

MS Thesis
Marketing and International Business

Shades of Pink
Reykjavík a gay-friendly destination

Julio César León Verdugo



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Shades of Pink
Reykjavík a gay-friendly destination

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to learn from gay men's previous travel experiences and what destination they have experienced as more gay-friendly. This research first reviews the concept of destination image, and what influences in creating the image of a destination, to later apply this concept to understand what factors play a role in the image creation of a gay destination.

The push and pull factors theory is also analyzed to explore the elements that influence gay men to visit a new destination. This research specially focused on finding out how gay welcoming and gay-friendly is the most northern capital of Europe, Reykjavík.

For the purpose of this research gay men were interviewed about their travel experiences, the interviews were formulated to explore four themes, which are destination image, gay push and pull factors, Reykjavík as a destination and Reykjavík as a gay-friendly destination. In-depth interviews were used to gain a richer data. All individuals who took part in this study had visited Reykjavík.

Through the interviews, Reykjavík seemed to be in gay men's mind as a really welcoming LGBT destination, and Reykjavík seemed to be a desirable destination for gay men although it wasn't necessary in their top five or next place to visit, but it was rather external factors that made them visit. LGBT events were one of the main reasons why they decided to visit Reykjavík.

As most of LGBT studies this research only focused on one of the individual groups of the LGBT community, gay men, which mean lesbians, bisexuals and transgender are excluded from this study.

This study analyses gay men's travel experience and emphasis in their visit to Reykjavík to find out how gay-friendly Reykjavík is.

Útdráttur

Markmið þessarar rannsóknar er að skoða ferðaupplifun samkynhneigðra karlmanna og hvaða áfangastaði þeir upplifa sem besta staðinn fyrir hinsegin fólk að ferðast á.

Í þessari rannsókn er fyrst farið í skilgreiningu á ímynd áfangastaða fyrir ferðamenn og hvaða þættir hafa áhrif á slíka ímyndarsköpun. Þessi skilgreining er gerð til þess að komast að hvaða sameiginlegir þættir skipta máli í ímyndarsköpun áfangastaða fyrir samkynhneigða ferðamenn.

Greining á “Push and pull factors” kenninguni er gerð til þess að komast að hvaða þættir hafa áhrif á val samkynhneigðra karlmanna er þeir velja nýja áfangastaði til að heimsækja. Rannsókn þessi beinist að nyrstu höfuðborg Evrópu, Reykjavík, þar sem komist er að því hversu vinaleg og opin borgin er gagnvart samkynhneigðum ferðamönnum.

Megindleg rannsóknaraðferð var notuð, þar sem viðtöl voru tekin við samkynhneigða karlmenn og þeir spurðir út í upplifun sína af ferðalögum. Viðtalinu var skipt í 4 þætti eða þemu sem voru: ímynd áfangastaða, samkynhneigðir “push and pull” þættir, Reykjavík sem áfangastaður og Reykjavík sem hinsegin vænn áfangastaður. Allir viðmælendur höfðu heimsótt Ísland undanfarin 4 ár.

Viðmælendum fannst öllum að Reykjavík væri mjög hinsegin vænn áfangastaður og væri mjög eftirsóknarverður áfangastaður fyrir samkynhneigða karlmenn, þó að upphaflega hafi Reykjavík ekki verið efst á óskalistanum. Það voru utanaðkomandi þættir sem gerðu það að verkum viðmælendur heimsóttu borgina og þar voru það LGBT tengdir viðburðir sem voru helsta ástæða þess að viðmælendur höfðu heimsótt Reykjavík.

Í þessari rannsókn er aðeins tekinn fyrir einn markhópur innan LGBT samfélagsins þ.e. samkynhneigðir karlmenn, sem þýðir að samkynhneigðar konur, tvíkyndhneigðir og transfólk voru ekki teknir inn sem markhópur.

Þessi rannsókn greinir ferðaupplifun samkynhneigðra karlmanna, með áherslu á upplifun þeirra á heimsókn til Reykjavíkur, til þess að reyna að komast að því hversu hinsegin væn Reykjavík í raun og veru er.

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1. Introduction

In today's world the LGBT Community (Lesbian, Gay, bisexual and Transgender) has become recognized as a community but not everywhere. More and more places do not persecute homosexuality anymore, although some places still do. On the other hand, some countries and cities around the world have legalized same sex marriage and transgender individuals have been recognized as a third sex. This means that with a more open society, the LGBT community has been accepted in more places around the globe, these individuals as their heterosexual counterparts also want to travel and go on holidays. Gay men want to travel to relaxing places or take adventure holidays, the question is do they have the same demands as heterosexuals or are their demands and needs different?

"Pink Tourism" is the term that is used to refer to this strong and powerful market and more and more scholars have become interested in the subject. What are their needs, wants and desires; and what kind of experiences are gay men looking for when they are in their holidays?

This research is to explore gay men demands during their holidays a niche in the so called "Pink Market". This paper provides information to tourism businesses about the needs and demands of the "Pink Tourism", and the big potential that Reykjavík has to target the LGBT community and how gay-friendly Reykjavík is as a capital. Services providers will gain a better understanding of this market and Reykjavík become aware of the potential that it has to become a welcoming pink city.

This study focused on four different themes, the first theme focuses on the destination image concept, those characteristics that influence and build a destination image, the second theme explores push and pull factors that influence the destination choice, and the third theme reviews the individuals' decision making to visit Reykjavík and their experience in Reykjavík, and last but not least the fourth theme focuses on discovering Reykjavík's friendliness toward gay men. These two last themes will be combined in one to build up a conclusion on Reykjavík's gay friendliness as a new gay destination.

The research questions are:

- What makes a destination Gay-friendly?
- What are the push and pull factors that influence gay men to choose a destination?
- How gay-friendly is Reykjavík?

The hypothesis of this study is that Reykjavík has a really open minded society that doesn't discriminate against LGBT people, and that LGBT members blend really easily into the heterosexual world. Reykjavík is not like other gay destinations such as London, Berlin, Barcelona and more. It does not possess a gay district with restaurants, bars, hotels and shops focused on the LGBT community, but rather the LGBT members are well integrated into society and can frequent the same restaurants, shops and hotels as heterosexuals and not be discriminated against because of their sexual orientation. Gay and Lesbians couples should not feel threatened and should feel safe when walking around Reykjavík holding hands, having a drink at a bar, dinner at a restaurant or even kissing in public because they won't get discriminated because of their sexual orientation.

This study starts by introducing the concept of destination image and the elements that play a role to build such image, then the following subchapter focused on the development of the gay and lesbian tourism image and the historical movements of this community to be recognized as such and eventually the development of gay spaces and gay destinations.

Chapter number three studies the gay travel motivations (push and pull factors) such as the development of an identity, escapism of the daily routine, how gay men had to lie and hide their true feelings and their sexual orientation, looking for anonymous sex and finding underground gay places to meet with other gay men; this chapter also will describe the enumerable events that today are organized specially for the LGBT community as well as some gay heritage. Chapter three also focuses on the gay friendliness of destinations and describes some of the most common and popular gay destinations around the world.

Reykjavik city is not known necessarily as a gay destination, although it has been described by number of magazines and traveling books as a gay-friendly destination, so chapter four will stated what magazines and traveling books had written about Reykjavík as a destination.

The methodology for this study will be explained in chapter number five, the goal of the research will be stated, the research method will extensively explained, as well as data collection and the process. And finally, chapter number six will present the results from the interviews and the questions of this study will be answered and supported, followed by the discussion and conclusion chapters.

2. Destination Image

The term “destination image” emerged in the early 1970s with the work of Hunt’s (1975) where his work examined the role of the destination image in tourism development. Since his study, the destination image has become a really important subject of study in tourism research (Hosany, Ekinci & Uysal, 2006;).

The concept of destination image is described by Lawson and Baud Bovy (1977) as the objective knowledge, prejudices, imagination and emotional thought of an individual or individuals about a particular place. While other scholars describe destination image as all the ideas, beliefs and impressions that people associate with a destination (Ferreira, 2011).

The images of tourist destinations, such as sites and attractions, are found on the internet, in television, in films, travel guide books, brochures, advertising and newspapers (Helgason & Sigurðarson, 2012). The purpose of tourist images is to communicate information and send messages about the tourist attractions, and those images are used in marketing, branding and the promotion of a tourist destination (Echtner & Ritchie, 1991; Pike, 2008).

While Valls (1992) described brand image as the consumer point of view of a destination as a set of consumer point of view, Bigné, Sánchez and Sánchez (2001) described destination image as the subjective interpretation of reality by the tourists. Therefore, the idea that tourists have of a destination is strongly subjective because it is based on the perception each tourist has of all of the destinations he has been to or have heard of (San Martín, Rodríguez, 2008; Ferreira, 2011).

For such reasons Tourism Marketing accepts that the development of a destination is mostly based on the consumer rationality and emotionality (Lin, Duarte, Kerstetter and Hou, 2007). In other words a tourist destination’s image is described by attributes of its resources and attractions which motivate tourists to visit that destination (Ferreira, 2011). Although destination images are always influenced by functional characteristics, such as climate, infrastructure, prices, transportations and more, psychological characteristics play an important role on the destination image with such things as the level of friendliness, safety levels and quality of services (Echtner & Ritchie, 1991). Examples of unique features and

events (functional characteristics) are China and the Great Wall and while in the psychological uniqueness of a destination can include the romantic atmosphere of Paris (Helgason & Sigurðarson, 2012). According to Tasci and Gartner (2007) pre-visit, during visit and post-visit are the three different phases of the destination image process.

As literature states, destination image is the idea or perception that visitors have of the place that they want to visit, as a result of this the construction of a gay destination image is a much longer process. The LGBT community had to go through a long and hard process of acceptance and with it the emerging of gay spaces which benefited and helped to develop gay destination image.

The next subchapters will explained the historical process of LGBT community, the emerging of gay spaces and how destination had gain their gay-friendly image. The last subchapter highlights the importance of this market.

2.1 The road to acceptance and recognition

Individuals attracted to the same sex or both male and female have always existed but it was not until recently that they began to be spoken of as a community, the LGBT community (Schiller & Weiss, 1988; Cloke, Crang & Goodwin, 2005). In the past people who spoke of sexual attraction to same sex were considered an abomination, to have sexual attraction for the same sex was a taboo. Today there is a bigger tolerance and acceptance of the LGBT community although in many countries around the world there is still a lot of discrimination and sexual preference for same sex is punishable by law. This was and is one of the main reasons why gays started searching for underground places to meet with other gays, places where they felt safe and could coexist with other people of the same sexual preference (Markwell & Waitt, 2006; Hughes, 2006). However, before this was possible a huge progress had to be made and this process is still ongoing.

One of the initial movements to recognize gays and lesbians, was a hot summer night in 1969, when a group of gays and lesbians decided to stop being victims and start fighting for their rights in the Greenwich Village neighborhood in New York City. Although some have censored the violence of these events, the fact is that the final result of the "Stonewall" revolts was a very positive sign for the

recognition of the gay and lesbian community that even now, in the 21st century still exists in the world as such (Schiller & Weiss, 1988; León 2010).

Gays and lesbians are not tolerated everywhere, but this has been changing slowly and there is a steady social openness towards the acceptance of this community, today there are laws that do not allow to discriminate because of sexual preferences, and many cities and countries allow same sex partner registrations and some have even legalized same sex marriage (GayCenter, 2014).

