

# **Reykjavík as a new gay and lesbian destination**

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10 ECTS thesis which is a part of  
*Baccalaureus Scientiarum* degree in Tourism Studies

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## **Author statement**

I hereby state that this assignment has been made by me and has not been used before as an evaluation assignment for any other university degree.

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*Julio César León Verdugo*

# Abstract

This thesis explores the emergence of gay and lesbian tourism and the importance of this market for the tourism industry. It studies Reykjavík's possibilities of becoming a new destination for the gay and lesbian community. Through academic writings, it discusses the developments from gay scene and gay spaces to the development of gay and lesbian destinations. What makes destinations attractive for this community and the important role that suppliers play on creating a "gay friendly image" is discussed.

Three interviews were carried out in Reykjavík, with informants on social attitudes and security for gay people in Reykjavík; information and activities targeting the "pink market" as tourist. The main results are that Reykjavík is regarded a secure city and open-minded towards the gay and lesbian community. Specific targeting for this market segment in tourism is rare and explained by the general acceptance of homosexuals.

*Keywords: gay and lesbian tourism, gay scene, gay spaces, gay destinations and gay friendly*

# Ágrip

Þessi ritgerð fjallar um vöxt og þróun ferðamennsku samkynhneigðra og vaxandi áhuga ferðaþjónustunnar á að ná í þennan hluta ferðamanna..

Rýnt er í hvað Reykjavík hefur upp á að bjóða til þess að verða vænlegur áfangastaður fyrir samkynhneigða ferðamenn. Í fræðilegri umfjöllun er rakin þróun og tilurð sérstakra áfangastaða fyrir samkynhneigða, sem má tengja þróun sérstaks rýmis samkynhneigðra í mörgum borgum. Fjallað er um hvað gerir þessa áfangastaði aðlaðandi fyrir samkynhneigða og hvernig viðburði hafa verið þróaðir sérstaklega fyrir samfélag samkynhneigðra.

Framkvæmd var rannsókn í Reykjavík, þar sem viðtöl voru tekin við markaðsstjóra ferðamála í Reykjavík, forseta samtakanna '78, og ferðaskipuleggjanda.

Viðmælendurnir töldu Reykjavík vera örugga borg og samfélagið opið fyrir samkynhneigðum. Ekki er mikið um sérstaka markaðssetningu fyrir samkynhneigða ferðamenn, sem m.a. var skýrt með því að þeim hópi væri ekki mismunað af ferðaþjónustuaðilum. Borgin býður upp á fjölbreytta afþreyingu fyrir samkynhneigða ferðamenn og aðra ferðamenn.

*Lykilorð: Ferðamennska samkynhneigðra, vettvangur og rými samkynhneigðra, áfangastaðir og vinalegt umhverfi samkynhneigðra.*

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**Julio César León Verdugo**

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# 1 Introduction

The pink market “gay and lesbian community” is one of the newest niches in the tourism industry and studies confirm that gay and lesbians are searching for holiday destinations and facilities to spend their leisure time. This community is noted for being formed by big spenders who travel more often than its straight counterpart. For these reasons, the tourism business is trying to gain knowledge of this community in order to target this so-called pink market. (Holcomb & Luongo, 1996; Aitchison, MacLeod & Shaw, 2000; Kotler, Bowen & Makens, 2006; Waitt & Markwell, 2006; Hughes, 2006).

The aim of this research is to gain a better understating of the “gay and lesbian community” as a new niche in the industry, as well as explore how this community was recognized and how gay and lesbian tourism had moved from being invisible into creating ghettos which later originated “gay meccas” and with those, the development of gay and lesbian destinations (Waitt & Markwell, 2006; Hughes, 2006).

The main objective of this thesis is to apply the knowledge derived from a review of what gay tourism means and its importance and impact in the hospitality and tourism to see if Reykjavík has the potential to become a new gay and lesbian destination. In order to do this, three questions are considered:

- What does a destination need to possess/have to become interesting to the Gay and Lesbian Market?
  - What does the Gay and Lesbian community search in these destinations?
  - What is the potential for Reykjavík to become a new gay and lesbian destination?

This research follows a qualitative methodology, in which three informal interviews were conducted following specific themes intended to maximize the information output of the interviewee. Each interviewee represents a crucial part in determining Reykjavík’s potential to become a new gay and lesbian destination.



## **2 Development of Gay and Lesbian Tourism**

Nowadays, it seems that gay men and lesbian women travel more and spend more money in holidays than straight people (Holcomb & Luongo, 1996; Aitchison, MacLeod & Shaw, 2000; Kotler, Bowen & Makens, 2006; Hughes, 2006). This has caused the Gay and Lesbian community to be recognized as one of the newest niches in the tourism industry and generated the expression “pink money”, which refers to the money spent by the gay and lesbian community and which seems to be wanted by all leisure and holiday businesses (Aitchison, MacLeod & Shaw, 2000; Holloway & Taylor, 2006; Hughes, 2006). Also, to further add to this fact, there are all year round events, such as parties, sport meetings, gay prides and circuit parties in cities around the world. This highlights the importance of studying the gay and lesbian community for the purposes of tourism. But who are they?

### **2.1 The road to acceptance and recognition**

Gay and lesbian people have always existed but it was not until modern times that they began to be spoken of as a community (Schiller & Weiss, 1988; Cloke, Crang & Goodwin, 2005). In past years, to have sexual attraction for the same sex was a taboo subject and to sleep with a person of the same sex was punished. It was for this reason that the gays and lesbians started searching for underground places to meet with other gays and lesbians and where they could coexist with and be accepted by straight people/locals (Markwell & Waite, 2006; Hughes, 2006). However, before this was possible a huge progress had to be made and this process is still ongoing.

Gays and lesbians are not tolerated everywhere, but there has been a slow but steady social openness towards the acceptance and better understanding of the gay community that we can see today and which owes its existence in large measure, to a hot summer night in 1969, when a group of gays and lesbians decided to stop be victims and start fight for their rights in the Greenwich Village neighborhood in New York City. Although some have censured 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 21<sup>st</sup> century still exists in the world as such (Schiller & Weiss, 1988).

