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The Role of Gay Spaces for a Gay Destination

Gay Tourism in Gran Canaria

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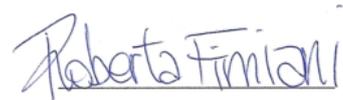
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Declaration

This thesis is the work of Roberta Fimiani.

All other contributors are acknowledged in the text and listed in the Bibliography.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Roberta Fimiani". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line underneath the name.

Abstract

This thesis has the aim to evaluate the role of gay spaces in Gran Canaria as a gay tourists destination with particular reference to gay exclusive resorts. The validation of the gay identity is a key motivation for homosexuals to travel, in order to connect with other homosexuals and experience the gay life that they might not be able to experience at home. Gay spaces have been defined both as liberated areas as well as ghettos, where the homosexuals are, in a way, restrained. The method chosen, a small number of semi- structured interviews with managers of gay exclusive resorts in Maspalomas, the hub of gay life in Gran Canaria, where major LGBT events are held, there is a gay friendly environment, a thriving gay scene and many gay exclusive resorts. In the case of Gran Canaria the gay-specific offer is complementary to the 'regular' tourism offer, as they coexist, complement and at times overlap. Nevertheless the gay centric holiday is still predominant amongst gay men, and it is likely to continue to be according to the informants. This is because gay tourists seek freedom and a sense of inclusion that they would not be able to find in mixed environments.

Keywords: Gay Tourism, Gay-exclusive resorts, Maspalomas.

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1. Introduction

1.1. Theoretical Framework

“No single discipline alone can accommodate, treat, or understand tourism; it can be studied only if disciplinary boundaries are crossed, and if multidisciplinary perspectives are sought and formed” (Graburn and Jafari, 1991: 7–8). This means that tourism cannot be truly understood when looked at as an isolated discipline, as it is rather a domain of study that draws upon all sorts of knowledge that may illuminate the diverse manifestations of this phenomenon. The main disciplines that contribute to tourism are marketing, geography, anthropology, behavior, business, human ecology, history, political science, planning and design, and futurism (Gunn, 1987; Tribe, 1997). In this thesis gay tourism will be examined primarily from a geographical point of view, nonetheless other perspectives will be also reviewed since they are necessary to fully understand the phenomenon.

Aitchinson (1999: 30) claims that cultural geography has become a combination of sociological and cultural studies, used to explore the range of behaviours, implications, consumption patterns and identities created in and through leisure and tourism. Geographies of tourism have been theorised as “place, practice, product and philosophy” (Ringer 1998: 9). Through the use of place, tourism socially constructs space, shaping tourist destinations (Ateljevic, 2000). These philosophies then lead to the theorisation of tourism as a fulcrum between circuits working within the production – consumption discourses, supported by the practices of negotiated (re)production. Britton (1991) argues that leisure and tourist experiences have become commodified in order to create economic profit, he debates that the whole array of leisure activities, including travel, are purchased and sold as an article of trade. As a result, institutionalised leisure markets its products as a form of escape and distraction, growth of individual understanding, and even something metaphysically significant, but without questioning the current social and material mandate (Britton, 1991). In Ateljevic (2000: 374) words, *“tourism and leisure, as the medium of legitimated transgression of normal codes of social behaviour, are forms of ideological control to maintain capitalist relations of production”*.

1.2. Background to the Study

“LGBT tourism may be broadly defined as any tourism activity, either specifically designed to attract the LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered) market, or one that, by nature and/or design, appeals to and is ultimately pursued by the LGBT market”. Southall and Fallon (2011: 221-2)

Gay tourism is not a recent phenomenon, as gay people have been travelling for centuries in search of safe havens, where homosexuality had not been ostracised as much as in their home country (Clift *et al*, 2002). It has been argued that tourism and being gay are intimately linked, as the social condemnation of homosexuality pushes many gay people to seek gay friendly or gay exclusive spaces. These are places where homosexuals are able to act as they wish without the fear of rejection and homophobia. In gay spaces they are also able to create relations with other gay people, which has been said to be essential for gay identity creation and validation (Hughes, 1997). However, as society becomes more accepting, the necessity for gay-specific vacations seems to be weakening, as gay people are welcome in more and more destinations around the world (Hughes, 1997).

