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Urban Sexuality Across Europe

Do LGBT Neighborhoods Matter?

Abstract: In the Western world, the "Stonewall Inn riots" of 1969 represent a turning point in the history of LGBT (urban) rights claiming. They gave a contribution to a morphological transformation of the Western cities, where there has been a gradual "homo-colonization" of different metropolitan districts, through the creation of the so-called LGBT neighborhood.

Adopting a territorial perspective, the paper aims to examine the levels of inclusion of sexual minorities in Europe and if they can imagine expansive possibilities for a life beyond the "gayborhood."

Examining the relationship among the level of social acceptance of gender and sexual minorities, their civil rights and the formation of LGBT communities in cities and the social functions they perform in Europe, the sociological analysis offers a classification of all European countries into 4 classes.

The work concludes with some critical reflections through which the authors consider the implications of their findings.

Keywords: Europe, social research, sociology, LGBT, LGBT neighborhood, sexual citizenship

Introduction

In the Western world, the so-called "Stonewall Inn riots," which took place in New York in 1969, started the modern struggle for LGBT rights in the United States. On that occasion the police broke into the Stonewall Inn gay bar and violently lashed out at some gay and trans customers. In that situation, the crowd reacted, pushing away the police and, in the following days, gay and trans people forcefully claimed the legitimacy of their identities in the public sphere. These riots represent a turning point in the history of LGBT (urban) rights claiming. The urban movements of the Seventies and Eighties to claim citizenship rights contributed to a morphological transformation of Western cities. The speed with which the "Stonewall Inn" model was adopted in several Western areas is partly explained by its urbanized sense of the coming out era. More specifically, in the major cities of America there has been a gradual "homo-colonization" of different metropolitan districts: San Diego's Hillcrest, Houston's Montrose, Atlanta's Midtown, Miami's South Beach, Washington D.C.'s Dupont Circle, Boston's South End, San Francisco's Castro. Each was an example of an LGBT neighborhood, and each seemed to be an example of gay commu-

nity focused exclusively on clustered interests, common moral and social norms and way of life; spaces where LGBT people could safely find one another and build communities together. The presence of these neighborhoods in the world does not only shape the lives of gay people and their communities, but also changes the life of cities.

They are portions of cities not far from the city centers that come up with a double objective: to affirm the existence of the LGBT community and to create spaces for inclusion, comparison and acceptance of minorities. In other words, the birth and urban organization of these neighborhoods was based on a self-recognition of the entire LGBT community which has become aware of its condition and started to fight the heterosexual domination. In this sense, the occupation of a part of the territory is an event with a specific meaning: LGBT people began to recognize themselves as members of a larger community, even with the awareness that different identities coexist within the LGBT group. This sense of belonging developed in consideration of the fact that the sexual and gender minorities, since they were not in line with the "norms" of heteronormativity, were all united by the same experience and the same impossibility to manifest themselves openly, freely.

Starting from the assumption that the relation between homosexuality and city is characterized by specific and distinctive traits, several scholars focused their reflections on this connection: Asking why LGBT neighborhoods first formed (Castells and Murphy 1982; Knopp 1997), how they effect on socio-cultural significance for queer people (Doan and Higgins 2011), why they appeal to straight people (Ghaziani 2019), and their socio-spatial patterns (Corbisiero and Monaco 2020; Whittemore and Smart 2016). More specifically, urban sociologists pointed out that LGBT neighborhoods were shaped precisely starting from the specific needs of sociality, exchange and sharing of gay people, emphasizing some of their main distinctive features (Aiken 1976; Brown-Saracino 2015; Whitmore 1975). Other scholars analyzed how a "post-gay turn" (Ghaziani 2011) affects these districts (Forbes and Ueno 2020; Forstie 2018; Hartless 2018).