Through time societies evolve and ideologies change with modernization in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and post-modern developments towards the end of the century, big transformations took place, leaving behind some traditional morals and ideologies. The transformations in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century are part of movements of different groups demanding rights and recognition, the women's movement, the black civil rights movement and the gay movement. Questions of identity, who am I and how do I differ from other people, became prominent (Cloke, Crang & Goodwin, 2005; Santrock 2008).

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

Questions of identity have been of high importance for the gay and lesbian community because they have been able to identify themselves as homosexual men and women, with romantic or sexual attraction or behavior among members of the same sex (Marcus, 1992; Cloke, Crang & Goodwin, 2005). It is often mistaken to speak of a “gay identity”, because these people do not share similar experiences, interests or way of life; but rather a sexual preference for the same sex. It is only this preference that characterizes the personal identity of which we speak (Hughes, 2006). Nonetheless, this concept has helped this community to create a sense of belonging to a group.

The gay and lesbian community has always been marginalized by heteronormativity. The idea that heterosexuality is compulsory has always been pushed the gay in the search for a home, a place that gives more sense of home than home itself (Markwell & Waitt, 2006; Hughes, 2006). With the transition from modern to post-modern societies a more open-minded society has evolved (Cloke, Crang & Goodwin, 2005), and a broader tolerance for people who are attracted to others of the same sex is being reached in societies in North-America and western Europe (Clapham & Waaldijk, 1993; Clift & Forrest, 1999; Markwell & Waitt, 2006; Hughes, 2006). However, in many countries in Africa, Eastern Europe and Arab world, any kind of gay performances are still strictly prohibited and it is even punished with death in some of them (ILGA, 2009).

In the past paragraphs we have mentioned that society has evolved from a really conservative posture into a modern one and post-modern, a society where some equality between genders is reached and the society became more open-minded towards gays and lesbians. For such a reason, the recognition of the gay and lesbian community as one, after years and years of mistreatment and intolerance; with in years this community became more visible and takes action in society, creating neighborhoods or “ghettos” (Markwell & Waitt, 2006; Hughes, 2006).

In the next sub-chapter the concept of Gay spaces is analyzed. Talking about gay spaces does not exclude any member of the LGBT (Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community) (Hughes, 2006), this concept involves all of these members, although most of the research made in tourism and leisure studies often focuses exclusively on the gay males and little research exists about the lesbians. But as it was just said when talking about gay spaces or gay scenes this does not exclude any member of the LGBT community.

## **2.2 Gay Spaces**

Since it is possible only to be gay or lesbian in some places and not others, the desire for recreation may lead gay and lesbian people to travel to the nearest gay bar or social space where they can be themselves. It is really common among the gay and lesbian population who come from small places to search for big gay spaces known as “gay Mecca”, “homelands”, or “Gay Capitals”. These are places where the gay identity thrives, cities where gay movements took place, or have monuments and museums in favor of the gay and lesbians rights and opposition to the privilege of heteronormativity. San Francisco for example as a “gay Mecca” has been attributed to the open-minded and ethnically diverse people, and the pride celebrations and the facilities located in the Castro Street for the gay and lesbians community itself (Markwell & Waitt, 2006; Hughes, 2006).

Gay capitals are spaces that facilitate opportunities to relate to other homosexuals and where they can escape from disapproval and discrimination such as

exclusive bars, clubs and restaurants for gays and lesbians (Jenkins, Morgan, Pritchard & Sedgely, 1998; Markwell & Waitt, 2006; Hughes, 2006).

Although “gay scene” is a term used among this community, simply referring to bars or clubs where gay and lesbians meet up, it does not necessarily refer to an entire area or city. Therefore, academics that researched this new niche came up with the term “gay space” (Hughes, 2006). Gay space is usually reduced to a set of events and establishments, where tourists can contact other gay people and allows the gays and lesbians to be themselves and feel comfortable and secure. Such places provide people with an opportunity to be more out and obviously gay, as well as the illusion of security and safety where tolerance can be assured. These gay spaces are highly populated by gay and lesbians obviously but are not exclusive for them and where straight people can also be found (Jenkins, Morgan, Pritchard & Sedgely, 1998; Aitchison, MacLeod & Shaw, 2000; Visser, 2003; Hughes, 2006).

Gay spaces are places that assure comfort and safety but above all tolerance. So to develop an entertainment space for this community it is necessary to take into account the inhabitant of these locations because tourism business are built of human relations (Hughes, 2006) and a constant interaction between the local and the traveler is necessary when hospitality and tourism services are provided to the gay and lesbian community.

The tourism industry sees a potential in this community because they have the wealth to travel and the time. They are demanding places to go on holidays and spend some leisure time (Hughes, 2003). This community has built gay neighborhoods already and now they demand spaces to spend their free time. To target this new niche of tourism it is necessary to have a better understanding of their demands. We know now that the gay and lesbian community is there, and that they are hungry to travel and spend their “pink money”.

## **2.3 Gays as market segment in tourism**

Tourism and marketing has focused on gaining knowledge in gays and lesbians demands as consumers and their characteristics as travelers, what their demands are and what they search in their holiday experience. With the recognition of the gay and lesbian community, it has become easier to target this community and create spaces for them to spend their holidays. This niche has been growing really fast and preferred destinations for this community have emerged, especially in Western European countries and North America (Hughes, 2006).

