



28 EISIC – 2025

Digital Nomadism and Opportunities for Sustainable Tourism in Minor Destinations: insights from the Valle dei Mocheni, Italy

Diego, Crucitti; Federica, Buffa; Lucia, Gatti; Umberto, Martini.
University of Trento, Department of Economics and Management
diego.crucitti@unitn.it; federica.buffa@unitn.it; lucia.gatti@unitn.it;
umberto.martini@unitn.it.

Abstract:

This paper investigates the intersection of digital nomadism and development opportunities for minor destinations. These destinations are becoming increasingly famous among slow tourists, who seek relaxed atmosphere and authentic experiences. However, due to their marginality, many of them lack essential services such as health facilities, schools and transport connections.

Grounded in contemporary shifts in work and mobility following the COVID-19 pandemic, the study explores how digital nomadism can serve as levers for sustainable tourism in minor areas. The study employs a case study approach, based on nine in-depth interviews with key public and private stakeholders engaged in the sustainable tourism development of the Valle dei Mocheni (Trentino, Italy).

The case study illustrates both the opportunities and challenges faced by minor destinations seeking to integrate digital nomads in their territorial strategies. Findings highlight a growing institutional interest in digital nomads as drivers of local innovation, yet also reveal critical barriers at the level of services, infrastructures and regulations that may undermine efforts to retain them over time. Among the challenges identified, several require strategic action, such as the limited housing options which lack amenities for digital nomads, and the need to develop year-round attractions. The research contributes to the literature on sustainable tourism development for minor destinations, providing managerial insights for policy-makers and destination managers.

Keywords: Digital Nomadism, Sustainable Tourism, Minor Destinations.

Paper type: Empirical analysis (Area of focus: 4. Tourism and leisure)

1. Introduction:

Technological development, the increasing ease of mobility, and greater work flexibility have redefined the concept of work and leisure. Following Covid-19 pandemic related trends, the spatio-temporal flexibility of work, once exclusively reserved for freelancers—free to manage their own activities and holidays—has extended to many other workers. Indeed, there is a growing attention to work-life balance, with the spread of new work arrangements such as smart working and remote work, and the emergence of new phenomena such as digital nomadism, which includes both touristic and work-related purposes.

Several studies have focused on examining the destinations of digital nomads to understand the associated potential, opportunities, and risks (Hannonen et al., 2023; Lonardi et al., 2023). These individuals have different needs compared to traditional tourists, such as co-working spaces and stable internet connectivity, as well as a range of dedicated services (AIND, 2023). Furthermore, digital nomads seek territorial contexts that allow them to immerse themselves in the local environment and live in close contact with local communities, with the aim of discovering their culture and traditions.

Potential destinations for this type of tourism include minor destinations and inner areas (Meneghello & Mingotto, 2018)¹, which, following the Covid-19 pandemic, have benefited from increased interest from tourist demand due to their peripheral location relative to large cities (Messina & Tregnaghi, 2023). These areas, particularly disadvantaged from an economic perspective, may offer significant potential linked to slow tourism.

With reference to the Italian context, policymakers have paid particular attention to the economic development of these territorial areas by defining specific intervention actions. Emblematic examples include the National Strategy for Inner Areas (SNAI) and the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (PNRR), which are programs and investment lines aimed at tourism and culture.

This paper presents the results of an exploratory study aimed at analyzing the opportunities and challenges that digital nomadism can bring to minor destinations, by considering a case study that presents unique and relevant characteristics in the Italian context. Specifically, the field research focused on the Valle dei Mocheni, an Italian inner area in the Province of Trento characterized by a minority language and culture, subject to depopulation phenomena and high tourism seasonality.

The paper is structured as follows: the next chapter presents the literature related to digital nomadism and minor destinations. Part two outlines the methodology for data collection and analysis, also reporting the preliminary interview findings and the unique characteristics that make the case study particularly interesting. Part three presents the results of the thematic analysis. Finally, the last section discusses the study's conclusions, its limitations, and some suggestions for future research.

2. Part 1: Literature Review

2.1 The phenomenon of digital nomadism

¹ Inner areas can generally be considered the opposite of urban areas—that is, areas lacking continuous urban settlement, typically characterized by small towns and villages (Field et al., 2014; Meneghello & Mingotto 2018).

The term digital nomad, introduced by Makimoto and Manners (1997), refers to individuals who, thanks to the widespread availability of mobile and portable technologies, are no longer bound by traditional spatial and temporal constraints in their professional activities, allowing them the freedom to work while traveling.

Compared to traditional nomadism, in which mobility is driven by the need to adapt to natural and climatic conditions or by spiritual/religious purposes, digital nomadism is justified by the desire to adopt a lifestyle centered on improving one's quality of life by leveraging travel as a source of learning and personal development (D'Andrea, 2006; Urmanbetova, 2018). Digital nomadism is further supported by the technological evolution of recent years, which has made portable technology more economically accessible to the general public (Schlagwein, 2018). Following the Covid-19 pandemic, digital nomadism has acquired new meanings and characteristics (Hannonen et al., 2023).

Hannonen (2020) and Luise (2022) identify two components in defining the current phenomenon of digital nomadism: (1) the work component and (2) the lifestyle component. The first identifies the digital nomad as a type of remote worker, described as a knowledge and skills-based professional equipped with digital technologies that allow them to work anytime and anywhere, outside conventional workspaces (Hannonen, 2020). The second element considers the digital nomad as a worker who, through digital technologies, is able to avoid the sedentary nature of office-based work. The freedom to travel enables the digital nomad to immerse themselves in local cultures, thereby enriching their knowledge and skills, and gaining access to experiences they would not otherwise encounter unless living as a temporary resident (Hannonen et al., 2023).

