makimoto, Manners, 1997). The authors then predicted how the development of mobile technologies

would affect human life, creating a lifestyle - not very common then - defined as "people freed from the constraints of time and location" (Makimoto, 2013, p. 40). A digital nomad can be defined as a fully mobile worker (usually intellectual) using digital technologies that enable work anytime and anywhere in the world (Liegl, 2014). The digital nomad's lifestyle is also characterized by a commitment to travel. Therefore, it is emphasized that it is not only a form of work but also the way it is organized and a generally understood lifestyle (Wang et al., 2018). At this point, a distinction should be made between the term "digital nomad," meaning a mobile worker carrying out work tasks from any and voluntarily chosen location in the world with the support of digital technology; and "digital nomadism" meaning the way of life led and developed by these traveling workers (Hannonen, 2020).

Digital nomads differ from remote workers residing in a permanent place of residence by the value attributed by nomads to gain new experiences through international travel. On the other hand, the main issue differentiating a digital nomad from a traditional tourist is that tourists most often travel as part of a vacation without needing to perform official duties during their stay. Additionally, a significant part of tourists is often unaware of the social situation of the visitor city. Most tourists also avoid direct integration and contact with local communities, which could potentially present the identity of a place to a much wider extent and show its unique features (Thompson, 2019). Digital nomads are more involved in exploring the whereabouts than traditional tourists. Thus, they engage in slow tourism to a much greater extent in their temporary stay (Putra, Agirachman, 2016). It is also worth emphasizing the difference between employees - immigrants, and digital nomads. The mobility of nomads motivates the search for new experiences, adventure, meaning, and discoveries rather than economic or political factors related to the work performed (O'Reilly, Benson, 2009). Some scientists classify digital nomads into three groups: time-flexible remote workers who do not travel, workers who frequently travel with permanent residence, and workers who travel without a permanent residence (Reichenberger, 2018). Non-traveling digital nomads, also city dwellers, often use public spaces or rented coworking spaces to do their work outside the apartment.

The digital nomad lifestyle is one of the fastest growing and most popular social trends. Over the next ten years, the estimated number of nomads will increase to one billion (Hatalaska, 2017). These changes create a chance for many territorial units to increase their competitive position. A city's competitiveness should be understood as the ability of a territorial unit to obtain the necessary resources, provide high-quality services, economic development, and attract and then retain customers (Ni, Kresl, 2014). The attractiveness of a city focuses on its resources and their presentation, while competitiveness refers to the positioning of the city through strategic management (Baron, Budziński, 2019). This means that when creating the attractiveness of a given city, local authorities should focus on selecting such features that, if properly configured and presented, will contribute to increasing interest in the city's offer.

Skillful use of marketing tools and promoting the city contribute to distinguishing a territorial unit and emphasizing its attractiveness and uniqueness. This serves to increase the demand for the offer of a given place, which in turn makes the city's competitive position more dynamic. In order to properly design an effective city's marketing communication, which will influence the perception of the city concerning the target group of digital nomads, it is necessary to recognize their needs and expectations. The choice of the location of the digital nomads is voluntary and inspired by the desire to explore the culture and resources of a given place. However, one of the critical aspects of presenting the city concerning this group is the distinguishing features of identity and the factors of attractiveness from their perspective, which require prior identification.

Due to the relatively new group of recipients of the city, which are digital nomads, and the lack of empirical research in this area, in particular those relating to territorial units, it is necessary to conduct research among this community to contribute to better recognition and definition of the lifestyle and their expectations towards the visited location. This study aims to identify the features and attributes of the city that make a given location attractive from the perspective of digital nomads. The conclusions drawn based on the collected data can be used to make possible changes in the image strategy of the city, better suited to the expectations of the group of digital nomads.

