

GAY AND LESBIAN TOURISM – IN SEARCH OF GAY SPACE?

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The paper explores existing published work related to gay and lesbian tourism motivations. Following, the findings of a small-scale quantitative study regarding the profile of the Greek gay and lesbian tourists and their motivations when choosing a holiday destination and accommodation are presented. The paper concludes that lesbians are less prone to travel to well-known gay destinations compared to gays and that both avoid homophobic destinations. In terms of accommodation and destination choice, sexuality is not the most decisive factor, although it plays a more important role for gays. Revealing the motivations of the gay and lesbian niche market can help develop an effective marketing strategy.

Keywords: *gay tourism, lesbian tourism, gay space, gay identity, motivation*

INTRODUCTION

Although gay men and women have always travelled, it is only in the last 15 years that scholars have tentatively started to look into the relationship between gay men and tourism mostly, as women remain neglected (Holcomb and Luongo, 1996). Similarly, tourism professionals ignored the gay and lesbian travel market, until it became evident that the so-called “pink pound” or “pink dollar” implied increased revenue.

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This initiated an effort in part of the tourism businesses to cater for the gay and lesbian clientele and was based on a widespread belief that this market has distinct travel preferences and motivations dictated mainly by their sexual orientation. There is a widespread view that gays have up-scale characteristics and are heavy holiday-makers. This profile, however, does not apply to the entire Lesbian Gay Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) community; lesbians are assumed to have different travel patterns and so are older gays among others. The surveys are inevitably biased towards gays who are more easily accessible, that is gays that are out and attend specific events (Hughes, 2004).

Such perceptions are reinforced by annual marketing data, such as the Community Marketing reports. According to the 2012 LGBT Tourism Demographic Profile the median LGBT traveler is gay, 47 years old, holds a bachelor's degree and works full time; he lives with his partner and together they have a household income of \$115.000; he took 4.7 trips last year and almost always uses the internet to plan and book travel. However, the reliability of such data has been questioned. Although CMI's research panel consists of 5,700 respondents, they are all US based and represent consumers who are interacting with the LGBT community through media outlets, organizations and events (Community Marketing Inc., 2012).

Within the frameworks of a wider on-going research on LGBT tourism in Greece, some first findings will be presented and analyzed. The paper attempts to shed some light on the profile of the Greek gay and lesbian tourists and their motivations when choosing a holiday destination and accommodation. This is part of a wider research that assumes that gay and lesbian tourism is a discrete tourism market with differentiated motives and needs.

As for the terms used in this paper, it should be noted that homosexual is assumed to be a biological term, while gay is a term used to describe homosexual men and women and lesbian is a specific term for gay women (Valentine and Skelton, 2003).

Therefore, the word "gay" will be used with reference to homosexual men and the word "lesbian" for homosexual women. Gay tourism is a term used to describe the tourism activity for both gays and lesbians.

TOURISM AND GAY IDENTITY

Consumption and especially leisure activity is assumed to play a decisive role in the formation and validation of individual identity (Wearing and Wearing, 1992). Gay identity is a term used to describe both gay and lesbian identity. Although the acceptance of the gay identity may be a personal matter, its validation is a result of interaction with others, i.e. the sense of belonging to a community with the same characteristics and of being different from the people outside the community (Hughes, 1997; 2006).

The social constraints, often evident in home environments do not allow gays and lesbians to perform their identities. To establish and validate their identity, gay men and lesbians are often forced to travel to places where they can have access to gay space. Under this light, Hughes argues that the search for gay identity is a form of tourism (Hughes, 1997). The salience of holidays is even greater for those who have not come-out. According to Howe (2001) gay tourism is a kind of pilgrimage in search of the individual identity (Waittand Markwell, 2006).

TOURISM AND GAY SPACE

Inextricably connected to the issue of gay identity is that of gay space. Gay space consists of a spatially discrete concentration of cafes, restaurants, bars, clubs, shops and residences; a public space where gays and lesbians are allowed to be affectionate and show intimacy (Myslik, 1996). They gay and lesbian space is usually the place where young gays and lesbians come-out, it offers support groups and the opportunity to meet people like themselves and develop a social network. It is the place where identities can be expressed and validated through the gaze of others (Valentine and Skelton, 2003).