However, it has subsequently been observed—also in light of the evolving nature of the phenomenon—that the concept of digital nomadism is difficult to frame when analyzed solely through the “work” and “lifestyle” lenses (Luise, 2022; Hannonen et al., 2023). Hannonen et al. (2023) identify three additional components: (3) the digital/online component, (4) the tourism and leisure component, and (5) the social component.

The digital and online component is defined as fundamental and essential, as communication tools allow digital nomads to enter a network of relationships and collaborations with clients, colleagues, and employers. The tourism and leisure component refers to studies that define the phenomenon as a form of leisure and slow tourism (Putra & Agirachman, 2016). As temporary residents with increased work flexibility and access to coworking spaces, digital nomads are able to share experiences, knowledge, and skills with both professionals and local communities. This enables them to spend more time interacting with locals, form deeper social connections, and adopt a more relaxed lifestyle—hence the notion of “slow” tourism (Putra & Agirachman, 2016).

Finally, the social component refers to the social ties that digital nomads establish in contexts unrelated to their nationality or culture of origin. By using coworking spaces and hubs, digital nomads cultivate a sense of belonging to a specific movement, connecting with like-minded individuals who share similar experiences (Hannonen et al., 2023).

Beyond the five components outlined above, digital nomadism presents specific characteristics that distinguish it from remote working and workation. Remote working is a broader concept referring to all individuals working remotely, characterized by varying degrees of focus on work and mobility (Cook & Simonovsky, 2020). Digital nomadism places less emphasis on the work dimension and prioritizes the opportunity to pursue more fulfilling personal and cultural experiences (Mancinelli, 2020). Workation, on the other

hand, refers to individuals who are able to combine work and vacation for various reasons. Bassyiouny and Wilkesmann (2023) distinguish workationers from digital nomads based on the significance attributed to travel: for workationers, mobility is not an essential component and they typically reside in the place where they work and have family ties, whereas for digital nomads, travel is central and their lifestyle involves frequent relocation from one place to another.

2.2 Digital nomads and minor destinations

The phenomenon of digital nomadism became more widespread in Europe, and specifically in Italy, following the restrictive measures introduced to contain the Covid-19 pandemic. Increased work flexibility and new ways of organizing business activities have led to the evolution of practices such as smart working and digital nomadism, which are now increasingly recognized and supported at both national and EU levels (AIND, 2023; Federal Public Service Social Security, 2023). The pandemic also impacted tourist flows, contributing to the development of a particular type of tourism defined as "proximity tourism," centered on the rediscovery of the potential of so-called "minor destinations" and inner areas, which are capable of promoting a sustainable tourism offer (Messina & Tregnaghi, 2023).

Inner areas can generally be considered the opposite of urban areas—that is, areas lacking continuous urban settlement, typically characterized by small towns and villages (Field et al., 2014). In Italy, inner areas have been defined within the framework of the National Strategy for Inner Areas (SNAI) using three main criteria: levels of education, healthcare, and mobility. SNAI is a place-based policy that aims to implement development strategies in inner areas that are coherent at the national level, promoting the direct involvement of local authorities, with the objective of making these areas more attractive and resilient while addressing their structural challenges (Barca et al., 2014; Department for Cohesion Policies and the South, 2025).

Inner areas are particularly affected by depopulation and an ageing population (Cipolloni, 2021; Tommasini & Pizzolati, 2023), as well as by poverty (Bianchino et al., 2022). These effects are the result of national development strategies implemented from the post-World War II period until the 1990s, during which public investment was largely directed toward industrialized areas (Caloffi & Serra, 2022). This approach incentivized the development of central areas while sacrificing more peripheral ones, which were primarily exploited as reserves of resources and labor (Barca, 2014; Ivona et al., 2021; Caloffi & Serra, 2022). As a result, a process of marginalization took place in these minor destinations, manifesting in several effects: population decline; demographic ageing; reduced employment opportunities; and a quantitative and qualitative decline in the availability of local public services (Ivona et al., 2021).

According to the Italian National Institute of Statistics (ISTAT), inner areas, compared to urban areas, have three main strengths which, if properly leveraged, could become a significant driver for tourism and territorial development (ISTAT, 2022):

1. Landscape and environment: Inner areas are predominantly located in hilly and mountainous regions, rich in protected areas and valuable landscapes.
2. Culture and heritage: The historical and cultural heritage preserved in inner areas contributes to reinforcing the identity of these places.

3. Small business: Agricultural activities, artisan production, and typical food and wine products found in inner areas—if properly enhanced—can represent a key asset for diversifying the tourism offer.

The tourism dimension of inner areas is reflected in the concept of minor tourist destinations, which are characterized by a limited number of visitors, a rural setting, under-recognized historical-artistic heritage, and cultural initiatives aimed at promoting local traditions. The tourism offer is typically based on small-scale facilities integrated into the landscape—such as bed and breakfasts, agritourisms, and *alberghi diffusi* (Confalonieri, 2011)²—providing a quiet and authentic environment, far from urban chaos, allowing visitors to enjoy a genuine and immersive experience (Calzati, 2013; Lonardi et al., 2023).

2.3 Minor destinations and digital nomadism

Considering the phenomenon of digital nomadism, it is necessary to examine its potential and opportunities, as well as the challenges that minor destinations must address in hosting these temporary visitors.