2. Theoretical background

The pace and type of changes occurring in the labour markets are mainly influenced by technological development, prevailing trends, and changes of a socio-cultural nature (Bendkowski, 2018). Among the contemporary social factors, the most common is the individual's motivation to pursue autonomy of action and the willingness to perform official duties flexibly, allowing for a harmonious combination of work and free time (Wittel, 2001). Globalization has also impacted the rapid increase in mobility among workers in recent years, taking up nomadism activities. Especially visible in the context of the simplicity and comfort of movement due to the development and high availability of the transport system. The work of digital nomads is not limited by socio-geographical factors, as they are characterized by freedom in choosing the place and time of work (Müller, 2016). Digital nomads choose a site as their location based on recreational, cognitive, cultural, and natural interests, not employment. The most frequently chosen destinations are exotic areas from the perspective of a digital nomad, which depends on the country of origin of a given person.

Coworking spaces appear more often in the offer of many cities, which is one of the components of the city's perceived image. The term coworking space can be understood as a form of work; work environment, or place of work; and as a service which is the rental of

appropriately adapted, shared rooms to carry out work (Bendkowski, 2018). Coworking spaces increase work efficiency and provide comfortable and high-quality equipment (including furniture, air conditioning, noise reduction, adequate lighting, vegetation, and high-speed Internet) (Howell, 2022). The character, appearance, and decoration of rooms proposed by individual developers, investors, or territorial units are influenced by the prevailing trends and the founder's visions. However, the functioning of offices should be based on the following assumptions related primarily to the prevailing atmosphere, constituting the idea of these spaces: collaboration, community, sustainability, openness, and accessibility (Schürmann, 2013). The use of coworking spaces by a given person lasts as long as it is comfortable while maintaining complete freedom of action (Spinuzzi, 2015). Therefore, using these spaces does not require long-term lease obligations from the users (Chevtaeva, 2021).

The growing trend and the essence of the occurrence and its impact on various areas of activity of countries, cities, and communities hosting digital nomads is confirmed by the constantly increasing number of published scientific research related to this phenomenon. The increase in research related to digital nomadism is focused mainly on describing and verifying the lifestyle and activities undertaken among digital nomads using empirical research. However, in the context of the theoretical approach to digital nomadism, there are still gaps and inaccuracies (Wang et al., 2018). This may be due to the relative novelty of the phenomenon, in particular, its mass occurrence in recent years. In one of the few scientific publications referring to the factors of choosing the destination of digital nomads, based on in-depth interviews, the aspects determining the choice of a specific city were distinguished (Lhakard, 2022):

- social (safety, access to health services, communicative, educated people, low crime rate, protection of human rights),
- cultural capital (local culture, tradition),
- environmental (including tourist and natural resources, attractions, weather, pollution, public spaces),
- city management (the honesty of the authorities, transparency of activities and policies, committed community).

The conducted research analysis and conclusions drawn should aim at developing universal, as far as possible, city management principles in acquiring and hosting digital nomads, with particular emphasis on the benefits for local communities (Wey, 2019). When verifying the factors for a given location, the implications should focus on development and strong promotion of cities, as they constitute a source of attraction and income that should not only be maintained but also increased (Gandini, 2016). The group of digital nomads can be classified as temporary residents, short-term business employees (as they are primarily freelancers), and tourists. At the same time, these are the three main groups of recipients of territorial marketing activities in almost every city. These are the groups that the city's strategy should focus on in terms of improving its attractiveness (Ashworth, Voogd, 1990). The analysis of

elementary requirements of the city shows that the inhabitants expect a clean and safe environment and the availability of services, business representatives pay attention to the quality of accommodation and the labour market, and tourists to accessibility, ease of movement, and exciting culture (Berg, Meer, 1999). By identifying and understanding the needs, desires, and behaviour of particular target groups, local authorities can influence the perception of a location as attractive from the perspective of a given group. Based on systematically collected data in this area, the authorities should implement specific changes in the functioning and external communication of the city, which would increase its attractiveness (Sinkien, Kromalcas, 2010). Actions aimed at increasing the city's attractiveness will deliver the intended effects in the form of, for example, increased demand for the city's offer, only thanks to long-term, systematic, and appropriately targeted efforts. For the image of the city to be an attractive and, at the same time, authentic reflection of its identity, local authorities should use and emphasize the current features of the city that make the place unique (distinguishing features of identity) (Glińska, 2012).