These districts are distinguished in their cities by the social practices of their users and inhabitants, the specificities of their cultural and socio-economic activities, or their contribute to creativity, inclusiveness and queerness as multicultural spaces (Pratt and Hutton 2013). More than community ghettos, these areas have been characterized not only by the coexistence of diverse lifestyles, trajectories and identities, but also by the contribution of the LGBT community to the gentrification of the city. In fact, the strong commercial, residential and symbolic presence of LGBT communities induces a phenomenon that has been coined as "gaytrification," due to the material and the symbolic changes they perform in these neighborhoods. These are, in fact, city areas which have in most cases undergone a restyling based on branding, tourism and leisure (Corbisiero 2016). This community also becomes a target of displacement and eviction when these gentrification processes turn into a fast increase in the real estate prices.

Although LGBT neighborhoods themselves have been among the main factors in improving the conditions of LGBT people, today something has changed. Over the world the LGBT communities have acquired a number of citizenship rights, even if they are sometimes still victims of discrimination or their sexual identity is not always fully recognized. In fact, laws, policies and safeguards for the LGBT community change over time and from one territory to another.

In this regard, Ghaziani (2014) argues that countries in which political gains and societal acceptance are widespread, gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people get expansive possibilities for a life beyond the "gayborhoods." More specifically, Ghaziani asserts that the assimilation of American gays has generated feelings of acceptance, integration, and safety, which is reversing an earlier propensity of lesbians and gay men to concentrate in discrete urban enclaves.

The research question we try to answer in this paper is whether space, understood here as an urban place that aggregates LGBT people as in the case of the "gay-neighborhood," is (still) a social inclusion device for LGBT communities. In particular, within the framework of academic research, we will focus on the situation of LGBT people living in Europe, where sexual citizenship rights are quite unequally distributed through the Continent. The current sociological analysis considers all European countries and not only those that belong to the European Union.

Thus, although the indications of the European Union are very clear on guaranteeing all citizens the same dignity and the same citizenship rights, each country recognizes different rights and protections for LGBT people. This fragmented situation gives LGBT neighborhoods a different meaning, which we will analyze in this paper.

This work has the following structure: in the first § we describe two of the main existing tools that monitor the condition of LGBT people in Europe. They are the ILGA Rainbow Europe Index, and the Social Acceptance of LGBT People created by the Williams Institute. In the following §, we create a synthesis of the two indices with the aim of classifying the European countries into 4 classes. Starting from the results that will emerge in the quadrant analysis, we will indicate for each group what kind of contribution an LGBT neighborhood can make in the countries that belong to that cluster. The work concludes with some critical reflections about the implications of our findings.

Sexual Citizenship Rights: a Look at Europe

Nowadays, belonging to the LGBT community does not mean the same all over the globe. We live in a world where sexual orientation and gender identity are used as discriminatory factors in some territories. On a global level, the recognition of human rights and sexual citizenship has acquired increasing visibility. As a result, laws, regulations and directives have been implemented in many territories to address discrimination and violence.

As for Europe, that is the territory this paper focuses on, since the 2000s we have witnessed a number of initiatives aimed at guaranteeing the LGBT community more rights. In particular, the European Union has repeatedly invited its member States to recognize all EU citizens the same rights regardless of their sexual orientation, gender identity, ethnicity or religion.

In this sense, Article 21 of the "Nice Charter" (2000) represents one of the first community mechanisms implemented to condemn any form of discrimination. Most EU Member States have implemented the gender equal treatment Directives (2002/73/EC and 2004/113/EC), either by designating some existing institution or by setting up a new institution. But not all European countries have fully transposed these directives into their

own national legislation. In addition, many States that do not belong to the European Union have implemented national laws against discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity.

On the other hand, even in some countries where laws and protections for the LGBT community do exist, sometimes episodes of homophobia or transphobia are recorded due to some prejudices that are still widespread.

Consequently, we cannot speak of Europe as a unitary continent. Indeed, the situation is very uneven.

In order to offer a clear vision of the European situation and highlight the main differences amongst the various European countries, some organizations have identified some parameters to create rankings and make comparisons at a global level.

The first of these organizations is ILGA with its Rainbow Europe Index. It is a yearly benchmarking tool created by ILGA-Europe (the European region of the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association), which ranks 49 countries in Europe on their LGBTI equality laws and policies. For the construction of its index, ILGA Europe takes into account the legal and political framework of each European country, considering a series of variables from six fields: "Equality & non-discrimination," "Family," "Hate crime & hate speech," "Legal gender recognition & bodily integrity," "Civil society space" and "Asylum" (see Table 1). Each country is assigned a percentage score between 0 and 100, which indicates the level of inclusiveness towards LGBTI people.