Regarding its potential and opportunities, these areas represent a possible destination for digital nomads. Several studies have shown that a portion of digital nomads prefer territorial contexts that are not overly urbanized, offer a lower cost of living, and provide suitable spaces for carrying out their professional activities (Putra & Agirachman, 2016; AIND, 2023; Tsvetcoff et al., 2024).

Moreover, digital nomadism can generate positive economic and social impacts for inner areas by promoting new models of local development. According to the Italian Digital Nomads Association, digital nomads can bring benefits to inner areas by diversifying tourism through longer stays (AIND, 2022) and by promoting local territories via social media (AIND, 2023). They also contribute to economic growth by supporting local small and medium-sized enterprises and fostering innovation (AIND, 2023; Floričić & Pavia, 2021). In addition, further positive effects can be seen in terms of territorial development—through the creation of authentic experiences and tailored services for digital nomads—and demographic revitalization, by attracting young people and helping reduce the digital divide (AIND, 2023; Flatio, 2023).

Nonetheless, inner areas present various critical issues in relation to digital nomadism. These include a lack of appropriate services and infrastructure, poor internet connectivity (AIND, 2023; Lonardi et al., 2023), the absence of rental contracts suitable for temporary residents (AIND, 2023), and cultural integration challenges, often hindered by language barriers and the temporary nature of the phenomenon (Gupta et al., 2024; Pinilla et al., 2008). Additionally, the promotion of minority languages requires careful management to avoid processes of commodification or potential linguistic threats (Lonardi, 2022). Finally, a synergy between public institutions, private actors, and local communities is essential to improve services and enhance the attractiveness of these territories (Lonardi et al., 2023).

² The *albergo diffuso* (literally “scattered hotel”) is a hospitality model originating in Italy, where guest accommodations are distributed across multiple buildings within a town or village. Unlike a traditional hotel, the rooms and facilities (such as reception, dining, and common areas) are located in separate structures (typically within walking distance) (Confalonieri, 2011). The *albergo diffuso* model is a widespread phenomenon across Southern (Camarata, 2025), Central, and Northern Italy (Panaccia & Leoni, 2019; Presenza et al., 2019), and it exemplifies a distinctive form of Italian hospitality.

With the aim of further exploring the development opportunities of inner areas and the challenges linked to the phenomenon of digital nomadism, the present study focuses on a specific case study.

3 Part 2: Methodology

3.1 The case study

The research interest in exploring development opportunities in Italian inner areas stems from two recent policy initiatives aimed at supporting these regions: the National Strategy for Inner Areas (SNAI) (see above) and the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (PNRR). The latter includes the regeneration of small cultural sites and aims to enhance the cultural and religious heritage of inner areas, seeking to balance tourist flows between central and peripheral regions.

The area selected for analysis is the Valle dei Mocheni, a minor destination located within the broader Valsugana tourist area (Trentino, Italy). This area was chosen as a case study for three main reasons:

1. The Valle dei Mocheni is the recipient of significant public investment through the PNRR and the project “Palù del Fersina – The Strength of a Minority: Revitalization of a Germanic Village South of the Alps,” which includes infrastructure redevelopment and tourism promotion initiatives, with a specific focus on *albergo diffuso* and the enhancement of local traditions (Messina & Tregnaghi, 2023).
2. The Valle dei Mocheni presents environmental, social, and cultural characteristics aligned with the preferences of digital nomads (Leali, 2019; AIND, 2022; Tsvetcoff et al., 2024). It is a mountainous area characterized by slow rhythms and quietness; it is located near the provincial capital and the third-largest urban center in the region; and it offers unique cultural elements as a German-speaking linguistic island, potentially attractive for intercultural exchange with tourists and temporary visitors.
3. The Valle dei Mocheni is part of the Valsugana tourist destination, which is distinguished by its commitment to sustainability and urban regeneration. Valsugana was the first destination in the world to be certified as a sustainable destination in 2019, according to the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC-D) criteria (www.visitvalsugana.it/en/sustainability/). The area also hosts several urban regeneration initiatives, such as the “Alta Valsugana Smart Valley” project, which aims to convert underutilized spaces into coworking facilities for both residents and visitors.

In addition to the distinctive features mentioned above, the choice to analyze the Valle dei Mocheni as a case study was also guided by consultations with key local stakeholders. The opportunity to explore the issue of digital nomadism in this specific area required an ex-ante assessment of the enabling factors that could attract this target group. As will be illustrated in the following section, the preliminary interviews confirmed the presence of such factors and the feasibility of conducting field research.

Given the unique characteristics of the Valle dei Mocheni and the exploratory nature of the research, the study focuses on analyzing the perceptions of local stakeholders regarding digital nomadism and identifying tourism and territorial development opportunities that may emerge, considering the area’s distinctive cultural context. The first research question is therefore defined as follows:

RQ1: What are the perceptions of public and private stakeholders involved in the tourism development of the Valle dei Mocheni regarding digital nomadism, given the valley's unique identity and cultural heritage?

The limited provision of services, which is a common feature of inner areas and often insufficient to meet the needs of both digital nomads and residents (see Section 2), forms the basis for the second research question:

RQ2: What challenges, according to the stakeholders of the Valle dei Mocheni, must be addressed to effectively attract and accommodate digital nomads?

Finally, considering the common issues of depopulation and tourism seasonality in these areas, the third research question explores whether investment in digital nomadism might mitigate such negative effects:

RQ3: Can investment in temporary residents and digital nomadism help reduce the high levels of seasonality and depopulation in the valley's territories? If so, through which tools or strategies?