Gay space develops most often in places where there is also a gay population and liberal attitudes towards homosexuality (Pritchard, Morgan and Sedgely, 1998). The development of gay space has functioned as a

measure of cosmopolitanism and tolerance for the modern city (Rushbrook, 2002). The lack of gay space in non-urban, non-metropolitan settings explains the strong association between gay identity and tourism. For some gays and lesbians, holidays may be their only opportunity to be openly themselves and behave as such. It is simultaneously a pull factor for gay tourists and a push factor, when it is absent from home (Hughes, 1997).

Gay tourism functions in a reciprocal way nowadays: it is about seeing and being seen. Gay tourists visit gay spaces as a tourist sight and simultaneously they become a sight themselves for the mainstream tourists, i.e. an attraction (Giorgi, 2002). Gradually gay space is undergoing a process of touristification, with the heterosexual gaze, introducing a “heterosexual invasion” and often re-establishing their hegemony over gay space and leading to its de-gaying. It is a contested space, where the homosexual and heterosexual identity conflict, while its establishment challenges the heterosexual norm (Pritchard, Morgan and Sedgely, 1998; 2002).

The development of the gay space has introduced new forms of marginalization and exclusion; it does not welcome the older, the women, the racial minorities or the less affluent (Rushbrook, 2002). Gay tourism, given gay visibility and lesbian invisibility, reflects and reproduces the gender inequalities visible in travel in general terms (Giorgi, 2002). Women are doubly marginalized, as women and homosexuals, in the tourism literature. The established community of gay men does not welcome lesbians in the gay space (Pritchard, Morgan and Sedgely, 2002).

Lesbians are less frequent users of the gay space because on the one hand it is male dominated and thus perceived as unsafe and on the other hand women have a greater tendency to rely on private social networks for leisure and identity validation (Hughes, 2007). “Lesbian identity is less focused on sexual activity or consumption in the way gay men’s is” (Hughes, 2007, pp. 21). Lesbian spaces are characterized as time-spaces, because they do not exist permanently, but are places temporarily transformed into lesbian spaces for specific days and at specific times. Lesbian venues are less visible and commercial than gay venues (Valentine and Skelton, 2003).

THE GAY AND LESBIAN TOURIST: LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL TRANSEXUAL (LGBT) HOLIDAY MOTIVATIONS

In 1998, it was already evident that at least the gay travel market consists of upscale, well-educated and free spending visitors, gay-friendly travel companies had expanded and gay destinations had begun to emerge. However, the gay and lesbian travel market is not a homogenous segment: not all wish to travel to a gay-friendly destination or take exclusively gay vacations, but certainly they wish to avoid being excluded from any destination (Pritchard, Morgan and Sedgely, 1998).

One of the first empirical studies on the holiday motivations of gay men is Clift and Forrest's research working with a sample of British gay men. The study revealed that gay men traveled to well-known gay destinations, urban and coastal, but to other destinations as well. Regarding the holiday motivations of gay men, the majority is motivated by factors similar to the straight tourists; comfort, good food and relaxation. One third of the respondents rated the gay dimension of a holiday as important. On the whole, respondents having visited a gay destination were more motivated by opportunities to socialize with other gay men (Clift and Forrest, 1999a).

Pritchard et al. conducted interviews and focus groups with gay and lesbian residents in Wales and the Netherlands and concluded that sexuality influenced holiday choices. The most important factors for travelling were the need for escape, for a sense of belonging and safety and the opportunity to be oneself, factors not that different from their straight counterparts. However, in the case of gay and lesbian tourists these factors were directly associated with their sexuality. Furthermore, gay holidays seem to be much different than lesbian holidays, with the first having a strong association with sex and the body. Thus, women have a feeling of being neglected by the travel industry (Pritchard, et al., 2000).