The tourism industry is relatively new but over the years it has developed and grown (Hughes, 2006). Marketing is being used as a tool to recognize individuals and groups in order to obtain an understanding of what they need and want, with the aim of creating products for them. When needs, wants and demands are recognized, the product is created. With the recognition of the gay and lesbian community and the appearance of a higher tolerance towards them, it has become easier for the marketing and tourism industry to study them, recognize their need and demand and supply a product for it (Clift & Forrest, 1999; Visser, 2003; Hughes, 2006). As a new niche in the tourism and leisure business, destinations and events have been developed to satisfy this demand (Kotler, Bowen & Makens, 2006; Ómar Ingi Magnússon, 2009). In the 20<sup>th</sup> century gay neighborhoods rose in the urban landscape of the global north societies. These neighborhoods are wealthy and present a demand of goods in which leisure and tourism are included; making the targeting of this community possible (Cloke, Crang & Goodwin, 2005). There are cities in the United States, Canada and in Europe

(Manchester, Ibiza, Paris and Amsterdam) where because of its nature of “gayness”, are highly populated by gays and lesbians. Therefore, these cities have developed bars and places for them and have become more tolerant towards the gay and lesbian community (Clift & Forrest, 1999; Visser, 2003; Hughes, 2006). Thus these cities have become popular among homosexuals around the world, who then travel as tourists to these places.

This might owe to the fact that homosexuals have always had the necessity of searching for “gay spaces”, in order to feel free and be able to relate to other homosexuals or to escape intolerance (Jenkins, Morgan, Pritchard & Sedgely, 1998; Hughes, 2006). The need for this space is influenced by intolerance and negative image that still exists towards homosexuals in other parts of the world, where they might often be tied to disasters, misfortunes and general problems in society – AIDS, decline of family and family values, decline in morality and more (Boswell, n.d.; Marcus, 1992). This intolerance has pushed this community to travel longer and more often to avoid intolerance and discrimination, in search for the homeland (Jenkins, Morgan, Pritchard & Sedgely, 1998; Hughes, 2006).

The above-mentioned might explain why Gay men, for example, are frequent and intensive holidaymakers. According to the US Nation Tour Association (NTA) “this market likes to travel and has the money and time to devote to that end”. Gays and lesbians seem to have a higher than average disposition to travel and possibility to stay longer abroad. Surveys in the US shows that 97% of this community had traveled in the past 12 months and 72% in the UK (Hughes, 2006).

One other piece of evidence supporting the claim of the need that the gay and lesbian community has to travel, is that after the 9/11 incident this was the first group of tourist that started traveling again (Cooper, Fletcher, Fyall, Gilbert & Wanhill, 2005 & Kotler, Bowen & Makens, 2006).

The search for privacy is supported by the fact that a preference exists by gay and lesbian tourists towards apartments, because of the higher sense of freedom therein compared to what they often encounter in hotels or guest houses. (Jenkins, Morgan, Pritchard & Sedgely, 1998; Hughes, 2006).

As was mentioned before, the gay and lesbian community has the time, the money and the necessity of a place to interact with other homosexual, which has made it an interesting segment in tourism markets. The next sub-chapter will analyze the development of destinations from gay spaces, and what these destinations require to become attractive to the gay and lesbian market.

## **2. 4 Gay destinations**

Destination choice is a process whereby travelers analyze places and search for the best attributes in them, that is, they discriminate destinations based on risks and 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.

A destination is the point of encounter between the local and the tourist. Tourists travel to other places with the purpose of recreation and freedom, often with the desire of experiencing and doing things that perhaps they would not do at home. When traveling, tourists indulge their fantasies (Clift & Forrest, 1999), which may cause them to behave in ways that create social friction between them and the residents. This is particularly worth considering when talking about the gay and lesbian tourists, since they are in search for a space to interact with other homosexuals.

Travelers like to feel safe, for this reason when searching for a destination to spend their leisure time (holidays), they analyze the places they desire to visit but certain level of safety and comfortably is needed. Neither straight nor gay tourists may want to spend time in a country, city or town where political conflicts or terrorists attack have happened recently, such destination may become undesirable for travelers (Aitchison, MacLeod & Shaw, 2000; Hughes, 2006).

Gay and lesbians travelers stay overnight(s) and interact with the locals. The locals provide accommodation and recreation. However, in the process of interaction differences are likely to arise, because of views towards homosexuality in general. This may create conflict for locals, particular groups and also suppliers, such as accommodations or airlines because of intolerance for gays and lesbians. Some places and suppliers may develop an anti-gay image while other's promote a "gay friendly" image (Hughes, 2006).

#### **2.4.1 Gay friendly and anti-gay image of destinations**

Gay and lesbian tourists have often been verbally insulted or discriminated when traveling. But why? This is often because of intolerance and misjudgment towards homosexuals, and lack of knowledge about this community.

Anti-gay image is found in destinations that because of their cultural norms and religious beliefs become less desirable for the gay and lesbian community. These destinations are often prejudiced and intolerant towards homosexuality and there are in some countries, strict laws that punish any kind of act of homosexuality. All these make those destinations not desirable for the gay and lesbian community (Markwell & Waitt, 2006; Hughes, 2006). But even in destinations that have always been known for welcoming the gay and lesbian community, there have been conflicts between locals and this community making such destination less attractive for gays and lesbians 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).

#### **2.4.2 Suppliers reinforcing a gay-friendly or anti-gay image**

As we mentioned above actions can promote or disturb gay-friendly images in certain destinations, but not only events create a favorable or a negative image, suppliers play a really important role as well.

Airline companies take an important role in the process of traveling. British Airways for example sent an anti-gay message by asking a South African passenger to stop kissing his boyfriend on a flight to London. Later, the passenger ended up in court (Hughes, 2006).

Another instance took place when a transgender took legal action against United Airlines when he was removed from his seat and was asked to change into male clothing (Hughes, 2006). Facts like these ones create often cause suppliers to be perceived as anti-gay.

American Airlines was targeted by particularly unfavorable publicity in 1993 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 event, with its slogan The “Rainbow TeAAm” (Hughes, 2006; American Airlines, 2009).

When it comes to terms of accommodation, it can be particularly difficult for the gay and lesbian community because they seem to search for a place where they can experience freedom. Some hotels acknowledge this fact and have taken steps to make the situation easier by adopting “gay-friendly” or “gay-exclusive” tags.

On the other hand places like Manchester, London, Brighton, and other cities in the UK, a country known for a high tolerance towards homosexuals, there have been some incidents where 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).