Over time society has evolved and ideologies have changed from modern to post-modern times, and there has been a development toward the end of the century and big transformations took place in the second half of the 20th century leaving behind some traditional morals and ideologies. Some examples of these movements are: the women's movement, the black civil rights movement and the gay movements and with such movements' questions of identity arise, who am I and how do I differ from other people, to what group do I belong, and this has become prominent (Cloke, Crang & Goodwin, 2005; Santrock 2008).

2.2 The gay community and gay spaces

Gay men haven't had a geographical homeland, which means they have been unable to find their roots and that is why gay men are always in constant search of home (Binnie & Valentine 1999; Howe, 2001). Gay men identified themselves as homosexuals when going on holidays, "same sex tourism is like a pilgrimage, a quest for an individual and collective identity" (Howe, 2001;Markwell & Waitt, 2006).

Gay men are in constant search for gay spaces, where they have the opportunity to express their gayness, networking and being with people like themselves, which can help them enhance their self-respect (Markwell & Waitt, 2006; Pritchard et al., 1998b, 2000; Howe, 2001; Hughes, 1997, 2002b, 2003). Gay men are often more relaxed and natural when they meet and are around other homosexuals because they do not have to repress their identity and are allowed to show affection in public (Cox 2002 & Hughes 2002a). However, not all gay men are in need of frequent gay spaces. The importance of this on individuals may vary and some homosexuals may feel more identified with their nation and do not need to search for an imaginary homeland (Cox 2002 & Hughes 2002a, 2006).

Furthermore, not all gay men feel oppressed in their daily life, and for such reasons they do not have the necessity of searching for a homeland, “gay homeland”. This means that these individuals do not need acceptance and recognition. Also it is really important to know that not all gay men are in search for gay spaces (Hughes, 2002b, 2003).

In today’s world not all countries have the same level of tolerance and it is only possible to be gay in certain places while it is not allowed in others, the desire for recreation has pushed gay men to explore and visit the nearest gay bars or social spaces where they can be themselves, specially gay men that come from small places in search for big gay spaces known as “homelands” or “gay capitals”. These are often places where gay identities thrive, cities where the gay movement took place, or where sites and monuments in favor of the LGBT community can be found and opposition to the heteronormativity (Pritchard, et al., 2000; Markwell & Waitt, 2006; Hughes, 2006; Ersoy, Ozer & Tuzunkan 2012).

Gay space can be defined as the physical manifesto of the gay community. It is often a concentration of bars and clubs as well as cafes, restaurants, shops, resident and public spaces where gay men can be themselves and permits gay identity. These spaces are targeted for and used by the gay community and is used as their leisure spaces (Ersoy, Ozer & Tuzunkan, 2012). Although gay leisure spaces are often accused of being dominated by “the good homosexual”, who is often described as the wealthy, young and beautiful gay man, excluding the flaming queer unwanted. (Markwell & Waitt, 2006: 255-256; Puar, 2002: 939; Howe, 2001; Hughes, 2003).

Often bars, clubs and restaurants where gay men are welcome are known as the “gay scene” that is the term used among this community, simply referring to the places where gays meet up and does not necessary refer to an entire area or city. That is why researchers have named “gay spaces”. Also the term gay capitals has been used and is often described as spaces that provide the opportunities to relate to other member of the LGBT community (other gay men), where they can escape from the disapproval and discrimination from restaurants, bars, clubs and shops

(Jenkins, Morgan, Pritchard & Sedgely, 1998; Markwell & Waitt, 2006; Hughes, 2006).

Gay spaces are a set of events and establishments where the tourist can socialize with other gay people, permitting gay men to be themselves and feel comfortable and secure. These gay spaces provide the opportunity to be out and openly gay, as well as a sense of security and safety, and fulfill with tolerance; these are some of the characteristics assured by gay spaces. Nevertheless, gay spaces are not exclusive to the LGBT community and straight people can also be found. (Jenkins, Morgan, Pritchard & Sedgely, 1998; Aitchison, MacLeod & Shaw, 2000; Visser, 2003; Hughes, 2006; Ersoy, Ozer & Tuzunkan, 2012).

Although it is really important when gay spaces are being developed that such spaces take into consideration and account the inhabitants of these location because tourism is built on human relations specially when providing services to the gay community (Hughes, 2006).

The LGBT community has built gay neighborhoods already and now they are demanding spaces to spend their free time, for such reasons the tourism industry sees this community as a potential niche in tourism and it has already started targeting, because gay men are demanding places to go on holiday and to spend their leisure time (Hughes, 2003).

The LGBT community is already established in many cities and countries around the globe and they are hungry to travel and spend their money now known as “pink money” (Hughes, 2003; León 2010; Ersoy, Ozer & Tuzunkan, 2012; Köllen & Lazar, 2012). Although it is important that for any new destination which wants to become gay-friendly needs to go through the road of acceptance and recognition of the LGBT community (Hughes, 2006).

2.3 Gay destinations

Destinations' choice is the process whereby travellers analyze places and search for the best attributes in them and choose the destinations that possess the most desirable characteristics (Cooper, Fletcher, Fyall, Gilbert & Wanhill, 2005; Hughes, 2006). In the world there are innumerable potential destinations, but some

of them are excluded because of the level of risk and therefore discarded (León, 2010).

Gay men plan their holiday for the same reason as heterosexuals, to get away from their everyday environment and daily routine, and the desire to explore new horizons and have new experiences (Pritchard et al., 2000). Although gay men have other reasons as well, which are to get away from their everyday life pressure and from hetero-normative daily life (Hughes, 2003; Pritchard et al., 2000; Clift & Forrest, 1999; Lazar & Köllen; 2012).

The travel motivations of gay men are often related to the sexuality and the desire of escaping the heterosexual world, to find a place that gives a feeling of belonging and finding a place to be 'oneself', and is therefore not shared with heterosexual tourists (Pritchard et al., 2000; Hughes, 2005a, 2005b; Ballegaard & Chor 2009;). The point of many authors (Pritchard et al., 1998b, 2000; Howe, 2001; Hughes, 1997, 2002b) is that by getting away from the heterosexual society while on vacation, gays and lesbians get an opportunity of feeling safe and accepted and avoid discrimination.

Travellers like to feel safe, that is why when they search for a place to visit and spend their holidays, travellers tend to analyze places that they desire to visit although some level of safety is needed, specially the gay tourists because they do not want to spend their holiday in a place where they are not welcome, that is why a gay-friendly image is needed for a destination to be chosen by gay men, which makes a destination with anti-gay image less desirable for this market (Aitchison, MacLeod & Shaw, 2000; Hughes, 2006; León 2010).

When promoting gay tourism, this may create conflicts for locals, particular conservative groups and also suppliers, such as accommodations, restaurants, shops or airlines because of intolerance for gays and lesbians. Some places and suppliers may develop an anti-gay image while others promote a gay-friendly image (Hughes, 2006; Ersoy, Ozer & Tuzunkan, 2012).

The transition from old into a modern and to a post-modern society has helped a lot to evolve and recognize the gay community as such. Specially in North-American and Western European societies a broader tolerance for people who are

attracted to others of the same sex has been reached. (Clapham & Waaldijk, 1993; Clift & Forrest, 1999; Cloke, Crang & Goodwin, 2005; Markwell & Waitt, 2006; Hughes, 2006). However today, there are still many countries in Africa, Eastern Europe and the Arab world, where any kind of gay performances are still strictly prohibited and it is even punishable with death in some of them (Pritchard, et al., 2000; ILGA, 2009). Making gay tourists seek for a safe place to go on holidays and gay-friendly destinations is a priority (Pritchard, et al., 2000).

2.4 Development of the Gay and Lesbian Tourism – Pink Tourism

This chapter will highlight the importance of one of the niches in tourism, the gay and lesbian tourism also known as “Pink Tourism” (Holcomb & Luongo, 1996; Aitchison, MacLeod & Shaw, 2000; Kotler, Bowen & Makens, 2006; Hughes, 2006; Ersoy, Ozer & Tuzunkan, 2012; Köllen & Lazar, 2012).

Pink tourism as a study subject is limited in literature since most of the studies only focused on one of the members of the LGBT community, the gay men. Although lesbians are often mentioned in the literature it is not rare that bisexuals and transgender are often excluded as part of the subject (Euromonitor International, 2010). Companies around the world have realized that the gay community has a strong monetary power and for such reasons there are on-going projects and campaigns to target this market, which is constantly growing. In Europe gays are about 6% of the total population and they conform 10% of the total tourism (Euromonitor International, 2010; Ersoy, Ozer & Tuzunkan, 2012).

Nowadays, it seems that gay men and lesbian women travel more and spend more money on holidays than straight individuals and it is considered an expanding and lucrative niche market (Holcomb & Luongo, 1996; Clift & Forrest 1999; Aitchison, MacLeod & Shaw, 2000; Kotler, Bowen & Makens, 2006; Hughes, 2006; Euromonitor International, 2010; Ersoy, Ozer & Tuzunkan, 2012; Köllen & Lazar, 2012). This has caused the Gay and Lesbian community to be recognized as one of the most profitable niches in the tourism industry and often referred to the money spent by this niche as “pink money”, this term highlighting the money spent by the gay and lesbian community, and today lots of industries are targeting this market,

specially the hospitality and tourism industry (Aitchison, MacLeod & Shaw, 2000; Holloway & Taylor, 2006; Hughes, 2006; Euromonitor International, 2010).

To further add to this fact, there are also many events around the world such as parties, sport events, prides and circuit parties to target this market. One of the main reasons for welcoming them is merely because of their assumed purchasing power as well as this market is known for paying higher prices for quality (Ersoy, Ozer & Tuzunkan, 2012; Köllen & Laza, 2012). It was estimated that in North America the money spent by pink tourists is around \$65 billions a year, and the success of gay tourism in Canada, UK and South Africa has made the tourism recognize the pink market as a growing market (Ersoy, Ozer & Tuzunkan, 2012).

Gay tourism is seen as a strong, powerful and very profitable market segment, (Pritchard, Morgan, Sedgely, & Jenkins, 1998a; Russell, 2001). In the past years the pink tourism has been described as the closest thing to a recession-proof market and rapidly growing (Holcomb & Luongo, 1996; Pitts, 1997; Markwell & Waitt, 2006). Gays seemed to have a more disposable income and a greater propensity to travel, it is a fact that gay men travel more often than the heterosexual man (Köllen & Lazar, 2012).

Another reason for the pink market being desired is because gay consumers are strongly known for being brand loyal, which means that once they had a favorable and pleasant experience, it is really likely that they will purchase this service again, marketers often agree that gays and lesbians conformed an interesting and powerful consumer group (Pritchard & Morgan, 1996; Pritchard et al. 1998a, 1998b; Luongo & Holcomb, 1996; Guaracino, 2007; Boyd, 2008; Stuber, 2002; Hughes, 2006; Luongo & Roth, 2002; Pritchard et al., 1998a, 1998b; Rushbrook, 2002; Ivy, 2001; Hall & Ryan, 2001; León 2010).

In 2009, TUI, one of the European leading travel and tourism companies launched a travel brochure to target the pink market “Gay and Travel” and in 2012, Dertour launched the “Gay Travel” cataloged a German travel agency. Also small companies around Europe are focusing on the pink market, that is why there are already some certifications that help this market to recognize companies that are gay welcoming and gay-friendly, the best known is the rainbow flag, although more

professional ones are IGLTA (International Gay and Lesbian Travel Association) (Köllen& Lazar, 2012), and GETA (Gay European Travel Association) (GETA, 2014).

