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## The role of digital nomadism in COVID-19 recovery strategy of the tourism sector: Case of Cape Town, South Africa

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### Abstract

*The COVID-19 pandemic travel restrictions affected the tourism sector in South Africa. Digital nomadism is an example of a new strategy that can help the tourism sector recover from the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. This paper explores government strategies for promoting digital nomadism in the tourism sector. The study used the case of the city of Cape Town to analyse secondary data, e.g., government strategies and media reports using thematic analysis. The findings showed that digital nomadism has the potential to promote innovation, new ways of working, and job creation. However, there are also challenges that recovery strategies must address for digital nomadism to be successful, e.g., delays in the introduction of remote work visas and the lack of clarity about digital taxation. The study contributes to the understanding of the benefits and challenges of digital nomadism in the context of developing countries.*

**Key words:** Digital nomadism, COVID-19 pandemic, Tourism sector, Economic recovery, Cape Town.

## 1. Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic affected the tourism sectors of countries across the globe (Abbas, Mubeen, Iorember, Raza & Mamirkulova, 2021; Nisachol & Traore, 2020). In Africa, countries enforced travel restrictions, stay-at-home orders, and border closures to control and prevent the spread of the COVID-19 virus (Dube, 2021; Yaya, Otu & Labonte, 2020). The travel restrictions and closure of borders led to a decline in the inbound and outbound numbers of tourists visiting African countries. The United Nations World Tourism Organization estimated a 74% decline in tourists across the continent because of travel restrictions (UNWTO, 2021). Consequently, there were business losses, business closures, losses of foreign exchange, and a decline in public revenue (Gossling, Scott & Hall, 2021; Rogerson, 2021). These problems contributed to the poor economic performance of African countries.

South Africa implemented a hard lockdown for an extended period (Dube, 2021). Economic activities such as work, learning, travel, and leisure were reduced to minimize the spread of the COVID-19 virus. The lockdown affected the tourism sector severely (sectors that contribute to Gross Domestic Product, create employment opportunities, and generate foreign exchange) (Rogerson & Rogerson, 2021). More recently, the South African government formulated strategies to recover from the effects of COVID-19 pandemic. Some of the recovery strategies include relaxing COVID-19 restrictions, providing stimulus packages to small businesses, and increasing the trading hours of tourism and hospitality organizations. Furthermore, the government is encouraging commercial banks to ease access to loans for small businesses in the tourism sector (Dube, 2021; Rogerson, 2021).

The South African government instituted new strategies for leveraging digital technologies for recovery of the tourism sector. Digital nomadism (a term encapsulating activities related to remote working, freelancing, gig work, and digital entrepreneurship by digital nomads) is one of the strategies that the government is considering for the tourism sector to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic (Claassen, 2021). The concept of digital nomads is generating interest among scholars and policymakers in developed countries of Europe and North America (see Hall, Scott & Gossling, 2020; Gretzel, Fuchs, Baggio, Hoepken, Law, Neidhardt & Xiang, 2020; Foley, Moncada, Mycoo, Nunn, Tandrayen-Ragoobur & Evans, 2022). Nonetheless, insights on digital nomadism in the context of South Africa are missing from the literature. This is creating challenges for scholars and policymakers to understand the phenomenon of digital nomads and to produce comprehensive strategies that are relevant to the context of South Africa. In an attempt to address this knowledge gap, the objective of the current study is to explore government strategies for promoting digital nomadism for tourism recovery against the COVID-19 pandemic. The study explored the influence of technology, economy, culture, health, and digital nomad visas on government strategies for economic recovery in the tourism sector of the Western Cape Province in South Africa.

The rest of the paper is presented as follows: Section 2 summarises the background of the study. Section 3 presents the theoretical perspective of the study. Section 4 outlines the research methodology for the study. Section 5 summarizes the research findings. This is followed by a discussion of the findings. Section 7 is the conclusion.

## **2. Background to the study**

### **2.1. Economic role of South African tourism sector**

The tourism industry is critical to providing travel-related services on a local, regional, and international scale. Examples of tourism sector services are air travel, public transport, accommodation, cruises, restaurants, festivals, sports events, music, arts, and meetings (Rogerson, 2021; Rogerson & Rogerson, 2021). Tourism services are crucial in contributing to job creation, supporting the livelihoods of workers, and economic growth (Garidzirai & Nguza-Mduba, 2020; Ramukumba, 2019). For instance, UNWTO (2021) reported that tourism contributed US\$3.5 trillion (about 4% of the global GDP) to the global economy in 2019 (before the COVID-19 pandemic). Furthermore, the tourism sectors across the globe comprise small and medium enterprises (about 80%) that provide employment opportunities to women and young people (UNWTO, 2021). Disruption of tourism sector operations and services (e.g., by pandemics, wars, political unrest, and terrorism) can have adverse effects on businesses, communities, and government (Abbas, Mubeen, Iorember, Raza & Mamirkulova, 2021; Nisachol & Traore, 2020; Sucheran, 2021).

In South Africa, tourism is one of the important sectors that is contributing towards the development of the country and redressing the legacy of apartheid (Viljoen & Henama, 2017). The sector supports job creation, innovation, generation of government revenue, and community cohesion. Sucheran (2021) reported that the tourism sector provides opportunities for entrepreneurs to start small and medium enterprises (about 750 000 direct jobs in 2019) and develop innovative products and services. The sector is also leading in the adoption of digital technologies to produce new ways of transacting and improve the efficiency and quality of services. For instance, the adoption of sharing digital platforms such as Airbnb (for accommodation), Uber (for travel), UberEATS (for food delivery), etc. (Henama, 2018; Henama & Sifolo, 2017). Furthermore, the tourism sector contributes to the gross domestic product (GDP) through foreign exchange and services. For example, the sector contributed 6.4% towards the GDP of South Africa in 2019 (WTTC, 2022). The tourism sector promotes the heritage and preservation of cultures that are showcased to tourists. The activities bring together groups from diverse communities and races to work together and promote community cohesion (Viljoen & Henama, 2017).