These all time known gay-friendly destinations such as many cities in the United States, the United Kingdom and Western Europe, after incidents like the ones just mentioned before create a less desirable and less gay-friendly image; forcing this community to search for new possible destinations (Clift & Forrest, 1999; Hughes, 2006).

These are all facts that influence the emergence of destinations for the gay and lesbian community and reinforce its gay-friendliness. They will also influence this community in the process of destination choice because they are in search of a place with high tolerance. A place where they can bond with other gay people and not be discriminated because their sexual preferences and where there is no need to hide. Like any other tourist they want to feel welcome. Suppliers play an important role when this community travels. So a positive attitude toward gays and lesbians is a determinant fact to visit certain destination (Markwell & Waitt, 2006; Hughes, 2006).

There are though other destinations that re-enforce their gay-friendly image; such is the case of Florida in the US. Since 1991, a Gay and Lesbian Day at Walt Disney World (Orlando) is held, this is an action that stimulates gay and lesbians to gather each year. In the first year (1991), it was estimated that 3000 visitors showed up. In 1995 attendance increased to 32,000 million and in 2004 around 135,000 was estimated. Despite this apparent success, throughout the years 1997 to 2004 different attempts to boycott the festivities took place, 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”.

The boycotts, however, had no effect and this event has become so popular that it has evolved from a one-day celebration to a weekend-long festivity. This year, the event will span a long weekend from the 3<sup>rd</sup> of June to the 7<sup>th</sup> (Holcomb & Luongo, 1996; Hughes, 2006; markbakerevents, 2010). This as an example of a destination that wants to re-enforce gay and lesbian tourism and which works in promoting its image as a gay-friendly destination.

Tourists in general, travel to see or visit particular “tourist sights” such as the Eiffel Tower (Paris), the Berlin Wall or the Empire State Building (New York), or to attend events such as the Olympic Games. There are a great variety of “sights” and events – tourist attractions – and these are motivators for tourists to travel. The gay and lesbian community visits the same tourist sights, but there are other attractions that have a particular appeal to this market. All around the world gay and lesbians events are held and these events promote places and creates a more welcoming gay-image (Hughes, 2006).

### 2.4.3 Popular gay destinations and locations where gay and lesbian tourism has developed:

- **Amsterdam** the largest city in the Netherlands, it is a city of high preference for the gay and lesbian community because of gay and lesbian life is very open and there are numerous visible venues for this community. The city has a heritage of buildings and canals, and the less conventional ones associated with liberal attitude towards sex. Bars, restaurants, hotels, saunas and dance as well as sex clubs are all over the city. It is one of the cities most know for its liberty and open-minded population; this city is associated with liberal attitude towards sex (and heterosexual and homosexual prostitution) and drug use. A really popular destination among straights, and one of the top destinations with in 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 including hippies, artists and gays. It is a popular destinations among the younger tourists because the club nightlife. Ibiza town and around the town such as Figueretas is the main area for gay hotels, restaurants, bars and clubs.
- **Manchester** in the UK has been targeting the gay and lesbian and has focused in the existing gay space of the “gay Village” located in the city-center. This is a gay space of bars and clubs, saunas, bookshops and restaurants, which has a concentration and coherence no t apparent in any other UK city. This a area was feature in a national UK television series Queer as Folk in 1999.
- **United States** perhaps the country with most location as destinations for the gay market. San Francisco for example as destination offers many attraction such as the golden gate bridge, the prison of Alcatraz and its cable-cars. Through the years the San Francisco started to be populated by gay and lesbian in the 1970 and has been nominated has the “gay capital of the USA2 by life magazine. Other destinations in the US are Palm Spring and LA in California and Key West and Fort Lauderdale in Florida where famous circuit parties are hold and gay spring breaks.

But not only have gay destinations originated and developed because of the gay friendly attitudes and the gay scenes in the places, but also because of things like sports events, festivals, prides and gay heritage influences in the development of gay destinations and increased popularity because of them.

### 2.4.4 Events and Heritage sites

Gay Games, parades and festivals and the circuit parties are attractions that influence gay and lesbians to visit a particular destination. In the US there is a particularly large number of gay and lesbian sporting teams and leagues and they hold sports events that attract spectators like all other sporting events. Most of the companies listed in gay and lesbian travel guides (US) mention or specialize in sport activity travel products such as swimming, soccer, golf, sailing, hiking, rafting and trekking. The gay and lesbian was formed in 1991 and there over 39 annual GLTA-sanctioned tournaments mostly in USA. They attract about 5000 players each year. In the UK for example the annual East Bourne (UK) women’s tennis festival attracts a large number

of lesbians spectators. Gay Rodeos are popular in the US and are likely to have tourism potential (Marwell & Waitt, 2006; Hughes, 2006).

“Gay Games” is a sports event for the gay and lesbian community very much like gay prides, festivals and circuit parties. The latter characterizes the gay scene in the US. However all of them are features of significance relevant in a travel decisions for this community. The same sex-marriage and partnerships registration are other factors that influence this market to travel. And since there are only few places where same-sex marriages are allow, this has increasingly influence this community to travel to such destination (Jenkins, Morgan, Pritchard & Sedgely, 1998; Hughes, 2006).

## **Gay Games**

Nowadays Gay Games is the largest sport event. Gay games have been held every 4 years since the first in San Francisco in 1982. The purpose has been to foster and augment self-respect of lesbian and gay men and to engender the respect and understand of the non-gay world (Gay Cologne, 2010). About 40 countries attended the 1994 New York Games and then the games were held in Amsterdam in 1998 with a quarter of a million visitors. Sidney and Chicago were the places that hosted to the next two Gay Games 2002 and 2006 respectably. And this year the biggest sport event among the gay and lesbians community are host by cologne, Germany. Where they are specking 12,000 participants from around the world. As it was just mentioned above, this sport event is the event that gets together the biggest number of gays and lesbians together (Holcomb & Luongo, 1996; Marwell & Waitt, 2006; Hughes, 2006; Gay Cologne, 2010).