Nevertheless, in the last decades a new niche product has emerged, which has been defined as ‘gay holiday’ that focuses openly on customers that identify themselves, and are interested, in traveling as gays and lesbians (Hughes, 2002a). Therefore, the reason to engage in tourism for gay people, in this case, is not to escape a situation where homosexuality is not accepted, but is to engage in a holiday where they can visit gay spaces and validate their gay identity whilst interacting with other homosexuals. In the context of Western gay urban cultures, gay districts might become gentrified zones of lifestyle consumption and tourist attractions, diluting and eroding gay spaces and identities (Ruting, 2008).

According to Hughes (2005) the sea, sun and sand holiday is the prevalent type of holiday, just like in the market as a whole. Popular destinations among gay men are diverse, they are both long-haul (in relation to Europe) such as the United States, the Philippines and South Africa; as well as short-haul, with Amsterdam, Gran Canaria, Ibiza, Mykonos and Sitges being the most popular ones (Clift and Forrest, 1999; Cope, 2006). Gran Canaria has been identified as one of the gay strongholds in Europe and referred to as ‘the big one’ destination in Europe (Cope, 2006).

1.3. Aim and Objectives

Most of the existing literature focuses on the consumer side of gay tourism, and when it is looked at from the supply side, the attention is placed just on marketing. In order to get new insight on gay tourism this research has been conducted consulting business owners and managers of gay exclusive resorts in Gran Canaria. This research focuses on Gran Canaria and it investigates how gay tourism is performed on the island, with the emphasis placed on gay exclusive resorts.

The aim of this research is to determine what role gay spaces play in Gran Canaria as a gay destination.

1. What do tourists seek in gay spaces in Gran Canaria?
2. How is the isolation of gay exclusive spaces perceived?
3. What is the future of gay tourism in Gran Canaria according to the local business owners?

1.4. Limitation of the Study

This research focuses on the tourism of homosexual men with little mention to lesbians. This is partly because of the rather limited amount of existing literature regarding lesbians and their tourism behaviour. Also Pritchard *et al.* (2000) argue that the holidays of lesbians are profoundly different, as they are not intimately linked to sex and the body, which are strong features of the gay holiday, but mainly because in Gran Canaria the larger part of homosexual tourists are male (Cope, 2000). Generalisation of knowledge is not the aim of this thesis, the results obtained do not attempt to define the gay tourism industry as a whole, nor to describe the perceptions of all queer people. Rather, this study aims to examine the way gay exclusive tourism is performed in Gran Canaria, on the basis of the results of the primary research and the existing literature, with the purpose of identifying the importance of gay spaces in this particular context.

1.5. Terminology

In order to make some clarity with the terms used throughout the text, a short review of the vocabulary follows. The term gay is normally used when denoting male homosexuals, however it is confusingly often used as an alternative to the term 'homosexual' to include

females also, for the purpose of this thesis, the terms gay or homosexual are used as general terms to describe men and women who are sexually attracted to members of the same sex (Hughes, 2005). The term straight is a synonym of heterosexual.

The term 'queer' used to be a derogatory term for homosexuals, but in the 1990s it has been appropriated by the gay community and nowadays is used to describe all those people that are somewhere in between the homosexual and heterosexual spectrum, the male and female identity spectrum, as well as sexual radicals and those who refuse to be categorised, who envision gender and sexuality as fluid and unlimited (Howe, 2001).

The term LGBT is an acronym for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender. Nonetheless many variations exist to include an increasing number of people that are seeking alternative identities to the dichotomy of male/female and heterosexual/homosexual model of sexuality. The most comprehensive acronym is LGBTQQIAA, which adds to the original acronym Queer, Questioning, Intersex, Ally, and Asexual (Myers, 2013).

Gay community refers to the diverse range of people that make up the queer population, (Hughes, 2006). According to Ivy (2001) the term 'community' describes a group of individuals that have a mutual interest or connection that may or may not share a territory or physical space. In the case of the gay community, concentrations of LGBT people living in the same geographical area, such as gay districts, are often seen as homelands (Hughes, 2006).

The term gay scene, or gay leisure space, comprises all those establishments, such as pubs, bars, restaurants, clubs, hotels, saunas and shops, which are gay, hence openly targeting LGBT people, in some cases exclusively (Hughes, 2002b).

To be in the closet is a phrase used to describe the state of concealment of one's sexuality, it refers to the construction of an imagined closet where to hide a specific aspect of one's life. Oppositely, to come out (of the closet) is the act of revealing publicly one's sexual orientation and is considered a milestone in the creation of one's gay identity (Myers, 2013).