### **2.2. Context of the study: City of Cape Town, Western cape province**

The study focuses on the context of Cape Town, in the Western Cape province of South Africa. The Western Cape Province's main economic activities include agriculture, services, tourism, fishing, and transportation, among others. The city of Cape Town has a population of about 4.7 million people (StatsSA, 2022). The city is home to four universities that are highly ranked among higher education institutions in Africa. Furthermore, the city attracts multinational companies for business process outsourcing and offshore ICT services. Cape Town's innovation ecosystem is vibrant for tech start-ups and digital entrepreneurs due to high-quality ICT infrastructure, luxury accommodation, professional and expert-friendly communities, co-working spaces, business parks, leisure centres, and the availability of investors (Naik & Spocter, 2021; Pollio, 2022; Pollio & Cirolia, 2022). Table 1 summarises the socioeconomic profile of the city of Cape Town.

Table 1: Demographics of Cape Town

| Description                                      | Value       |
|--|-------------|
| Population                                       | 4, 758, 433 |
| Households                                       | 1, 303, 988 |
| Unemployment rate                                | 22.4%       |
| People with access to Internet                   | 80.9%       |
| 4G/LTE coverage                                  | 100%        |
| Sources: (ICASA, 2022; StatsSA, 2022; SEP, 2021) |             |

Cape Town is a popular tourist destination. The tourist attractions of Cape Town include Kirstenbosch Gardens, Table Mountain, Robben Island, Signal Hill, Good Hope, the District Six Museum, the Waterfront, etc. Further, Cape Town hosts sports tourism and events including the Over 50's Cricket World Cup, the Two Oceans Marathon, the Cape Town International Jazz Festival, Cape Town Carnival, etc. (Daniels & Tichaawa, 2021; Garidzirai & Nguza-Mduba, 2020; Hemmonsbey, Tichaawa & Knott, 2021). In addition, Cape Town has rich venues for coastal and marine tourism that offer whale watching, scuba diving, kayaking, and nature cruises (Rogerson, 2021). Thus, the tourism sector in the Western Cape Province provides more employment opportunities, supports government revenue generation, and promotes social cohesion (Daniels & Tichaawa, 2021).

### 2.3. Covid-19 pandemic and tourism in South Africa

Like many countries across the globe, South Africa experienced adverse effects of the COVID-19 pandemic (Dube, 2021; Rogerson, 2021). The first case of COVID-19 in South Africa was reported in March 2020. The country went into lockdown at the end of March 2020. This meant that all economic activities (work, education, internal and cross-border travel, and leisure activities) were reduced, and only essential services were allowed (Dube, 2021). The lockdown affected many businesses and communities, resulting in business closures, job losses, and reduced government revenue (Hamann, Muthuri, Nwagwu, Pariag-Maraye, Chamberlin, Ghai, Amaeshi & Ogbechie, 2020; Rogerson, 2021). The tourism sector was also affected; there was a decrease of 72% in tourists in 2020, and about 154,000 jobs in the tourism sector were lost in the second quarter of 2020 (StatsSA, 2021). In the Western Cape Province, lockdown showed further problems such as youth unemployment, an increase in crime, and gender-based violence (Hamann, Muthuri, Nwagwu et al., & Ogbechie, 2020). The tourism sector was also affected by the severe draught and was under water restrictions (Dube, 2021). The national and provincial governments have developed economic recovery strategies to overcome some of the challenges posed by the effects of lockdown and the COVID-19 pandemic.

### 2.4. Tourism sector recovery strategies against COVID-19 pandemic

The South African government developed a Tourism Recovery Action Plan (TRAP) to address the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic at the national level (DT, 2021). The thematic areas of

the TRAP were "protecting and rejuvenating supply, re-igniting demand and strengthening enabling capability for long term sustainability" (DT, 2021:5). The tourism sector is prioritised in TRAP as one of the critical areas that can support economic growth, job creation, and revenue generation. Among the themes were promoting safety standards, protecting assets and infrastructure for tourism, and reviewing tourism sector policy to support socio-economic development (DT, 2021). The Western Cape government also developed a recovery plan at the provincial level. The goal of the provincial recovery plan is to provide a "whole-of-society response in order to create jobs, foster safe communities, and promote the well-being of all Western Cape residents" (WCRP, 2021). In the statement, the recovery plan was addressing issues related to the COVID-19 pandemic and other socio-economic issues in the province. Table 2 outlines the thematic areas of the two strategies.

Table 2: Themes in Tourism Recovery Action Plan and Ten-point tourism strategy

| National Government recovery plan themes            | Cape Town ten-point tourism strategy                     |
|---|--|
| 1. Norms and standards for safe operations          | 1. Implement Bounce back tourism plan                    |
| 2. Promote domestic demand                          | 2. Support tourism businesses                            |
| 3. Strengthen investment and resources mobilization | 3. Lobby for ease of COVID-19 restrictions               |
| 4. Protecting tourism infrastructure and assets     | 4. Promote domestic tourism campaigns                    |
| 5. Execute global marketing programme               | 5. Supporting partnerships for connectivity and growth   |
| 6. Promote tourism regional integration             | 6. Promoting safety measures for COVID-19                |
| 7. Review tourism sector policy                     | 7. Tourism promotion to key markets via social media     |
|   | 8. Develop new tourism products                          |
|   | 9. Promoting resilient and responsible tourism standards |
|   | 10. Promote schools' tourism programme                   |
| Sources: DT, 2021; TPS, 2021                        |  |

The city of Cape Town also developed a ten-point tourism strategy. In line with the Western Cape Recovery Plan, the ten-point tourism strategy outlined points for improving the status of the tourism sector. Some of the points were: supporting tourism businesses to cope with the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic; promoting domestic tourism so that there was local demand for tourism services; supporting safety standards for COVID-19 and the safety of visitors; developing new tourism products together with local communities; lobbying with the national government to remove some of the COVID-19 restrictions; and supporting the implementation of the provincial economic recovery plan (TPS, 2021). As highlighted in Table 2 above, there was consistency in some of the thematic areas of the two strategies. For instance, promoting the tourism sector, supporting COVID-19 safety standards, developing new products in the tourism sector, and promoting domestic tourism.

The provincial strategy prioritises the creation of remote work visas, which will promote the country as a destination for digital nomads. The provincial government is promoting the

remote work visa as one way to attract digital nomads to Cape Town and support the development and recovery of the tourism sector. The strategies propose amendments to the immigration laws to legally support the remote work visa. This means that legislators will be required to pass laws relating to remote work visas, such as the authorisation of digital nomads and the conditions under which they will work in the country, as well as issues such as business registration and taxation. While there is interest among policymakers both at the provincial and national level, to the knowledge of the author, scholars have not explored digital nomadism in detail in relation to the realities and context of South Africa. This study is motivated to address part of this knowledge gap.