Hughes conducted a research regarding gay men's destination avoidance and choice in 2002 based on a small number of semi-structured interviews with gay men in Manchester. The researcher developed a typology of gay

men's holiday ranging from non-gay holidays, to gay-related and finally gay-centric holidays. Generally the gay men follow the same holiday patterns as the rest of the society and have a minimum requirement that a destination is either gay-friendly or has gay space. More important was the motivation to avoid destinations that were perceived to be intolerant to homosexuality (Hughes, 2002b).

Drawing the attention to on-site travel experiences, Poria conducted a qualitative research exploring the hotel experiences of gays and lesbians in the UK and in Israel. Gays and lesbians wish to be treated in the same way as their straight counterparts. Furthermore, they are interested in services associated with their lifestyle and sexuality (late breakfast, proximity of gay space, double bed allocation), and in issues concerning their personal safety (Poria, 2006).

Focusing on the neglected issue of age and sexual orientation, Hughes and Deutsch investigated the motivations of older gay men. They adopted a qualitative approach with semi-structured interviews with gay men over 35 living in the UK. The results reveal that older gay men are interested in renewing old and making new friendships, wish to have access to gay space, stay at a gay-friendly hotel and avoid homophobic places and situations, while sexual activity didn't appear to be a decisive factor for travelling. They are not satisfied with the gay holiday packages offered by gay tour operators, as they are sex-oriented and expensive and confirmed a need for diversity of gay travel products (Hughes and Deutsch, 2010).

METHODOLOGY

Purpose of the study was to assess the travel motivations and patterns of Greek gay and lesbian tourists. To this end a quantitative research was conducted with the use of a self-administered questionnaire with mostly closed-ended questions and a couple of open-ended questions.

Questionnaire design

The questionnaire consisted of 23 questions and was structured in 4 sections. The section “General travel attitudes” included questions on travel frequency, on average stay by type of accommodation, expenditure, seasonality and preferable booking methods. Section “Tourist accommodation” included questions on motivators influencing accommodation choice and staff’s behavior. Section “Tourist destinations” included among others questions on popular destinations, factors influencing destination choice and media influences. The last section of the questionnaire was “Demographics”.

Sample and data collection

Sampling for the LGBT community is a particularly problematic issue, since there are no official data in Greece regarding the size of the population. There is a widespread view that the LGBT population constitutes the 10% of the entire population based mostly on the Kinsey reports on human sexual behavior: *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* (1948) and *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female* (1953) by Alfred Kinsey (<http://www.kinseyinstitute.org/research/ak-data.html#homosexuality>, accessed 13/06/2013). However, this view hasn’t been confirmed by other studies and has been the subject of considerable criticism (Binson et al., 2007). The sampling technique employed was snowballing. Although, this method has a number of disadvantages, in the case of hard-to-reach or socially stigmatized populations it appears to be an almost indispensable method.

Conducting an ethnographic research would have probably shed more light on the understanding of the population’s motives and behavior and the decision-making process. However, such a research would also introduce subjectivity to the analysis of the data. Even more importantly, the presence of the researcher within the community of the gay and lesbians would have influenced their behavior and answers regarding their travel motives. The latter becomes more evident when taking into consideration the fact that the researcher is not herself a lesbian, which provides though the research with an objective perspective. Probability sampling would have allowed for generalization of the findings to a larger population, but this involves

estimating the size of the population. Since the national census in Greece doesn't yet include questions related the sexual identity or behavior, such data is unavailable. The use of large samples can partially overcome the problem of selection bias (Atkinson and Flint, 2001).

In total 100 questionnaires of Greek gay and lesbian travelers were completed. Initial respondents were identified through the researcher's friends and acquaintances and at the OutviewLGBT Film Festival in Athens (18th to 28th April 2013).