1.6. Structure Of The Study

The thesis is divided into five main sections. In the introduction chapter the theoretical framework was presented, followed by a short description of the context of the study, then the aim and objectives were stated along with the limitations of the study, concluding with an explanation of the key terms. In the second chapter the literature will be reviewed, exploring the existing publications on the topic of gay tourism giving an overview of its development and

its current features, including the motivations for travel. The literature review will continue by exploring the concept of gay identity, after that it will examine gay spaces and the different issues related to them. In the final sections of this chapter the marketing aspects of gay tourism will be presented followed by a description of gay tourism in Gran Canaria. The third chapter, the methodology, will describe the research method used, the process of research and the case study. In the following chapter the findings of the interviews are presented along with a discussion. In the final chapter the conclusion of this thesis are presented.

2. Literature review

“Gay tourism has been identified as an area in which transnational intersections of identity, sexuality, politics and economics are producing new social formations and practices” (Murray, 2007: 49). This means that gay tourism has many different facets that need to be examined in order to fully understand it, as many issues, belonging to different disciplines, come in place when researching this phenomenon.

In the first chapter of the literature review, gay tourism will be conceptualised in order to give the reader an understanding of how gay tourism developed and what it looks like today, including the motivations for gay people to travel. After that, the concepts of gay identity and spaces will be examined, focussing especially on the issues related to gay spaces. In the following chapters the marketing of gay tourism will be examined, and successively Gran Canaria and its gay tourism industry will be presented.

2.1. Gay Tourism

Gay tourism has existed for a very long time but in different forms. It has been reported that back in the nineteenth century homosexual men would travel on grand tours in a quest for places where their sexuality could be expressed more freely. These tourists would generally be gay men from northern European countries travelling to Italy and Greece, which at the time used to be societies where homosexuality was more accepted (Aldrich, 1993). Up until the Second World War gay tourism was elitist, as at that time international travel was only affordable for wealthy intellectuals and artists, who would travel between London, Berlin, New York and Paris (Clift *et al*, 2002). The post-war period brought social changes and de-industrialization, which resulted in the creation of few gay-safe districts that were found mainly in large cities of the UK and the US (Clift *et al*, 2002).

Despite the emergence of a few gay enclaves, homosexual people were constantly experiencing discrimination, such as discharge from military service, jail, public humiliation through the publication of their names in newspapers, as well as being forced into mental hospitals (Hughes, 2006). Numerous persecutions over the years resulted in a number of demonstrations, such as the New York League for Sexual Freedom in 1964, and Stonewall in 1969. Thanks to these historic events these sites became eventually gay landmarks and tourist

destinations (Clift, Luongo and Callister, 2002), with Stonewall being recognised as a national historic landmark (Hughes, 2006). Consequently, in the 60s and 70s, homosexuality became less ostracised and gay districts developed in an increasing number of cities. However homophobia was still widespread. According to Bailey (1992), these spaces were still not available to the larger part of homosexuals, but just the fact that these ‘identity spaces’ existed, would still influence those LGBT that were not able visit them.

According to Southall and Follon (2011) up until the mid-1990s, gay tourism was fundamentally isolated from mainstream travel in regard of targeted products, services and marketing. As a consequence, exclusively gay destinations and facilities were the most prominent choice for queer people. Nonetheless, as the visibility and acceptance towards LGBT people grew, as well as the acknowledgment of the importance of this market segment, the confidence of gay and lesbian tourists grew to the point that they started to break away from the boundaries of exclusively gay spaces. This does not imply that before this time LGBT people, who were not interested in all-gay environments would not travel, but they would have chosen to travel in a more discreet way, integrating with friends and family, gay as well as straight, and pursuing a less ‘homo-sexualised’ holiday.

According to Cox (2001) “there is no such thing as a typical gay holiday” (cited in Hughes, 2006: 58). However, Hughes (2002a) has conceptualised the vacations of homosexuals into two broad categories: non-gay and gay.