Based on the indicators that ILGA Europe has identified, with reference to 2020 the ranking that has been drawn up has Malta in the first place (the Country has a legislation capable of guaranteeing its LGBT+ citizens 94% of social inclusion). The ranking ends with Azerbaijan, which obtained a score of 2% (ILGA 2021).

Unlike ILGA Europe, the LGBT Global Acceptance Index built by the School of Law Williams Institute seeks to measure the level of acceptance of LGBT people and their rights in 175 countries over the world without considering the regulatory framework. Consequently, it can be considered as a social index, built on the basis of survey data about public beliefs regarding LGBT people and policies in order to come up with a single country-level score for acceptance. To produce a single score for each country, the Williams Institute created a data archive, where it consolidated cross-national global and regional survey data on attitudes toward LGBT people and rights.[1] The 2021 resulting dataset included 6,198 country-question-years under analysis with 98 different question wordings. The combined individual-level sample includes 7,059,822 responses to questions relating to LGBT people and rights. Though the questions varied in form and time period, they are all related to a respondent's core acceptance of LGBT people. An individual might have different answers to questions about the morality of homosexuality, the desirability of an LGBT person as a coworker, and the acceptability of discrimination against LGBT people; however, collectively, all of the answers point to a respondent's underlying degree

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[1] Amongst the surveys we can find the AfroBarometer (2014–2018), the America's Barometer (2014–2018), the Eurobarometer (1993–2019), the European Social Survey (2002–2018), the European Values Survey (1981–2018), the Gallup World Poll (2006–2020), the International Social Survey Programme (1988–2018), Ipsos International (2013–2017), the LatinoBarómetro (2002–2015), the Pew Global surveys (2002–2019), and the World Values Surveys (1981–2020).

Table 1

Criteria to measure LGBTI inclusiveness

Equality & non-discrimination	• Constitution (sexual orientation) • Employment (sexual orientation) • Goods & services (sexual orientation) • Education (sexual orientation) • Health (sexual orientation) • Conversion therapy (sexual orientation) • Equality body mandate (sexual orientation) • Equality action plan (sexual orientation) • Constitution (gender identity) • Employment (gender identity) • Goods & services (gender identity) • Education (gender identity) • Health (gender identity) • Conversion therapy (gender identity) • Equality body mandate (gender identity) • Equality action plan (gender identity) • Law (gender expression) • Constitution (sex characteristics) • Employment (sex characteristics) • Goods & services (sex characteristics) • Education (sex characteristics) • Health (sex characteristics) • Equality body mandate (sex characteristics) • Equality action plan (sex characteristics) • Blood donations
Family	• Marriage equality • Registered partnership (similar rights to marriage) • Registered partnership (limited rights) • Cohabitation • No constitutional limitation on marriage • Joint adoption • Second-parent adoption • Automatic co-parent recognition • Medically assisted insemination (couples) • Medically assisted insemination (singles) • Recognition of trans parenthood
Hate crime & hate speech	• Hate crime law (sexual orientation) • Hate speech law (sexual orientation) • Policy tackling hatred (sexual orientation) • Hate crime law (gender identity) • Hate speech law (gender identity) • Policy tackling hatred (gender identity) • Hate crime law (intersex) • Policy tackling hatred (intersex)
Legal gender recognition & bodily integrity Depathologisation	• Existence of legal measures • Existence of administrative procedures • Name change • No age restriction, Name change • Self-determination • Non-binary recognition • No Gender Identity Disorder diagnosis/psychological opinion required • No compulsory medical intervention required

Table 1 (Continued)

Legal gender recognition & bodily integrity Depathologisation (cont.)	• No compulsory surgical intervention required • No compulsory sterilisation required • No compulsory divorce required • No age restriction • Legal gender recognition procedures exist for minors • Prohibition of medical intervention before child is able to informed consent (intersex)
Civil society space	• Public event held, no state obstruction of freedom of assembly (3 years) • Public event held, there is enough protection (last 3 years) • Associations operate, no state obstruction of freedom association (last 3 years) • LGBTI human rights defenders are not at risk • No laws limiting external funding • No laws limiting freedom of expression (national/local)
Asylum	• Law (sexual orientation) • Policy/other positive measures (sexual orientation) • Law (gender identity) • Policy/other positive measures (gender identity) • Law (intersex) • Policy/other positive measures (intersex)

Source: ILGA (2021).

of acceptance of LGBT people. According to this approach, a person's acceptance of LGBT people is considered as a latent, unobserved variable which is related to survey responses that have been observed through these questions.