3.2 Data Collection

For data collection, in-depth interviews were conducted with public and private stakeholders involved in the tourism and territorial development of the Valle dei Mocheni. Hannonen et al. (2023) and Boluda Chova and Ehrlich-Treuenstätt (2023) carried out interviews aimed at understanding the perceptions and impressions of respondents regarding the topic under investigation. Similarly, in this study, semi-structured interviews were chosen to allow respondents to speak freely, guided by an interview protocol.

A thematic analysis was subsequently conducted on the interviews (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to examine and compare stakeholder opinions and perceptions and to identify the key themes emerging from the data.

Interview participants were identified through desk analysis with the aim of mapping actors involved in the tourism and territorial development of the valley. In some cases, snowball sampling was adopted, following a specific question posed to the interviewees, in order to verify the completeness of the initial mapping and, if necessary, expand the number of respondents.

Key public and private stakeholders engaged in the tourism and territorial development of the valley were selected to ensure a balanced representation of both categories' interests and perspectives.

Among the main topics addressed with public stakeholders were their perceptions of the digital nomadism phenomenon, as well as the institutional actions and strategies to be undertaken to attract this market segment. In contrast, interviews with private sector actors focused on their perceptions of the phenomenon and on the provision of services tailored to digital nomads.

Two preliminary interviews were conducted (as referenced in the previous section), followed by nine scheduled interviews with local administrations and private stakeholders in the Valle dei Mocheni. The interviews were conducted between May 2024 and January 2025. Two stakeholders contacted did not agree to participate. The final list of interviewees, the dates of the interviews and the duration of each interview are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1: Overview of the interviews

#	Category of stakeholder	Interview date	Interview duration
1	DMO (Preliminary interview)	22/05/2024	00:23:00
2	Advanced Training School (Preliminary interview)	10/10/2024	00:40:15
3	Public Entity	15/10/2024	00:38:15
4	Public Entity	21/10/2024	00:44:20
5	Foundation ETS	08/11/2024	00:28:45
6	Cultural Institute	15/11/2024	00:36:10
7	Association	21/10/2024	00:15:05
8	Public Entity	26/11/2024	00:25:50
9	Non-profit Organization (ONLUS)	14/01/2025	00:23:25

Source: authors' own elaboration

The interviews, conducted with the informed consent of the participants, were recorded and subsequently fully transcribed in order to facilitate the analysis of the collected data. A thematic analysis was then carried out. Thematic analysis enables the identification, analysis, and representation of patterns or emerging themes within qualitative data, and is particularly flexible with respect to different research questions and types of data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The full interview transcripts were manually coded with the aim of identifying recurring topics and particularly significant insights. By combining and comparing the themes that emerged, it was possible to reconstruct the perceptions and opinions of the interviewees regarding the phenomenon under investigation.

The following section presents the preliminary interviews, which were conducted to assess the relevance of the case study in relation to the research objectives.

3.3 International Focus Group Preliminary interviews

The preliminary interviews were conducted to assess whether the case of the Valle dei Mocheni could be considered suitable for the research objectives.

The first interview, carried out with the director of the Valsugana DMO, revealed that the destination intends to invest in the development of digital nomadism. Specifically, plans include the creation of coworking spaces and the renovation of underused and/or abandoned buildings, with the aim of attracting digital nomads to the area. This strategy would generate two positive effects in terms of the social sustainability of tourism in both Valsugana and the Valle dei Mocheni. First, it would promote deseasonalization, as the flow of temporary visitors would occur outside the traditional peak tourism periods (which currently concentrate in the summer). Second, it could attract new visitors potentially interested in relocating to the area, thus offering a potential response to the issue of depopulation.

The interview also identified some geographically relevant areas for studying the phenomenon, including the Valle dei Mocheni. These areas, in fact, experience both tourism seasonality and depopulation and, at the same time, contain public buildings suitable for conversion into community spaces.

The second preliminary interview, conducted with the coordinator of an Advanced Training School of the region (Trentino School of Management), aimed to clarify the PNRR project that involves one of the four municipalities of the Valle dei Mocheni (Palù del Fersina). This municipality, with about 160 inhabitants, is attempting to counteract depopulation and promote the Mòcheno culture (Agenzia del Lavoro della Provincia Autonoma di Trento, 2022). Although PNRR funds are allocated solely to this municipality, the project involves the other three municipalities in the valley, thanks to collaboration between local public and private stakeholders (Messina & Tregnaghi, 2023). The initiative focuses on building renovation and landscape enhancement. It promotes electric mobility, digitalization, and the development of infrastructure for outdoor tourism. In the field of tourism and territorial development, three specific actions are being implemented. The first concerns the protection and promotion of linguistic minorities. The goal is to make Palù del Fersina the cultural reference point of the Valle dei Mocheni by revitalizing the historic center and restoring buildings intended for exhibition spaces dedicated to Mòcheno culture and other minority languages. The second action focuses on defining an outdoor tourism product. This project, currently underway, aims to enhance the valley's natural assets and integrate them with existing tourism offerings. The third action relates to *albergo diffuso*. Provincial grants have been allocated for the renovation of mountain huts and rural buildings for tourist use, as well as hospitality training for property owners.

Finally, the interview highlighted that the municipal administration is currently developing a coworking space within the town hall premises for the benefit of residents.

Based on the findings from the preliminary interviews, the Valle dei Mocheni was identified as a suitable case study area to investigate tourism and territorial development opportunities in an inner region with strong potential to attract digital nomads.

The subsequent section illustrates the results of the thematic analysis, organized according to the macro-themes that emerged during the coding process.