3. Research methodology and results

In order to identify the factors of destination attractiveness in the opinion of the digital nomads, a quantitative study was carried out using the diagnostic survey method. The CAWI (Computer-Assisted Web Interview) technique was used, the main advantages of which are safe collection and relatively quick data analysis among a broad international community. The survey was developed using a tool: a Google Forms questionnaire with a custom-designed scale containing a total of eleven questions. The elements of the study were digital nomads who took, are going, or plan to undertake a journey in this capacity soon. The questions included in the questionnaire in English were shared several times in online groups and thematic forums, along with the characteristics of the respondent (digital nomad, adult) and a description of the purpose of the study. The groups and internet forums selected by the author bring together the community of digital nomads and are used to exchange views, opinions, experiences, and insights on destinations. The research material was collected from the beginning of July till the end of August 2022, and an Excel spreadsheet was used to analyze the collected data.

A total of 209 respondents participated in the study, 128 of whom (61.2%) were freelancers. Four age groups were specified: 18-25 (18); 26-35 (100); 36-45 (67); 46 years and more (24). The vast majority of the respondents had higher education – a bachelor's degree (61.7%), a master's degree (29.2%) and 18 persons (8.6%) completed education in high school, and one of the respondents had a Ph.D. degree.

The introduction to the listing of the main factors of the city's attractiveness was the verification of whether there were specific preferences of digital nomads regarding the size of the city of destination. Cities of different sizes (using the population criterion¹) present a different specificity, mainly in management style, including the number and type of investments, social structure, and broadly understood the urban offer. The respondents were offered the possibility to choose one of the four basic sizes of the city. The possibility of selecting the answer "it does not matter" was proposed in the suggested responses. The percentage distribution of respondents' answers is presented below (figure 1).

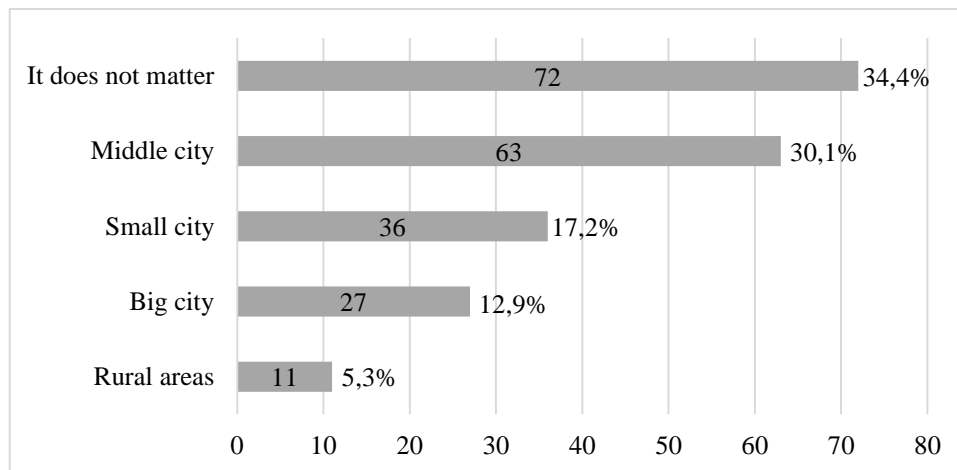


Figure 1. Destination city size preferred by digital nomads in 2022.

Source: Own elaboration based on the analysis of the survey results.

The analysis of the answers shows that among the surveyed digital nomads, there are no strong preferences regarding the size of the chosen destination. The highest percentage of the answers (34.4%) indicated the lack of importance of the city's size in terms of population. The second most frequent answer was a middle-sized city, usually characterized by a complete offer in terms of services and products. An interesting result may be that most respondents would choose a small city rather than a big one, and the least frequently indicated of the proposed answers were rural areas (5.3%).