## **Gay Heritage**

Gay Heritage is another determinant factor for some gay and lesbians travelers. Stonewall riots in Greenwich Village (New York) may be a place of pilgrim for some. The “homomonument” in Amsterdam may be a symbol of “gay liberation”. This is a composition in the form of three large, horizontal, granite triangles which commemorates Nazi persecution of gay and lesbians, but which has become a symbol of a more general world-wide discrimination. The AIDS memorial in Company’s Garden, Cape Town has a particular poignancy in a country where 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 a places of significance marked by rainbow tiles set in to the pavement. The trail takes in the memorial to Alan Turin, 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 Wild 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).

When it comes to gradual legalization of marriage and of partnerships between same sex couples in several parts of the world have created a new market in ceremonies comparable to that for the heterosexual wedding and celebrations. Same-sex marriage is legal now in many countries such as Denmark (became the firs country same-sex union in the from of “registered partnerships” in 1989), Netherlands, Spain South Africa,



Norway, and Canada. The legalization of same sex married through Canada it has encouraged visits for the purpose of marriage and it has been creating a more gay-friendly image of the whole country. Seems that since 2000 half of the marriage licenses issue in Canada had been for couple outside the Canadian population, bringing with it a traveler for the purpose of getting married (Marwell & Waitt, 2006; Hughes, 2006).

### **Gay Prides**

Gay and Lesbian parades and festivals are important element of gay tourism. Gay prides take place all over the world even in those cities or countries where homosexuals are not accepted. The gay prides started as and still are movements in manifestations of human rights, so people should 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 use as antonym of shame. Protest parades have, however, become more festive and carnivalesque. 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 now in Europe is hold Europride an international event dedicated to this community, hosted by a different European city each year. The festival includes numerous sporting and artistic event staged throughout the host city (Marwell & Waitt, 2006; Hughes, 2006)

### **Circuit Parties**

Circuit parties are other events that influence the gay and lesbian community, there are circuit parties in many destinations around the world but they are really common in the US. There are over 100 of these in the US, and they are know as “weekend long, erotically-charged, drug-filled gay dance even held in resorts across the country”, they are events of discos, parties, pool parties, club nights, dinners, concerts and entertainments for several days. The most famous are the White Party men and Dinah Shore Weekend for women both in Palm Spring. Circuit parties can be hold as well in Ski Week, where offer the opportunity to sky with other gays and lesbians but they are also including evening parties in their programs (Hughes, 2006).

All these gay events mentioned above seemed to be mostly focused for gay tourists usually of a younger age, this may be because a smoother transition to the development of a gay identity than has the older gay men. They have struggle through life because a less open-society and there was not such thing of gay and lesbian community or gay and lesbian rights. Because of this younger gay generations (40 – “forty and younger”) seem to live their social lives in a gay milieu than were older men and this follow trough into holidays. They have grown in an open-society with gay spaces and able to meet other gays and lesbians. While the older generations (50 + “forty and older) there are in search of more quite places to relax and more comfort when traveling and they are really little in the gay scene (Deutsch & Hughes, 2009). Although the younger and older generations were concern to ensure access to a gay space, and to ensure gay-friendliness on holidays and to avoid homophobic places an situations (Marwell & Waitt, 2006; Hughes, 2006; Deutsch & Hughes, 2009).

## 3 Methodology

### 3.1 Method

In order to meet the aims of this study, a qualitative approach using explorative interviews was used. In recent decades qualitative approaches are becoming more popular in leisure and tourism studies, involving face-to-face interaction between people (Veal, 2006).

When using a qualitative method the information obtained is “richer”, about relatively few cases rather than the more limited information about a large number of cases, which is more typical of quantitative research (Veal, 2006). The researcher attempts to analyze thoroughly, in great detail, a particular subject or issue (Mann, 1985; Esterberg, 2002; McIntyre, 2005; Veal, 2006).

“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).

Informal interviews, usually involve relatively small number of individuals being interviewed. The idea of the informal interview is that the interviewer stimulates the informant to talk about the themes of the study and he or she just listens (Mann, 1985; Veal, 2006). With this kind of interviews large amounts of information are generally collected from relative small number of people (Veal, 2006). The interviewee may deliver the information in different sequences from the prepared themes but this does not really matter because it is the topic that counts, and not the order of themes or the way they were introduce (Mann, 1985).

The advantages of combining explorative interviews and recording are the possibility of listening again for relevant information when analyzing the interviews. In an ideal situation, during the interview the conversation floats like two persons talking about a subject they both have interest in and people will forget the recording machine (Mann, 1985; McIntyre, 2005; Veal, 2006). The simplicity of the themes will take away the pressure of feeling like he or she is interrogated, and a feeling of a natural conversation may allow the interviewee to open more and feel more free to talk.

### 3.2 Data

For all those reasons mentioned above, explorative interviews were chosen as a method for study and the interviews recorded. Themes were prepared for each interview, some themes are similar in all the interviews while some are specific for that interviewee (see themes in appendix).

Three people with different positions were selected as informants for this study, but each of them represents different sides of the issue that wanted to be explored. Combining the analysis from these interviews allows me to explore and gain a better understanding of the question formulated for this study. The interviews

had average length of forty minutes each although two of them developed more talking after the recorder was off, two of the interviews were made in coffee house and the other at interviewer house.

The themes that were selected for all of interviews were:

- Theme A. Inquires about social attitudes towards Homosexuals
- Theme B. Availability of information of special interest for the gays and lesbians tourist
- Theme C. Do tourists (gays and lesbians) ask for any specific information
- Theme D. Reykjavík as a gay and lesbian destination

The purpose of the theme A was to gain knowledge on gay and lesbian rights in Iceland, and how has being the attitude towards the gay and lesbian community through history. What role do they play and the level of acceptance of homosexuals in Iceland, how safe is to be gay in the Icelandic society. This theme is of a really importance because security and tolerance are really important factors to the development of new gay and lesbian destination.

Theme B explores the availability of any kind of information of relevance to the gay and lesbian community, if there is or has being any kind advertising to reach and target this community from Reykjavík or specific supplier such as hotel, restaurants, clubs and tour operators.

