RETHINKING GAY TOURISM: A REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Oskaras Vorobjovas-Pinta
Anne Hardy
University of Tasmania, Australia

ABSTRACT
This paper presents an exploratory overview of the emergence of gay travel market as well as the travel motivations of gay men and women. Moreover, it is suggested that there is a parallel between gay space and gay travel motivations. However, little research has been undertaken on the outcomes of societal change and increased acceptance of homosexuality and its impact on the gay tourist motivations. The present paper reveals that gay tourism literature has failed to catch up with the changing societal environment, therefore the stereotyped and generalised projections on the motivations and social behaviours of gay travellers have perpetrated a distorted understanding of gay travel market.

Keywords: gay tourism; tourist motivations; societal change; gay space; tourism development.

INTRODUCTION
A ‘dream market’ or an ‘untapped gold mine’ (Kahan & Mulryan, 1995; Peñaloza, 1996). These two powerful words have been used to describe the gay market. Underpinning these words is the assumption that the gay tourism market is one which is homogeneous, high yielding, easy to market to and easily identifiable. The gay tourism market has been described as one which is typical of tourism, as it is an activity whereby peoples’ choices of holidaying habits and spaces are created as a reaction against their daily lives and social circumstances (Browne & Bakshi, 2011). Consequently, sexual orientation as a demographic element of the macro-environment ipso facto is assumed to have a substantial influence on one’s tourism experiences (Pritchard, Morgan, Sedgley, Khan, & Jenkins, 2000). This paper condenses the historic background of the gay travel market and presents insights into the existing literature on the gay travel market, as well as the fragmentation of knowledge arising from out-dated sources. Furthermore, in light of limited academic research of modern and evolving travel gay travel market, this paper argues that there is a complementary relationship between gay tourism and the neo-tribal theory.

HOMOSEXUALITY AND SOCIETAL CHANGE: A BRIEF REVIEW
Over the past fifty years, there have been many changes in terms of societal tolerance and acceptance of gay people. However, the notion of tolerance, which is closely interlinked with a term ‘human rights’, is perceived differently in various regions. Human rights can be understood as freedoms of an individual in the society and the possibility to realise them. Local laws and other social norms regulate human rights. Some of the main features of human rights are universality, generality and indivisibility, as well as they are influencing and determining each other, they are also based on human equality before the law, equality in general and other principles (United Nations, 1948). Consequently, one can ask how universal human rights can exist in a culturally diverse world. Moreover, such dilemmas as how cultural diversities can be respected in the process of globalization continue to persist. The attitudes towards homosexuals still considerably differ depending on locality, culture, political decisions, history or religion etc. Numerous Western countries respect homosexual rights, which are reflected in societal and legislative standards (e.g. marriage equality, the right to adopt for same-sex couples), whereas many African, Asian and Eastern European countries are
bounded by the social and/or legal norms, which are reflected through the legal discrimination of homosexuals, prosecution, death penalty, etc. Consequently, the acceptance and tolerance of gay men and women inevitably corresponds to the alterations of sociological, psychological and demographic elements (Crompton, 2003; Loftus, 2001; Werum & Winders, 2001). Historically, a major breakthrough of the gay and lesbian movement occurred in the mid-twenty first century. An assemblage of several historic events has led to the liberation and acceptance of homosexuality, including the Stonewell Riots in 1969; a shifting of the demographic composition of the population; changes in cultural ideologies; increased educational levels; establishment of gay NGO’s and university queer societies, etc. (D’Emilio, 1983; Loftus, 2001; Valocchi, 2005; Werum & Winders, 2001). In 1973, the American Psychiatric Association declassified homosexuality as a mental abnormality vis-à-vis a ‘sociopathic personality disturbance’ (Morin, 1977; Werum & Winders, 2001). In addition, in 1990 the World Health Organisation removed homosexuality from the list of mental illnesses a.k.a. International Classification of Diseases (European Parliament, 2011; King, 2003). These changes paved the way for greater societal acceptance of homosexuals.