The second question was related to the most important factors regarding a given location that affect its choice. 11 primary responses were suggested, relating to the prices of accommodation, the popularity of the place, the city's offer, accessibility, and the prevailing culture and local community. The list of suggested answers was developed independently, distinguishing economic, social, communication and tourist factors, including selected factors from the survey conducted among foreign tourists (Krzyżanowska, Wilczewska, 2018). Due to the insufficiently recognized empirically and theoretically problem and to better identify the factors constituting a choice given location by digital nomads, the respondents were allowed to

¹ The population criteria were presented to the respondents in the content of the suggested answers. The population criteria used in the study to distinguish the size of territorial units are accepted and used in the scientific literature and by the United Nations.

provide their own answers. The chart below shows the percentage distribution of the suggested answers (figure 2).

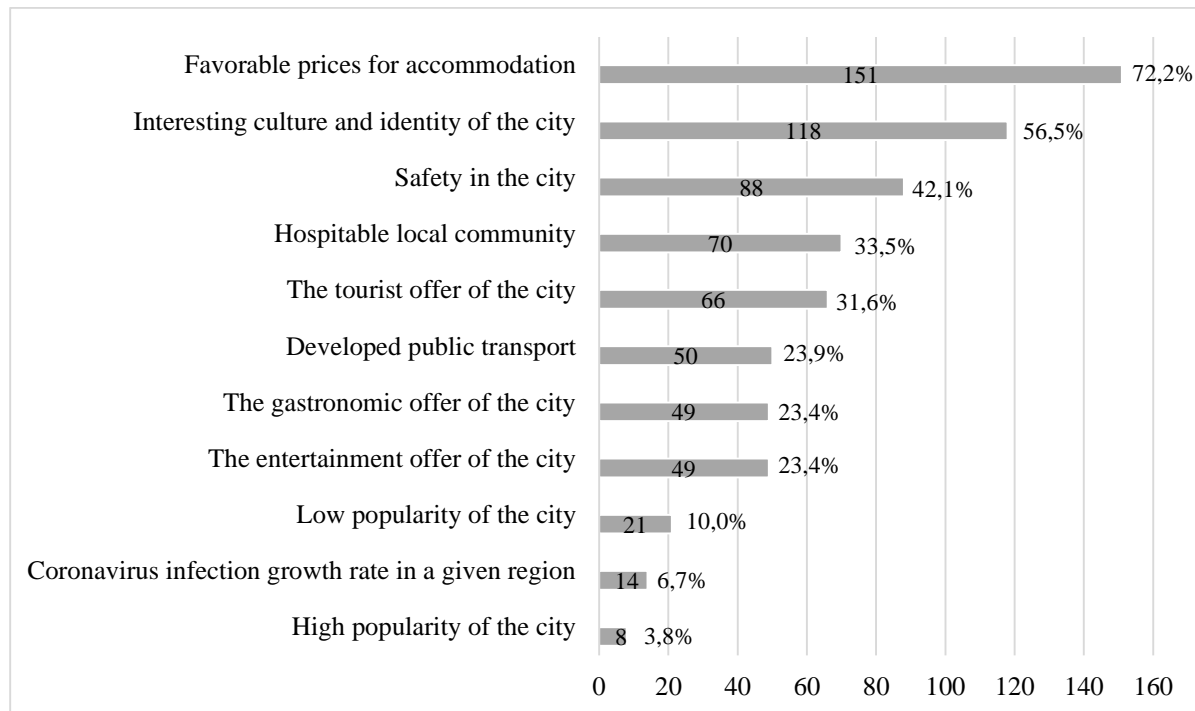


Figure 2. The importance of selected factors for digital nomads in choosing a destination in 2022.

Source: Own elaboration based on the analysis of the survey results².

The most critical factor, indicated by over $\frac{3}{4}$ of the respondents, was the favorable accommodation prices offered in a given location. This factor was significantly high, regardless of the preferences regarding the size of the destination. Another important factor, indicated by more than half of the respondents, was the city's interesting culture and identity, which is indeed strongly related to the lifestyle of digital nomads and the search for experience and authenticity of a place in the visited cities. Safety in the destination area was also often indicated (42, 1%), closely related to the low crime rate. Among *own* answers about factors determining the choice of a given destination, the respondents most often indicated: the proximity of the city to natural areas and the possibility of close sightseeing, and weather factors - moderate climate (warm, but not stuffy and no extreme heat).