Theme C intends to find out what kind of information this community is asking for, what are gays and lesbian asking when they arrive to a new destination in this case to Reykjavík, in terms of accommodations, tours, food and bars.

The purpose of the last theme D concerns the potential that has Reykjavík to become a new gay and lesbian destination, what does Reykjavík as a destination that may interest this community. And specially bring up the attractiveness of this capital to develop gay and lesbian tourism in Reykjavík.

Although before the explorative interviews were conducted, a visit was made to the main information centers in Reykjavík in Aðalstræti 2, with the purpose of find out if there was any kind of information of relevance to the gay and lesbian community and themes just mentioned above were used. They said that in the old version of the website <http://www.visitreykjavik.is/>, they used to have information of relevance for the gay and lesbian community but that this new version they will not have any specific information of relevance for this community, and that they don't have any specific information for the gays and lesbian and that is only during Reykjavík Gay Pride Weekend that they have brochures and the agenda of the daily events during that weekend.

Also specific themes were created specifically for each interviewee with the purpose of exploring more in areas that they are more familiar with, the first interview was with the president of Samtökin 78, The National Queer Organization in Iceland, Svanfríður Lárusdóttir.

“Samtökin ‘78, The National Queer Organization, is an interest and an activist group for homosexuals, bisexuals and transsexuals in Iceland. The organization’s goal is for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transsexual

persons to be visible and recognized and enjoy their rights to the fullest in Icelandic society” (Samtökin 78).

As a president of the National Queer Organization in Iceland, she has good knowledge of subjects like gay and lesbian acceptance in the Icelandic society, legal rights for homosexuals and advantages and disadvantages of living in Iceland as homosexual. The specific theme created for her was:

- Theme E. If Samtökin 78 has an Agenda of events that may interest the gay and lesbian community, this with the purpose of explore activities that are done in Iceland by the local gay and lesbian community and does not reach the gays and lesbians that travel to Reykjavík, who may be able to join such events.

With the purpose of gaining knowledge on the gay and lesbian tourism market, Eva María Þórarinsdóttir, was interviewed. She is a student at the University of Iceland doing a Master degree in Tourism Studies and also a marketing manager of Elding whale watching company. The company has offered few tours focusing on the gay and lesbian community and Eva Maria is creating her own travel agency for the “pink market”.

- Theme F. Past experiences and future plans in the pink market, where the theme explores past tours that she has organized for the gay and lesbian community and the experience she has gain from it, and that she is putting in practice to target this new market and the creation of a gay and lesbian travel agency “NaviGayTour”.

And last but not least the tourism-marketing manager in Reykjavík and capital area Dóra Magnúsdóttir. She is in charge of analyzing the demands of potential travelers visiting Reykjavík and try to satisfy and meet their demands. The themes made for her interview were:

- Theme G. to explore if Reykjavík as intended in target in any way the gay and lesbian community.
- Theme H. the relevance of the Reykjavík Gay Pride Weekend and its importance for the tourism in Reykjavík, and specially the impact in tourism during this weekend for both national and international travelers and If more gay and lesbian visit Reykjavík during that weekend than other weekends.

With these explorative interviews the aim was to collect information and views on the possibilities of Reykjavík becoming a new gay and lesbian destination from three important perspectives: A) The gay and lesbian association on the social status of homosexuals and attitudes towards this community in Reykjavík. B) From the tourism marketing manger, on what the city authorities have done or are planning to do to reach to this new niche in tourism C) From the Elding marketing manger on what has been done and future plans of targeting the “pink market”.

## **4. Reykjavík as a potential Gay and Lesbian destination**

### **4.1 Social attitudes**

All informants agree on Reykjavík being characterized by having a free and open-minded society, where feeling attracted to same sex is not an issue and is part of every day life for this society. Reykjavík, as a European capital, has followed similar developments in gay rights as the rest of Western Europe. Icelanders have become really open towards homosexuals, according to the president of the Samtökin 78, the queer association in Iceland:

“Gay people have competently the same right than straight since 1996”

Samtökin 78 was established in 1978, and it has been a key factor on fighting for gay and lesbian rights and the organization has achieved much in changing attitudes. However, it was not until 1996 that gay people obtained same rights as their straight counterparts such as getting married, couples registration and adoption rights. Compared to many countries Gay people are treated with respect and have not been severely marginalized or mistreated because of their sexual orientation. Eva María said she felt happy being Icelandic and lives in such an open society where equality has been reached between straight and homosexuals rights, and where:

“If you have prejudice against gay people you are un-cool”

According to Eva María there is no more fight, referring to how society is open and accepts gays and lesbian as members of society. The Icelandic society has by now a high degree of tolerance for the gay and lesbian community and according to the Marketing Manager in Reykjavík and the capital area, the Icelandic society has a general tolerance towards people irrespective of sexual preferences, color or where they come from.

### **4.2 Availability of information for gay and lesbian tourists**

According to informants at the tourism information center in Reykjavík, there is no tourist information specifically for this community. The old website [visitreykjavik.is](http://visitreykjavik.is) used to recommend some restaurants, clubs and hotels characterized for welcoming the gay and lesbian community, but now they are creating a new website that will only provide general info and there will be no information target the gay and lesbian community.

Eva María mentioned that in the Icelandic tourist market there is not any kind of information now that may interest the gay and lesbian community; Unlike in other countries, such as the UK where the pink market is quite big. She added that in Reykjavík, there are some places gay people know about and are operated by gay people like the hotel “Rooms with a view” and the gay bar “Barbara”.