RESULTS

Sample characteristics

A total of 100 questionnaires were completed, 98% of whom had completed all the sections. Men and women not identifying themselves as gays or lesbians were excluded prior to analysis, leaving a sample size of 82 questionnaires. Respondents excluded were those identified as heterosexual/straight, bisexual, queer or trans. Gay men represented 62.2% of the sample, while lesbians 37.8%. The quota for the general population in Greece is 49.2% men and 50.8% women (http://el.wikipedia.org/wiki/%CE%94%CE%B7%CE%BC%CE%BF%CE%B3%CF%81%CE%B1%CF%86%CE%AF%CE%B1_%CF%84%CE%B7%CF%82_%CE%95%CE%BB%CE%BB%CE%AC%CE%B4%CE%B1%CF%82, accessed at 5/7/2013). This mismatch may be explained by the fact that gays are assumed to be more than lesbians; the 2011 Census data by the Office for National Statistics, UK indicate that lesbians represent 31.8% and gays 68.2% of the total gay and lesbian population (Office for National Statistics, 2011). Along the same line, the Community Marketing Report indicates that only 25% of their sample was lesbians, while gays accounted for the 74% (Community Marketing Inc., 2012).

In order to make up for this misrepresentation between gays and lesbians a sample weight has been applied with the use of SPSS only for the tables and figures where information is presented comparatively for gays and lesbians.

Table 1 reports information on the age, partnership, education, residence and employment status of respondents in the sample.

Table 1: Characteristics of gay and lesbian respondents

Age group (n=82)	%
18-24	19,5
25-34	42,7
35-44	23,2
45-64	14,7
Partnership (n=82)	
Single	45,1
Withpartner, livingseparately	32,9
Withpartner, livingtogether	22,0
Education (n=82)	
High schoolgraduate	19,5
Technical/tradecourse	8,5
College	12,2
Bachelor'sdegree	29,3
Master'sdegree	25,6
Doctoraldegree	4,9
Residence (n=82)	
Largecity	89,0
Smallcity	6,1
Village/countryside	4,9
Employment (n=82)	
Full-time in the private sector	18,3
Part-timeprivatesector	9,8
Full-time in the public sector	15,9
Part-timepublicsector	3,7
Freelancer/Entrepreneur	22,0
Student	19,5
Pensioner	3,7

Networking

7,3

There is an overrepresentation of ages 25-34 (42.7%), most respondents are single (45.1%) and have received a high education (54.9% hold a bachelor's or master's degree). Furthermore, the population in the sample is almost exclusively urban and 47.6% of the respondents are private or public sector employers. Within the sample, gays are slightly more educated than lesbians.

Destinations

The questionnaire included an open-ended question on destinations visited within the last five years in Greece; in Europe and outside Europe, as well as destinations the respondent intends to visit within the next three years. The fact that this question was open-ended resulted in answers including countries, cities and islands. Definitely there are huge differences and particularities among these tourist destinations. However, a closed-ended question in this instance would have suggested a restricted range of destinations, selected with the researcher's criteria.

Figure 1: Popular destinations

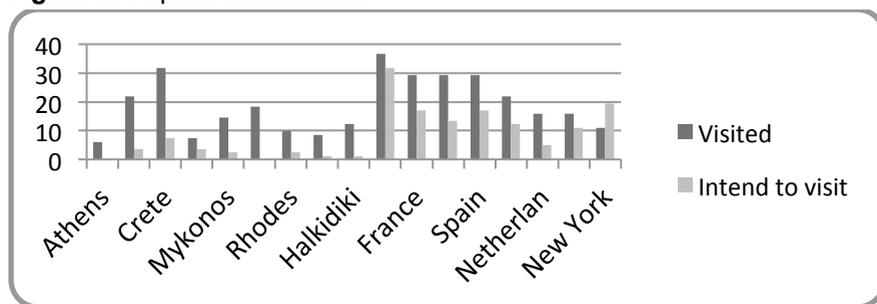
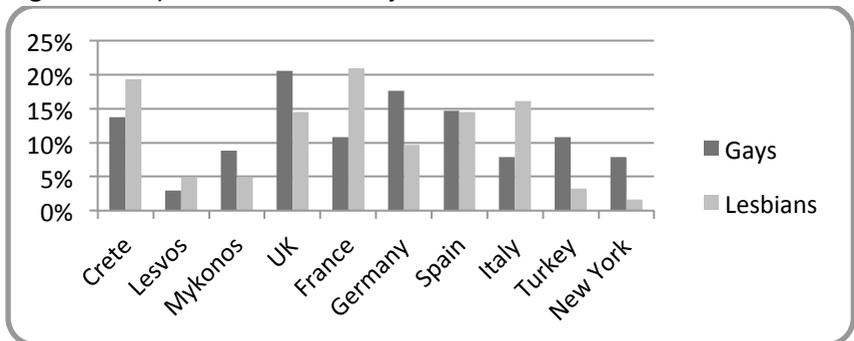