### **3. Theoretical perspective to the study**

#### **3.1. Defining digital nomadism**

The concept of digital nomadism has emerged over the last three decades (e.g., Makimoto & Manners, 1997) as part of the explanation of changes in society because of advances in technology, culture, and economic activities. The concept cut across disciplines and themes related to economy, technology, and culture/leisure studies (Thompson, 2019). The debate on the concept of digital nomads will consider the three dimensions and position the discussion within tourism in the context of developing countries.

Hannonen (2020:2) defines digital nomadism as *"the lifestyle that is developed by these highly mobile, location-independent professionals"*. In this definition, the author describes the patterns of working for professionals that deviate from normal working patterns where professionals work in an office and have to present themselves at work. In this type of lifestyle, a digital nomad is *"a category of mobile professionals who perform their work remotely from anywhere in the world, utilizing digital technologies"* (Hannonen, 2020:2). In another definition, Thompson (2018) describes digital nomads as *"workers whose primary employment takes place on the internet. They are not required to show up in person to conduct their job, thus they are location independent"*. Similarly, Mancinelli (2020:148) defines digital nomads as *"individuals who, taking advantage of portable computing technologies and widespread Internet access, can work remotely from any location and use this freedom to explore the world"*. Nash, Jarrahi, Sutherland, and Phillips (2018:1) define digital nomads as a *"movement that arises from a combination of improved global access to information and information infrastructures, more flexible work arrangements, a preference for travel, as well as adventure and work flexibility among the younger generation of knowledge workers"*. From these definitions, we note that technology, mobility, and flexibility in work patterns play a crucial part in the lifestyle of digital nomads.

#### **3.2. Opportunities and challenges of digital nomadism**

There are advantages of digital nomad lifestyle. Digital nomads develop skills that are in high demand in industries to suit their lifestyle. For instance, digital nomads work as software developers, online marketers, digital marketers, website designers, language tutors, etc. (Nash, Jarrahi, Sutherland & Phillips, 2018; Thompson, 2019; Wang, Schlagwein, Cecez-Kecmanovic & Cahalane, 2020). Some digital nomads explore the route of entrepreneurship and start their own enterprises (Bartosik-Purgat, 2018). Hence, some digital nomads develop

the skills necessary for establishing and managing businesses (Bozzi, 2020; Wang, Schlagwein, Cecez-Kecmanovic & Cahalane, 2019). Another advantage is that digital nomads have flexible working patterns, e.g., they are not confined from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. working hours and do not have to be confined to one geographical location. They can travel to places where there are more opportunities (Nash, Jarrahi, Sutherland & Phillips, 2018). Digital nomads can combine work with leisure, where they can travel to various places and explore different cultures while working (Hemsley, Erickson, Jarrahi & Karami, 2020; Orel, 2019). Ritchter (2020) noted that digital nomads can cope better with stress (technostress as a result of remote working) when they are able to balance work and leisure.

Some of the challenges of digital nomadism are loneliness, double taxation, safety, and precarious work. Digital nomads can be subjected to loneliness when they travel to places away from their home where they may not have relatives and friends accompanying them (Orel, 2019). Issues of taxation can affect digital nomads. For example, when digital nomads stay in one location for a long time, they may be liable to pay both foreign tax and tax in their home country (Hensellek & Puchala, 2021). Some places where digital nomads travel can have less security and limited medical facilities and services, especially in developing countries. These can cause digital nomads to be concerned about their safety. Another challenge is that digital nomadism is perceived as a precarious work where digital nomads are subjected to poor working conditions and short-term contracts with no benefits such as retirement and health insurance packages (Wang, Schlagwein, Cecez-Kecmanovic & Cahalane, 2020). Understanding the benefits and challenges is crucial, especially for policymakers, so that digital nomadism strategy can mitigate some of the challenges.

### **3.3. Conceptualizing the influences of digital nomadism**

The study attempted to conceptualise digital nomadism in the context of tourism economic recovery. The study selected five areas that can be considered crucial to explaining and understanding the role of digital nomadism in supporting economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic in the tourism sector in the context of developing countries. The five areas are technology, economy, culture, digital nomad visa, and health (see Table 1). To elaborate, the five areas summarised in the subsequent paragraphs.

Related to technology, digital nomads take advantage of the Internet, mobile technologies, cloud computing, portable hardware, cloud-based software, and online platforms (Nash et al., 2018; Ritchter, 2020). These technologies support digital nomads' ability to work remotely from any location, communicate, and collaborate with others and employers (Wang, Schlagwein, Cecez-Kecmanovic & Cahalane, 2019). The technologies, in a way, facilitate the lifestyle of digital nomads, where they are able to take up work while they travel and explore different cultures. Travel for digital nomads is part of tourism because it allows them to move to locations with work opportunities and leisure while working (Hannonen, 2020; Hemsley, Erickson, Jarrahi, & Karami, 2020).



Table 3: Operationalization of the influences of digital nomadism

| Category           | Examples of requirements or factors to consider in strategies  | References  |
|--------------------|--|---|
| Technology         | Internet connectivity, coworking spaces, Tech survey, Digital Skills, Remote working, or telework.   | Nash, Jarrahi, Sutherland & Phillips 2018; Ritchter, 2020 |
| Economy            | Employed/Self-employed, Services/consumption, Cost of living, Minimum income, Contribution, Production, Products, Precarious work/Work life.   | Bozzi, 2020; Tyutyuryukov, & Guseva, 2021                 |
| Culture            | Lifestyle, Leisure, no limit of physical location on the move, Adventurous, Entrepreneurial/Risk taking, Marital status (single), Age (30-40 years or above 65 years/retired), Attitudes towards foreigners. | Bartosik-Purgat, 2018; Orel, 2019; Krakat, 2021           |
| Health             | COVID-19 pandemic restrictions, Well-being, Mobility/carriers, Loneliness.   | Chevtava & Denizci-Guillet, 2021;                         |
| Digital nomad visa | Permission to work/start a business, Taxation, Terms of Visa, Minimum income, Relocation incentives, Business registration, and business incentives.   | Tyutyuryukov & Guseva, 2021; Hensellek & Puchala, 2021    |