The president of Samtökin 78, Svanfríður, said that there are many thing that may interest the gay and lesbian community, but this information is not available in one place, rather it is spread everywhere,

“We locals know where other gays and lesbians work, we know about some activities but these are things that tourists cannot find in one place”

To what also she adds:

“For example there are gay dances every month, but not always Samtökin 78 is in charge of them, the months are distributed among the organizations for example in August is gay pride weekend, June and July the gay pride committee collects funds for the gay pride; October, November and Christmas and new years eve are events and balls that Samtökin 78 organized; Women with women organization organize every 2<sup>nd</sup> weekend of July a camping trip, which this year they will do it with Samtökin 78 to have a family weekend for those gays and lesbians couples who have children, but this is information that cannot be found in one place like if you are sitting in London and want to go to Iceland, you cannot find all this information in one place, not even in Iceland”

Svanfríður, pointed out that there is a privately owned website by Frosti Jonsson, that provides tourism information for the gay and lesbian community on where to stay and what to do while visiting Reykjavík. After checking the website we found out that it focused on the gay and lesbian community although information on accommodation, cafes, bars and events are not exclusively for that group.

Svanfríður, president of Samtökin 78, also mentioned that gay and lesbian tourists come by the center and ask for information such as on restaurants, cafes, clubs and activities; But that there is little specific information of interest for them. She said that when tourists come and ask for such information in Samtökin 78 she told them to “go everywhere” because in Iceland it is ok to be gay everywhere.

Eva María mentioned that she usually recommends places where she and her girlfriend visit. She remarked that:

“Gays and lesbians like any other tourist come to see same attraction as straight people and visit same museums They go out for dinner and wine tasting in Reykjavík and visit the local attractions like any other tourists”.

#### **4. 3 Reykjavik as a gay and lesbian destination**

According to all informants, Reykjavík has an open society and favorable attitudes towards gays and lesbians making the capital a potential attraction for this community. According to Þóra, the marketing manager:

“Gay people are welcome everywhere, neither hotels, restaurants or clubs will act in any way to make gay and lesbians feel uncomfortable or unwelcome”

This makes Reykjavík an excellent option for developing gay and lesbian tourism. According to Eva María and Svanfríður Reykjavík has a “gay scene” already, although Eva María said that it cannot be compared to gay capitals like in the UK, with just gay bar Barbara and a exclusive gay male bar MSC. Þóra mentioned that from time to time there are some places that become popular among the gay and lesbian community in Reykjavík, but in general the nightlife, restaurants and cafes change rapidly in the

capital area and it is hard to keep track of these changes. She thought most hotels and restaurants were open to everyone:

*“Rooms with a view* is an example of hotel gay own and gay operator, although there are enumerable hotels and restaurants that will welcome anybody”

For such reason “gay friendly” label is not necessary in Reykjavík like in other countries. and is rather something that the Icelandic society have always have as value tolerance towards gay and lesbians, and that this community is welcome every where.

The marketing manager in Reykjavík and the capital area said that they were not targeting any specific group, rather reacting to the demand of certain markets. She expressed her sympathy for the gay and lesbian community saying:

“Gay and lesbian community is one of the best groups to target but unfortunately because of the lack of money, “we cannot afford to target any specific market, but that they have being really reactive to the demand of this community”

Þóra said that couple of magazines had come to Iceland to write about how easy is to be gay and lesbian and how the Icelandic society is open toward homosexual.

Reykjavík Excursions and Elding Reykjavík whale Watching are two companies that advertise them selves as “gay friendly” and are officially label as such in the IGLTA website (International Gay and Lesbian Travel Association), although they are not gay and lesbian exclusive (IGLTA, 2010).

Reykjavík gay pride is one of the biggest events in Reykjavík. According to the Marketing Manager in Reykjavík and the capital area, Gay pride is among the top five festivals in Iceland. During this weekend the hotels are full and everywhere you go into hotels, restaurants, swimming pools and bars you can see gay people that has come to the capital because of the Gay pride. Reykjavík and Samtökin 78 work together through this weekend to put up the festival the president of Samtökin 78 mentioned during the interviews:

“Gay pride is a general family friendly event not exclusive for gays and lesbians but for everyone, while in other places is only for the gay and lesbian community”

Gay pride in Iceland is like a national day where not only the gay and lesbian community shares with friends and relative but also the whole Icelandic society go out and celebrates; Also Eva Maria and Þóra emphasized point that “Gay Pride” is a family friendly event.

While discussing about the relevance of Gay pride for the tourism business in Reykjavík and capital area Þóra said the importance of gay pride for Reykjavík had come up in discussions with some straight people right after the Icelandic crises and people agreed:

“That Gay pride is at least one thing that we can do right, to celebrate and educate our children, fomenting tolerance and that it is ok to be gay”

Póra expressed that the open-minded society in Iceland accepts homosexuals and creates an open environment for this community. And it would be an issue for homosexuals to come and travel and co-exist with locals without the fear of being insult, mistreated or made them feel unwelcome.

But Reykjavík not only offers the gay pride weekend as an attraction, but so much more. The tourism-marketing manager thinks that culture night, winter light festival, music festival and Airways may attract this community as well because gays and lesbians are really interested in having a good time and experiencing culture, according to her. After all straight tourists and gay tourists visit and enjoy the same attraction. Eva Maria also emphasized this point.

Although Eva Maria thinks that this community needs more than just the regular services provided for tourists in general, this community is known for being brand loyal and in search for a more specialized service they seem to travel more often and have some extra money. Once Eva Maria organized a special gay cruise where the captain, crew and waiters were all gay and the atmosphere was much easier and comfortable than on regular tours. There was high catering and wine tasting. The cruise was supposed to last for three hours but was prolonged for four. This was according to Eva Maria because by having the whole crew from gay and lesbians this creates a more friendly and relaxed atmosphere.

Eva Maria is starting a company she calls “NaviGayTour”. It will target the gay and lesbian community. She wants to provide a more personalized service, employing mostly gay and lesbians, or really gay friendly people, so tourists will experience a sense of freedom and liberty. If they feel like hugging or kissing their boyfriend or girlfriend they should feel a hundred percent comfortable in doing so she wants to provide a more relaxed, secure and easy atmosphere. Her plan is to mostly take them to the same places that all tourists go and visit in Reykjavík, but offer a more specific and personalized service, a more gay service.