The scores move along a scale ranging from 1 to 10. Considering only the European countries, the ranking published in 2021 has Iceland in first place (with a score of 9.8). Also in this case, the last place in the ranking is occupied by Azerbaijan, which obtained a score of 1.4.

Both surveys, even if they place the various European countries in different positions, confirm the heterogeneity that characterizes the European continent with regard to the inclusion of LGBT citizens.

Main Analysis

As anticipated, we aimed to create a classification of the European countries that is able to take into account both the regulatory framework and the level of acceptance and social openness towards LGBT people and issues, in order to identify, at a later stage, the possible role of the LGBT neighborhoods.

To summarize the information produced by ILGA and Williams Institute data into a single tool, we proceeded with a quadrant analysis. Technically it is a scatter plot that is divided into four quadrants.

More specifically, we obtained the scatter plot putting the two scores on the X and Y-axes. Subsequently, Each European country, based on the two scores obtained, has been projected onto the Cartesian plane, placing itself in one of the 4 quadrants.

Table 2

REI 2021

Position	Country	%
1	Malta	95
2	Belgium	75
3	Luxembourg	73
4	Portugal	69
5	Norway	68
6	Finland	66
6	Spain	66
6	Sweden	66
7	Denmark	65
7	UK	65
8	Montenegro	64
9	Netherlands	62
10	France	58
11	Iceland	55
12	Ireland	54
13	Germany	53
14	Austria	51
15	Greece	47
16	Croatia	46
17	Slovenia	42
18	Bosnia Herzegovina	40
19	Switzerland	39
20	Estonia	38
21	Andorra	35
21	Kosovo	35
22	Albania	33
22	Hungary	33
22	Serbia	33
23	Cyprus	31
24	Slovakia	30
25	Georgia	27
25	North Macedonia	27
26	Czech Republic	26
27	Lithuania	23
28	Italy	22
29	Bulgaria	20
29	Moldova	20
30	Romania	19
31	Ukraine	18
32	Latvia	17
33	Poland	13
34	Belarus	12
35	Russia	10
36	Armenia	8
37	Turkey	4
38	Azerbaijan	2

The table included in the paper does not contain the scores of the countries Liechtenstein (19), Monaco (11) and San Marino (3) since they were not included in the 2021 GAI.

Source: ILGA (2021).

Table 3

GAI 2021

| Position	Country	Score
1	Iceland	9,78
2	Netherlands	9,46
3	Norway	9,38
4	Sweden	9,18
5	Spain	8,77
6	Denmark	8,69
7	Ireland	8,41
8	UK	8,34
9	Malta	8,01
10	Switzerland	8
11	Finland	7,96
12	Belgium	7,95
13	Luxembourg	7,82
14	Germany	7,73
14	France	7,73
15	Andorra	7,48
16	Austria	7,2
17	Italy	6,94
18	Portugal	6,87
19	Slovenia	6,21
20	Czech Republic	5,87
21	Greece	5,44
22	Estonia	5,25
23	Cyprus	5,16
24	Poland	5,15
25	Hungary	5,08
26	Croatia	5,05
27	Slovakia	4,82
28	Latvia	4,42
29	Lithuania	4,38
30	Bulgaria	4,19
31	Romania	4,1
32	Turkey	3,94
33	Serbia	3,71
34	Montenegro	3,53
35	Kosovo	3,52
36	Belarus	3,38
37	Russia	3,28
38	North Macedonia	3,13
39	Georgia	2,94
40	Ukraine	2,91
41	Bosnia Herzegovina	2,87
42	Albania	2,65
43	Armenia	2,17
44	Moldova	1,91
45	Azerbaijan	1,42
46	Iceland	9,78

Source: Williams Institute (2021).