3. Gay Travel Motivations (Push and Pull factors)

Pritchard et al. (2000) came up with the idea of dividing the push factors into two sets of motivational factors and explained that homosexuals' extrinsic motivation is shared with that of heterosexuals and is often related to escaping, to run away from everyday life and work.

Motivations are described as individual reasons to do actions and persistence to do it until achieving the goal. Motivations are the willingness to make an effort to reach goals to satisfy some personal needs (Mullen & Johnson, 1990). In the following chapter push and pull factors will be analyzed and emphasis will be put on the gay male traveller's motivations.

In tourist literature Dann (1977) adapted the push and pull factor to tourism and described push factors as internal and what motivates people to want to travel, while the pull factors are the characteristics that a destination possesses and appeals to travellers (Khan, 2013). But it was not until Gnoth (1997) proposed the push and pull factor should be actually applied to study tourism and the process of tourism motivations (Gnoth, 1997; Ballegard & Cho, 2009).

"Gnoth (1997) further developed on this theory and explains that needs can manifest internally as well as externally and influence an individual into action (push). Needs and psychological motives together with "signs in objects, situation, and events" (pull) create motivation and act as a desire for travel" (p. 290-291).

Push factor are the motivators and needs that are felt by the individual and awakes the desire to travel away from everyday environment (Crompton, 1979; Dann, 1981; Crompton & Fakey 1991). And pull factors are all those features, attractions and attributes that a destination possesses and attracts people looking for a different environment, often these pull factors can be beaches, hiking resorts, spas, events and more (Crompton & Fakey, 1991). Fakey and Crompton (1991) classified them into six categories:

- Social opportunities and attractions
- Natural and cultural amenities
- Accommodations and transportation
- Infrastructure for and friendly people
- Physical amenities and creativities
- Bars and evening entertainment

Push and pull factors are of some importance to tourism because this can build and specially focus on segments with particular demands, gay men are in search for a safer and more friendlier place than home, a place where they can escape from the heteronormativity and where they are not marginalized and can be themselves (Crompton & Fakey, 1991; Pritchard, et al., 2000; Markwell & Waite, 2006; Hughes, 2006; Lazar & Köllen, 2012). Figure 1 analyzes the factors influencing gay tourism.

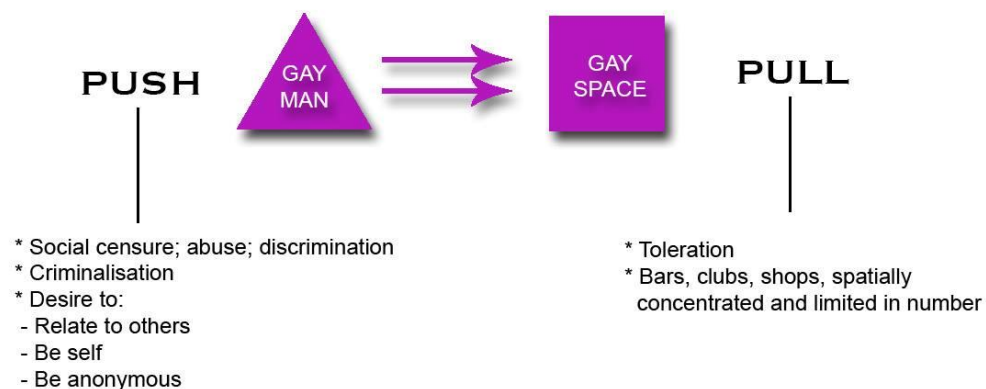


Figure 1 Factors Influencing gay tourism (Hughes, 2002).

Although Cliff and Forrests (1999) in their study defined three gay tourism motivations: gay social life and sex, cultural and sights and comfort and relaxation, which fit in the factors influencing gay tourism according to Hughes in 2002. Except

for the cultural and sight which came with time and the greater acceptance of the LGBT community (Guaracino, 2007). Also Lazar & Köllen in 2012, described escapism and anonymity, gay identity and looking for sex as a push factor like Hughes did in 2002, and described gay friendliness and gay events as pull factors.

These facts tell us that gay travellers' motivational factors do not necessarily differ from the "mainstream tourists" like wanting to explore new places and people, sightseeing and relaxation, although there are several specific gay push and pull factors that influence on destinations' choice. The following subchapter will analyze gay push and pull factors.

3.1 Gay push factors

Gay push factors are described by Hughes (2002) as social censure, abuse and discrimination, desire to relate to others, be self and be anonymous. Gay men are in search for a place where negative push factors are minimized or almost non-existing.

3.1.1 Social censure, abuse and discrimination

Heterosexuals and their normative have always pushed the LGBT community in search for the promised land "home", a place that gives gay men a sense of belonging and acceptance, because through the years the LGBT community has always been marginalized by hetero-normativity and tried to escape from heterosexism (Pritchard, et al., 2000; Markwell & Waite, 2006; Hughes, 2006).

Gay men, because of everyday hetero-normative, need to suppress themselves in everyday life situations so they do not appear as outcasts and spotted as gays. Holidays and vacations provide the opportunity to gay men to be themselves and feel free because they are anonymous at the destination; they do not fear to be recognized as gay. Also escaping from every day stress and tension of hiding being gay is an important motivation factor of gay tourism (Ersoy, Ozer & Tuzunkan, 2012; Lazar & Köllen, 2012).

3.1.2 Relate to others and be anonymous

Gay men have always lived in a hetero-normative society and they have often travelled to destinations where they feel safe and are able to validate their gay identities. Holidays give gay men the chance to construct, confirm and change their sexual identity by socializing with other gay men and to escape from hetero-normativity and intolerance to a place where it feels safe and gives a sense of belonging (Pritchard, et al., 2000; Lazar & Köllen, 2012).

Many gay men are still in hiding and they do not identify themselves as homosexual in their homes (back in their home city), for such reasons they tend to travel to meet other gay men, because abroad they are unknown (Pritchard, et al., 2000).

Gay men travel more than heterosexual men, because when being abroad in the anonymity they can meet with other gay men. These meetings often end up in sexual encounters. Sexual relationships may happen between two tourists or a local and a tourist. Gay men have more sex on holiday than heterosexuals. One of the reasons is that some gay men are still in hiding back home and when on holiday they have the opportunity to have anonymous sex and get to know other gay men (Carolan, 2007; Ersoy, Ozer & Tuzunkan, 2012; Köllen and Lazar 2012). While for some gay men the main reason to travel is to have sex, for other gay tourists this remains only a possibility. On this sexual encounter this may involve payment or free will, free of charge (Monterrubio 2009; Lazar & Köllen 2012).

3.1.3 Identity (be self)

Identity has been really important to the LGBT community, because once this community was recognized as such the individuals that conformed to this community had a sense of belonging, and they have been able to identify themselves as homosexual men and women attracted to same sex in a romantic or sexual way (Cloke, Crang & Goodwin, 2005). Identity can be described as the way that individuals feel they belong to a certain group or community and not to another in this case, not to the heterosexual community but the homosexual community now known as the LGBT community (Burr, 2003; Cloke, Crang & Goodwin, 2005; Hughes 2006; León 2010).

“Identity is a sense of belonging to a group, and involves the most intimate aspect of our personal lives but are also related to a wider notion of social inclusion and exclusion” (Cloke, Crang & Goodwin, 2005, 394).

Gay men do not necessarily share same experiences, preferences, interests or life styles and for such reasons the literature suggests that it is wrong to speak of “gay identity”, because gay men only share a sexual preference for the same sex and its only this preference that characterizes the personal identity and since homosexuality is often stated as not choosing to be homosexual, but individuals choose to identify themselves as such (Hughes, 2006 & León 2010).

Homosexuality can be described as the outcome of the individual’s sexual preference and the social environment (Rudd, 1996; Sinfield, 1997; Rushbrook 2002), today with the recognition of the LGBT community, this has helped individuals to give them a sense of belonging and become part of a group (Markwell & Waite, 2006; Hughes, 2006).

3.2 Gay pull factors

Gay pull factors are described by Hughes (2002) as gay men in search for toleration (gay friendliness), as well as for bars, clubs, shops, spatially concentrated and limited in numbers.

3.2.1 Toleration (Gay Friendliness)

In hetero-normative societies gay men are almost always a minority, so when these individuals travel to “gay-friendly” places, they are given the opportunity to enjoy their holidays in an environment surrendered by other gay tourists. And in some cases for gay tourists the level of “gayness” is crucial when choosing their holidays (Clift & Forrest; 1998).

Gay Friendliness is a term used to described places where homosexuality is accepted and where gays can socialize and be open about their sexuality. This suggests that gay tourist travel and to go on holidays to gay resorts and gay hotels,

since in most destinations there is a predominance of straight tourism and such destinations do not help to escape from the hetero-normative environments (Pritchard, et al., 2000; Ballegaard & Chor 2009; Ersoy, Ozer & Tuzuncan, 2012; Lazar & Köllen, 2012). The fact is that there are many countries around the world where homosexuality is still not accepted as in western societies, and gay tourists might have to face discrimination and prejudice. Even in some countries there is the risk of being assaulted or punished by law (Hughes, 2002; Ersoy, Ozer & Tuzuncan, 2012; Lazar & Köllen, 2012). This may be a strong factor when gay men are choosing a destination or not choosing it (Lazar & Köllen, 2012).

Cliff and Forrests (1999) also described cultural and historical sites as other pull factors and gay events by Lazar and Köllen, 2012.

3.2.2 Gay Events and Gay heritage

Gay games, parades and festivals are pull factors that influence gay men to visit a destination. In the United States (US) there are a big number of gay and lesbian sports teams and leagues that hold sporting events annually (León, 2010). Also nearly every larger US city and Western European cities annually host a Gay Pride Parade with surrounding events and festivals (León 2010; Lazar & Köllen, 2012). And many cities or places have become iconic because of historical events as a symbol of gay liberations and recognitions of the LGBT community (Marwell & Waitt, 2006; Hughes, 2006; León, 2010).

3.2.2.1 Gay Games

Today, Gay Games is the largest LGBT sporting event in the world. Gay Games have been held every 4 years; the first Gay Games were hosted in San Francisco in 1982. The purpose of the games was to promote self-respect of lesbian and gay men, to promote equality and avoid discrimination because of athletes' sexual preferences (Gay Cologne, 2014). In the 1994 Gay Games in New York about 40 countries attended the sporting event. Sydney and Chicago were the two following cities to host the games in 2002 and 2006 respectively (Holcomb & Luongo, 1996; Marwell & Waitt, 2006; Hughes, 2006; Gay Cologne, 2010). The Gay Games in 2010 were hosted in Cologne and according to the Gay Games organization 9.500

participants attended and took part in 31 different sporting disciplines like swimming, diving, soccer, ice hockey, bridge, tennis, sport shooting, waterpolo and more (GayGames, 2014). And just the past summer Gay Games were hosted in Cleveland, United States and about 10,000 athletes attended. (GayGames, 2014 & gg9cle, 2014).

Other big sporting events are Outgames which are celebrated every 3 or 4 years but not in an Olympic year, in intervening years the European International Games take place, last Outgames were hosted in Budapest in 2013, the next Outgames will be in Miami Beach, Florida, in the US in 2017 (Glisa, 2014).