4 Part 3: Research Results

4.1 Perception of the phenomenon

The phenomenon of digital nomadism was correctly identified by the mayors and local administrations interviewed, who highlighted both its potential and the specific characteristics of the target group. Among private sector actors, in some cases it was necessary to clarify certain distinctive features of the phenomenon, which in turn fostered a more in-depth discussion of the topic.

According to respondents, the valley—due to its location and proximity to major destinations in Trentino—represents an attractive territorial context for digital nomads, as it allows them to combine professional activity with the exploration of new places. One interviewee noted that some visitors had already combined work-related and leisure purposes during their stay in the valley:

“There have already been cases [...] in which people chose [to stay in the mountain huts, Ed.] not only for tourism but also for long periods of work. We had a few

examples, particularly in Sant'Orsola, of Norwegian and German visitors who, especially in the spring and summer seasons, stayed in our huts [...] enjoying a holiday, as you mentioned, while working” (18).

However, some more critical positions on the phenomenon were also recorded. In particular, one mayor noted that the phenomenon does not represent something new in the valley, especially in terms of the length of stay, referring instead to the traditional practice of *villeggiatura* (extended holidaying). Among private stakeholders, certain doubts emerged regarding the fragmented nature of the phenomenon. Specifically, it was noted that the digital nomad lifestyle is accessible only to certain professionals—such as IT specialists—whose work does not require a constant physical presence. Furthermore, the temporal discontinuity of the practice was also emphasized.

4.2 Hosting digital nomads in the valley

With regard to the reception of visitors in the valley, both public and private respondents agreed that no particular dynamics of integration between non-residents and the Mòcheno community were observed, with the exception of some resentment toward irresponsible behavior by certain tourists, which was perceived as harmful to the landscape and environment. Among private stakeholders, it also emerged that some visitors who own second homes in the area tend to show a lack of interest in the local culture and traditions—an attitude that, according to interviewees, does not bring any economic or social benefit to the territory.

Overall, stakeholders emphasized the importance of greater openness of the valley to the outside world. The welcoming of economic operators and/or professionals is considered crucial to ensuring the sustainability of existing economic activities in the area.

4.3 The attractiveness potential of the valley

The Valle dei Mocheni represents a cultural unicum within the broader Valsugana area. According to interviewees, Mòcheno culture and traditions—dating back to the Middle Ages—constitute both an element of attraction and an opportunity for cultural exchange between the Mòcheno community and visitors. Particularly relevant in this context are the promotional activities related to language and culture carried out by the local *Pro Loco* associations and the Istituto Mòcheno, which attract an increasing number of visitors each year.

The natural landscape is another key factor of attractiveness, due to the presence of various trekking and cycling routes leading to scenic viewpoints throughout the valley, as well as to sites of scientific or historical interest. Increasing attention is also being directed toward the development of the wellness sector, which is regarded as a potential area for future enhancement. Lastly, the valley is located in close proximity to several major tourist destinations in the Trentino region.

4.4 Key challenges in positioning the valley as an attractive destination for digital nomads

Although the valley presents attractive potential, these elements are not sufficient on their own to appeal to the digital nomad target group. As highlighted in the literature and confirmed by public and private stakeholders, a destination must offer adequate services tailored to the specific needs of this segment in order to be truly attractive.

First and foremost, the supply of essential services—which interviewees consider limited—needs to be strengthened. In this regard, local municipalities are working to ensure the maintenance and continuity of these services, especially in response to ongoing demographic decline.

The main critical issues identified by stakeholders concerning digital nomads include internet connectivity, coworking spaces, private and public mobility, housing solutions, and the valley's position relative to the rest of Trentino.

The valley's complex morphology negatively affects mobile and internet signal quality. Efforts are currently underway to install additional transmission towers to improve mobile coverage, and to lay fiber-optic cables in the historic centers. These interventions support digital transformation and improve services for both residents and visitors.

Coworking spaces are seen by stakeholders as an opportunity for both residents and digital nomads who are in need of professional work environments. These spaces also facilitate knowledge and skill exchange among professionals. Two coworking spaces are planned in the valley as part of the Alta Valsugana Smart Valley project. While the library of the Istituto Mòcheno could potentially serve as a space for study and community gathering, it is not considered suitable to function as a coworking space.

Regarding mobility, stakeholders acknowledge the excellent road connectivity with Trentino's main urban centers, but point out that public transportation is poorly adapted to the needs of both residents and digital nomads, with limited service especially outside of school hours.

Housing options in the valley are limited, and stakeholders agree that hotels and B&Bs do not represent the most suitable solution for digital nomads. The most appropriate accommodation options for this segment are seen in the mountain huts (*baite*), which emerged during the valley's economic and social development and have now been converted for tourism use. Although not all of them are suitable for digital nomads, these structures offer more flexibility in terms of space and time. However, critical issues remain, such as limited length of stay, suboptimal internet connectivity, and geographic isolation. Both public and private stakeholders agree that although the geographical location of the Valle dei Mocheni is potentially a strength—due to its proximity to major tourist attractions and urban centers—the lack of services raises concerns, especially the risk that the valley may be perceived as merely a "bedroom community."

Private stakeholders additionally highlight the lack of initiatives and events during the winter season, which limits the valley's attractiveness to visitors and potential digital nomads. They also point to the challenges faced by *Pro Loco* associations, which, despite their role in promoting local events, suffer from a lack of generational turnover in leadership and from heavy bureaucratic procedures.

4.5 Opportunities of digital nomadism in the valley

Public administration representatives believe that the interventions currently being implemented in the valley—specifically in terms of digitalization, landscape redevelopment, and building renovation—have the potential to attract both tourists and digital nomads. Integration between the local community and digital nomads is seen as a potential driver of economic revitalization, capable of stimulating entrepreneurship and enhancing resources that are already present in the area but often unrecognized by the residents themselves.