The scatter plot has been converted into a Quadrant Analysis chart by adding two dividing lines which split the chart into 4 quadrants. We used the mean values to mark the division amongst the quadrants on both the x and y axes. Thus, vertical and horizontal lines corresponding to the mean values on x-axis and y-axis respectively are added to the scatter plot.

European countries are grouped into 4 quadrants as shown in the Figure 1. The horizontal line on the Cartesian plane represents the average REI score (40) and the vertical line represents the average GAI score (5.44).

As a result, we have obtained the following four quadrants:

Q1 contains the European countries that obtained a higher than average score both for the GAI and for the REI;

Q2 hosts the European countries where the tolerance for LGBT people and issues is higher than the average value of the GAI, but the REI score is lower than the average;

Q3 contains the European countries where both the REI and the GAI scores are lower than the average values of the two indices;

Q4 hosts the European countries where the tolerance for LGBT people and issues is lower than the average value of the GAI, even if the REI score is higher than the average.

Figure 1

Quadrant Analysis chart
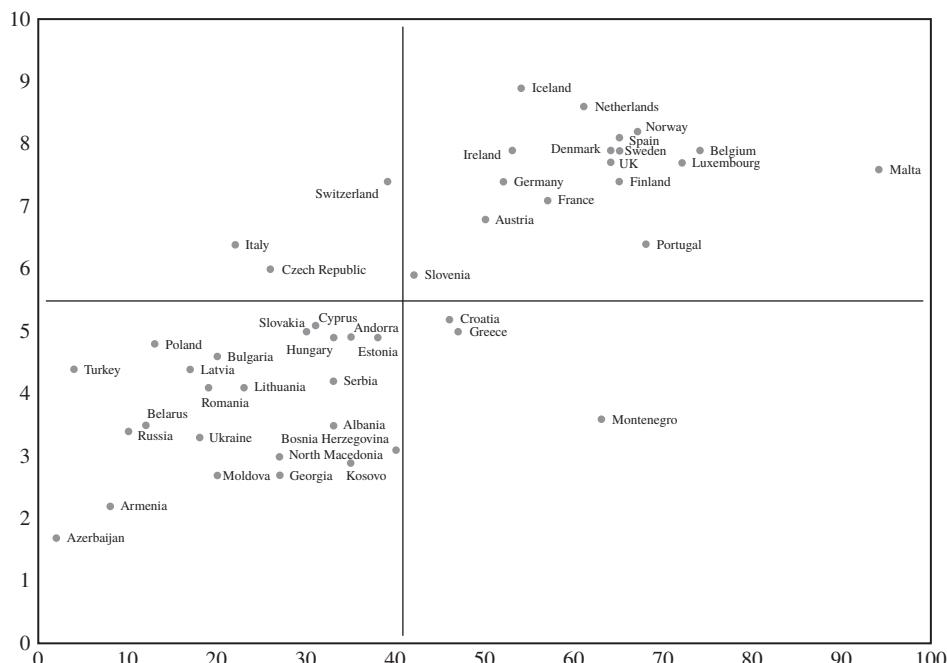
The Quadrant Analysis allows us to see immediately that there are many countries in Europe that are not very inclusive towards LGBT people. In fact, the left side of Figure 1

contains many more states than the right side. In these territories evidently an acceptance and knowledge of sexual and gender minorities does not exist yet.

In a more or less accentuated way, in the countries that are contained in the second and third quadrant, today there are still cases of violence, oppression and discrimination against sexual and gender minorities.

Consequently, with regard to these states today it is not possible to share Ghaziani's thesis, since the lack of tolerance towards the LGBT community forces many European lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender people to hide or to repress their identity.

For example, we think that LGBT neighborhoods in these countries could be very useful tools to give visibility and dignity to the LGBT community living there. To better understand what we have just argued, we can give some examples. As for the third quadrant, the most emblematic cases are represented by Poland and Hungary.