When attending gay events, gays can be part of a community, they can socialize among people who do not judge based on sexualities, and this represents a getaway from the heterosexual normativity of daily life. Gays get the opportunity to celebrate their sexuality in public and their “true identity” especially gays who are still in the closet (Markwell & Waitt; 2006; Ballegaard & Chor 2009; Köllen & 2012).

All these gay sporting events create a sense of community and bring together lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) athletes from all over the world to celebrate equality and diversity, and they are not only a sporting event but a cultural and human rights event, and these events are open to all, regardless of sexual orientation (GayGames, 2014; Glisa, 2014; Lazan & Köllen 2012).

3.2.2.2 Gay Prides

Another important element of gay tourism and a really strong pull factor are gay and lesbian parades. Gay prides started as, and still are, movements in manifesto from the LGBT community to be recognized as such and human rights, for people to be proud of their sexual orientation and gender identity, that diversity is a gift and that sexual orientation and gender identity are inherent and cannot be intentionally altered. The pride word is a word used as an antonym of shame. For example in London Gay Pride marches the number of participants increased from 700 to 250,000 from 1972 – 1997 (Pritchard, et al., 2000; Marwell & Waitt, 2006; Hughes, 2006; León, 2010).

These gay parades and festivals take place all over the world even in those cities or countries where homosexuals are not accepted. While in other cities and

countries where gays have gained rights and are not discriminated against such festivals have become more of a festive and carnivalesque event. Gay pride festivals usually start with a party the night before the parade and a party after the parade to close the festival. Every year in Europe beside the city prides, a Europride is held, an international event dedicated to this community, hosted by a different European cities each year. The Europride includes numerous sporting and artistic events staged through the host city (Marwell & Waitt, 2006; Hughes, 2006; León, 2010).

3.2.2.3 Circuit Parties

Circuit parties, which are other important, pull factors when gay men choose their holidays; circuit parties are very common in the US and in many other destinations in Europe today. In the US there are about 100 and they are often described as “weekend long, erotically-charged, drug-filled and gay dance held in resorts across the country” (Hughes, 2006).

Circuit parties are a series of events of discos, pool parties, club nights, dinners, concerts and entertainments for several days. One of the most popular and famous in the US is the White Party Men. Circuit parties can be held as well during ski weeks, where gay men have the opportunity to sky with other gays, these events also include evening parties and other activities (Hughes, 2006; León, 2010).

3.2.2.4 Gay Heritage

Gay Heritage has been another important pull factor for gays when choosing a destination, especially the older generations. Stonewall in Greenwich Village (New York) is a place of pilgrimage for some, because there were a series of spontaneous, violent demonstrations by members of the gay community against the police, and this is considered one of the most important events of gay liberations (Hughes, 2006).

Other heritage sites are considered the “homo-monument” in Amsterdam as a symbol of “gay liberations”. The AIDS memorial in Company’s Garden, Cape Town, has a particular poignancy in a country where a large percentage of the population is HIV-positive (Marwell & Waitt, 2006; Hughes, 2006).

“A gay and lesbian heritage trail has been developed in Manchester (UK), with places of significance marked by rainbow tiles set in the pavement. The trail takes in the memorial to Alan Turing, a pioneer of computer development who committed suicide in 1954 following a prosecution for homosexual activity. It also includes the Beacon of Hope, the UK’s only HIV/AIDS memorial. Oscar Wilde has a particular significance for many gays and lesbians, if only because of his famed trial and subsequent imprisonment for gross indecency in 1895” (Hughes, 2006).

Marriage has been another reason for gay men to travel to new destinations; a new market has opened since marriage between same sex couples is gradually becoming legal. Same-sex marriage is legal now in many countries such as Denmark (became the first country same-sex union in the form of “registered partnerships” in 1989), Netherlands, Spain, South Africa, Norway, and Canada. The legalization of same sex marriage through Canada has encouraged gay men couples to travel there for the purpose of marriage and it has helped creating a more gay-friendly image of the whole country. Since 2000 half of the marriage licenses issued in Canada have been for couples outside the Canadian population, bringing with it a traveller for the purpose of getting married (Marwell & Waitt, 2006; Hughes, 2006; León 2010).

All events mentioned above are mostly focused on gay men, usually of a younger age, the reason for this may be that there has been a smoother transition to the development of the gay identity than it has been for older gay generations. Older gay men have struggled through life because back then society was not as open to gays and there wasn’t an established LGBT community and there were not such things as gay and lesbian rights (Deutsch & Hughes, 2009).

Younger gay generations (forty and younger) seem to be living their social life in a gayer milieu than were older men and this follows through into holidays. This generation has grown up in a more open society where gay spaces have been developed and they have had the opportunity to meet other gay men, while older generations (fifty and older) had to struggle to get rights and not be discriminated

against because of their sexual preferences, and literature suggests that they are in search of a more relaxed and comfortable place to spend their holiday and not necessarily with a big gay scene (Deutsch & Hughes, 2009). Although, both young and old gay generations want to ensure access to a gay space and to gay-friendly destinations on holiday and to avoid discrimination and homophobia (Marwell & Waitt, 2006; Hughes, 2006; Deutsch & Hughes, 2009).

3.3 Gay-friendly and anti-gay-friendly destinations

Gay men have often been verbally insulted and discriminated against when travelling, this often because of intolerance and misjudgement toward homosexuals (León, 2010). For such reasons the necessity of searching for a secure space to interact with other homosexuals (Binnie & Valentine 1999; Howe, 2001; Cox 2002 & Hughes 2002a, 2006).

Gay men like to feel unthreatened when travelling, they want security and feel comfortable; so when choosing a destination to spend holidays it is more likely that they will choose destinations known for being gay-friendly and where gay are not discriminated against. Deserting destinations known for an anti-gay image and being unfriendly to the LGBT community, such places become less desirable to gay travellers (Aitchison, MacLeod & Shaw, 2000; Hughes, 2006; Lazar & Köllen, 2012).

Destinations can gain an anti-gay image because of cultural norms and religious beliefs becoming less desirable for the gay tourism market. These destinations are intolerant towards homosexuals and strict laws punish any act of homosexuality (Markwell & Waitt, 2006; Hughes, 2006). For example the murder of an American resident in Prague was believed to be the outcome of a gay encounter with a gay prostitute. This and an earlier murder of a New Zealander, promoted many questions on whether the Czech Republic is safe for gay tourists who visit the country every year (Hughes, 2006).

3.3.1 Popular gay destinations

Gay-friendly destinations have developed because of a welcoming attitude towards homosexuals, gay scenes, but also because of specific events hosted by the cities

such as sport games, gay prides, festivals to target the LGBT community or for having locations considered gay heritage; all these influence a destination to become gay-friendly and increase popularity among the gays (León 2010). Here below a few of the most popular gay destinations will be listed:

- **Amsterdam** the largest city in the Netherlands has always been a city with a really open minded society and a city of high preference for gay and lesbian community, the city has a large number of venues for this community. The city for a long time has had a liberal attitude towards sex. Bars, restaurants, hotels, saunas and dance as well as sex clubs are all over the city. Amsterdam has always been known as one of the cities best known for its liberty and often its association with liberal attitudes and toward sex (and heterosexual and heterosexual and homosexual prostitution) and drug use. A really popular destination among straights, and one of the top destinations within the gay and lesbian community (Hughes, 2006).
- **Ibiza** is one of the Spanish Balearic Islands (which includes Mallorca) in the western Mediterranean Sea. It became really popular because of its alternative culture artist, gay life, hippies and more open-minded people. It is a popular destination among the younger tourists because of the nightlife. Ibiza town and around town, places such as Figueretas is the main area for gay hotels, restaurants, bars and clubs (Hughes, 2006).
- **United States** has always been characterized for been a country with most locations as destinations for the gay market. San Francisco, for example, as a destination offers many attractions, such as the Golden Gate bridge, the prison of Alcatraz and its cable-cars. Through the years San Francisco started to be populated by gays and lesbians in the 70's and has been nominated has the "gay capital" of the USA by some magazines. Other destinations in the US are Palm Springs and Los Angeles in California and Key West and Fort Lauderdale in Florida where famous circuit parties are held and gay spring breaks (Hughes, 2006).

- **Manchester** in the UK has been targeting gays and lesbians and has focused on the existing gay space of the “gay Village” located in the city-center. This charming city/town is known for its gay space of bars and clubs, saunas, bookshops, cafes and restaurants, which has a concentration and coherence not apparent in any other UK city. This area was featured in a national UK television series *Queer as Folk* in 1999 (Hughes, 2006).

Other world wide gay destinations include: Barcelona, Paris, Sydney, New Zealand, Cape Town, New York, Bahamas, Costa Rica, Canada, Thailand, Mexico, Hawaii, Key West and Brazil. In Germany for example the German National Tourism Board published an annual gay-friendly brochure with information in detail about gay life in Germany, shops, restaurant, clubs, bars, events and accommodations. Germany ranks at the top as the ideal gay destination in Europe followed by Stockholm and is known as the gay capital of the north, the Stockholm pride has lasted for five years and attracts about 20,000 visitors annually (Ersoy, Ozer & Tuzunkan, 2012).

Gay men who are keen to broaden their horizons travel to places like Mykonos and Sitges (Barcelona). New destinations are also Eastern European cities like Prague and Budapest. In South America for example Buenos Aires, Argentina increased its gay tourism market about 80% in 2011, the same-sex partnership made the capital gay-friendlier and put the capital on the gay map (Ersoy, Ozer & Tuzunkan, 2012).

3.3.2 Suppliers reinforcing a gay-friendly destination

As has been mentioned above, actions can promote or disturb gay-friendly images of destinations, but not only events create a favorable or negative image, suppliers play a crucial role in defining how gay-friendly is a destination. Airlines for example play a crucial role in the process of travelling. British Airways gained an anti-gay image when a South African passenger was asked to stop kissing his boyfriend on a flight to London. Later, the passenger ended up in court (Hughes, 2006).

American Airlines in 1993 was targeted by anti-gay propaganda when a passenger with HIV was removed from a flight after he refused to cover his lesions

and stow his intravenous bag. A crew of the same airline requested to change blankets and pillows because gay passengers were seated there. These two incidents created a really anti-gay campaign for the airline, and the airline decided to take action. It adopted a very positive gay and lesbian policy and, ironically, the airline has been attacked because of this. But today, American Airlines is the first major US airline who has targeted the gay market and has contributed funds to several equal rights organization and sponsored gay and lesbian events, with its slogan The “Rainbow TeAAm” (Hughes,2006; American Airlines, 2014).

When gay tourists are searching for accommodation this can be particularly challenging and difficult, gay tourists search for places where they can experience freedom, for such reason some hotels have taken this fact into consideration by adopting “gay-friendly” or “gay-exclusive” tags. On the other hand other cities such as London, Brighton and Manchester in the UK, which are cities in a tolerant country towards homosexuals some same sex couples have felt unwelcome in certain hotels where they have been offered twin beds or refusal to check in rather than a double bed (Clift & Forrest, 1999; Hughes, 2006; León 2010).

When incidents like the one mentioned above occurred this can damage the image of the destination even though such destinations have always been known for being gay-friendly. For example cities in the United States, the United Kingdom and Western Europe have had to manage encounters like the one mentioned above to keep a gay-friendly image (Clift & Forrest, 1999; Hughes, 2006).