Regarding the potential of digital nomadism to counteract depopulation, some stakeholders expressed a positive view. As one interviewee stated:

“In my opinion, absolutely yes, because the arrival of young or not-so-young individuals who approach the area and perhaps even decide to work within the Valle dei Mocheni [...] this type of work [...] could generate new employment opportunities” (18).

Among private sector actors, additional opportunities were identified, especially from a social perspective. Digital nomadism would allow isolated locations to maintain a “connection with the world”:

“The idea of opening up, of having a graft, a broader perspective, in my opinion creates that kind of positive cross-contamination. Even just meeting someone who’s been to or lived in America, having a chat, sharing a coffee... it’s very interesting” (15).

However, concerns also emerged regarding the length of stay of digital nomads and their willingness to relocate permanently. One mayor pointed out:

“If they [digital nomads, ed.] come, they are certainly welcome. However, they do not have an impact on depopulation. They spend and support the local economy, they sustain food services. But depopulation is linked to stable residence” (14).

Given their inherently “nomadic” nature, their presence is viewed as too temporary to have a structural impact on the depopulation phenomenon. Therefore, it becomes necessary to adopt strategies aimed at extending the average length of stay of these visitors.

5 Part 4: Discussion and Conclusion

Digital nomadism, reflecting recent shifts in work and leisure patterns, has garnered growing interest among scholars and professionals for the opportunities it presents to the regions it touches. This research aimed to explore the phenomenon by analyzing the tourism-territorial supply side, focusing on a specific area with unique socio-economic characteristics: the Valle dei Mocheni—a minor destination featuring unspoiled natural landscapes, a unique language and culture, and recipient of significant national-level funding.

Interviews conducted with local stakeholders revealed that, although the phenomenon is not widely known or clearly identified by all, it presents socio-economic development opportunities for the area. No significant issues emerged related to the reception of visitors by the local community, nor were linguistic or cultural threats reported. However, in order for digital nomadism to become a viable model of sustainable tourism, it is necessary to raise awareness among the local population, helping them to understand the benefits and potential associated with this phenomenon. Interviews revealed some resistance and skepticism among residents, which, if left unaddressed, could become a barrier to welcoming digital nomads in the long term. Results also highlight the need to educate digital nomads to respect the local culture and territory, which in some cases is overlooked—possibly because, as transient visitors, they do not perceive the area as “theirs.”

Our study also highlights the difficulty that minor destinations face in developing and implementing a tourism and territorial development strategy tailored to the needs of digital nomads. Such a strategy is usually not a priority for local governments, which tend to focus in the short term on improving services for residents and tourists, and on counteracting the

“bedroom community” effect common in these areas. Nevertheless, our study suggests that some interventions—although primarily aimed at residents—may also benefit digital nomads, such as the creation of coworking spaces and the installation of signal repeaters and internet infrastructure.

From a long-term perspective, and with a specific focus on the digital nomad target group, the adoption of targeted actions is necessary. Priority should be given to:

a) Housing solutions: Interventions are needed to make *baite* (mountain huts) more accessible and appealing through renovations or improved internet connectivity. However, despite national-level tourism support schemes, these remain difficult to implement due to regulatory constraints.

b) Public mobility: Strengthening transport links to nearby cities is essential, reducing reliance on private vehicles.

c) Tourism offerings tailored to digital nomads: Projects should be designed to facilitate encounters with the local community. These encounters could allow the local community to become more familiar with the phenomenon and benefit from the knowledge and skills digital nomads bring through their professional activities. At the same time, digital nomads would have the opportunity to discover and appreciate the customs and traditions of the host community.

In the long term, these actions could help mitigate issues related to high seasonality and depopulation affecting the valley. Reducing the seasonality of tourist flows—despite the organization of events and community engagement initiatives—remains challenging, as there are currently few tourism products or attractions outside the summer season, even though *Pro Loco* associations have expressed interest in developing wellness and thermal tourism. As for the issue of depopulation, improved access to *baite*, better public transport connectivity, and the organization of events could, over time, encourage digital nomads—particularly those seeking peaceful, nature-based settings—to consider relocating.

Although this study contributes to the literature on sustainable tourism development in minor destinations—particularly by offering useful insights for the management of policies and initiatives targeting digital nomads—some limitations must be acknowledged. The small sample size and exclusive focus on a single case study limit the generalizability of the findings. Future research should therefore focus on different minor destinations, including those with similar characteristics to the current case and those that are also classified as minor, but possess different attributes (e.g., more or less peripheral, higher or lower depopulation risk, etc.). A comparative analysis of heterogeneous cases could help identify different challenges and opportunities based on each destination’s unique features. An additional avenue for research could involve analyzing case studies outside the Italian context, with the aim of further understanding differences and peculiarities in the dynamics of minor destinations and digital nomads across various cultural settings.