As concerns the former country, it is now known that for some years some Polish municipalities, districts and voivodeships have established the so-called "Strefy wolne od LGBT," namely zones free from LGBT ideologies and people. They can be defined as municipalities and regions of Poland that have declared themselves unwelcoming about LGBT issues and claims, for example by banning equality marches and other LGBT events. Thus, although Poland decriminalized homosexuality in 1932, much earlier than most other European countries, over one hundred municipalities, that is one third of the total, and some voivodeships have adopted resolutions against homosexuality. These initiatives have been promoted by local authorities who have supported statements in defense of the traditional family and against what they consider a pernicious ideology. Świdnik, a town in eastern Poland with just over 40,000 inhabitants, was the first city to declare itself an "LGBT-free zone."

This is why the establishment of LGBT neighborhoods could ideally represent the starting point for claiming the rights of sexual citizenship, occupying a portion of the public territory. Wherever sexual and gender minorities cannot fully live their identity, in fact, coming out into the open, occupying urban spaces or proudly displaying the signs and symbols of the LGBT community (such as the rainbow flag) are useful tools to emphasize the need of visibility and recognition at a social, cultural and regulatory level.

A similar situation is that of Hungary. Even though Hungary recognizes cohabiting same-sex couples ("élettársi kapcsolat") since 1996 and registered partnership ("bejegyzett élettársi kapcsolat"), an institution very similar to marriage is available for same-sex couples since 2009, legislation concerning parental authority, adoption and artificial insemination disregards the situation of LGBT-parent families. In addition, in June 2021, Parliament approved a law banning the dissemination of material that "promotes" homosexuality or sex change in the eyes of minors under 18. The measure was wanted and voted by Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's party. The law was conceived with the aim of combating pedophilia, deliberately equating it with homosexuality and gender change. Dunja Mijatovic, the Council of Europe's commissioner for human rights, also spoke on this issue. She publicly asked Hungarian deputies not to pass this law since it improperly equated pedophilia and homosexuality.

The law also censors many media contents (such as films, advertisements or television series) telling stories with LGBT protagonists. Evidently, laws like this can further increase

the stigma against the LGBT community contributing to create a hostile environment towards sexual and gender minorities.

Also in this case, a bottom-up mobilization apt to oppose the current laws, the activation of the "gay friendly" resource and an urban regeneration in terms of "cosmopolitanism" and "homosexualization" could be elements capable to defend the full citizenship of the LGBT community. In this sense, the LGBT neighborhoods can be considered not only as urban spaces in the city capable of overcoming the problems related to homophobic and heterosexist intolerance, but also symbolically areas able to be spaces of tolerance and openness in general.

Thus, one might wonder why in countries where there is a disparity in the treatment of LGBT people at the local and national level, such neighborhoods (even if only to a limited extent) don't appear, while they could bring such great benefits to sexual minorities. Obviously, a possible bottom-up push for urban and social change collides with the ways in which the repression of LGBT people takes shape. In other words, mass arrests or physical and verbal attacks are huge deterrents for LGBT people. Even when LGBT people are highly motivated to assert their identity and gain greater visibility in the public space, they must carefully consider what the consequences of their actions and the responses from the institutions may be. For example, in August 2020 a group of LGBT activists took to the streets in Warsaw to celebrate Gay Pride. On that occasion, the police intervened by beating up any demonstrator, including women and the elderly, with clubs. At least fifty demonstrators were loaded into police vans and put in custody (Oxford Analytica 2020). It is clear that similar forms of repressive government violence not only inhibit the creation of LGBT spaces for fear of consequences, but these attitudes also force many gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people to emigrate in order to escape such forms of social persecution.

In the second quadrant of the Cartesian plane there are only 3 countries. They show a good level of openness towards LGBT issues, even if they still appear backward from a regulatory point of view. A clear example is represented by Italy. This country can be viewed as an important sociological laboratory for understanding how sexual and gender minorities find refuge and comfort in rainbow urban spaces even in contexts where they are not protected at national level. Thus, Italy today does not recognize full citizenship to LGBT people. At the regulatory level they do not enjoy all civil and political rights: for example same-sex couples cannot marry or adopt (Monaco and Nothdurfter 2021). In addition, LGBT people are not yet protected by a law against homo-bi-transphobia, although the possibility of introducing this legislative measure has been discussed at length in Parliament. More specifically, Alessandro Zan—a member of "Partito Democratico" (PD), Italy's major left-wing political party—in 2020 proposed to extend the Legge Marino (a law passed in 1993), which denounces language and deeds that amount to religious, political and racial discrimination by adding aggravating factors for sexual orientation, gender and gender identity. The so-called "Zan Bill" was first voted by the Italian Parliament in November 2020, but it was not approved in 2021 due the obstructionism of center-right parties supported by some Catholic representatives, who asserted that this kind of law was not really necessary to prevent discriminatory acts based on sexual and gender identity.