Figure 1 presents the most popular destinations as mentioned by all respondents. The black bar indicates the places already visited by gay and lesbian tourists and the grey bar the destinations they plan to visit. The most popular destinations in Greece are Crete, Thessaloniki, Paros and Mykonos. However, Mykonos and Lesbos don't seem to be as popular as expected

taking into consideration their reputation as gay and lesbian destinations respectively. Abroad, UK is by far the most visited destination and most importantly respondents intend to travel to the country again. France, Germany and Spain rank also very high and interestingly New York although not a much visited destination is one of the top destinations gays and lesbians plan to visit.

Regarding the special motivations of visitors of the above destinations, Crete is more popular with tourists looking for sea and sun, archaeological and cultural sites and local culture, while Thessaloniki is more popular with tourists seeking holiday and good food, rest and relaxation and getting away from other people. Lesvos attracts more tourists looking for rest and relaxation, sea and sun, archaeological and cultural sites, convenient and cheap holiday package and getting away from other people. Lesvos is a significant tourist destination especially for middle class and low-income Greek lesbians who cannot afford to travel to renowned lesbian resorts (Kantsa, 2002). Visitors motivated by sea and sun, gay and lesbian night life and getting away from other people will more probably have visited Mykonos and Paros, while gays and lesbians looking for gay night life will choose UK and Spain. Italy is mostly popular for the archaeological and cultural sites.

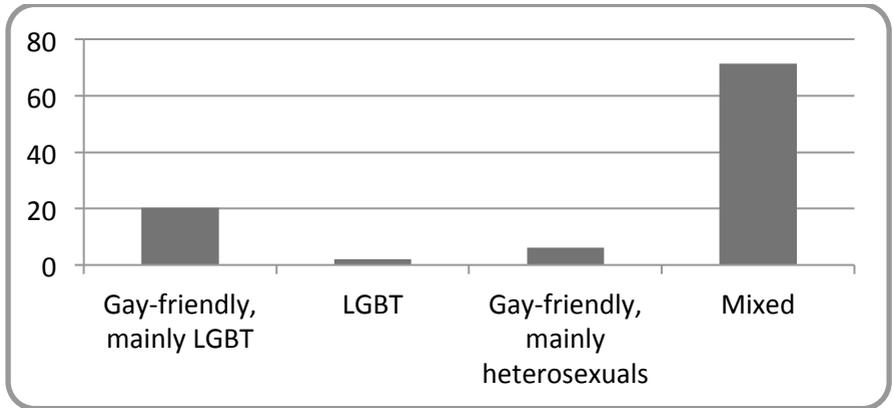
Figure 2: Popular destinations by sexual orientation



Data on figure 2 demonstrate that Crete (19.3%), France (20.9%), Italy (16.1%) and Lesvos (4.8%) are more popular with lesbians, while Mykonos

(8.8%), UK (20.6%), Germany (17.7%), Turkey (10.8%) and New York (7.9%) are more popular with gays.

Figure 3: Preferable composition of visitors at tourist destinations



Respondents were also asked what the preferable composition of visitors at tourist destinations was. As shown in figure 3, a great majority (71.5%) would prefer a mixed composition of people, followed by a 20.3% that would prefer to be around gay-friendly, mainly LGBT people.