The mobility of digital nomads can be influenced by the host countries. Good digital infrastructure in the host country can support the activities of digital nomads. For instance, with high-quality internet connectivity (e.g., broadband and fiber networks) that can support remote working, virtual collaboration, and cloud data storage. Using the Internet, digital nomads are able to access applications for performing their business activities, storing information about their business, and performing other business activities crucial for their work, including Internet banking and online payments for services, e.g., visa applications, business registration in host countries, applications for bank accounts, and booking for accommodation (Nash, Jarrahi, Sutherland & Phillips 2018). Furthermore, co-working spaces (with access to digital technologies) can support both Indigenous entrepreneurs and digital nomads to collaborate in product or service development. Co-working spaces also provide opportunities for digital nomads to meet other people, including investors, and present their business ideas. Some of the facilities in the co-working spaces include free access to Wi-Fi or short-term office spaces with shared facilities (Chevtava & Denizci-Guillet, 2021; Hemsley, Erickson, Jarrahi & Karami, 2020; Orel, 2019).

The economy of the country plays a part in the promotion of the lifestyle of digital nomads (Wang, Schlagwein, Cecez-Kecmanovic & Cahalane, 2020). Production and consumption of products and services can determine work opportunities for digital nomads. The production and consumption of products and services can influence the type of work that digital nomads engage in. Digital nomadism challenges work patterns where employers have control over the working times, patterns, and preferences of workers. Digital technologies are empowering digital nomads to choose the lifestyle that they prefer, e.g., to work remotely on a temporary basis, maintain their own pensions and health insurance, and explore opportunities for travel and learning other cultures (Bozzi, 2020; Wang, Schlagwein, Cecez-Kecmanovic & Cahalane, 2020). Thus, digital nomads support a neoliberal model of economy

that gives more power to individuals as consumers and to individuals who are relying less on government welfare programs. Such economies concentrate on the expansion of markets and competition for services and products (Peck & Tickell, 2002; Smith, 2012). The economic arrangements can promote innovation and the development of new products and services that can compete with other products on the market and create employment opportunities (Bartosik-Purgat, 2018; Thompson, 2018). However, the choices that digital nomads make have implications for economies, e.g., where to invest, types of businesses, and type of lifestyle (Bozzi, 2020; Hermann & Paris, 2020). In cases where the working population is small and has a younger population with a precarious work lifestyle (e.g., digital nomads), governments may experience challenges in building a tax base to support welfare systems for the aged and vulnerable members of communities (Eichhorst & Rinne, 2017; Rahayu, Kusumastuti & Puspitosari, 2022).

Some authors (e.g., Nash, Jarrahi, Sutherland & Phillips, 2018; Hensellek & Puchala, 2021) have suggested that digital nomadism is suitable for people within the age of 30 to 40. It is assumed that people within this age group are not married and do not have family responsibilities like looking after young children. They can travel from one location to another without the need to maintain child care and education. Similarly, people over 65 years old who have retired can participate in digital nomadism, where they can establish businesses and relocate to areas where there are more opportunities to grow their businesses (Wang, Schlagwein, Cecez-Kecmanovic & Cahalane, 2019). In some ways, digital nomads are eager to learn about the cultures and values of the communities to which they travel (Zaman, Aktan, Qureshi, Bayrakdaroglu & Nawaz, 2021). Digital nomads also organise themselves and establish communities where they work and collaborate while maintaining their independence (Chevtaeva & Denizci-Guillet, 2021; Hemsley, Erickson, Jarrahi & Karami, 2021).

The culture of the host countries can also affect the activities of digital nomads. Zaman, Aktan, Qureshi, Bayrakdaroglu, and Nawaz (2021) suggest that tourism depends on human-to-human interactions, and culture forms part of this process. Tourists consider culture when choosing a tourist destination. For instance, the culture towards foreigners, whereby the local communities welcome foreigners, is crucial for digital nomadism. Local communities can allow the digital nomads to establish businesses and support some of their activities (Kratat, 2021; Krakat, 2021b). The local communities can benefit from employment opportunities, income generation through hosting digital nomads (e.g., providing accommodation and transport services), and skills development when collaborating in business activities in co-working spaces (Nash, Jarrahi & Sutherland, 2021).

Some governments have initiated digital nomad visas or remote working visas to attract skilled professionals to work or start business and support their local industries, e.g., the ICT sector and tourism sector (Hermann & Paris, 2020; Gadzo, 2020a; 2022b). Examples of countries that have digital nomad visas or temporary remote working visas are Greece, Spain, Croatia, Montenegro, Estonia, and Iceland (Gadzo, 2022a). A digital nomad visa gives permission to digital nomads to travel to host countries alone or with their families. Disclosure of income, possession of health insurance, and proof of business registration are some of the requirements for a digital nomad visa. The duration of the digital visa varies, for example, some are for 3 months or 6 months, while others are for up to a year. The governments are

also providing tax rebates and business incentives (e.g., local business registration and support for opening business bank accounts) to ease the process of operating a business in the host country.

Health is considered one of the most crucial factors for digital nomads. With the emergence of COVID-19 pandemic, countries have set preventive measures to control the spread of the virus (Ritchter, 2020; Wang, Schlagwein, Cecez-Kecmanovic & Cahalane, 2020). In some cases, the preventive measures limit travel between countries and regions. This can affect the mobility of digital nomads, as they may fail to travel to areas that have more opportunities. There are also potential health risks for digital nomads when traveling to areas that have high cases of COVID-19. Hence, travel health insurance premiums have become expensive because of the COVID-19 pandemic (Richter & Richter, 2020). Some people perceived that digital nomads were carriers of the COVID-19 virus (Chevtaeva & Denizci-Guillet, 2021). The result of limited travel for digital nomads is a loss of income in the tourism sector. Furthermore, there are losses in income for businesses that provide services to digital nomads, e.g., accommodation and hospitality. Longer stays in one geographical region are affecting the tax status of digital nomads. In some cases, the digital nomads are charged residential tax because they stay so long in the country (Tyutyuryukov & Guseva, 2021).

#### **4. Research methodology**

The objective of the study was to analyse strategies for promoting digital nomadism for tourism recovery against the COVID-19 pandemic. Qualitative research fitted well with the purpose of the study (Patton, 2013). The phenomenon of digital nomads was relatively new in the context of South African tourism sector. Hence, the study was exploratory in nature (Kalu & Bwalya, 2017).