More recently, popular culture as well as the ‘coming-out’ stories of such well-known public figures as Elton John, Ellen DeGeneres, George Michael, Neil Patrick Harris, Ricky Martin, Jason Collins and others has contributed to the spread and development of homosexual rights (Guzarino, 2007). In addition, the political decisions of a number of countries to equalise the rights of heterosexuals and homosexuals by permitting homosexuals to marry (or to enter into partnerships) have legally eliminated the societal boundaries of marginalisation. Therefore, the prevailing opinions on homosexuality over the years have been shifted from being perceived as abnormal to being accepted, and even considered as ‘mainstream’ (Vaid, 1995, in Werum & Winders, 2001; Browne & Bakshi, 2011; Gluckman & Reed, 1997).

GAY TOURISM RESEARCH: A REVIEW

The increasing acceptance of gay lifestyles has to some extent, been reflected through small, but gradual increases in explorations on gay tourism. The depth of this research is still limited, especially when compared to explorations of the tourism sectors, thus prompting claims that studies into gay tourism have been substantially neglected (Monterrubio, 2009; Pritchard, Morgan, Sedgely, & Jenkins, 1998). This neglect is evident in the paucity of research into the historical, social, psychological evolution and development of the gay tourism segment (Clift & Forrest, 1999; Clift & Wilkins, 1995; Melián-González, Moreno-Gil, & Araúa, 2011; Pritchard et al., 1998; Vandecasteele & Geuens, 2009). Of that which has been conducted, the majority of authors have concentrated on demand side elements, such as the motivation, demand for and behaviour characteristics of the gay tourism sector. Some authors argue against the existence of gay market segment in tourism. In fact there are comparably few documented examples in the literature, which acknowledge the phenomenon of gay tourism. For example, Hughes (2005) claims that it would be naïve to expect that sexual orientation ipso facto could be enough to define a market segment. Furthermore, in earlier literature, Fugate (1993, in Peñaloza, 1996) has disputed the existence of gay market segment, as there are no sufficient measures to fulfill ‘[…] the traditional criteria of being identifiable, accessible, and of sufficient size’ (Peñaloza, 1996, p. 10). However, further research by Gluckman and Read (1997) and Peñaloza (1996) legitimises the existence of gay market segment on the grounds of improved social acceptance, consumer subjectivity, market heterogeneity as well as due to the existing interrelated proximities between market segments and social movements.
Despite the arguments against the existence of gay market segment as a legitimate phenomenon, there is evidence that gay tourism has existed even prior the era of mass tourism in 1841, when Thomas Cook arranged the first rail trip from Leicester to Loughborough (Renshaw, 1994). Aldrich (1993) has suggested that some forms of gay tourism existed as early as 1750s or even earlier. This involved wealthy, well educated and upper class homosexual men from the Northern European countries travelling to the Mediterranean destinations in search for exotic cultures, warmer climates and the companionships of younger men. During those times, homosexuality was often associated with art, as the homosexual traveller was ineluctably linked with an ‘artistic and aesthetic experience’ (Graham, 2002). Arguably then, the genesis of gay tourism originated directly from the Grand Tours, which started in Stuart period and evolved during the Georgian era.

The subsequent Victorian period has been described as a point of departure for gay tourism (Aldrich, 1995; Clift & Forrest, 1999; Clift, Luongo, & Callister, 2002; Clift & Wilkins, 1995; Holcomb & Luongo, 1996). In late 19th and early 20th century Berlin, Paris and London developed gay tourism infrastructure, including cafés, cabarets and salons (Hughes, 2006; Peñaloza, 1996; Prickett, 2011). Weimar Berlin was considered the ‘gay mecca’ or an ‘Eldorado’ during those days, as homosexual culture there was flourishing to a great degree offering a safe haven for the locals and the travellers to escape the heteronormative world and to express their sexuality (Clift et al., 2002; Prickett, 2011). Due to its tolerance, modernity and openly homosexual culture, it remained a sanctuary for gay men and women until the Nazi revolution in 1933.