Facts mentioned above are what makes destinations desirable or not for the gay tourism market, and depending on what kind of actions gay tourists experience this will reinforce or weaken the gay welcoming image. All these will affect the pink tourism on destination choice because this market is searching for high tolerance. A place where they can bond with other gay people and not be discriminated against because of their sexual preferences and where there is no need to hide, like any other tourists they want to feel welcome. Suppliers play a really important role when it comes to gay tourism; that is why a positive attitude toward gays is a determining factor to visit a certain destination (Markwell & Waitt, 2006; Hughes, 2006; León 2010).

Florida, for example, has worked hard to reinforce their gay-friendly image, since 1991 the theme park Walt Disney World Orlando has hosted a gay and lesbian day creating a really positive image toward the gay community. In 1991 it had estimately about 3000 visitors, in 1995 there were about 32,000 and in 2004 around 135,000 and in 2010 was estimated that 150,000 LGBT members, families and supporters visited (About; 2015). Although this event has been really successful, the park has had to deal with many boycotts that have been attempted, effectuated by different associations in the US, which featured the American Family Association (AFA), USA Southern Baptist Convention because of different issues as “anti-Christian” and “anti-family” (Hughes, 2006; León 2010). Despite the boycotts this event has been growing and growing and becoming more popular and it has grown from a one day celebration to a weekend-long festivity (Holcomb & Luongo, 1996; Hughes, 2006; León 2010). This as an example of a destination that wants to reinforce its positive image toward the LGBT community which are not only gay and lesbian couples but today are also families, this has been successful both for the state and the park in promoting a gay-friendly image (León, 2010).

4. Reykjavík as a destination

Reykjavík is described by Lonely Planet as the world's most northerly capital and combines colourful buildings, creative people, eye-popping design, wild nightlife and a capricious soul to a devastating effect. Reykjavík is really cosmopolitan, even though it is much smaller than any other capital in Europe. It's merely a town by international standards but the city is full of life, great museums, captive art, rich culinary cuisine and funky cafés and bars (Lonely Planet, 2015).

Reykjavík was described by the Dailyxtratravel as an enlightened and friendly atmosphere in the capital of Iceland, where people can be quite open about their sexual orientation and where the legal status of gay people is considered to be one of the best, with individuals' rights protected in the country's constitution (Dailyxtratravel, 2013).

The official visit Reykjavík website states:

“Reykjavík is very proud of its LGBT community and has become quite the beacon of rainbow coloured light in the past few years. Apart from being the first country in the world to elect an openly gay head of state, all LGBT people in Iceland enjoy the same rights as everyone else regardless of their sexual orientation, including the right to marry. Reykjavík is also home to the award winning travel service Pink Iceland - a company devoted to the travel needs of LGBT guests - and has a great number of gay-friendly hotels, bars and nightclubs” (Visit Reykjavík, 2014).

Reykjavík is a small capital but as vibrant as other mega cities. The gay scenes may never be as big as Manchester or Brighton but certainly as fun and vibrant as in those cities (Leon, 2010; Dailyxtratravel, 2013). Reykjavík today's gay bar is Kiki, which is the queerest bar in town. Upstairs DJ's play until early morning for a fun crowd. Below, Bravo Bar is a cozy chill-out bar, with DJ's as well, local draft beers and light fare including pizza and paninis (Dailyxtratravel, 2013).

The Queer community center is open in winter during the evening where the LGBT community can get to know, they have gay movies nights, game nights and cozy conversations (Dailyxtravel, 2013; Samtökin 78, 2014).

But this is not all. Reykjavík gay scene also offers many events all year around, including the Pink Party held at least twice a year in October/November and again in January/February during an annual festival sponsored by the city of Reykjavík Rainbow Reykjavík, the LGBT winter festival (Dailyxtravel, 2013; Pink Iceland, 2014; Rainbow Reykjavík, 2014). According to Visit Reykjavík, Gay Pride weekend is one of the biggest events in the capital of Iceland.

“Reykjavík city is extremely proud of its fabulous Gay Pride festivities, which have been putting a spectacular sparkle in the month of August ever since it’s first outing in the year 1999. A huge, merry and colorful Gay flotilla parades through the center of town followed by a grand outdoor concert attended by over one hundred thousand people – lesbians and gay men, bisexuals and transgender people, friends, relatives, fellow citizens and numerous foreign visitors – all showing solidarity with the gay cause on the second weekend of August every year!” (Visit Reykjavík, 2014).

5. Methodology

Methodology is about finding the best possible method to collect information and knowledge and this research; how people see and construct or imagine their world (Deniz & Lincoln, 2005; Silverman, 2005; Bryman 2012). Researchers are part of knowledge construction, which is collected from the interaction with the subject (Silverman, 2001; 2004; Bryman, 2012).

Given the challenge involved in researching a relatively new subject “pink tourism” and the limited information on the subject this study will adopt an exploratory, qualitative approach. The purpose of this chapter is to help the reader understand the methodology applied in the master thesis.

Not all researches or studies can be quantified easily, for such reason this study chose a qualitative research where a more exploratory method is used of questioning and gaining the participants’ experience in the subject (Silverman, 2001; 2004).

The Qualitative research method was selected for this study because this method allows to merge into the individuals’ experience, this kind of research allows participants to share information and experiences in their own words and in their own way, allowing the participants to think back and relive experiences (Bryman, 2012).

For the purpose of this study, qualitative research gives the opportunity to explore gay men’s previous experiences during their holidays or vacations and to gain rich information from their previous experiences and their visit to Reykjavík. It will also help to find out what were the push and pull factors for going on holiday and the gay friendliness of the destinations they have visited.

5.1 The goal of the research

The goal of this research is to gain a better understanding of the concept Pink Tourism and what creates a gay-friendly destination image. This study will analyze deeply the push and pull factors that influence the destination choice process of the

gay men, and to find out Reykjavík's gay friendliness and the potential to become a gay destination. The research questions are:

- What makes a destination Gay-friendly?
- What are the push and pull factors that influence gay men to choose a destination?
- How gay-friendly is Reykjavík?

This study will only study one of the groups that form part of the LGBT community, gay men, all individuals taking part in this study are gay men who had visited Reykjavík. This study aims to explore what makes a destination gay-friendly from the destination image concept, which states that a destination image is created from the tourist's previous experiences or what he has heard or read about it, as well as suppliers and residents (San Martín & Rodríguez, 2008; Ferreira, 2011; Llodrà-Riera, Martínez-Ruiz Jiméñez-Zarco & Izquierdo-Yusta; 2015).

The interest in the topic for this research comes from the researcher's personal experiences. The researcher is currently working in tourism and he has helped to organize gay and lesbian events in Reykjavík and abroad, as well as having himself taken part in gay and lesbian events in many different cities in Europe as well as in North America. For such reasons this study aims to gain a knowledge in what characteristics shape a destination to be gay-friendly. This study also wants to analyze what are the factors (push and pull) that play a role to build a gay destination image. And if Reykjavík possesses those characteristics and can become a new gay destination.

5.2 The research method

Qualitative research is used to understand and study the social world from the individuals' perspective. The talk about qualitative research as the method where things can be studied in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or intending to interpret the way that people see things or the reason for doing things (Deniz & Licoln, 2005). As for this study, the purpose is to gain experiences from gay men's decision making process when visiting a new destination.

Qualitative researches want to understand how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their world, and the meaning that they give to their experiences (Creswell, 1994; Merriam, 2009). This study wants to understand what influences gay men on choosing a destination, what the process is like and what motivates them to select a new city or country.

How they think, the process that is engaged, the reason for taking that decision are examples of questions that qualitative approaches want to understand (O'Leary, 2004).

Some of the advantages of this research method are that data is collected in words and pictures, through interviews and observations (O'Leary, 2004). Qualitative research focuses on describing the meaning and interpretation of life events (Merriam, 2009).

“When the goal is to understand the ‘insider’s’ perspective, a quantitative design is just not the way to go. You can’t write effective questions for a survey without a better understanding of the worldview of those you want to study” (Priest, 1996, p.106)

Nowadays, the qualitative approach has become really popular in leisure and tourism studies because of its exploratory methods and interpretations (Veal, 2006). That is why this method was chosen, gay men want to travel and they travel more often than their straight counterparts and according to Euromonitor International (2010) gay men have a higher spending power and are more brand loyal.

“Qualitative research is concerned with individuals’ own accounts of their attitudes, motivations and behavior. Although qualitative research is about people as the central unit account, it is not about particular individuals per se; reports focus rather on the rather patterns, or clusters, of attitudes and related behavior that emerge from the interviews” (McIntyre, 2005, 127- 128).

Although, it has often been said that qualitative research is often hard to measure and its reliability has even been questioned, an epistemological position in qualitative research will be the stress on the understanding of the social world through an examination of the interpretation of that world by its participants. And an ontological position described as constructionist, which implies that social properties are the outcome of the interaction between individuals, rather than phenomena out there and separate from those involved in its construction (Bryman, 2012).

Qualitative, exploratory approaches are concerned with investigating the meanings, which reside in social practice (Deniz & Lincoln, 2005). And about understanding the social construction of reality; the close relationship between the researcher and the subject that is studied; and the environment that shapes the research (Flick, 2002; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

However, in our modern world, researchers are faced with new social perspectives and studying casual relationships to develop knowledge (Silverman, 2001;2005; Flick, 2002; Bryman 2012), the LGBT community is being recognized as such in more and more places around the world and they want to travel and explore the world, so what better way than doing it by using a more open and exploratory method like the qualitative one.

Although it is often that this method criticized for being non-scientific, of little value, impressionistic and sometimes to be too subjective (Bryman, 2012). By this is meant that qualitative findings rely too much on the researcher and giving significance and analyzing what is important and what is not. As well as a close personal relationship that the researcher developed with the people studied (Bryman, 2012). But at the same time, people recognize that there is no way of doing research that is “better” than others as the way of doing the research depends a lot on the project or subject to study and it depends on the researcher’s individual preferences (Silverman, 2001;2005; Flick, 2002; Bryman 2012).

5.3 Qualitative Data and Qualitative interviews

Data collection in any research is really important and it represents the key point of any research project (Bryman, 2012). Data is nothing more than ordinary bits and

pieces of information lying around the environment ready to be collected (Merriam, 2009).

Data can be concrete and measurable; like the number of tourists visiting a destination. Although when studying the reason or the cause of a phenomenon, like in this case what makes a destination gay-friendly?; then that data is not only data but qualitative data, this kind of data is collected not by counting but often by direct quotations from people's experiences, opinions, feelings and knowledge, most of the time obtained through interviews to get the detailed description of their decision (Marriam, 2009; Kumar 2011).

"Interviewing is rather like a marriage: everybody knows what it is, and awfully lot of people do it, and yet behind each closed front door there is a world of secrets" (Oaklay, 1981, p. 30).

So when gay men are travelling and they decide to explore a new destination, which factors play a role on their decision making?

Interviews are often used when the behavior cannot be observed, such as past events (Merriam,2009). In-depth interviews (also called semi-structured or informal) were conducted, Informal interviews are that the interviewer stimulates the informant to talk about themes of the study and he or she just listens (Mann, 1985; Esterberg, 2004; Veal 2006; Merriam 2009).

These in-depth interviews help to collect a large amount of information from a relatively small number of people (Esterberg, 2004; Veal, 2006), for this study the gay men taking part in this study. Even though the information delivers defile in sequence from the prepared themes, it does not really matter because what is important here is the topic and the amount of information collected from their experiences (Mann, 1985; Esterberg 2014).

That is why Kvale (2007) described the interviewer as a traveller in a journey away from home where he observes from the outside, talks to and encourages people to tell the story of the world they live in. The traveller will often get a new perspective of the world he lives in (Brinkman & Kvale 2009). The interviewer will

travel into the gay men's previous travelling experiences to understand what motivated them to travel to those destinations they have visited.