Purposeful selection was used to select archival data for the study. Only data that was relevant to the study was selected (Etikan, Musa & Alkassim, 2015). The data include government documents, e.g., national and provincial strategies on tourism, speeches from government officials, and the COVID-19 recovery plan. These were sourced from national and provincial government websites. We include media reports from online media websites to improve the diversity of views on the topic of digital nomads (Patton, 2013). The online news websites were searched using the following terms: “digital nomadism,” “remote work visa” and “digital nomads.” Table 4 summarises the list of documents analysed in the study.

Table 4: Summary of documents used in the study

| ID   | Description of the document(s)   | Source |
|--|--|--------|
| D#1  | Western Cape Recovery Plan – March 2021  | WCG    |
| D#2  | City of Cape Town ten-point tourism strategy - 2021                                  | WCG    |
| D#3  | Western Cape Government submission on the Draft Remote Working Visa - 2021           | WCG    |
| D#4  | Western Cape Broadband Implementation Plan - 2011                                    | WCG    |
| D#5  | Sector digital disruption impact assessment - 2017                                   | WCG    |
| D#6  | State of Province Address – Western Cape 2021  | WGC    |
| D#7  | Tourism satellite account for South Africa, final 2017 and provisional 2018 and 2019 | TD     |
| D#8  | Tourism 2021   | SSA    |
| D#9  | The state of ICT sector Report in South Africa 2020                                  | ICASA  |
| D#10   | The state of ICT sector Report in South Africa 2021                                  | ICASA  |
| D#11   | Local online media reports   | ON     |
| <p><b>Key:</b><br/>           ICASA = Independent Communications Authority of South Africa (<a href="http://www.icasa.org.za">www.icasa.org.za</a>)<br/>           SSA = Statistics South Africa (<a href="http://www.statssa.gov.za">www.statssa.gov.za</a>)<br/>           DT = Department of Tourism (<a href="http://www.tourism.gov.za">www.tourism.gov.za</a>)<br/>           WCG = Western Cape Government (<a href="http://www.westerncape.gov.za">www.westerncape.gov.za</a>)<br/>           ON= Online news articles (<a href="http://www.destination.investcapetown.com">www.destination.investcapetown.com</a>, <a href="http://www.infoq.com">www.infoq.com</a>, <a href="http://www.iol.co.za">www.iol.co.za</a>,<br/> <a href="http://www.businessstech.co.za">www.businessstech.co.za</a>, <a href="http://www.capetown.travel">www.capetown.travel</a>, <a href="http://www.mybroadband.co.za">www.mybroadband.co.za</a>, <a href="http://www.wesgro.co.za">www.wesgro.co.za</a>)</p> |  |        |

The selected documents were analysed using content analysis. Steps of content analysis (Erlingsson, & Brysiewicz 2017) were followed. The process began with reading all articles to gain a general understanding of the ideas of digital nomadism in the context of South Africa and Cape Town in particular. The second step was rereading the documents and noting the text that was interesting and relevant to the study. The text was assigned codes to represent its short meaning. The codes were later grouped together to form categories. The categories were also grouped into themes. The steps were repeated, and at the end, a report was produced to address the objectives of the study (Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2017).

## 5. Summary of research findings

This section summarises the research findings from data analysis. The recovery strategy addressed ten areas and was categorised into three themes, summarised as follows:

- **Promoting the tourism business environment:** the city of Cape Town planned for a better business environment that would be ideal for organisations operating in the tourism sector. The aim was to resume trading and ensure the long-term operations of the businesses. The city had planned to offer financial support to struggling businesses and promote services via digital platforms (D#1; D#2).

- **Easing of some of the COVID-19 restrictions:** the city of Cape Town also planned to lobby for the easing of COVID-19 restrictions with the national government so that tourists could be allowed to visit the city. In addition, certain recreational activities in the tourism sector need to be allowed so that businesses can start offering their services. (D#1; D#2)
- **Tourism development:** the city of Cape Town planned to promote the development of tourism by introducing tourism in schools, running media promotion campaigns, and introducing new products. One of the new products was remote working, which could attract digital nomads and local visitors to Cape Town. (D#1; D#2; D#3)

The three thematic areas in the ten-point plan were perceived to be important in the development and recovery of the tourism sector. Furthermore, there was discussion about improving the sector's services, such as remote work, to attract more tourists, including digital nomads, in order to boost the local economy through income and job creation.

The three thematic areas highlighted above were related to plans at the strategic level of the provincial government. We explored further the thematic areas that emerged from our analysis: technology, economy, culture, health, and digital nomad visa. These are summarised in the subsequent subsections.

### 5.1. Technology

Reliable digital infrastructure is one of the facilities that can support digital nomads in choosing a particular tourist destination. Our analysis revealed that the city of Cape Town had adequate digital infrastructure that could support the remote working and the lifestyle of digital nomads.

Cape Town had a high-speed internet connection infrastructure that was linked to internet gateway points and undersea cable landing points. Cape Town was connected to the gateway points by five undersea cables, including the Equiano cable, West Africa cable system, Africa Coast to Europe, 2Africa, East Africa Submarine System, among others. On the middle mile of digital infrastructure, Cape Town had an internet penetration rate of 63% (D#5). Furthermore, the city has about 715 public free Wi-Fi hotspots, more than 25 co-working spaces. There were approximately 25 business accelerator programs in the city, which were run by private organizations and government departments. Multinational ICT companies had a presence in the city and offered ICT offshore services. The ICT multinational companies created opportunities for small ICT companies through business outsourcing and contracts.

The four universities in Cape Town (e.g., University of Cape Town, University of Western Cape, University of Stellenbosch, and Cape Peninsula University of Technology) had local, regional, and international students who participated in learning and research activities. The universities also collaborate with multinational ICT companies to create an ideal environment for promoting the development of new innovations and businesses through collaboration. The entrepreneurial ecosystem of Cape Town supported digital nomads to engage in start-ups that created employment opportunities for local community members. Table 5 summarises themes related to technology that could support digital nomads in remote working.