The appearance and manifestation of gay culture was not exclusively a European phenomenon. In the late years of the nineteenth century, New York developed significant gay urban infrastructure, including numerous bathhouses, brothels and saloons, where male prostitutes would engage in sexual intercourse with their solely gay clientele (Branchik, 2002; Graham, 2002). Furthermore, in 1877 a guidebook *Pictures of New York Life and Character* published some content, which according to some of the authors had a homosexual agenda (Clift et al., 2002).

As illustrated in the above examples, the phenomenon of gay tourism is evident and it has a deep-rooted historical background. Early literature in gay tourism focussed heavily on gay travellers’ demographic characteristics. Gay tourists have been commonly defined as high spending travellers with significantly more disposable income than their heterosexual counterparts (Community Marketing, 2012; Golding, 2003; Hughes, 2003). This has led to claims that they represent a powerful, profitable and a recession-proof market segment (Guaracino, 2007; Melián-González et al., 2011; Peñaloza, 1996; Pritchard et al., 1998; Roth; Southall, 2009). Gay tourists have also been described as individuals who were well educated (Black, Sanders, & Taylor, 2007; Gluckman & Reed, 1997; Golding, 2003; Hughes, 2003, 2005; Kahan & Mulryan, 1995; Peñaloza, 1996). These assumptions continue today – according to the Community Marketing, Inc. (2012), LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender) travellers spend an estimated US$70 billion a year in the United States alone.

In addition to their high spending behaviour, various authors have identified gay travellers as trendsetters (Gluckman & Reed, 1997; Guaracino, 2007; Hughes, 2005), innovators (Vandecasteele & Geuens, 2009), as well as ‘early adopters, hedonists and aesthetes’ (Hughes, 2005; Stuber, 2002). Homosexual holidaymakers have also been described as *ex post facto* revivers, as they were the first to return to tourism industry after the 9/11 events (Guaracino, 2007).

As well as expenditure and their propensity to set trends, literature has explored the motivations behind gay tourism. It has been argued that gay tourists are motivated by the desire to engage into social interactions and self-exploration, as well as to get away from the day-to-day routine. As such, the motivations are driven for the yearning of self-fulfilment, to escape daily routines and to relax...
In addition, it has been suggested that gay men travel with an intention to express their sexuality, spend quality time with like-minded gay men and/or simply to be in a safe – bully-free – environment (Clift & Wilkins, 1995; Hughes, 2006; Monterrubio, 2009; Pritchard et al., 1998; Waitt & Markwell, 2006). It has also been argued that closeted gay men at new and unfamiliar destinations have the opportunity for freedom and a chance to be away from the constraints of society. These travellers aim for the possibility of anonymity, as they have a chance to temporarily ‘come out’ of the closet and be open about their sexual preferences (Graham, 2002; Holcomb & Luongo, 1996; Waitt & Markwell, 2006). Overwhelmingly, the literature suggests that the opportunity to have more sexual encounters is one of the most significant reasons why homosexual men are motivated to travel (Clift & Forrest, 1999; Hughes, 1997, 2006; Mendoza, 2012; Monterrubio, 2009; Pritchard et al., 2000; Waitt & Markwell, 2006). For example, a study conducted by Clift and Forrest (1999) reveals that sex plays an important role while being on holiday. The assumed significance of the ‘sex’ factor as a strong driver for gay tourism may lead to the distorted perceptions regarding gay tourist motivations. However, as argued by Plummer (1992) travelling behaviour and interests of modern young gay men are very often equivalent to those of heterosexual men and women. There are several studies revealing that sex when holidaying appeals equally to the heterosexuals, for example, Canadian women travelling to the Caribbean and spending ‘quality’ time with beach boys (Herold, Garcia, & DeMoya, 2001), or British and Irish men travelling to Riga, Latvia to explore the cheap bars and chase the local girls (Petersons, 2005).