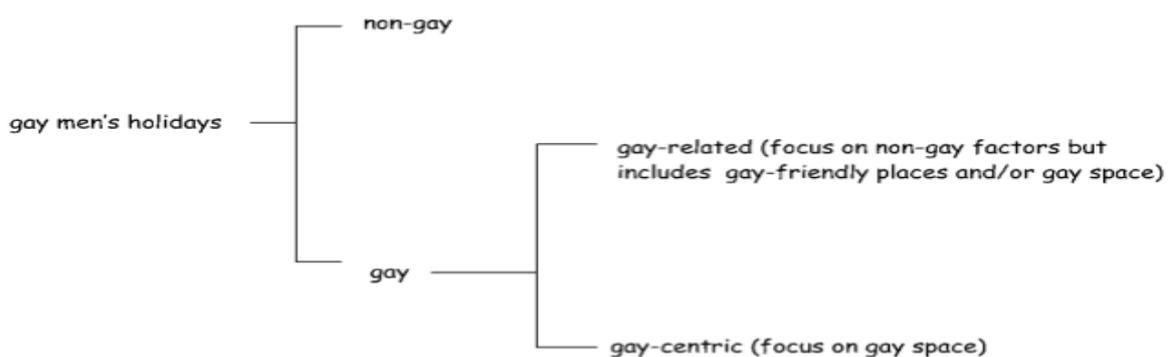


Figure 1 Typology of Gay Men's Holiday (Hughes, 2002: 301)

The first type of holiday is not different in any way from those of their heterosexual counterparts; on the other hand, Cox (2001) suggests that this type of holiday inhibits in a way the behaviour of LGBT people during their vacation (cited in Hughes, 2006: 58).

The other category can be described as running in a continuum, ranging from gay-related holidays, wherein gay spaces are regarded as one of the factors influencing the choice of destination but it is regarded as equally important to other features such as sun, culture or heritage. On the other end of the spectrum are gay-centric holidays, in this type of vacation gay space is the main attribute looked for, and the tourists are principally interested in immersing themselves in the gay life of the destination (Hughes, 2006). Southall and Follon (2011) argue that there is not much research confirming the extent to which LGBT people prefer to visit destinations specifically tailored towards their needs, and that only a small minority of homosexual people are interested in gay-specific travel. Stuber (2002) argues that although homophobia is not as widespread as it used to be, there is still the perception of heterosexuality being the norm opposite to homosexuality, triggering in the gay community a sense of exclusion. There are two distinct reactions to this situation, dividing queer people into two different groups, the first of which being the ‘obeying’ type that prefers to visit a discreet gay environment or a remote destination. Whereas the other group, the ‘uproar’ type, tries to overcompensate this sense of exclusion by engaging in ostentatious queer experiences.

2.1.1. Holiday Motivation

The rationales for choosing a vacation are normally categorised as push factors, which are the socio-psychological motivations that persuade an individual to go on holiday; whilst the pull factors are the attributes of a destination that attract the individual to visit a particular place (Decrop, 1999). Hughes (2002a: 300) describes these factors in the following model:

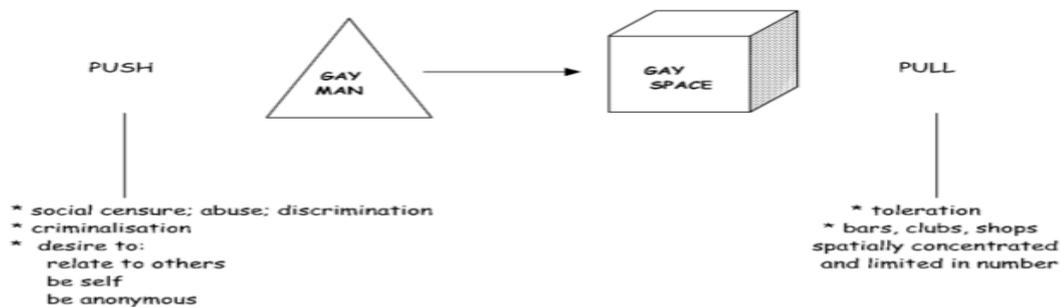


Figure 2. Factors influencing gay tourism (Hughes, 2002a: 300)

The model elaborated by Hughes covers only the factors that are directly related to one’s sexual orientation, not mentioning other elements, which are equally important in the choice to travel to a specific destination. Clift and Forrest (1999) have established in their study that

the motivation for travel among gay man can be grouped in three broad categories: gay social life and sex; culture and sights; comfort and relaxation. In the specific case of a sun and beach gay tourism destination the most important resources are the climate, the gay scene, nightlife, a gay-friendly environment, exclusively gay accommodation and good restaurants (Melián-González et al., 2011).