Motivations

Table 2: Factors influencing accommodation choice by sexual orientation

	Gays	Lesbians
Price	3,69	3,65
Referral from friend	3,30	3,00
Internet access	2,96	2,10
Gay-friendly reputation	2,90	2,63
Location	2,82	2,77

Review of accommodation	2,80	2,77
Location near LGBT neighborhood	2,60	2,27
Advertising in LGBT print and/or Internet media	2,31	2,03
Affiliation/rating with gay-friendly organizations	2,27	2,20
Restaurant	1,90	1,55
Pool	1,82	1,69
Availability of gay/lesbian entertainment	1,78	1,47
Loyalty program/points	1,65	1,27
Hotel gym	1,45	1,20

Respondents were given a 4-point Likert scale, where 1 indicated not at all influencing and 4 extremely influencing and asked to indicate the degree to which the above factors were –if at all– influencing when choosing a tourist accommodation. For both gays and lesbians the most important factor is the price of the accommodation and the least important the availability of a hotel gym. Other factors ranking high are referral from a friend, the gay-friendly reputation of the accommodation, on-line review of the accommodation and its location. Gays are more interested than lesbians in internet access, while singles seem to be more interested in the gay-friendly reputation and the proximity of the gay space.

Table 3: Factors influencing destination choice by sexual orientation

	Gays	Lesbians
Explore new destinations	3,39	3,10
Convenient and cheap holiday package	3,20	3,26
Getting away from other people	3,18	3,26
Rest and relaxation	3,16	2,90
Local culture	3,16	3,06
Return to favorite destinations	3,06	3,16
Holiday and good food	2,96	2,90
Sea and sun	2,94	2,94
Archaeological and culture sites	2,94	2,84

Well known tourist sights	2,92	2,58
Visit friends/family	2,78	2,48
Mainstream event	2,67	2,48
Gay/lesbian night life	2,65	2,42
Socialization with other gays/lesbians	2,61	2,19
Famous night life	2,55	1,90
Gay/lesbian culture and venues	2,55	2,39
Spontaneous decision	2,45	2,00
Sex	2,35	1,87
Gay/lesbian event	2,31	2,16
Luxury and shopping	2,04	1,58
Adventure trip	1,98	2,10
Gay/lesbian accommodation or cruise	1,92	1,68

Respondents were asked to rate items regarding the decisive factors when choosing a tourist destination in the same 4-point Likert scale. On the whole the most important factor is exploring new destination and the least important, travelling to a gay/lesbian accommodation or on a cruise. Other important factors include booking a convenient and cheap holiday package and getting away from other people. As for the differences between gays and lesbians, gays are more interested in exploring new destinations, while lesbians are more likely to return to a favorite destination. Gays value more rest and relaxation, visiting well-known tourist sights, night-life including gay socialization, and all items associated with their sexual orientation. Lesbians are more likely to book a cheap holiday package and need to get away from other people.

Regarding other characteristics of the respondents in the sample, holiday and good food is more important for respondents 35-44 years old, who are also very interested in rest and relaxation. For a convenient and cheap holiday package will look mostly the young students. Young respondents (18-24 years old) need mostly to get away from other people, while people in a relationship, living together are more likely to return to a favorite destination and look for good food. As expected, singles are interested in gay and lesbian night life.

DISCUSSION

Destinations

Despite the small sample size and the fact that a non-probability sampling technique does not allow for generalizations, the study still provides interesting findings, since it is the first of its kind in Greece. Regarding popular destinations, gays and lesbians seem to choose destinations with an established gay scene, mainly abroad, but also resorts, where they can enjoy sun and sea holidays. Among gays the most popular are UK and Germany, among lesbians Crete, France and Italy, while Spain seems to be a favorite destination for both.

Taking into consideration the fact that the majority of gays and lesbians feel more comfortable among a mixed composition of visitors at tourist destinations, we can conclude that gays and lesbians in the sample don't travel exclusively to well-known gay destinations, although none of the destinations visited include homophobic countries.