Clift and Forrest (1999) proposed three major facets: ‘gay social life and sex’, ‘culture and sights’ and ‘comfort and relaxation’. Other studies conducted by various researchers defined and clustered very similar aspects of gay tourist motivation (Clift & Wilkins, 1995; Hughes, 1997; Melián-Gonzáles et al., 2011; Mendoza, 2012).

Table 1: An Exploration of the Approaches that Gay Tourism Research Has Taken

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Examples of Authors (Year)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Demand-lead Studies</td>
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<tr>
<td>Questioning of whether it</td>
<td>Fugate (1993); Gluckman &amp; Reed (1997); Hughes (2005); Peñaloza (1996);</td>
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<td>is a discrete segment</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Demographic explorations</td>
<td>Aldrich (1993); Badgett (1997); Clift &amp; Luongo (1995); D’Emilio (1993); Graham (2002);</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Peñaloza (1996); Wait &amp; Markwell (2006); Werum &amp; Winders (2001)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Motivations</td>
<td>Clift &amp; Forrest (1999); Holcomb &amp; Luongo (1996); Melián-Gonzáles, Moreno-Gil &amp; Araña (2007); Plummer (1992); Pritchard et al. (2000)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yield</td>
<td>Badgett (1997); Black, Sanders &amp; Taylor (2007); Carpenter (2004); Gluckman &amp; Reed (1997);</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Golding (2003); Guaracino (2007); Hughes (2005); Kahan &amp; Mulryan (1995); Peñaloza (1996)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sex as motivator</td>
<td>Clift &amp; Wilkins (1995); Hughes (2006); Lévy, Laporte &amp; El Feki (2001); Mendoza (2012);</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Monterrubio (2009)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Marketing</td>
<td>Branchik (2002); D’Emilio (1984); Gluckman &amp; Reed (1997); Guaracino (2007); Hughes (2003; 2005; 2006); Kahan &amp;</td>
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Mulryan (1995); Peñaloza (1996); Roth (No date); Southall (2009); Stuber (2002); Vandecasteele (2009)

Supply-lead Approaches

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<th>Category</th>
<th>Authors</th>
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<tr>
<td>Consumer behaviour</td>
<td>Hughes (1997); Hughes &amp; Deutsch (2010); Monterrubio (2009); Plummer (1992); Reilly, Rudd &amp; Hillery (2008)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Destinations</td>
<td>Browne &amp; Bakshi (2011); Clift &amp; Forrest (1999); Clift &amp; Wilkins (1995); Graham (2002); Holcomb &amp; Luongo (1996); Hughes (2003); Melian-Gonzáles, Moreno-Gil &amp; Araña (2007); Pritchard, Morgan &amp; Sedgely (1998)</td>
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As illustrated above (see Table 1), in addition to research that has focussed on the demand-lead elements of gay tourism such as demographic characteristics, consumption patterns and motivation, there is a small amount of research, which has explored the supply-lead aspects of the market, such as consumer behaviour, gay space and destinations. Within the gay tourism literature, there is a body of research pertaining to space. Gay space has been defined as ‘[...] the physical manifestation of gay community’ (Hindle, 1994, p. 11). The existence of such space is essential, as it offers a point of coherence where like-minded people possess a feeling of fellowship and share common interests, as well as have a sense of belonging and solidarity among themselves. Arguably, gay space provides a cultural and social platform for homosexual men and women (Hindle, 1994; Hughes, 2003; Pritchard et al., 1998) who have been forced to create their own spaces in order to express their identity, sexuality and affection, and be not bound to heterosexual norms. Arguably, modern gay tourism constitutes ‘[...] a particularly concentrated spatial pattern’ (Holcomb & Luongo, 1996, p. 712) and provides gay men and women with a strong feeling of togetherness and sense of community, where they feel safe from discrimination, bullying and other prejudices. Gay space also provides a platform for communication and various services, inter alia, dating, escorts, HIV testing, counselling, body piercing, cinema, pubs, hotels, gyms, clubs, clothes etc. Consequently, the relationship between gay space and gay culture creates a particular pattern of consumption and needs (Hughes, 2003).