According to Ryan and Hall (2001) it is widely assumed that gay people are particularly promiscuous, they argue that this is because of the way mass media pictures gay tourism: as a manifestation of a gay lifestyle riddled with stereotypes, homophobia, significant misconception and deliberate exaggeration. Additionally it has been debated that there is no motive to suppose there is more casual sex than in the expression of heterosexual behaviour (Ryan and Hall, 2001; Clift and Carter, 2000). As with all myths, there is a degree of reality in this belief, as a matter of fact, studies have been carried out concerning sexual behaviour of gay people whilst abroad and they indicate that sex is a significant incentive for gay men to go on holiday. In the study conducted by Clift and Forrest (1999) in Brighton, 48% of respondents reported sex with a new partner during their last vacation, and this result was confirmed in a later study carried out at the London Freedom Fairs, although with a slightly lower percentage, 45%, which is still a very significant result (Clift, Callister, and Luongo, 2002). Monterrubio (2009) affirms that sex represents an important and recurrent part of gay tourism, even though sex cannot be defined as an ever-present aspect in gay travel, the prospect of sexual encounters appears relevant for certain types of vacations. This is the case of gay-centric holidays, as it is self evident that gay people travelling to a gay destination are likely to do so in order to socialise with other homosexual people, and possibly to engage in sexual encounters (Clift and Forrest, 1999; Waitt and Markwell, 2006).

As previously mentioned, gay and straight people engage in tourism for similar reasons, such as the need for relaxation, escape and self-fulfilment (Dann, 1981; Sharpley, 1994). Despite the fact that modern society is increasingly accepting towards different sexualities and gender identities, the study conducted by Pritchard *et al.* (2000) concludes that everyday life for many homosexual people is still noticeably problematic. This is because many of them might still be in the closet or have to be discreet about their sexual orientation; therefore holidays can give them a respite from the everyday difficulties of being gay, by geographically and emotionally distancing themselves away from home (Cox, 2002). Whilst away on vacation this category of homosexual people has the chance to experience a world where they can be open

about their sexual orientation, as they do not wish to suppress their sexuality when on holiday (Pritchard *et al.*, 2000).

Another factor affecting the decision making process of gay people when choosing a vacation is risk avoidance. In addition to the usual risks, such as terrorism or exposure to health hazards, LGBT people will try to avoid situations of verbal or physical abuse, discrimination and embarrassment based on their sexual orientation (Hughes, 2002a, b; Hughes, 2006). There have been many instances in which destinations would not welcome gay tourists, with tourists boards openly discouraging their travel, governments harassing gay people, and in some extreme cases, even arresting them for no apparent reason (Want, 2002). Another uncomfortable situation can arise when a homosexual couple is denied a double room in a hotel or not even offered one, leading gay people to favour a gay exclusive accommodation over a standard one. On the other hand, gay exclusive space may also be a source of risk, there LGBT people could easily be identified as a target by homophobic groups and be abused both verbally and physically (Hughes, 2006). It has been argued that sometimes discrimination is unwilling or imagined, nevertheless research shows that gay people would favour a gay destination in order to rule out completely any type of uneasiness or discrimination whilst on holiday (Hughes, 2002b).

Research shows different outcomes concerning gay travel, but what seems to be applicable to the whole queer community is that LGBT people generally seek the same features as heterosexuals in a holiday, but they at least expect for the destination to be gay-friendly, not necessarily requiring gay space, which is often regarded as a bonus (Cope, 2000).

2.2. Gay Identity

Identity formation and validation is one of the most important rationales for gay holiday according to many researchers (Hughes, 1997; Cresswell, 2004; Monterrubio, 2009; Davies, 1992; Knopp, 1992). Gay tourism is considered to be pivotal in the life of gay people, same sex tourism has even been compared to a pilgrimage, a journey to build an individual and collective identity, this is because it supplies access to spaces that are regarded as 'imagined homelands', 'Oz-like sites of concentrated fantasy' (Waitt and Markwell, 2006: 3).