While discussing with Eva Maria about her company she mentioned that Reykjavík already has a gay scene and possesses one of the characteristics that the gay and lesbians community search in a place to spend their holidays and leisure time. Also she adds that Reykjavík is also a safe and secure place where it is not an issue to be a homosexual. Clubs, bars and hotels are not labeled “gay friendly” and have not launched a campaign to target the pink market, because gay and lesbians are welcome everywhere and there is no place where they may be discriminated for being gay. According to the marketing manager and president of queer association not even in the smallest village in Iceland gay and lesbians may feel unwelcome, all these making Reykjavík as an excellent place to develop as a new gay and lesbian destination.

Gay pride may be the event that may attract and interest the most to gay and lesbian tourists on visiting Reykjavík, but this capital has other festivals like the ones mentioned before that may interest this community and because of the high acceptance and tolerance towards homosexuals in Iceland make these festivals already gay friendly, suitable for this community. The marketing manager mentioned that this would not be possible if the Icelandic society was not so open-minded and tolerant as it is.

Póra mentioned that she sometimes asks herself if all members of the gay and lesbian community want to be targeted and segmented. She mentioned that a member of this community could visit Reykjavík and experience all its attractions without feeling threatened without targeting them as a specific market, part of the “pink market”. Although Eva Maria thinks that this community needs a specific targeting, they are known for being brand loyal and need a more personalized and specific targeting for such reason the creation of her company.



So in few months Reykjavík will have a new exclusive gay and lesbian tour operator “NaviGayTour”. And Reykjavík will be suitable for those who want to escape intolerance and experience a really personalize gay service and a gay experience, and for those who may just want to visit a city where to be gay is ok, with out the necessity of experiencing a pure gay travel experience.

## 5 Conclusion

This research explores and reviews, how homosexuals have always existed but there was a big still-on-going struggle before they gained recognition as a community and accepted in society. Not everywhere in the world gay and lesbians are treated in a favourable manner: some countries have laws against them and some others go as far as to punish them with death. However, the northern hemisphere of the globe (Eastern Europe, the USA, Canada) provides gay and lesbian people with more legal rights including that to marry and adopt (Holcomb & Luongo, 1996; Aitchison, MacLeod & Shaw, 2000; Kotler, Bowen & Makens, 2006; Hughes, 2006). These are benefits that the gay and lesbian community in Iceland has had since 1996 when, according to the president of Samtökin 78, an equality of straight and homosexual rights was reached.

Security and tolerance from society is really important when talking about gay and lesbian touristic destinations because this community is looking in their process of traveling is to experience a place where they can be themselves and feel comfortable where they won't be discriminated because of a sexual attraction for a person of the same sex (Bowen & Makens, 2006; Hughes, 2006). Security and tolerance from society are some characteristics that can be found in the Icelandic society according to Svanfríður and Eva María, and makes Reykjavík a desirable destination for the gay and lesbian community.

Suppliers play an important role according to Hughes (2008) in his book "*Pink Tourism*", negative action toward homosexuals creates anti-gay images while a welcoming campaign and marketing for this community creates a "gay-friendly" image. According to Þóra, the marketing manager in Reykjavík and the capital area, Reykjavík has a constant gay-friendly image because gays and lesbians are welcome everywhere and they won't experience any discrimination or sense of unwelcoming because of their sexual orientation.

Gay prides started and still are movements in manifestations of human rights, so people should be proud of their sexual orientation and gender identity (Bowen & Makens, 2006; Hughes, 2006). This is an attraction that influence gays and lesbians to visit a particular destination, and in Reykjavík Gay pride weekend is one of the biggest event of the year, specially because is not a weekend only for the gay and lesbian community but for the whole Icelandic society, these expressed by Þóra and Svanfríður.

Hotel, clubs, bars and restaurants in Reykjavík open the doors to all tourists gay or not to welcome them during that weekend but the gay and lesbian community is not only welcome that weekend but all year around because Iceland is characterize for being a tolerant and open-minded society.

Þóra said that Reykjavík is some how already a gay and lesbian destination because this community can come anytime of the year and feel welcome and there is a gay scene in this capital already, even though is small.

Reykjavík has two gay bars MSC and Barbara, and two tour operators that are label as "gay friendly" Reykjavík Excursions and Elding Reykjavík whale Watching, with in few months Reykjavík will have an exclusive gay and lesbian tour operator "NaviGayTour"; All these resuming the gay scene and the tolerance of this north capital of Iceland, Reykjavík.

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# Appendix

Theme A. Inquires about social attitudes towards Homosexuals

Exploring:

- Behavior
- Security
- Gay and lesbian right in Icelandic society

Theme B. Availability of information of special interest for the gays and lesbians tourist

Such:

- Hotels
- Clubs
- Restaurants
- Tours / Events

Theme C. Do tourists (gays and lesbians) ask for any specific information

Concerning:

- Accommodation
- Activities (tours and events)
- Dinning and drinking

Theme D. Reykjavík as a gay and lesbian destination

What does Reykjavík have as a destination that may interest the gay and lesbian tourists / community?

- Events
- Attitudes
- Security
- Suppliers
  - Hotels
  - Clubs
  - Restaurants
  - Tours

Are there any hindrances for developing Reykjavík as a destination for gay's and lesbians?

Theme E. Does samtökin have an Agenda all year around?

Yes - What's on it?

(Events that they organize that may interest the gay and lesbian community).

Theme F. Past experiences and future plans concerning the gay and lesbian community

- What kinds of tours have you organize for this community?  
And how was the experience and tour?
- Own plans about targeting this market segment (gay and lesbian community).

- Why the idea of creating your own company and targeting the pink market

Theme G. Targeting the gay and lesbian community in tourist promotion

- Has Reykjavik targeted the gay and lesbian community?
  - If yes: What has been done? (Promotion material: how, where, when?)  
Any further plans of promotion for this market segment?
  - If no: Any discussion or plans about targeting this group?

Theme H. During the Gay pride festival weekend

- Is the Gay pride event important for tourism in Reykjavik?
  - If yes: In what way important?