Finally, the prevailing assumption that gay tourists are those who seek sexual experiences, safe places and are high yielding, highly educated tourists has recently been questioned. Several authors have argued that it is fragmented, scattered and diverse (Hughes & Deutsch, 2010; Stuber, 2002) and diversity within the gay tourism market has also been observed, such as diversity in age (e.g. young vs. old), gender (e.g. gay men vs. lesbian) and place of living (e.g. rural vs. urban) (Branchik, 2002; Hughes & Deutsch, 2010; Southall, 2009). The reasons for this change in perception may be societal and is explored in the following section.

REASSESSING THE GAY TRAVEL SEGMENT: THE DEFICIENCIES IN GAY TOURISM RESEARCH

Based on the reviewed literature, gay tourists are primarily motivated by the opportunity to express their homosexuality in a non-judgmental space. Consequently, the argument may be made that the assumptions surrounding the gay tourism market are based on reflections of historically formed gay
travel motivations, which stem from the alleged imposition of heteronormativity, social constraints and the suppression of gay identity, as well as from the dichotomies of acceptance/rejection, segregation/amalgamation, inclusion/exclusion.

Modern research has overlooked the impact of the societal change and legal acceptance on the motivations of gay travellers. Moreover, it is very little known about the gay travellers coming from, or going to, countries, where homosexuality is not legally and/or socially accepted. Most of the literature on gay tourism was written in the 90’s and early 2000’s, when being gay in Western countries was not as acceptable as it is now. Therefore, at that time, and, of course, to some extent also today, gay men were assumed to have been travelling in order to escape intolerance, sodomy laws, and homophobia, as well as to engage in possible sexual activities (Holcomb & Luongo, 1996; Hughes, 2006; Monterrubio, 2009; Pritchard et al., 1998; Pritchard et al., 2000). Existing literature claims that homosexual characteristics do not correlate with the prevailing mainstream interpretations of normality; therefore homosexuals have been marginalised (Haslop, Hill, & Schmidt, 1998). Moreover, even though the gay travel market has been suggested as being heterogeneous, there has been no deeper interest in researching (understanding) any differences that may exist between existing gay travel-market segments. There has also a dearth of research, which explores whether societal change has influenced the motivations and nature of the gay tourism market.

As of 1st of September 2013, fifteen countries and more than a dozen of other territorial units have legally corroborated the integration of homosexuals in a form of marriage equality. In addition, more than a couple of dozens of other countries have recognized gay civil unions or other forms of partnership. Other societal changes have included children adoption processes for same-sex couples, which means that there are now more homosexual parents with children (Prudential, 2012). Despite social change and acceptance of homosexual men and women, gay tourism literature is often based on stereotypes and biased observations (Vandecasteele & Geuens, 2009). Inevitably, stereotyped and generalised projections on the motivations and social behaviours of gay travellers have perpetrated a distorted understanding of gay travel market, as well as the needs and desires of a gay traveller. Badgett (1997) and Carpenter (2004) debunked the assumptions that homosexual men have more available funds due to their status of being ‘DINKS’ (i.e. double income, no kids). It has been found that that gay individuals often suffer from salary discrimination (Badgett, 1997; Carpenter, 2004). Badgett (1997) then argued that: “[u]sing those numbers to describe all lesbian and gay people is misleading and, in many cases, deliberately deceptive’ (Badgett, 1997, p. 66).