In the following question, respondents were asked to indicate, according to their personal preferences, 1-3 factors that make a given city *attractive* in the context of a digital nomad's stay. Among the analyzed responses, the most frequent ones in the following order were: weather, technological facilities - Internet speed; costs of general maintenance, cleanliness of the city, safety, proximity, readability of the city and road communication, availability of areas for sports (gyms, running and cycling routes), the attitude of the local community towards tourists and visitors (open and hospitable, welcoming, tolerant, involved in place); and interesting architecture. Among the less frequent or individual responses, there were such aspects as: low

² The answer percentage does not add up to 100 because the question allowed multiple answers.

air pollution, official language, diversity of the place, leisure opportunities, number of events, low number of tourists and predominance of local communities, and warm or seaside climate.

Then, the respondents were asked about the travel or planned mode of travel in the context of trip participants as a potential variable in the preferences of city characteristics and use. The following answers were proposed in a closed question: alone, with a friend/partner, or with a family member(s). The vast majority of the surveyed nomads (58.4%) travel alone, 36.8% with a friend or partner, and only 4.8% with a family member(s).

Then, the respondents were asked whether they would use coworking spaces in the place of destination to perform their official duties. The question was closed and contained three possible answers: yes, no, and maybe. The highest percentage of the surveyed nomads (46.4%) consider using the coworking space, and nearly $\frac{1}{3}$ of the respondents (32.5%) declare that they use coworking spaces while in the destination. When analyzing the results, it was verified whether the travel mode in the context of the trip participants impacts the use of coworking offices. The largest disproportions were noted between people traveling with a partner and alone (figure 3).

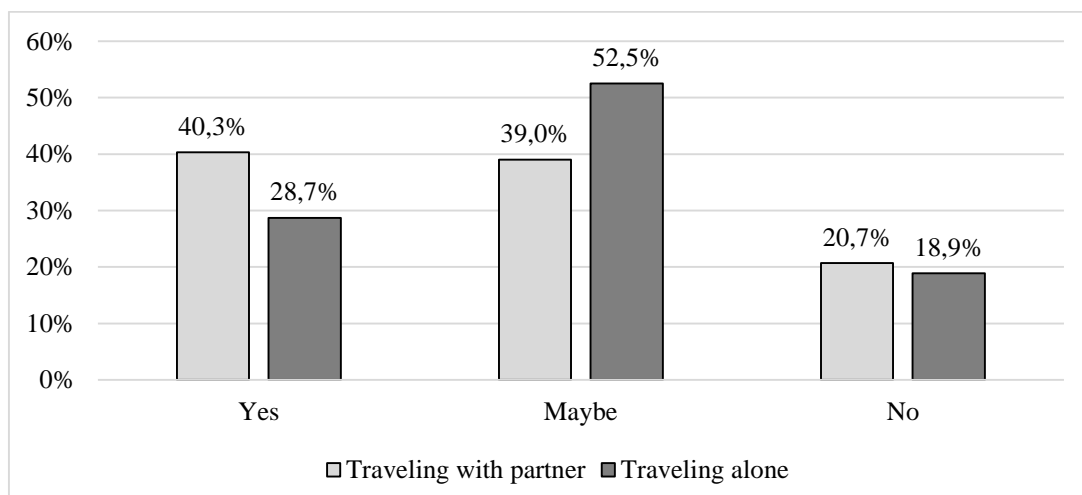


Figure 3. Willingness to use coworking spaces by digital nomads in the destination in 2022.

Source: Own elaboration based on the analysis of the survey results.

Based on the analysis of the responses, it was also noticed that people who intend to use coworking spaces to a greater extent choose large (17.6%) and medium-sized (33.8%) cities and almost five times less often choose the rural areas as a destination compared to the overall sample of respondents. The analysis of significant preferences related to the use of coworking spaces was not noticed between freelancers and people employed by the company, and the percentage distribution of responses was similar.