Some of the advantages of interviewing are that this kind of method is more appropriate for complex and sensitive situations (Kumar, 2011), in this case the sexual orientation of the interviewees. Since the interviewer is gay himself this is used as an advantage as well since interviewees will feel more comfortable and willing to share more than if the researcher was straight.

Although in-depth interviews do not only have advantages it also has disadvantages such as this kind of method can be time consuming and expensive, the quality of the data collected will depend a lot on the quality of the interaction, the researcher may introduce his or her bias; but on the opposite side they are really good to collect in-depth information (Esterberg, 2004; Kumar, 2011).

When getting into the people world during the interview, recording the interview is really good because it is possible to listen again and revive moments and relevant information during the interview analyses (Mann, 1985; McIntyre, 2005; Veal, 2006), for the purpose of this study interviews will be recorded and transcribed. It is ideal that during the interview the conversation floats like two people talking about a subject they both have an interest in so people can forget the recording machine (Esterberg, 2004).

The qualitative research will help this study to collect data on gay men's destination choices, and to explore deeply the push and pull factors that influence these individuals to choose a new city or country to spend their holidays. As well as the information in their visit to Reykjavík and their perspective on Reykjavík gay friendliness as a destination.

5.4 Interview themes

As mentioned above the in-depth interviews were selected as a method because this will allow the researcher to immerse into the interviewee's world, as it was just mentioned the interviewer is gay himself and this will allow to establish a better connection with the interviewees and dig deeper into their inner thoughts, needs and wants when choosing a new destination.

The interview questions were developed and organized in four themes:

1. Destination Image
2. Push and Pull factors
3. Reykjavík as a destination
4. Reykjavík a gay-friendly destination

In the first theme, Destination image, the researcher wants to gain knowledge about what influences the decision making on going on holiday or vacations, as well as what characteristics will attract and encourage them to travel, as the literature suggests the destination image is built from previous travelling experiences or the perception held by the potential tourist about a destination and will heavily influence the destination choice, this theme will also explore characteristics that are less desirable for gay men when travelling to a place.

The second theme studies gay push and pull factors of a destination choice. Through the interviews the researcher will dig into what gay men are looking to experience in their holidays and if there are any factors that may motivate them to choosing one place rather than another. These push and pull factors can be gay-friendliness of a place, tolerance, gay identity, gay historical sights and events oriented to target the LGBT community like gay games, gay prides and circuit parties.

The third theme aims to explore their experience in Reykjavík as a destination, their perception of the city, and their experience and what characteristics stand out from Reykjavík and how they would describe the city of Reykjavík.

The fourth theme aims to explore the interviewees' impression of Reykjavík as a gay-friendly destination. For the purpose of this study theme three, Reykjavík as a destination, and four Reykjavík as a gay destination, they will be combined into one to analyze the interviews and write the conclusion of this thesis.

5.5 Selecting the interview persons

For the purpose of this study the selection of individuals was limited to gay males which are one of the groups that compound the LGBT community (Lesbian, Gay,

Bisexual and Transgender). All individuals used for the purpose of this study are men that had visited Reykjavík.

The researcher had taken part in the organization of several gay events held in Reykjavík like IGLA2012 (International Gay and Lesbian Aquatics) a sporting event that is hosted once a year in different cities among Europe and North America. Also in two annual LGBT events hosted in Reykjavík, Reykjavík Gay Pride and Rainbow Reykjavík. For such reasons the easy access to gay men who attended a gay event in Reykjavík. A few other individuals were selected from the researcher individual's personal contacts. The reason of choosing these two characteristics in the sample was so the researcher will have the opportunity to explore and gain a richer data collection from the gay men and their experience in Reykjavík.

5.6 Data Collection and interview session

All the interviews were conducted via skype or face time, which are programs to do video conferences and in this case the interviews were all face to face interviews (video) and only the voice was recorded, to record the interview an external recording machine was used.

Since the researcher knew in person all the participants, before starting the interviews a small chat of how are you and what have you been up to started the interviews. These small conversations were in purpose to set up a more comfortable atmosphere during the interview. Then the researcher will inform the participants that the interview was to be recorded and transcribed.

The interviews lasted an average of 20 minutes per interview and 26 interviews were conducted for this study. All individuals that took part in this research are gay men who had visited Reykjavík for different reasons. The nationalities of the individuals were really broad but most individuals lived in North America or Europe. Their age range is from 23 to 52 years old. A table will be presented with the participants' background in the results chapter.

5.6.1 Analysis of the interviews

In order to analyze the interviews, the researcher will transcribe the interviews because this will allow to deeply analyze the interviews and use quotations from individuals taking part in this study. Transcribing the interviews will allow the researcher to relive the moment of the interview and analyze in more detail, when listening only there is the possibility that you miss an interesting comment or point of view from the interviewee (Bryman, 2012). It is also really hard to take notes while listening to the interview. Transcribing it will allow the researcher to analyze deeper the interviewee's point of view and take notes at the same time. This will later help the researcher in writing the conclusion of the study. The goal of the interview research is that the interview answers will help to build knowledge and in the process help the researcher to elaborate conclusions (Kumar, 2011). But, in order to not get wrong information it is necessary to pay special attention to the research design (Lewis, Thornill & Saunders, 2009).

6. Results

This chapter will present results from the interviews formulated for the purposed of this research. Each subchapter presents interviewees' destination image (beliefs and impressions of destinations), what push and pull factors trigger them to choose a new place to visit and their perception of Reykjavík as a destination and its gay friendliness.

The following table presents the background of the gay men who took part in this research:

Table 1 Background question from gay men taking part in this research

Name	Place of birth	Living in	Age	Education
Aaron	UK	London	26	Bachelors
Auston	Texas,USA	Madrid	32	Masters
Bruno	Brazil	London	33	Masters
Christoffer	Cologne, Germany	Stuttgart	25	Bachelors
Clay	Texas, USA	Chicago	30	Masters
Daniel	Sweden	Stockholm	36	Masters
Danny H	Wales, UK	London	20	Bachelors
David	Phoenix, USA	Madrid	28	Bachelors
Dimitris	Greece	Stockholm	33	Masters
Don Yu	Philippines	London	35	Doctors
Eric	Holland	Amsterdam	40	Technical S.
Eric H.	Canada	Montreal	24	Bachelors
Iker	Spain	Paris	34	Bachelors
James	Seattle, USA	Seattle	37	Bachelors
Kent	Taiwan	New York	52	Masters
Maerj	Holland	Amsterdam	25	Bachelors
Mike	Costa Rica	London	34	Bachelors
Mogens	Denmark	Copenhagen	41	Masters
Moran	Israel	Tel Aviv	25	Bachelors
Neil	Belfast, Ireland	Sydney	30	Masters

Pablo	Spain	Madrid	26	Masters
Pascal	Brighton, UK	Brighton	42	Masters
Paul	West England	London	49	Masters
Robert	Canada	Montreal	29	Bachelors
Roman	Germany	Stockholm	39	Masters
Spencer	Texas, USA	Seattle	50	Masters

6.1 Travel Motivations and building a destination image

The decision of visiting a new destination or re-visiting a destination is influenced by many different factors; Better weather was the characteristic that gay men who took part in this study looked for the most when doing research in order to visit a new destination. Weather needs to be much better than the one they experience at home and it often involves hot weather followed by a nice beach to relax. The table below presents some of the other characteristics that gay men research when choosing a new place to visit.

Table 2 Characteristics that influence destination choice

Characteristics that influence destination choice	
- Weather	- Beach
- Culture	- Food
- Variety of Activities	- Sightseeing
- Night Life	- Museums
- Monuments	- People
- Historical sites	- History
- Heritage	

Among the participants for this project there was a pattern, where many of the participants described two types of holidays, one which was described as a relaxing beach holiday where factors such as warm weather, nearby beach, easy and calm atmosphere were characteristics considered when choosing this kind of holiday.

On the other hand there was a city break kind of a holiday described by the interviewees where top characteristics were history, food, culture, and nature were

stronger characteristics and had more weight on the decision making of visiting a new destination.

Some of the interviewees said:

“ . . . for me sometimes its just a beach holiday and sometimes it's a city break...where I want to see different architecture and different historic place, there a lot of nature to do . . . ”

Bruno, London

“ . . . a holidays over sea is time for relaxing . . . ”

Paul, London

“ . . . relaxing holiday then probably somewhere by the beach, but if it is like a weekend sort of break then it will somewhere nice city with restaurants . . . probably also sights to see . . . and I also like adventures . . . ”

Neil, Sydney

“ . . . Sometimes you want to go to the beach and that would be like a relaxing vacation, but sometimes you want to go visiting a particular city, but sometimes I want to go visiting a particular city and so I would be culture of the city, what kind of gay community you have in that city and you know museums, restaurants, the safety and all those things.”

James, Seattle

It seems that when choosing a destination gay men ask themselves first if they want to relax by the beach or go and explore a new city.

Individuals who took part in this study were also asked if there were any kind of characteristics that will influence them not to visit a destination. The top three characteristics that were mentioned were, the level of security, Violation of human rights and Laws against LGBT community. This means that gay men who took part in this study always look for a place where they can feel comfortable and safe. In

the figure below there are other characteristics that were mentioned during the interviews, which reduces the desire of visiting places with such characteristic.

Table 3 Characteristics that will influence gays not to visit a destination

Characteristics that will influence gays not to visit a destination	
-	Security
-	Similar places like home
-	Expensive
-	Hard to access them
-	Too warm
-	Crime rate
-	Length, if its far away
-	Violation of human rights
-	Laws against LGBT community
-	The humidity of a place
-	Forbids homosexuals
-	Similar cultures
-	War zone
-	Homophobic governments
-	Unwelcoming destinations
-	Political instability

Gay men are not so different from heterosexuals; they are looking forward to go on their holiday and enjoy their free time, they want to escape from daily life and everyday routing, same as heterosexuals, gay men want to explore new cities, go to adventurous destinations, exploring, walking, hiking, see nature, do some sightseeing and more. One of the interviewees said:

“ . . . I am looking for new experiences, so looking to do new things, tasting new food, meeting new people, looking at new landscape, new and old architecture, shopping, new supermarkets, new language...”

Pascal, Brighton

6.2 Gay Destinations (Push and Pull factors)

Gay holidays are often portrayed as topless men by the beach or a pool, they are often with perfect physics, a lot of parties and drinking. All these characteristics are always involved in the concept of gay vacations. When asked during the interviews

the gay men what is a gay vacation or a gay holiday in your head?; they all mentioned circuit parties, holidays in Barcelona and Berlin, partying, drugs and sex.

All individuals who took part in this study used three specific words to describe a gay holiday; those words were nightlife, drink, and sex. And claimed that rarely they would choose a destination just because of the gay scene. Interestingly enough all individuals who participated in this study have at least once or more than once attended a gay event, the most common event was gay prides, they have either attended abroad or in their home city.

6.2.1 Push Factors

During the interviews many claimed that they do not choose a destination based on their sexual preference or the gay-friendly status of a destination, they all said that they would always check the gay scene wherever they go.

“... my personal idea of a gay vacation is basically going somewhere where there is a sports tournament or perhaps the pride going on... I don't go for anything because its gay I would rather go for something because its nice as a gay person to be there and meet other gay people ...”