However, the strong social movement and the willingness of some mayors to fight for the recognition of citizenship rights for sexual and gender minorities has helped to

create some rainbow areas in the country (Corbisiero and Monaco 2017). In this process of emancipation, which is still ongoing, the assistance of a part of the media system and the LGBT associations active in the territories also contributed positively (Barbagli and Colombo 2001; Corbisiero and Monaco 2021).

Probably, also due to this contrast between the national and the local level, in Italy there are no real LGBT neighborhoods. In fact, it should be specified that even within the cities that prove to be more open and inclusive toward the LGBT community, there are no truly gay districts, if not small or temporary. In Rome, for example, the gay area par excellence is represented by via San Giovanni in Laterano, a street near the Colosseum, which is known by the name of one of the most famous and ancient gay clubs in the area, namely "Coming Out." Here, discos, saunas and clubs follow one another. However, structures and clubs are also present in other districts of the capital, such as the "Muccassassina" disco, in the Prenestina area, the "Frutta e Verdura" in the Portuense area or the "Mario Mieli" center, which is located near Basilica San Paolo, far from the center.

A similar profile is shown by the city of Naples. Even if the Neapolitan capital has recently recognized the LGBT district in the ancient center of the city at an institutional level, the Neapolitan LGBT community lives different urban spaces, in particular some squares, such as Piazza Bellini, Piazza dei Martiri, Piazza Monteoliveto, Piazza Santa Maria La Nova, Piazza San Domenico.

The most famous LGBT neighborhoods are present in some of the countries that occupy the first quadrant. There we find all those States that have progressive and cutting-edge legislations, protecting their LGBT citizens through specific laws, targeted policies and other cultural initiatives. At the same time, public opinion also appears to be more inclusive and tolerant. In these places, therefore, the LGBT neighborhoods perform a double symbolic function.

Since LGBT people are well integrated into the social context, they go to these spaces in the city, but not exclusively. There, sexual and gender variability are seen as personal features with which people can freely live their identity inside and outside LGBT neighborhoods. From this analytical angle, it is safe to argue that LGBT neighborhoods represent spaces of inclusion for citizens open to all minorities, not just sexual ones. They are points of exchange and comparison between all people, where even LGBT people (but not only) can feel free to express themselves. The rise of such LGBT neighborhoods has been able, over time, to eliminate the inequalities, thus favoring compromise and integration.

In other words, these places are not ghettos, as some argue. On the contrary, they are open to the whole population, since the aim behind their constitution is to drop all social and cultural barriers that exclude one or more categories of citizens.

The second function that we can therefore recognize to the LGBT neighborhoods of the countries that occupy the first quadrant is as tourist attractors. In fact, we know that in post-modern society tourism is considered an experience of personal growth and a moment of freedom (e.g., Urry 2003; Novelli 2005; Minneart, Maitland and Miller 2006; Monaco 2022). Consequently, for LGBT travelers, the existence of these spaces represents a safe haven, especially if they come from social and territorial contexts hostile towards them (e.g., CAUTHE 2014; Waitt and Markwell 2014; Vorobjovas-Pinta and Hardy 2016; Guaracino and Salvato 2017; Corbisiero, Monaco and Ruspini 2022).

Probably one of the best-known gay districts is SoHo in London. It is an area located in the heart of the city, where the majority of the LGBT population resides, which benefits from a series of attractions and services specifically dedicated to this target. In particular, there are shops, cultural and sports associations dedicated to the LGBT community, as well as a series of queer clubs.