Table 5: Summary of themes related to technology in nomadism

| Categories                   | Description  | Examples of statements   |
|------------------------------|--|--|
| Broadband                    | Availability of high speed internet connection that can support activities of digital nomads   | <i>“With the Western Cape Government’s (WCG) Broadband Game Changer, we’re striving towards a Western Cape where every resident in every town and village has access to affordable high-speed broadband infrastructure and services, has the necessary skills to effectively utilise this infrastructure, and is actively using this in their day-to-day lives” (D#11)</i> |
| Co-working spaces            | Presence of physical spaces where new business ideas are developed and explored  | <i>“There are over 30 co-working spaces and 715 free Wi-Fi spots in the city of Cape Town alone with many options in the greater Western Cape province” (D#5)</i>  |
| Free Wi-Fi                   | Availability of internet access at no cost to support work of digital nomads and those offering services that promote remote working | <i>“Anyone with a Wi-Fi enabled device can use the service. Devices that are within the coverage area of a hotspot located at any of the 1600 sites in the Western Cape will be able to use the limited free Wi-Fi service.” (D#11)</i>  |
| Accessible and Affordability | Participation of communities and having ICT services that can be used by all   | <i>“There was unanimous support for the prioritisation of the development of a well-functioning, robust, affordable and accessible telecommunications infrastructure for the Province of the Western Cape” (D#4)</i>   |
| Services                     | Work that support the activities of digital nomads and remote working  | <i>“There are over 30 co-working spaces and 715 free Wi-Fi spots in the city of Cape Town alone with many options in the greater Western Cape province” (D#5)</i>  |
| Digital skills               | Ability and knowledge on integrating and use ICT in personal and economic activities   | <i>“The mission is that by 2030, every citizen has access to affordable high speed internet (infrastructure and services), has the necessary skills to be able to effectively utilise this infrastructure” (D#11)</i>  |
| Innovation                   | Creation of unique business solutions that change the existing practices and generate income   | <i>“And creating an environment for the new kinds of service oriented businesses in the local, national and international space” (D#5)</i>   |

While there was adequate ICT infrastructure to support remote work, the last-mile connectivity of the internet was expensive. This meant that providers of other services, e.g., co-working spaces, accommodations, restaurants, etc., could increase their services to cover internet connection costs. This could also affect digital nomads who work remotely.

## 5.2. Economy

Activities and processes related to the production and consumption of goods and services were important in attracting digital nomads to Cape Town as a remote work destination. The provincial government has set goals in place that maintained part of the economic activities in various sectors in Cape Town, including tourism, hospitality, services, health, manufacturing, banking, and business process outsourcing. The city’s economic recovery plan

had three thematic areas for recovery. These were responses for short-term responses (addressing unemployment and business operations), adaptation and recovery for medium-term responses (getting people to get back to work), and stabilization for long-term responses (new means of production for inclusive economic growth). The responses were crucial in ensuring continuity and growth in various economic sectors, including tourism and hospitality, which could support digital nomads and remote workers. Table 6 summarises the thematic areas that were related to the economy.

Table 6: Summary of themes under economy.

| Categories          | Description   | Examples of statements   |
|---------------------|---|--|
| Capital expenditure | Use of budget in infrastructure investment that will support services         | <i>“... the city commits to using its considerable capital budget to stimulate the economy through its planned infrastructure projects. Where possible, the city will limit the leakage of the impact of its spending, by enhancing the local procurement of goods and services.” (D#11)</i> |
| Employment          | Supporting organisations to avoid job losses                                  | <i>“City’s Special Purpose Vehicles (SPV), assisted companies to implement rapid business continuity measures to ensure that as many people as possible remained employed during lockdown” (D#11)</i>  |
| Services            | Supporting hospitality services to reduce cost of rates                       | <i>“The City’s Finance Directorate has made relief measures available to guest houses and certain B&amp;Bs and now allows them to apply to change their property classification due to the impact of COVID-19, which could cut rates bills in half” (D#11)</i>                               |
|                     | Improving efficiency to lower cost of doing businesses                        | <i>“... enhancing business retention efforts, lowering the costs of doing business and transacting with the city to making it easier for expansion and investment to resume again” (D#11)</i>  |
| Information         | Providing timely and accurate information for businesses                      | <i>“The Invest Cape Town website is frequently updated with the latest and most accurate information available to give businesses access to vital information on ongoing interventions and assistance available from national, provincial and local government” (D#11)</i>                   |
| Collaboration       | Different organisations working together to produce unique business solutions | <i>“The Cape Innovation &amp; Technology Initiative (CiTi) works with government, business and society to promote the inclusive growth of the digital economy” (D#11)</i>  |
| Planning            | Having guiding documents for the development of tourism sector                | <i>“Cape Town Tourism (CTT), have formulated plans, embraced technology and used research as a strategic guide, to plot a sustainable future for the City’s vital and vibrant tourism sector” (D#11)</i>   |

As seen in Table 6, the city of Cape Town had a budget for infrastructure investments that would improve the services sector and provide services that would benefit the digital nomads. The strategies for assisting businesses in retaining employees and continuing to provide services were critical to the city's economy. Another interesting economic strategy was improving efficiency in the business environment and reducing the costs of doing business in the city. Information was made available via websites, where businesses and digital nomads could easily find the information used for business decisions. Different organisations in the

city, e.g., government departments and private sector organisations, collaborated on initiatives for improving the digital ecosystem and enhancing participation in the digital economy.

### **5.3. Culture**

Interactions between locals and digital nomads can enhance the exchange of knowledge and values; and foster a deeper appreciation of diversity. Welcoming culture was important for digital nomads to feel safe and in recognition of their contribution to the economy of Cape Town. Hence, the tourism recovery highlighted the importance of culture, as highlighted in the following statement:

*"In the Western Cape as well, the COVID-19 period has underscored the importance of the New Norm culture programme, which aims to shift the culture to one that is more adaptive, stimulates innovation, harnesses data intelligence, and promotes continuous learning and a caring approach. The New Norm culture programme is at the heart of the new way we work, and its aims must direct our planning ethos." (D#1).*

As noted in the statement, the COVID-19 pandemic facilitated change in many areas, including culture. This was important for both the local people of Cape Town to support new ways of living and to create an environment that was ideal for people coming from other parts of the world, including digital nomads. The strategy also supported the culture of learning and caring so that digital nomads could find their way easily in adapting to the culture of the city. The digital nomads would also share their culture through their work and use of the services that were available in the city, including co-working spaces, accommodations, and services for digital business start-ups and other ICT sector companies.