REFERENCES:

- Agenzia del Lavoro della Provincia Autonoma di Trento. (2022, February 14). *PNRR e riqualificazione dei borghi: il Trentino si propone con Palù del Fersina e la val dei Mòcheni: Comunicato stampa PAT n. 380 lunedì, 14 febbraio 2022*. Agenzia Del Lavoro Della Provincia Autonoma Di Trento. Retrieved November 1, 2024 from <https://www.agenzialavoro.tn.it/Ultime-Notizie/PNRR-e-riqualificazione-dei-borghi-il-Trentino-si-propone-con-Palu-del-Fersina-e-la-val-dei-Mocheni>
- AIND - Associazione Italiana Nomadi Digitali. (2022). Secondo Rapporto sul Nomadismo Digitale in Italia: Come far diventare l'Italia una destinazione attraente e ospitale per remote worker e nomadi digitali. In www.nomadidigitali.it. https://www.nomadidigitali.it/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Secondo-Rapporto-sul-Nomadismo-Digitale-in-Italia_1.4.pdf
- AIND - Associazione Italiana Nomadi Digitali. (2023). Terzo rapporto sul Nomadismo Digitale in Italia: Come il nomadismo digitale può contribuire a ridurre il divario economico e sociale in Italia, attraendo professionisti e talenti nei piccoli centri e nelle aree interne del nostro Paese Opportunità, vincoli, criticità e proposte. In www.nomadidigitali.it. https://www.nomadidigitali.it/report/AIND_report2023.pdf
- Barca, F., Casavola, P., & Lucatelli, S. (2014). Strategia nazionale per le Aree interne: definizione, obiettivi, strumenti e governance. In <https://www.agenziacoesione.gov.it/>. Materiali UVAL n°31. https://www.agenziacoesione.gov.it/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/MUVAL_31_Aree_interne.pdf
- Bassyouny, M., & Wilkesmann, M. (2023). Going on workation – Is tourism research ready to take off? Exploring an emerging phenomenon of hybrid tourism. *Tourism Management Perspectives*, 46, 101096. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tmp.2023.101096>
- Bencardino F. (2010). In Cresta, A., & Greco, I. (2010). *Luoghi e forme del turismo rurale: Evidenze empiriche in Irpinia*. Franco Angeli.
- Bianchino, A., Madia Carucci, A. M., Tebala, D., & Carbonara, M. (n.d.). Le aree interne tra spopolamento e povertà. In www.istat.it. Retrieved August 10, 2024, from https://www.istat.it/it/files//2022/09/31_ISTAT_MILeS2022_Bianchino_Carbonara_Carucci_Tebala.pdf
- Boluda Chova, J. and von Ehrlich-Treuenstätt, K.T. (2023) *Nomadism without borders: Exploring connections in digital nomad destinations: An ethnographic multiple-case study in Malaysia & Colombia*, Master's dissertation, Jonkoping University.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77-101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- Caloffi A, Serra M (2022) Revisiting Perroux's development poles: The cases of Italy and Brazil. *Instituto de Economica* 425: 1–23.
- Cammarota A., Marino V., Resciniti R. (2025). Residents' perceptions of "sustainable hospitality" in rural destinations: Insights from Irpinia, Southern Italy. *Journal of Destination Marketing and Management*, 35, art. no. 100963. DOI: 10.1016/j.jdmm.2024.100963
- Che cosa sono le aree interne. (2024, February 6). Openpolis. Retrieved August 22, 2024, from <https://www.openpolis.it/parole/che-cosa-sono-le-aree-interne/>
- Cipolloni, C. (2021). Le politiche di contrasto al fenomeno dello spopolamento nelle Aree interne. *ITALIAN PAPERS ON FEDERALISM*, (3), 52-79.

- Confalonieri M. (2011). A typical Italian phenomenon: The "albergo diffuso". *Tourism Management*, 32 (3), pp. 685 – 687. DOI: 10.1016/j.tourman.2010.05.022
- Cook, D. (2020). The freedom trap: digital nomads and the use of disciplining practices to manage work/leisure boundaries. *Information Technology & Tourism*, 22(3), 355–390. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40558-020-00172-4>
- Coppola, E. (2023). I centri storici minori delle aree interne tra valorizzazione e restanza. *BDC. Bollettino Del Centro Calza Bini*, 23(1), 51-61. <https://doi.org/10.6093/2284-4732/10469>
- D'Andrea, A. (2006). Neo-Nomadism: A Theory of Post-Identitarian mobility in the Global Age. *Mobilities*, 1(1), 95–119. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17450100500489148>
- Dipartimento per le politiche di coesione e per il sud. (2025, March 31). *Piano strategico nazionale delle aree interne 2021-2027 (PSNAI) e allegati*. Dipartimento per Le Politiche Di Coesione E per Il Sud. Retrieved June 8, 2025, from <https://politichecoesione.governo.it/it/documenti-ed-esiti-istituzionali/documenti-strategici-di-inquadramento/programmazione-2021-2027/piano-strategico-nazionale-delle-aree-interne-2021-2027-psnai-e-allegati/>
- Federal Public Service Social Security. (2023). *Framework agreement on cross-border telework* [PDF]. https://socialsecurity.belgium.be/sites/default/files/content/docs/en/international/framework_agreement_on_cross-border_telework.pdf
- Field, C. B., Barros, V. R., Dokken, D. J., Mach, K. J., & Mastrandrea, M. D. (A c. Di). (2014). Rural Areas. In *Climate Change 2014 Impacts, Adaptation, and Vulnerability* (pp. 613–658). Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/cbo9781107415379.014>
- Flatio. (2023, August 13). The positive impact digital nomads can have on local communities. Retrieved August 27, 2024, from <https://www.flatio.com/blog/the-positive-impact-digital-nomads-can-have-on-local-communities>
- Floričić, T., & Pavia, N. (2021). LINKAGE OF LEISURE WITH REMOTE WORK AND DIGITAL NOMADISM IN TOURIST ACCOMMODATION FACILITIES. *Tourism in South East Europe . . . /Tourism in Southern and Eastern Europe*, 35, 247–268. <https://doi.org/10.20867/tosee.06.17>
- Gupta, S., Jaiswal, R., & Gupta, S. K. (2024). Digital nomads: a systematic literature review and future research agenda. *Tourism Review*. <https://doi.org/10.1108/tr-12-2023-0869>
- Hannonen, O. (2020). In search of a digital nomad: defining the phenomenon. *Information Technology & Tourism*, 22(3), 335–353. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40558-020-00177-z>
- Hannonen, O., Quintana, T. A., & Lehto, X. Y. (2023). A supplier side view of digital nomadism: The case of destination Gran Canaria. *Tourism Management*, 97, 104744. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2023.104744>
- Internazionale. (n.d.). *Città dormitorio > significato - Dizionario italiano De Mauro*. <https://dizionario.internazionale.it/parola/citta-dormitorio>
- Istituto Nazionale di Statistica. (2022). La geografia delle aree interne nel 2020-vasti territori tra potenzialità e debolezze.
- Ivona, A., Rinella, A., Rinella, F., Epifani, F., & Nocco, S. (2021). Resilient Rural areas and tourism development Paths: A comparison of case studies. *Sustainability*, 13(6), 3022. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su13063022>