Mogens, Copenhagen

Mogens from Copenhagen in his interview made it clear that he does not necessarily go abroad just because of the gay scene, but that it is nice to meet other gay people when going abroad or visiting a new city.

When asking Pascal, a gay man from UK, if the gay-friendly status of a destination would influence his destination choice, he immediately answered “No”, although later he said “I have probably every city where I have been to for business, I do, I will check out and see what gay life is like, just because of curiosity”. Pascal also joined a gay swimming team in Brighton and for the past 5 years he has always engaged with gay sports clubs of cities he has visited.

During the interviews it was clear that when asked about the concept of a gay vacation or a gay holiday, individuals were surprised and answered with a rather

negative image of the concept and a stereotypic concept of a white gay perfect body male or a dark skinned man by the beach, drinking and partying involved.

However, a few of the men also described the concept of gay holidays as places to escape from oppression, places to be themselves, feel free and be able to show affection to their partners in public.

“... gay guys can feel completely comfortable in their own skin and can meet people from all around the world, make new friends, lovers, do a range of activities..”

Danny, London

“ ... is most important to LGBT travellers that the place has to be friendly and welcoming so for e.g. if you are going with your boyfriend or your husband or same sex partner you don't ever feel awkward. You want to feel welcome in the hotel or guest house that is #1, you want to feel safe and welcome regardless if you are going hiking in Iceland or going to a beach in Spain, it's always about safety and a feeling of acceptance ...”

Auston, Madrid

6.2.2 Pull factors

Through the interviews the most commonly mentioned LGBT events were: LGBT sport events, circuit parties, ski gay weekends, as well as cities or regions known for being really open minded and really gay-friendly, such as Sitges, Berlin, Barcelona, San Francisco, Stockholm, Amsterdam and London.

Destinations around the globe have gained a reputation of being gay-friendly and welcoming to all the LGBT groups, some destinations more than others, When interviewing the gay men the destinations mentioned the most were Berlin and Barcelona and Reykjavík as well was mentioned a couple of times. Below is a list of the most gay-friendly destinations mentioned during the interviews.

Table 4 Gay-friendly destinations

Gay-friendly Destinations	
Berlin	Barcelona
London	Tel Aviv
Stockholm	Madrid
Copenhagen	Reykjavík
New York	San Francisco
Sitges	Mikonos
Manchester	Paris
Amsterdam	Reykjavík

As was mentioned in the literature some cities around the globe have targeted the LGBT community more than others and some successful cities were just listed above which means those destinations have marked themselves as gay-friendly and are in top of gay men's minds.

According to the gay men interviewed, events which target the LGBT community are a sign of gay friendliness of a destination, so events such as gay prides, gay ski weekends, LGBT sport events, circuit parties and more will definitely attract the LGBT market and will encourage them to visit such destinations. Although it does not only have to be that a destination is hosting an event, also locals and suppliers need to be ready to welcome the LGBT community as well because they play an important role in the building of a destination image. On the other hand there are also cities or even entire countries that are known for being anti-gay and unfriendly.

Russia was the only country that every single interviewee mentioned during the interview, and commented about their anti-gay laws, to what many gay men added that they wouldn't visit that country until the LGBT community is recognized as such and violence against its members stop. Also many gay men, during the interviews, stated that they wouldn't visit even though they have a desire to visit Russia because they do not want to support an economy that mistreats and punishes homosexuality.

Interestingly enough some gay men said that they would still visit one day and even more remote places as long as there was something interesting to see and do

even though they disagree on the political enforcement and anti-gay image and anti-gay laws in Russia.

Moscow and Saint Petersburg were mentioned as enough reasons for some gay men to visit Russia despite the conflicts and attacks against the LGBT groups. Some of them are even willing to compromise, act somehow more straight, meaning acting less flaming or dressing more serious rather than scandalous, and even one individual with partner was willing to behave like they were only friends rather than partners.

“... If I go to a country with my boyfriend where it is illegal to be gay and its dangerous then we will have to be in the closet ... as a visitor I will book like a double bed, like two separate beds . . . I am really adventurous, I will still go to places that are not really gay-friendly if there is something that I am interested in...even to Russia ...”

David, Madrid

During the interviews it was also asked if products/services, such as hotels and airlines were to mark themselves as gay-friendly if that would have any impact in the purchasing process, rather few said yes and that they would gladly purchase from gay-friendly brands, although most of the interviewees said that it wouldn't matter but when they were asked if a company or a brand had an anti-gay image, then all said that they wouldn't purchase products from them.

“I don't mind going to a country that is generally not that gay-friendly, but of course spending my money with the business that I know was not gay-friendly, no I wouldn't probably do that”

Mogens, Copenhagen

6.3 Reykjavík

During this study all individuals who took part in this study were tourists who had visited Reykjavík: 13 of the individuals who took part in this study visited Reykjavík

during a LGBT event that took place in Reykjavík, while the other 13 visited because there were other factors that influenced them to choose to visit Reykjavík, Iceland.

While interviewing the gay men and asking how come they decided to visit Reykjavík they said:

“ . . . a friend suggested . . . and because of the scenarios, northern lights, and it's a cool place open minded and friendly . . . ”

Aaron, London

“ . . . cheap flights . . . Reykjavík felt like it was interesting place. It sounded like a totally different than Spain or Italy or the normal tourist parts of Europe. So could be quite interesting.”

Christoffer, Stuttgart

“ . . . I always wanted to go . . . very different . . . it is beautiful. . Peaceful country . . . ”

Dohn Yu, London

Reykjavík as a destination, was described as a particular city with a charm and unlike other cities, and even was often described as a small capital compared to others, but it did not take any charm from the capital of Iceland, and the small size of the city was rather a quality, described as easy to get around, accessible, beautiful, friendly, fun and relaxing city. All interviewees were amazed by the landscape and how impressive the mountains around Reykjavík were and what beautiful scenery was around the city.

Maerj from Holland, when asked how he would describe his experience in Reykjavík? He said “Good, really good actually”, to what he added that even though the city was tiny it was really easy to get around, he expressed how happy he was with his visit and really liked the way the people interacted with each other, and how people were super friendly.

Pascal from London and Kent from New York agree that the light during their visit was amazing, the clearness of the light, and the visuals were stunning.

“ . . . It was a dream come true . . . “

Kent, New York

The next figure shows the words that were used during the interviews to describe Reykjavík. Friendly, Colorful, Cold, Natural, Cute and Clean were the top words most used to describe the northernmost capital in Europe. And always ending with the sentence, “and a very friendly people”.



Figure 2 Words used to describe Reykjavík.

And when asked how they would describe Reykjavík in one sentence these were their answers:

Table 5 Gay-friendly destinations

Interviewees	Reykjavík in one Sentence
Aaron	Reykjavík is tiny but friendly and alive
Auston	It's is very open, friendly and welcoming city that is cute and very picturesque
Bruno	Reykjavík is very cute with quite few stuff to see and do and very friendly people
Christoffer	Bigger than I thought
Clay	It's a cute city with beautiful architecture and friendly people
Daniel	Really nice that you must visit sometime in your life
Danny	Impolite but in a friendly way
David	It's a beautiful city with friendly people and it got like a small town vibe but it's the capital. So its like balanced that way.
Dimitris	Out of this world, its is like being in the moon in Reykjavík
Dohn Yu	It was fun and it was really full
Eric	The smallest capital where it is happening!
Eric H.	Reykjavík is really friendly
Iker	Capital in the middle of nowhere, but amazing and different from any capital in the world
James	Reykjavík was very welcome... I would like to go back
Kent	Reykjavík would be a dream destination
Maerj	Like an alien, as home coming
Mike	Absolutely fabulous, amazing, surreal, different, magical, expensive and cold
Mogens	I think fun and hospitality city
Moran	Great hot dogs, nice quiet place to be and to go to treks
Neil	Everyone should go to Reykjavík to see the Northern Lights
Pablo	Reykjavík is the city of living and let everyone live their life

Pascal	Reykjavík is one of the most amazing places
Paul	A place to be yourselves, or the place to be by yourselves
Robert	One of the greatest vacations that I have experienced
Roman	The biggest party village at the end of the world
Spencer	An amazing city

Reykjavík was often described as a really nice city-town, and really colorful views, and a really friendly people. It was often mentioned that it wasn't the biggest capital they had been to but with a lot of life in it and a lot of things happening.

6.3.1 Reykjavík a gay-friendly destination

During the interviews most of the individuals showed their interest in the country but for most of them they did not have Reykjavík as their first choice but once someone suggested they were totally on board, also the Reykjavík LGBT events were an excellent reason to decide to visit Reykjavík and it's a really strong pull factor for such reasons it made their decision even easier. The three gay events mentioned were:

- Gay pride Reykjavík (Annual event during August which started in 1999 according to the Gay Pride website)
- Rainbow Reykjavík (A new winter annual event which takes part at the end of January)
- IGLA sport event (International Gay and Lesbian Aquatics in 2012)

Some of the participants expressed themselves saying:

"Really it was because of IGLA. I had thought of visiting Iceland but when I found that IGLA was going to be there, I was really excited...!

James, Seattle

“ . . . one of the main reasons was that, you guys hosted the gay world championships in aquatic...”

Daniel, Stockholm

“ . . . I already had Reykjavík on my list of places to go. So it was a big bonus that the tournament was taking place there and certainly added to so I thought let's go ahead and go to Reykjavík, and explore Reykjavík, . . . I have read a lot about Reykjavík, looked at photos and I really wanted to visit. . . “

Spencer, Seattle

To a big extent gay events taking part in Reykjavík do influence the visit to the capital of Iceland, especially for the pink market. Through the interviews it was obvious that even gay men do not search right away for the gay scene when travelling, they will always look up how gay-friendly a destination is for security and safety reasons, if there is a gay scene and even if any event is taking place during their visit.

In terms of security and openness, Reykjavík and people in the capital and even in the countryside are really open and liberal towards the LGBT community according to the interviewees.

“... Iceland is a smaller community where people tend to know each other much more and therefore I guess its you get the impression that its even more integrated..!

Mogens, Copenhagen

“... if you hold hands in Reykjavík, nobody is going to care, or say something... you can do it in New York, but it is not the same feeling...”

Dimitris, Stockholm

Reykjavík was described as a very safe city, during the interviews the interviewees were asked how gay-friendly Reykjavík was, to which every single gay man who was interviewed responded positively,

“Oh very, very gay-friendly. I think you have less to worry about in Reykjavík than any other city in the world, just because of its already in sort of standard safety levels and on top of that is gay-friendly”

Eric, Amsterdam

And many of them quoted:

“ Reykjavík on a scale 1 – 10 a 10”

Pablo, Asturias

Reykjavík as gay-friendly was given only nines and tens and one interviewee gave it an 11, Moran from Tel Aviv. Here below is a chart with some of the most relevant quotes when asking how gay-friendly Reykjavík was?

How gay-friendly is Reykjavík?	
Auston	Very gay-friendly probably from the top of my head its probably in the top three or top five gay-friendly cities in the world
Christoffer	It's a very gay-friendly, a good destination, there was such a line at the gay club everyone wanted to go there
Eric	Oh very, very gay-friendly. I think you have less to worry about in Reykjavík than any other city in the world, just because of its already in sort of standard safety levels and on top of that is gay-friendly.
Eric H	I felt like it was really easy to do whatever I wanted to do, go where I wanted to go without homosexuality being a question or issue
Maerj	Extremely gay-friendly... I come from a small town in Holland but bigger size of

	Reykjavík and there is a lot more gay life going on in Reykjavík, ... as I recall you are even in a gay swimming team.
Neil	I found it very gay-friendly, on the street there is rainbow flags and stuff and like the gay bar was quite prominent on the street and general scenes.
Spencer	I think really gay-friendly, like here locally (Seattle)

Table 6 How gay-friendly is Reykjavík?