### **5.4. Health**

Health was a critical issue for the City of Cape Town. Health strategies were related to the safety and well-being of all residents of the city. This was captured well in the statement in the provincial recovery plan: "... implementation of the COVID-19 Hot Spot approach that brought together national, provincial, and municipal officials to work with communities in local areas to slow down COVID-19 transmission and respond to humanitarian needs" (D#1). Furthermore, the recovery plan considered people coming to Cape Town for leisure and work, including digital nomads. The tourism recovery emphasised prevention for the spread of the COVID-19 virus while accommodating tourists and guests to visit Cape Town (D#2).

The economic recovery strategies highlighted as preventive measures for the COVID-19 pandemic include vaccination programs, screening, and isolation to ensure that there is no loss of life. Visitors coming to South Africa were required to follow the COVID-19 travel protocol. Some of the safety protocols include showing a proof of vaccination or a COVID-19 test certificate that was valid for 72 hours upon arrival (if not vaccinated), wearing masks, social distancing, and sanitizing. In the event of a positive COVID-19 case, infected people were encouraged to quarantine and isolate in designated facilities. The provincial strategy also highlighted the need for easing the COVID-19 protocol restrictions: "Continue to lobby the national government to responsibly ease the current COVID-19 restrictions that are making it difficult for tourism and hospitality establishments to operate in a financially sustainable



manner." (D#2). Furthermore, there were options for vaccination as indicated in the following statement: "... full recovery of that sector [tourism] is dependent not only on the rate of domestic vaccinations but also on the rate of international vaccinations." (D#1). This meant that there were expectations for tourists visiting Cape Town, including digital nomads, to be vaccinated to ensure the safety and well-being of all.

### 5.5. Digital nomad visa

There was interest in introducing a digital nomad visa to support the economic recovery of the Western Cape from the COVID-19 pandemic. The provincial government presented a proposal to the national government to introduce the remote work visa. The proposal was submitted to the Department of Home Affairs and the Presidency. The existing work visa had restrictions on short-term visitors who wanted to work or establish and operate a business in the country. Some of the restrictions were related to business registration requirements and the duration of the present visa (e.g., 30 days), which may not attract more remote workers and digital nomads. Hence, the Western Cape provincial government requested a review of the Immigration Act of 2002. Table 7 summarises the categories that emerged related to the digital nomad visa.

Table 7: Summary of categories for digital nomad visa

| Categories       | Description   | Examples of statements  |
|------------------|---|---|
| Identity         | Describing the ways of being and lifestyle of remote workers                  | "The digital nomad visa will allow remote workers (people who work or freelance for foreign employers, companies, or even run their own business) to stay in South Africa" (D#11)   |
| Valid passport   | Legitimate travel document that was recognised for entry in the country       | "A passport or travel document valid for no less than 30 days after the expiry of your intended visit" (D#11)   |
| Income           | Demonstration of available income to meet dairy expenses while in the country | "An applicant must provide evidence of employment abroad, as well as a sufficient income from such employment or own business registered abroad" (D#11)   |
| Accommodation    | Arrangement for a place to live while in the country                          | "The province proposed a short-term remote work visa for an initial one-year period, with the option to renew it for an additional two years. The qualifying requirements could include a minimum threshold amount of income or savings, proof of accommodation for at least one year, and proof of travel and health insurance" (D#11) |
| Insurance        | Health insurance to support medical and care expenses while in the country    |   |
| Duration of visa | The expected time that will be spent in the country                           | "... would simply need to make an amendment to Section 11 of the Immigration Act which relates to an extension of visas beyond 90 days for specific activities" (D#11)  |
| Delays           | Delays in legal processes for enacting the remote visa                        | "The Western Cape government sent a comprehensive proposal to government way back in May 2021 and resubmitted it in September 2022 .... We are eagerly awaiting its release" (D#11)   |

As can be seen in Table 7, urgent attention was needed in the Western Cape Province to welcome digital nomads so that they could help address the shortage of skilled personnel and promote the local economy through tourism. There was recognition of digital nomads as being highly skilled and that they could contribute to the economic recovery of the province through their ability to create new businesses: "*Highly skilled foreign workers create more than one job for South African workers on average and contribute significantly to tax revenues and spending in the economy, as well as to productivity improvements and innovation.*" (D#11). This point was important because the country experienced job losses due to the lockdown. Their level of unemployment was high and allowing skilled foreign workers could also be seen as neglecting the local workers' ability to participate in the economic recovery. However, the identity of digital nomads was presented in such a way that they could support the recovery of the tourism sector through job creation.

It was noted that digital nomads were required to demonstrate considerable income as part of their identity and status, as noted in the following statement: "*these travelers could on average spend at least R50,000 per month in the country*" (D#11). They could use their income for accommodation services in the country and participation in recreation activities. Another requirement for the visa was medical insurance that could be used in the event of an emergency. The nomads were required to meet their medical expenses while in the country.

There were delays in the implementation of the digital nomad and remote working visa programs. There are formal processes required for the parliament to pass the immigration bill. However, some stakeholders perceived that the delays were affecting the country's ability to capitalise on digital nomads in the economic recovery.

## **6. Discussion of research findings**

The study set out to explore government strategies for promoting digital nomadism for tourism recovery against the COVID-19 pandemic. The findings showed that the city of Cape Town's tourism recovery strategy concentrated on improving the tourism business environment, easing COVID-19 restrictions, and implementing tourism development initiatives that would improve income generation and create jobs. As part of the initiatives for developing the tourism sector, a remote working visa was proposed to attract tourists, including digital nomads. The assumption was that the digital nomads would help grow the economy through services and job creation. The three areas were precursors to the strategies that would be ideal for digital nomads to be part of the entrepreneurial ecosystem of Cape Town.

The findings also showed that the city of Cape Town has improved ICT facilities and infrastructure that could support remote working, including broadband, co-working spaces, free Wi-Fi, accessible and affordable internet, digital skills, and an innovation environment. The findings were consistent with studies that highlighted the growth of technology hubs that support tech startups in Cape Town (Pollio & Cirolia, 2022; SEP, 2021). Our study revealed a more strategic view of the resources and highlighted the role of the government through its strategy that ensured the potential use of ICT infrastructure to support the recovery of tourism and remote work for local and international tourists, e.g., digital nomads.