Then, attempts were made to identify the most frequently used sources of information by digital nomads on the choice of destination, which is critical for cities that distribute their marketing offer. Four responses were suggested, and the possibility of giving their own answer, also the question allowed for multiple choice. The most frequently given answers among the respondents were online thematic groups (75.6%) and official websites of cities, where the offer

and characteristics of individual territorial units are presented (48.3%). Then, information obtained from friends and/or family (37.3%) was indicated. The least frequently chosen responses from the one proposed by the researcher were books, catalogs, and guides (5.7%). In self-provided responses, the respondents also mentioned social media such as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Google, and Wikipedia, travel blogs, and information from residents of a given destination. The variable that has the most substantial impact on the sources of obtaining information is the age of digital nomads. The highest disproportions were observed between digital nomads aged 26-35 and people 46 years old and more, which is shown in the figure 4. below:

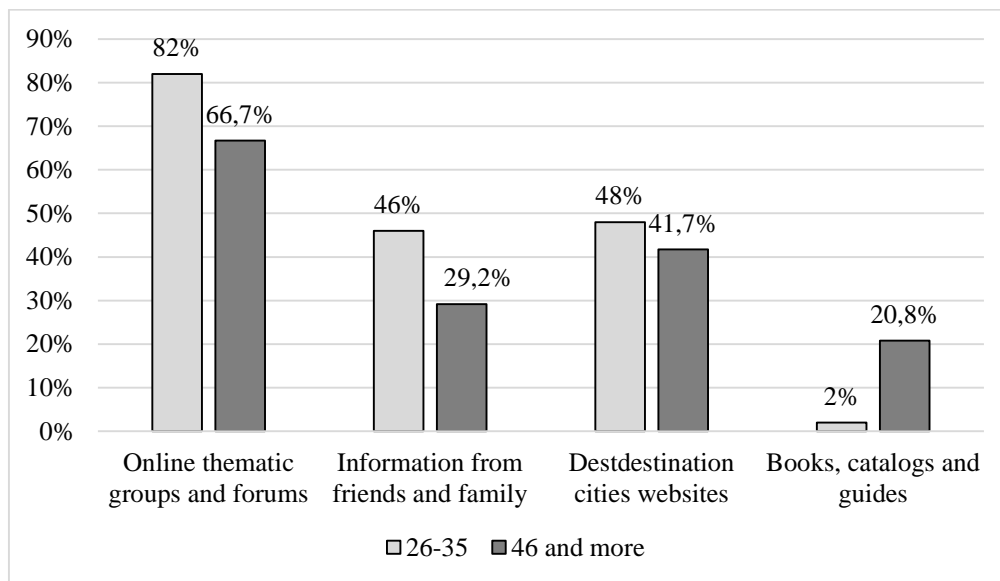


Figure 4. The most frequently chosen sources of obtaining information on destinations, indicated by digital nomads in 2022.

Source: Own elaboration based on the analysis of the survey results³.

The largest percentage of the surveyed digital nomads (82%) using internet forums are people aged 26-35, and those who use catalogs and guides on specific cities are people over 46 years old. Information obtained from the websites of the cities of destination in each group had similar values (between 40% and 50%).

4. Conclusions

Based on the analysis of the results of the quantitative study, it was confirmed that such aspects as safety, interesting and preserved local culture and tradition, an adequately developed communication system and diverse infrastructure of the city, the presence of places enabling the implementation of activities have a high impact on the choice of location by digital nomads

³ The answer percentage does not add up to 100 because the question allowed multiple answers.

(Lhakard, 2022). Moreover, the basis for choosing a given location is the cost of living and accommodation. This result is consistent with the study on the factors determining the choice of destination conducted among traditional tourists traveling abroad (Krzyżanowska, Wilczewska, 2018). Based on the most critical factors determining the choice of a given destination by digital nomads, it was also confirmed that they have preferences that fit within the requirements of three groups of city recipients: residents, tourists, and business workers.