Both gay men who visited Reykjavík to attend an LGBT event and those who decided to visit Reykjavík because of other reasons found Reykjavík as a really welcoming and gay-friendly city, and with a really high level of integration between the straight community and the LGBT community.

“On a scale one to ten, it’s, I don’t know, nine. It’s very gay-friendly, it’s very, because when I was there for gay pride, it’s interesting I didn’t feel like everywhere I went there was a bunch of gay people. You may feel sad just that it’s gay Pride, so everybody going to able to get gay people. It wasn’t that way, felt like, everywhere you went you were welcome, gay or straight and there was a bunch of just welcoming, friendly people and a lot of the stores, you know, I remember having a lot of rainbow flags in them. It’s not like necessarily a store that markets itself for the gay community. They just, it was gay pride and they supported everyone. So it didn’t feel like this is the gayest city, like in a gay, you know, there is not even a gay neighborhood. There is just like two gay bars but it doesn’t seem like – it doesn’t feel like you need one because gays are welcome everywhere, so you can go to any establishment”.

David, Madrid

Through the interviews Reykjavík was not necessarily described as the biggest gay city or gay destination, because Reykjavík does not have a big gay scene or big gay party events all year around, although Reykjavík has two annual events, gay pride in August and Rainbow Reykjavík at the end of January.

Despite this Reykjavík was often quoted as more gay-friendly than other big known gay destinations like London, New York, Berlin and Copenhagen. To interviewees Reykjavík has reached a really high level of integration between the gay community and the straight community, where they both can coexist and interact without the necessity of gay ghettos or a big gay scene.

“ I was amazed that it was very gay-friendly, more than Stockholm”

Dimitris, Stockholm

“There are maybe areas in Copenhagen where I wouldn’t go hand-in-hand with my boyfriend on Saturday night or after midnight. I wouldn’t fear that in Reykjavík you know, but it’s probably more or less the same. I think Copenhagen is a very safe city, but I think probably Reykjavík is even more safe, I can imagine.”

Mogens, Copenhagen

“I mean I was only there for a few days, it is a weird place, it is a little, don’t get me wrong here, it’s a bit asexual.... You know a lot of real mix of people that don’t, I mean it wasn’t define, I mean you got a couple of bars and ... I think most people go to all the different bars”

Paul, London

“ I though it was actually excellent integration... when I was at the gay bar a lot of people there were straight. So there is obviously a lot of mixing”

Clay, Chicago

The interviewees described Reykjavík as a destination with a lot of qualities, Reykjavík as a unique city, particular, beautiful and amazing. All gay men who participated in this study were positively surprised of how such a small capital and country is so open minded and positive toward the gay community. Reykjavík was

described as a really gay-friendly destination and it was even compared to some of the main gay destinations in the world but with a particular charm.

“A lot of freedom, respect and peace I would say here in Reykjavík”

Eric, Amsterdam

7. Discussion

This study interviewed 26 gay men who had visited Reykjavík, half of the participants came to the capital of Iceland specifically because an LGBT event was taking place in the city, while the other half came because of other reasons. To find out their travel motivations and the image they about Reykjavík as a destination, in-depth interviews were carried out and recorded to later on transcribe them for the analysis of them.

The aim of the interviews were to find out the gay men's travel motivations. As well as the impression of destinations previously visited and their experience and their feeling on gay-friendliness of the places visited. Push and pull factors were closely analyzed to find out which factors play an important role in the decision making of visiting a new place. And last but not least to find out how their experience in Reykjavík was and how they saw Reykjavík's gay friendliness.

Literature suggests that destination image is influenced by information and content generated by travellers (Llodrá-Riera, Martínez-Ruiz & Jiménez-Zarco, 2015), which is how some destinations have gained their reputation as gay-friendly cities and even to be known as gay destinations. Such destinations are cause of previous gay traveller experiences, gay men felt welcome, not threatened and with a really open-minded society where they did not need to hide their sexual orientation.

Through the interviews the most gay-friendly cities named were London, Berlin and Barcelona, these three cities had targeted the LGBT community in their official websites; Reykjavík was also named as a really gay-friendly city and the city of Reykjavík on a smaller scale also targeted the LGBT community through their visitreykjavik.is website.

Literature also suggests that some of the push factors are social censure, discrimination and the want to relate to other homosexuals (Hughes, 2002). Even though during the interviews being asked if the gay scene was a factor that would influence their decision making on visiting a new place most of the participants said no, interestingly enough they all visited a local gay bar or got in contact with some of the gay local men. It seems that at first they do not travel to validate their gay

identity but somehow while travelling gay men always end up exploring the gay scene of the city being visited.

Gay Games, Gay Prides, Circuit Parties and gay heritage are considered pull factors and gay holidays are often spoken of (Hughes, 2020). Studies suggest that gay events trigger gay men to visit new destinations, although interestingly enough some of the men who were interviewed for this study said that they wouldn't travel to a new city just because an LGBT event was taking place, but all gay men who were interviewed admitted that they had at least once travelled to attend an LGBT event.

It seems that there is a misconception of the gay holiday and gay events, during the interview they were asked to describe a gay holiday and they all described it as partying, drinking, topless man, sex and drugs. All of the participants shared experiences where they had attended a gay pride, or a sport event, and even ski gay weekends, which means they had engaged in gay holidays. The interviews show that gay men had a misconception of gay holidays and that this did not only include drinking, partying, topless man, drugs and sex.

Gay men want to explore and discover new places and they even seemed not to care about the gay scene or the gay friendliness of a destination but to some these factors do play an important role. While there are others where these gay events do play a really important role in the decision making of visiting a new place.

As the results show many of the participants taking part in this study had described Reykjavík as a really tolerant city and country as well as gay-friendly, those characteristics being some of the main pull factors influencing gay men to visit new places.

Reykjavík as a destination offers two annual LGBT events: Gay Pride in August and Rainbow Reykjavík at the end of January, these events as push and pull theory suggests play an important role in the decision making of the gay men, results show us that many of the guys who were interviewed for this research visited Reykjavík just because of the LGBT events.

Reykjavík was described as a really welcoming city; small party village, easy to get around and very gay-friendly, even though not all of them were here to attend a gay event.

Even though Reykjavík city has not necessarily focused on targeting the LGBT community, there is a small travel agency targeting the gay community: “Pink Iceland”, and the gay pride in Reykjavík is one of the biggest city events. Reykjavík in this study was compared to some of the biggest gay destinations of the world like Barcelona, Berlin, Copenhagen, Amsterdam, Stockholm, Tel Aviv and London. Reykjavík has been described to have a really high level of gay friendliness and integration between the gay community and straight community and that that integration is greater than all-time known gay destinations like Copenhagen, Stockholm and London. Which means Reykjavík’s image as gay-friendly is already building up from travellers’ experiences.

7.1 Limitation, contributions and further research

This study interviewed only gay men who had visited Reykjavík, lesbians, bisexual and transgenders had been left out of this study, a question is if those groups of the LGBT community will feel the same when visiting Reykjavík. Also most of the participants in this study are gay men who live in North America and Western Europe, perhaps a study of men in Eastern Europe, the Middle East, and Asia would be interesting.

Also the study has focused only on tourists, perhaps a study on gay men in Reykjavík will also be interesting to see what is the perception of the local gay men. The straight community will be another interesting group to research: How do they feel about the gay pride in Reykjavík and the Rainbow Reykjavík festival?

This study has contributed some knowledge on gay men and their destination choices, push and pull factors, as well as their perception of gay holidays, gay-friendly destinations and gay-friendly products and services and how an anti-gay image of a product or service will prevent gay men to consume.

But interestingly enough is that when it comes to an anti-gay image of a destination gay men are sometimes willing to compromise and still visit such destinations, while other gay men wouldn’t even consider visiting countries where

homosexuality is a crime and LGBT groups are persecuted, and put a high value on it and appreciate when destinations are gay-friendly and gay welcoming.

An interesting future research would be a study of the straight community in Reykjavík and their perception of the gay community and gay events, combined with the experience of gay local men and gay tourists and their perception of Reykjavík as gay-friendly, and elaborate a conclusion from these three points of view to reach a greater conclusion of how well integrated are the straight and the gay community in Reykjavík and how gay-friendly Reykjavík is.

8. Conclusion

This research started by reviewing the concept of destination image and the development of such an image in a gay destination, first came the road to acceptance and recognition of the LGBT community and with it the rise of gay spaces where homosexuals felt welcome and un-threatened and gave them a sense of belonging.

Even though at first gay motivations are quite similar to heterosexuals there are other factors that play an important role in gay men's heads when choosing a destination. Their travel motivations are often related to their sexuality and the desire to escape the heterosexual world into a more gay welcoming one. Travellers want to feel safe, especially gay men, since they have been marginalized and discriminated against through the years.

Many cities around the world are becoming more and more gay-friendly and the LGBT community has been recognized, although there are many cities and even entire countries where same sex relations are prohibited and punished, like in eastern Europe and the Arab world, while in some countries in western Europe and cities in North America same sex marriage has been legalized.

Some of gay men's push factors to visit a new destination are social censure, discrimination and the desire to relate to other gay men, while some of the pull factors are more tolerant societies, gay friendliness and the organization of LGBT events.

Reykjavík as a destination was in gay men's mind and in their list of most important to visit, but not necessarily at the top. IGLA2012, Gay Pride and Rainbow Reykjavík played a really important role in the men's decision making to visit Reykjavík.

Even though Reykjavík does not possess a big gay scene like London, Copenhagen or Berlin, Reykjavík was described as a really gay-friendly destination, with a really friendly and open minded society where both the gay community and the straight community coexist really close to one another.

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Appendix – In-depth interviews

Shades of Pink

Reykjavík a gay-friendly destination

Themes to be explore through these interviews

- **Destination image**
- **Push and pull factors**
- **Reykjavík as destination**
- **Reykjavík a gay-friendly destination**

Background questions:

Where are you from?

What your age?

What's your level of education?

What is your current job?

1. What influence your decision when it comes to choosing your next destinations for holiday/vacations?
2. What characteristics will attract/encourage you to visit a destination?
3. What characteristics will influence you **not** to visit a destination?
4. What things are you looking to do when you are on your holidays/vacations?
5. How come did you decide to visit Reykjavík?
6. How would you describe your experience in Reykjavík?

7. What characteristics would you say stand out from Reykjavík?
8. In one sentence how would you describe Reykjavík?
9. What is your idea of gay holidays/vacations?
10. The gay friendliness of a destination, how does that influence on your destination choice?
 - a. Why?
11. Are there destinations that you wouldn't visit because of their anti gay friendliness?
 - a. Like which ones and why?
12. Which destination would you consider the more gay friendliness?
 - a. Why?
13. What kind of gay events have you attend and where?
 - a. Why?
14. Does it matter if products/ services are gay-friendly or not gay-friendly/Supportive?
 - a. How come?
15. Reykjavík as a destination, how gay-friendly would you say it is?

16. To what other cities or “gay destinations” would you compare Reykjavík to?
17. If your gay friends were planning to visit Reykjavík, what would you tell them about Reykjavík?