Identity is not a very straightforward concept, many different meanings can be given, but it is generally who, or what, a person identifies him- or herself with. Identity is constructed in

reference to the world that an individual is surrounded by, what makes him or her the same as others and what distinguishes him or her from others (Hughes, 2006). Many are the aspects that can affect the identity formation of a person, ranging from gender, ethnicity, religious beliefs, class and sexual orientation. According to Bell (1991) for homosexuals, sexuality can be a dominant element in the process of shaping identity. Homosexuality as a source of identity rather than a sexual act is a relatively new concept, dating back to the 19th century (Hughes, 1997). Queer theory recognises that the sexual identity of a person is not fixed but fluid and that there are many identities that a person can choose to perform (Cresswell, 2004).

Mitchell (2000), Hughes (2006) and Butler (1990) argue that identities are socially constructed and performative, rather than being given, in other words identities are performed, meaning that they are produced through behaviour, consumption preferences, and lifestyle practices that project a certain identity, affirming one's position in society (Britton, 1991). Sexual identity is said to be an individual's construct but at the same time it needs validation from other people, both gay and straight. According to Monterrubio (2009) in many cases it involves the participation in certain leisure activities in a spatial concentration of bars, clubs, residences and public spaces. The engagement in such activities in specific gay spaces enables them to validate their identity through the interaction with others. For many homosexuals the acceptance of their gay identity is crucial in their lives and being gay is increasingly associated with a particular lifestyle (Hughes, 1997). It has been argued that identity can also be created and consolidated through consumption, and Hughes (1997) suggested that the consumption of a holiday is one aspect of this process. Within the framework of the modern cultural economy, tourist consumption can be regarded as a 'socially constructed activity denied and accepted by those who produce and consume it' (Ateljevic, 2000: 376).

Many gay men who have not come out of the closet are often unable to express their sexuality openly and therefore must meet secretly (Hughes, 1997). According to Davies (1992) gay men manage coming out by geographically separating their lives in order for their gay identity only to be expressed in places that are perceived as safe. Those people that are not free to reinforce their gay identity at home decide to travel in the quest of an anonymous environment in which to be openly gay (Monterrubio, 2009). In his study Cox (2002) has described the experience of a gay man that created a multiplicity of sexual identities for himself: at home he could not be open about his sexuality, so he would spend all his holiday time in Ibiza, where he had even established a network of friends. A person could live and work in a

fundamentally heterosexual society and in his leisure time visit “the resort of gay society” (Hughes, 1997:5). Knopp (1992) introduces the concept of ‘place-based identities’, which refers to the creation of identities in relation to the appropriation of space. Cox (2002) asserts that gay identities are a matter of spaces, and places have an implication on the formation of identity, in which holidaymaking has a central role, giving the chance to homosexuals to discover other gay cultures.

2.3. Gay Spaces

Ivy (2001) has described gay space as fundamentally a ‘leisure arena’. According to Hindle (1994) gay space is place for social interaction, which comprises of a concentration of businesses, ranging from bars and nightclubs to saunas, shops and residences as well as public spaces, such as streets and parks. Collins (2004) has conceptualised the evolution process of gay spaces in a time-framed model divided into four stages. The first ‘pre-condition’ stage encompasses a neglected urban district with low rents, where a small gay community is present or a gay oriented venue has emerged. Successively in the ‘emergence’ stage, an increasing number of queer people start to patronise the growing number of gay enterprises located in the area and in the third step, ‘expansion and diversification’, the district becomes an increasingly appealing area for gay people to live and start gay related business. In the final stage, ‘integration’, gentrification and the attractiveness of gay venues draw also non- queer people to the area (Collins 2004). Gay spaces may become commodified and integrated into larger urban regeneration, contributing to the colonisation of these areas by other groups that might not be as open to non-normative others, predictably creating strains (Ruting, 2008).

2.3.1. Gay Spaces: Segregation Vs Congregation

Gay spaces are most commonly leisure spaces where LGBT people can express openly their sexuality, where being gay is the norm (Visser, 2002). Chauncey (1996: 224) asserts that space itself has “has no natural character, no inherent meaning” and that gender, sexuality or ownership are not embedded in space. Nevertheless according to Visser (2007: 1345) “the power relations of everyday life normalise space as asexual (to heterosexuals) and as heterosexual (to non-heterosexuals)”. This means that places that are perceived from straight

people as absent of any sexual connotations, have in the eyes of the LGBT community, heterosexual sexual implications. Also Valentine (1993) argues that heterosexuality is strongly conveyed in space, but it is normalised in a manner that just goes undetected. Gay spaces have an important meaning for the LGBT community, this is because of the heterosexual implication of spaces: queer people had to go to great lengths in order to overthrow the norm and appropriate space (Chauncey, 1996). In gay places the roles are subverted, making queer people the majority in a world where they would normally be a minority (Blichfeldt *et al*, 2012). Most societies are structured by hetero-normative regimes, and those who do not fall in a specific gender or sexual orientation category are most likely to feel out of place and marginalised (Graham, 2007). In a hetero-normative world, gay spaces give the opportunity to LGBT people to be themselves without fear of homophobic abuse. It is a place where homosexuals can socialise with each other in an environment that is free from prejudice (Hughes, 2006).