Another intriguing dilemma is that the acceptance and integration of homosexual spaces have resulted in the blending of previously dichotomised homosexual/heterosexual spaces. Blurring of the lines between gay and straight spaces is arguably causing the ‘degaying’ process of gay spaces. The popularity of exclusively homosexual spaces, such as bars, clubs, restaurants and gay districts, amongst the heterosexual observers is argued to be a raising problem by several authors (Browne & Bakshi, 2011; Haslop et al., 1998; Pritchard et al., 1998; Visser, 2008).

The collection of the observations above raises the question as to whether the integration and acceptance of homosexuals in a wider – intra- and inter-national – global psyche have contributed to the change of the travel motivations of homosexuals. If we agree that sexual orientation is one of the core composing elements of societal demographics, when combined with the fact that sexual orientation is no longer oppressed, we can argue that the gay travel segment has, and continues to evolve. It follows therefore, that as a demographic grouping, the needs and desired tourism experiences of this market segment represent one of the influences existing in the macro-environment of the market.
DISCUSSION

This paper aimed to explore the existing literature on the gay travel market and to indicate where gaps in gay travel literature lie. It revealed that two significant gaps may exist. The first relates to early research that suggested that the gay travel market is homogenous and includes well-educated, high spending visitors who seek to express their sexual identity in a safe and non-judgmental environment. Much of this literature was written in the 1990s, following a decade of fear fuelled by the AIDS epidemic and prior to societal change where gay marriage, lifestyles and families have been accepted both legally and by the broader society. It would be logical to suggest that societal changes such as increased tolerance and acceptance of homosexuals in recent years, coupled with legislative changes, may well have impacted upon the motivations and travel habits of gay travellers.

Secondly, this research has revealed that existing literature pertaining to gay tourism has focused on the demand elements of the market, including expenditure, behaviour, the motivations, and demographic characteristics. Little research has explored how gay travellers use space, and in light of increased societal acceptance, whether their use of space has changed in recent times.

Further research is needed to explore the relationship between societal and legislative change and the potential changes in the gay travel market. This would add depth to the proposition by Hughes & Deutsch (2010) and Stuber (2002) that the gay tourism market may be more heterogeneous than previously conceptualised. Arguably, homosexual travellers are bounded by similar lifestyles and shared values, yet the degree to which this is played out through their travel choices is unknown. The application of theories such as neo-tribal theory offers an opportunity to explore how gay travellers make decisions on travel, communicate with each other before, during and after the journey and the way in which they use gay space and perform their identity. Neo-tribal theory emerged in late 1980s as an alternative to the culturally dominant, uniform and class-based theory of subculture. At its core are the notions of fluidity, reflexivity and individuality (Bennett, 1999, 2005, 2011; Hesmondhalgh, 2005; Shildrick & MacDonald, 2006; Wang, 2005). According to Maffesoli (1996), contemporary culture has facilitated the notion of the individual, and as such mass culture has become fragmented into a myriad of tribal groupings (Muggleton, 2000, in Bennett, 2011; Hardy, Hanson & Gretzel, 2012; Hardy, Gretzel & Hanson, 2013). Neo-tribes may be organised around interim identities, lucrative commodities, labels (brands) (Cova & Cova, 2002; Hardy, Hanson, & Gretzel, 2012; Wang, 2005) and places (locations), as the emergence of the neo-tribes is an outcome of the collective conquest of a space. Moreover, following on from the research by Hardy, Gretzel and Hanson (2013), neo-tribal theory may allow for ‘sub-tribes’ of travellers to be identified. These are tribes, which have at their core a similarity, which in this case is sexual orientation. However they may differ in terms of their travel behaviour. The neo-tribal theory provides an opportunity to examine the behaviour, motivations and, particularly, use of space of modern gay travellers. This approach has clear synergies with the likelihood that the gay travel market is more diverse than it has been previously conceptualised and further research is needed to explore its relevance and application.

This research will contribute towards current gaps in gay travel literature by examining a) whether the current gay travel market is more heterogeneous than previously thought; and b) the role that space plays in neo-tribal theory.

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