Tourist destination and holiday motivations

The choice of a holiday destination is above all an exploration of a new destination for gays and lesbians and then booking a convenient and cheap holiday package and getting away from other people. The second factor can be associated with the Greek recession, which has restricted the Greek tourists' ability to pay for high quality services. Gay and lesbians have been described as natural travelers due to their intrinsic need to escape from home and from people to whom they have to conceal their sexual identity. Even for people who are not "in the closet" travelling may entail an exposure to different perspectives on sexuality and sexual identity(Hughes,2006; 2002).

Other important factors influencing the choice of the holiday destination are: returning to a favorite destination, learning the local culture, resting and relaxing and enjoying sea and sun. Gays are more interested in exploring

new destinations, while lesbians in returning to a favorite destination. All in all, gays value more factors associated with their sexual orientation, such as gay and lesbian night life and socialization with other gay men. Although most surveys indicate an increased sexual activity of the LGBT people – mainly the gays- during holidays, sex doesn't seem to score high in the factors influencing destination choice (Clift and Forrest, 1999b).

Youngsters and students, who probably have a lower disposable income are more likely to book a cheap and convenient holiday package and are motivated by their need to get away from other people. Singles are more interested in gay and lesbian night life, while respondents living with their partners are more likely to be repeater tourists. Respondents 35-44 years old are interested on holiday and good food and rest and relaxation mostly.

On the whole, gay and lesbian tourists appear to travel to the same destinations, as their straight counterparts and are motivated by fairly the same factors. However, they need to feel safe and have access to gay space.

Tourist accommodation and holiday motivations

As for the accommodation choice during holidays, price is the most decisive factor. This can be easily explained by the fact that Greece is going through a great recession at the time the study was conducted. Friends' referrals, location and on-line review of the accommodation, gay-friendly reputation and internet access play also a very important role. It is again evident that gays and lesbians are interested in quite the same attributes as straight customers when choosing a tourist accommodation; they only need to feel welcomed regardless of their sexual identity.

When comparing accommodation motivation between gays and lesbians, gays are more interested in internet access, probably due to the fact that men are more intense users of the internet (Ono and Zavodny, 2003). Furthermore, if we take into consideration the available social media and mobile applications, we can assume that gays tend to socialize more through the internet and become more sexually active. The fact that they value high internet access is under this light another factor related to sexual identity. On the whole, gay men pay slightly more attention to attributes associated with their sexual orientation, such as gay-friendly reputation and proximity

to the LGBT neighborhood. The facilities of the accommodation – restaurant, pool gym– are not evaluated when choosing a holiday accommodation.

CONCLUSIONS

The study extended the analyses of previous researches on gay and lesbian tourist motivations by focusing for the first time on the Greek market, but also by including lesbians, a group mostly neglected within tourism research.

However, the methodological approach of the paper was different from most studies, as a quantitative research was employed here, in order for the trends and the types of tourists under research to be revealed without the interference of the researcher. Certainly the study suffers representativeness of the sample, as the snowballing technique employed does not allow for generalizations of the findings.

The findings of the study are in the same line with many of the conclusions of other studies in the field but most importantly added some knowledge regarding the motivations of lesbian tourists and their differences from gay tourists. Greek gays and lesbians do not frequent the same holiday destinations, while their sexual identity seems to influence in different ways their accommodation and destination choices. Mykonos, UK and Germany, all destinations with a developed gay scene are very popular with the gay travelers. When choosing accommodation, gays consider the price, friends' referrals, internet access and its reputation as gay-friendly. As for the factors influencing their destination choice, gays are motivated by the need to explore new destinations, the price and quality of the holiday package, the need to get away from other people and to rest and relax.

Lesbians travel more frequently to Crete, France, Italy and Lesbos. The most decisive factors for accommodation choice for lesbian tourists are the price, a friend's referral, the location and the review of the accommodation. When it comes to destination choice the price of the holiday package together with the need to escape from other people are the most important

factors. Lesbian tourists are also frequently repeaters and return to their favorite destinations.

It remains to be seen in comparative studies how the tourism profile of Greek gays and lesbians is different from that of other nationalities, while the tourism of lesbian tourists needs also further and in depth research.

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