- Ivona, A., Rinella, A., Rinella, F., Epifani, F., & Nocco, S. (2021). Resilient Rural areas and tourism development Paths: A comparison of case studies. *Sustainability*, 13(6), 3022. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su13063022>
- Leali, F. (2019, September 25). *Nella Valle dei Mòcheni si entra sottovoce*. Frammenti Rivista. Retrieved September 19, 2024, from <https://www.frammentirivista.it/nella-valle-dei-mocheni-si-entra-sottovoce/>
- Lonardi, S. (2022). Minority languages and tourism: a literature review. *Journal of Heritage Tourism*, 17(3), 342-356.
- Lonardi, S. (2022). Minority languages and tourism: a literature review. *Journal of Heritage Tourism*, 17(3), 342-356
- Lonardi, S., Buffa, F., & Martini, U. (2023). Challenges and opportunities of digital nomadism for minor tourism destinations: the case of Valsugana (Italy). In Sinergie Sima Management Conference-Rediscovering local roots and interactions in management (pp. 213-223).
- Luise, V. (2022). Digital nomad lifestyle: A liminal experience of identity transition. *Sociologia del lavoro: 162, 1, 2022*, 208-228.
- Makimoto, T., & Manners, D. (1997). *Digital Nomad*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Mancinelli, F. (2020). Digital nomads: freedom, responsibility and the neoliberal order. *Information Technology & Tourism*, 22(3), 417-437. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40558-020-00174-2>
- Meneghello S., Mingotto E. (2018). Networks of historic houses as a strategic option for sustainable tourism development: The venetian villas case. *WIT Transactions on Ecology and the Environment*, 227, pp. 197 - 208. DOI: 10.2495/ST180191
- Messina, P., & Tregnaghi, V. (2023). I borghi storici nelle politiche del PNRR: due casi studio a confronto. *Regional Studies and Local Development*, 4 (RSLD VOLUME 4 ISSUE 1), 1-30.
- Ministero della Cultura. (2024, May 14). MIC3 - Investimento 2.1 “Attrattività dei borghi” - PNRR Cultura. PNRR Cultura. Retrieved August 22, 2024 from <https://pnrr.cultura.gov.it/misura-2-rigenerazione-di-piccoli-siti-culturali-patrimonio-culturale-religioso-e-rurale/2-1-attrattivita-dei-borghi/>
- Paniccia P.M.A., Leoni L. (2019). Co-evolution in tourism: the case of Albergo Diffuso. *Current Issues in Tourism*, 22 (10), pp. 1216 - 1243. DOI: 10.1080/13683500.2017.1367763
- Presenza A., Messeni Petruzzelli A., Sheehan L. (2019). Innovation through tradition in hospitality. The Italian case of Albergo Diffuso. *Tourism Management*, 72, pp. 192 – 201. DOI: 10.1016/j.tourman.2018.11.020
- Pinilla, V., Ayuda, M., & Sáez, L. (2008). Rural depopulation and the migration turnaround in Mediterranean Western Europe: A case study of Aragon. *Journal of Rural and Community Development*, 3(1). <https://journals.brandonu.ca/jrcd/article/download/91/33>
- Putra, G. B., & Agirachman, F. A. (2016, August). Urban coworking space: creative tourism in digital nomads perspective. In *Proceedings of Arte-Polis 6 international conference* (pp. 169-178).
- Putra, G. B., & Agirachman, F. A. (2016, August). Urban coworking space: creative tourism in digital nomads perspective. In *Proceedings of Arte-Polis 6 international conference* (pp. 169-178).

- Schlagwein, D. (2018). The history of digital nomadism. *In International Workshop on the Changing Nature of Work (CNOW)* (Vol. 22, p. 1).
- Tomassini, C., & Pizzolati, M. (2023). Il supporto intergenerazionale e le aspettative in vista della perdita di autonomia degli anziani nelle aree interne in Molise. In *Per una Italia che cresca. Diversità, prossimità e generatività dei territori fra transizioni e diseguaglianze* (pp. 193-197). Consiglio Nazionale dell'Economia e del Lavoro (CNEL).
- Tsvetcoff, R., Rui, Patricio, & Alcada, S. (2024). Attracting digital nomads to rural areas: An attempt to bridge. *Sustainable development of territories in contexts of uncertainty*. Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Urmanbetova, Z. (2018). Digital and Historical Nomads. *Humanities Bulletin*, 1(1), 70–81. Retrieved from <https://journals.lapub.co.uk/index.php/HB/article/view/37>