Furthermore Myslik (1996) asserts that queer spaces give LGBT people a sense of belonging to a community, and therefore a sense of empowerment: they have a place where to feel accepted, safe and at home. Many queer tourists would travel to well-known gay travel destinations in the quest for a 'homeland', a place where to find a like-minded people, as they could not find this sense of inclusion and belonging back home, where they might have experienced a 'spiritual exile' (Howe, 2001). This isolation could be caused either by the lack of access to gay space, or by the fear of discovery in the local gay space, which leads them to avoid it (Hughes, 1997). Gay space is often perceived as the physical manifestation of gay community and is seen as a place of safety, political power and identity formation (Browne and Bakshi, 2011). Collins (2006) asserts that geographical studies have determined the importance of both space and place in the creation, development and validation of gay identity. According to Collins (2007) homosexuals find that the participation in leisure activities in gay spaces allows them to develop into the gay person that the desire to be, therefore through place gay men create a social identity by performing it (Farr, 2007). On the subject of identity, Howe (2001) argues that the sense of safety perceived in gay areas would in the long term lead queer people to give less importance to their sexual identity. The concept of identity is flexible, even when queerness is used in the actual process of claiming a homeland (Howe, 2001).

Nonetheless, it has been established that not every homosexual needs to engage in gay exclusive leisure activities to validate their gay identity. Browne and Bakshi (2011) in their

study have found that many respondents are happy to visit any place, both gay and straight, so the assertion that homosexuals cannot be themselves in regular leisure settings is therefore not always true. A study conducted by Blichfeldt, Chor and Milan (2012) shows that not all homosexuals are interested in visiting gay spaces both at home as well as on holidays.

The rationales behind this feeling were found to be diverse: Hughes (2006) reports that some gay people want to avoid gay space when on holiday because they want to avoid the 'homometropolis'. Some gay tourists would argue that gay spaces have lost their original meaning, they once used to be arenas for political discussion and LGBT rights activism, but have now just become cruising areas (Kantsa, 2002). Another reason for the lack of interest in gay spaces can be due to the increasing accessibility to the internet, which offers homosexual men and women the opportunity to establish social interactions, get in touch with queer communities and find sex online, without having to travel away from home (Ruting, 2008).

Many gay people do not feel the need to validate their gay identity and therefore they are not on the quest for a 'gay homeland' or shelter in a place with a high concentration of queer people and gay structures (Ivy, 2001). According to Aitkenhead (1997) and Tatchell (1997) sexual identity is losing importance because the queer community has become accepted and integrated into mainstream society. Homosexuality has been argued to be normalised to the point that, for example, in Hawaii, although gay tourism is affirmed, there are no gay-exclusive enterprises, this is because queer people do not feel the need to be as defiant in the validation of their identity (Link, 2002).

There is a debate over the issue of segregation juxtaposed to congregation, it has been argued by both homosexual and heterosexual people that concentration of gay enterprises and dwellings might not be desirable as they can result in gay 'ghettos' (Hindle 1994). Some queer people do not find gay spaces appealing, as a matter of fact, they found that these spaces were perceived as segregated, isolating the LGBT community into a discreet gay district (Browne and Bakshi, 2011). Therefore gay spaces can be perceived as a place where gay identity is performed safely, in anonymity, but at the same time it can be perceived as a 'confining prison' (Cresswell, 2004: 105).