The specificity, features and resources of a territorial unit are influenced by the size of the city, most often expressed by the population criterion. In smaller territorial units, due to the generally lower rate of migration, tighter social ties, and lower degree of anonymity, visitors can experience a greater degree of preserved authenticity and cultural identity. These are the main aspects sought by people who practice slow tourism, which characterizes the travel aspect of the lifestyle of digital nomads. On the other hand, rural areas differ significantly from units with urban rights in terms of resources and sensitivity to any changes occurring in them (Rauhut Kompaniets, Rauhut, 2016). This may limit the offer and the package of amenities for nomads and may be the reason for the reluctance of the surveyed group to choose this type of destination. An important variable influencing the choice of the city size is the intention to use coworking spaces, which is associated with a more extensive and diverse offer characteristic of big territorial units.

Among the identified, most often indicated by the digital nomads factors making a given city an attractive choice, were developed technological facilities and shared facilities in this context. The basis is access to a fast internet connection. Digital nomads do not necessarily have to use coworking spaces or accommodations to perform their duties, but also public places, e.g., cafes, that offer WiFi access (Fuchs, Sandoval, 2014). Some countries deliberately use amenities that facilitate and increase the presence of digital nomads by offering a convenient system for the registration process of cell phones (Lhakard, 2022). Another critical factor is the city's legibility and ease of movement, which can be influenced by the managers of territorial units by appropriate design of the city identification system relating to the city's topography, coherent, legible, and common signs of streets and buildings. A group of digital nomads may also be attracted by the aspect related to the possibilities of spending free time actively (parks, green areas, running and cycling routes, recreational facilities), which, based on the research, turned out to have a high impact on the attractiveness of a given location. A significant factor from the digital nomad's perspective is also the attitude and behavior of the local community. There is a consensus among city marketing researchers that residents play a critical role in promoting the city's offer as local experts with high credibility (Choi, Fu, 2018). Deliberate inclusion and encouraging residents to participate in promoting the city's image and offer, although it is still underestimated, has a critical impact on the feelings of visitors during their stay and may contribute to the increase in demand to a greater extent than through the offer presented in traditional marketing materials. Also, due to the need and desire of nomads to explore different cultures, the inhabitants' attitude is essential as they are the primary group

presenting the identity and authenticity of a given place. This is mainly due to informal contacts and oral communication with external groups (Casais, Monteiro, 2019). Therefore their openness and kindness are of particular importance in this context. The involvement and support of the local community in the city's policy results from the consent and acceptance of top-down management goals. Therefore, local authorities should present to residents the benefits of hosting a group of digital nomads and plan activities aimed at increasing their share in the consumption of the city's offer.

An important result of the analysis of the conducted research is the determination of the sources of obtaining information on destinations most often used by digital nomads. Knowledge of information transmission channels allows city managers to adjust better the method and type of content delivery to a selected target group. However, nowadays, due to high competition and the speed of information dissemination, cities have limited control over the sources of their formation (Berne et al., 2011). Almost every second respondent, regardless of belonging to a given age group, uses the information posted on the official websites of territorial units, which are designed and published following the strategy of a given city. Cities that want to acquire a group of digital nomads should use the communication tool of their website for this purpose in a conscious way, including information on the benefits of selecting a territorial unit from the perspective of digital nomads.

5. Future research directions

This study was conducted among the international community of digital nomads. In subsequent studies on the analysis of preferences and factors determining the choice of a specific location, the researcher proposes to distinguish the studied groups according to, f.e., the continent of origin, which may indicate different and diverse requirements in searching for and discovering new cultures and interpreting the exoticism of departure and factors determining the attractiveness of the city.

In order to support the practical use of research by territorial units, it is required to in-depth analyzes related to the acquisition of information by digital nomads about the city. For this purpose, subsequent studies should identify what information related to the functioning and work in the city is most often sought by digital nomads, which may contribute to adjusting the city's offer and then presenting it to the target audience through appropriate channels.

An important aspect is a parallel research among the local community regarding, among other things, expectations or fears related to the stay of a relatively new group of visitors - digital nomads, which have emerged in recent years. Awareness of the attitude of the residents will allow managers to pursue a sustainable city policy, respecting the interests of external and internal groups.

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