Remaining on the subject of LGBT neighborhoods in big capitals, it is impossible not to refer to the Marais in Paris, which develops between the 3rd and 4th arrondissements. It is a portion of the territory, once dangerous, today frequented mainly by gay people and young university students. In this district there are many types of rainbow clubs ranging from classic bars or nightclubs to saunas.

Chueca in Madrid is also located in the center, a few steps from the university area. For a long time the place was infamous, frequented mainly by drug dealers and addicts. In the early eighties of the last century, following the fall of the Franco regime, the area witnessed an intense restyling, quickly becoming the "gay district" of the city, where private clubs began to come to life, with accommodation facilities, saunas and rainbow associations. This has led many Spanish LGBT people since the early nineties to live in this district, combining housing needs with those of sociality.

Finally, in the fourth quadrant, we have some examples of countries where education toward differences is still needed. There, in fact, despite the fact that protections for the LGBT community do exist from a regulatory point of view, the level of tolerance is still quite low. Croatia, Greece and Montenegro must therefore work to guarantee their LGBT citizens a more inclusive and comfortable social context.

Conclusion

The distribution of the countries on a Cartesian chart allows us to argue that the most tolerant and inclusive countries towards the LGBT community are those in which sexual and gender minorities are protected also from a regulatory point of view. In fact, the areas in which social openness and legal protections are not aligned represent clear exceptions to the general trend.

The elements that sociologically have contributed to the reproduction of LGBT neighborhoods overall within the main urban centers in the world are: the ever higher percentage of young LGBT immigrants who move away from transphobic socio-cultural contexts to move towards large, more inclusive and democratic metropolises; the growing visibility of LGBT people and of their ethical, political and economic values; the work of the social movements and associations (Kirkey and Forsyth 2001).

However, even if rainbow zones are widespread in some European cities, contrary to what Ghaziani suggested, we believe that in Europe the time is not yet ripe to argue that LGBT neighborhoods are no longer necessary. Rather, as our analysis highlighted, the LGBT community still needs today to reclaim its identity in many territories. Consequently, in the most hostile countries, LGBT neighborhoods can be a possible tool to fight for the full recognition of citizenship rights, even by symbolically marking a part of the territory.

At the same time, precisely because in Europe and in many areas of the world LGBT people cannot fully live their identity or are still victims of discrimination, they can enjoy the existence of LGBT neighborhoods that are present in the most progressive countries at least as tourists. In this sense, LGBT neighborhoods represent an attraction factor for the host countries. In an increasingly global and globalized tourism market, the most inclusive destinations for sexual and gender minorities are characterized as poles of tolerance and open-mindedness.

In other words, LGBT neighborhoods of modernity can be considered free zones whose principal imperatives are tolerance and inclusion and in which diversity is not a discriminating factor. On the contrary difference represents a distinctive element, a trait to be protected and valued in order to maintain heterophile relationships.

Despite the need for further research we can highlight some concepts of policy implications: (a) European and local authorities should be attentive to the particularities and mechanisms of self-regulation that are critical to the existence of any LGBT neighborhood; (b) much attention must still be paid to the processes of territorial integration of Eastern Europe, still struggling with homophobic phenomena; (c) if the European policy and advocacy pattern is to support and preserve LGBT life in urban neighborhoods, so an LGBT inclusiveness model of urban planning should be encouraged by supranational human rights institutions (such as the United Nations and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe) to address mainstreaming pressures, as much as gentrification and over-tourism phenomena.

In any of these fields, an attentive policy action is needed, particularly in view of the complexity of the governance mechanisms regulating the functioning of rainbow cities (Corbisiero and Monaco 2013), avoiding the risk of compromising with their actions the characteristics of inclusiveness and sustainability of LGBT neighborhoods. It is also fundamental The European groups and communities on LGBT Rights (as well as the online platforms and forum who are interested in issues that impact the lives of LGBT people) would monitor the situation of LGBT people in EU Member States and beyond, and would liaise with civil society groups to relay their concerns at the European level. Nevertheless, even the LGBT battles and claims have moved more and more on the virtual spaces due to unstoppable force of Internet, LGBT neighborhoods are not entirely smothered and it will remain resonant and revelatory features of urban life.

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