The findings also highlight the significance of the economy of Cape Town in the recovery of the tourism sector and the anticipated role that digital nomads can play in a local economy. The city of Cape Town's strategy for recovery measures in place to support capital expenditure, employment, services, information, collaboration, and planning. The measures were important in supporting economic sectors of the city, including tourism and hospitality, which could attract tourists and remote workers in the efforts to boost economic recovery. The findings were consistent with studies that note the significance of local economies in supporting the tourism sector (Henning, 2022; Rogerson & Rogerson, 2021). The current study has demonstrated that the availability of services and continuity of economic activities in other sectors were crucial for the successful recovery of tourism in Cape Town.

Another intriguing point was the recognition of cultural changes as part of the tourism sector's recovery. The findings showed that COVID-19 facilitated change in Cape Town, and digital nomads could also share their culture in the city through interaction with tourism and hospitality service providers in co-working spaces and innovation hubs. Pollio and Cirolia (2022) noted similar findings that the city of Cape Town has a welcoming culture that supports tech start-ups. One of the contributing factors is the role of the provincial government in promoting the city to the global market. Furthermore, the provincial government was driving integration to bridge the urban divides that exist in the city due to the legacy of apartheid using digital technologies (Pollio, 2020).

The findings showed the influence of COVID-19 on economic activities related to tourism. The city of Cape Town had strategies in place to ensure the safety of visitors, and tourism organizations were trained in COVID-19 preventive measures. Hence, digital nomads, as part of the expected visitors to the city, were also required to follow the preventive measures set by the national government. These include showing proof of vaccination or a negative COVID-19 test certificate and following preventive measures. These measures were consistent with studies that outlined safety travel measures during the COVID-19 pandemic (Dube, 2021; Rogerson, 2021; Martin-Gonzalez, Swart & Luque-Gil, 2021).

Interestingly, the proposal for a remote working visa emerged from the city of Cape Town as part of provincial government efforts rather than those of the national government. This may be the reason for the delays because the effort emerged from the middle level of government rather than the top level of government. The findings showed that the proposal highlighted features related to identity, valid passport, income, accommodation, insurance, and duration of the visa. The findings address part of the requirements of a remote working visa or a digital nomad visa in other parts of the world that have similar features (Chevtaeva & Denizci-Guillet, 2021; Gadzo, 2022a; Gadzo, 2022b; Tyutyuryukov & Guseva, 2021). Some of the information that did not emerge in our findings were business registration and tax registration requirements for digital nomads. This can affect the way the government assesses the contribution of digital nomads to the economy.

Our theoretical contribution is the emerging conceptual framework depicted in Figure 1 below. We suggest that technology, economy, culture, digital nomad visa, and health can be viewed in a more holistic way (as closely related) when considering the role of digital nomads in the tourism recovery strategy. We believe that these factors can be a good starting point

when understanding the role of digital nomads in tourism sector recovery strategies, especially in the context of developing countries.

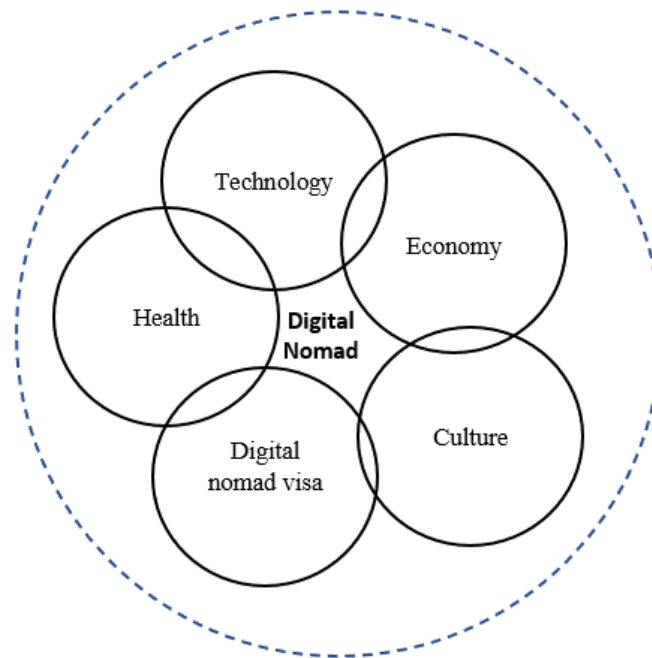


Figure 1: Emerging conceptual framework for the study

The study was without limitations. We did not conduct interviews with stakeholders who may have an interest in digital nomads. However, the secondary data, e.g., the provincial government strategy document on economic recovery and media reports, allowed us to shed light on the new phenomenon that was new to the context of South Africa. Our aim was to explore and generate a better perspective on the topic before embarking on full-scale research (see Bowen, 2007; Ruggiano & Perry, 2019). As a result, this study serves as a foundation for additional research to obtain first-hand information from stakeholders highlighted in the study, such as digital nomads, provincial government officials, tourism and hospitality sector associations, national government officials (e.g., Department of Home Affairs), business innovation hubs, co-working spaces, and ICT multinational companies that use the services of digital nomads. The proposed conceptual framework can be validated in other studies conducted in a similar setting in South Africa. Another area for future research is digital nomad taxation, where strategies and legislation will be assessed to see if they address taxation. Another study can look at the process of how visas are developed in developing countries to unpack and understand the causes of delays and identify areas for improvement. The study makes the following recommendations for practice: (a) Officials from the provincial government can clarify the tax rules for digital nomads to ensure their contribution to the economy is measured and recorded; (b) the provincial government official can enhance lobbying for the expediting of remote work visas and digital nomad visas at the

national government and legislature so that the country can begin to reap the benefits of remote working and improve the economy.

## **7. Closing remarks**

Tourism is an important economic sector for the city of Cape Town. The COVID-19 pandemic affected the sector, and the provincial government and city officials see value in the introduction of remote working visa to attract more tourists, including digital nomads, to the city of Cape Town. The findings showed that technology, economy, health, culture, and digital nomad visas were considered in the tourism sector's economic recovery strategy. However, issues related to digital taxation did not receive adequate attention. The study proposed a conceptual framework that can be validated in further studies. The paper contributes to understanding the role of digital nomadism in a developing country context.

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