Another issue that resulted from research is that in gay spaces there is an increasing social marginalisation of certain LGBT people. This is often because they do not fit in the image of the 'good homosexual', which is the stereotype of the white, young and beautiful gay men, so the groups that are often ostracised are lesbians, ethnic minorities and older gay men (Hindle,

2000). As a matter of fact a large number of queer people decide to avoid gay venues, disassociating themselves from the social customs of the gay 'scene', because they disapprove of the implicit or actual exclusion of certain people within the queer community (Ivy, 2001). Furthermore, it has been argued that places can be 'queered' (Browne and Bakshi, 2011) through the use of a specific place by groups of gay men who do not frequent gay spaces for socialising and therefore rework heterosexual places (Visser, 2007). Therefore spaces can be considered gay and straight at the same time, rather than a dichotomy, so place is not necessarily ghettoised, intimidating or hetero- or homo-normative (Browne and Bakshi, 2011).

2.3.2. Uses Of Gay Spaces by Tourism

Shields (1991) in his interpretation of imagined and actual places, uncovers how the cultural systems and spatial arrangements, which create social spatialisation, produce certain place-myths over time. Britton (1991) defines as 'tourism production system' the activities involved in the process of endowing places and spaces with social meaning and depictions that allow these places to be included into the production practice linked to tourism. In some cases this production system causes the issue of the commodification of places in tourism, where many stakeholders collectively construct spaces and places that communicate a certain 'identity' message. Tourism has been argued to contribute to the creation of artificial identity places, with the purpose of marketing them as a product to be sold to tourists. With regard to gay tourism, over commercialising and touristifying gay space can eventually cause a loss of a truthful gay identity (MacCannell, 1976; Britton 1991; Ateljevic, 2000).

Rushbrook (2002) argues that LGBT spaces have become more and more visible to, and visited by, the public at large, which are on the quest of the geography of cool, a search for a place-based exotic other. When tourism boards acknowledge the attractiveness of gay spaces, these areas are marketed as tourist attractions and thus they become more accessible to mainstream visitors. Furthermore the advertisement of gay districts leads to a form of assimilation into mainstream culture that strengthens the integration of the gay and lesbian niche market (Rushbrook, 2002).

Although the attention of mainstream tourism marketers may be appreciated, at the same time it subsidises the integrity of queer communities, weakening and eroding gay spaces and identities, contributing to their 'degaying' (Pritchard *et al*, 2000: 268). Gay districts are

used as a representation of the cultural and lifestyle diversity of tourist destinations, and are packaged as zones of enjoyment, with LGBT people being part of the attraction of these areas (Rose, 2000; Rushbrook, 2002). According to Rose (2000: 107), the local people “*are required to play their part in these games of heritage, not only exploiting them commercially through all sorts of tourist-dependent enterprises, but also promoting their own micro-cultures of bohemian, gay or alternative lifestyles, and making their own demands for the rerouting of traffic, the refurbishment of buildings, the mitigation of taxes and much more in the name of the unique qualities of pleasure offered by their particular habitat*”. As a matter of fact, the promotion of gay spaces as places of gay consumption and tourism has in some cases caused the prices to increase and consequently excluded many LGBT people from the participation in local social activities (Binnie and Skeggs, 2004).

Rose (2000) asserts that city politicians and entrepreneurs used transgression as a tool to project an image of cosmopolitanism. Binnie and Skeggs (2004: 46) assert that: “*In terms of the spatial politics of cosmopolitanism, it is imperative that we recognise that cosmopolitanism operates through access to and knowledge of specific places and spaces*”. So the general public would visit these enclosed districts that would present “authentic” others in a consumable way, for example, pride events or drag shows (Rushbrook, 2002). There is also an evident contradiction intrinsic in the commodification of gay spaces, when too many mainstream visitors enter a gay district, its basic attribute of authenticity, gayness, will be diluted. (Binnie & Skeggs 2004). There has been a debate on the hetero-sexualisation of gay leisure spaces, when non-queer people started frequenting gay districts, making them, in a way, more heterosexual, it had been regarded as an invasion of gay places, weakening their radical political potentials by ‘degaying’ them (Casey, 2004).

Nevertheless, heterosexuals are not the only ones eager to buy into a global gay culture constructed for the market. Homosexuals have been described as ‘cultural dupes’ that, allured by an illusory social acceptance, consume commodified gay spaces (Altman, 2001). Want (2002) argues that the degaying of gay attractions is to be attributed to the queer community as well, asserting that there was a weakening in the political focus and more importance was conferred to their carnivalesque component. Furthermore, Clarke (1997: 8) claims that gay activism used to be about gay rights and equality, whilst now it has become a “celebration of consumerism, gay orthodoxy and body Fascism”.

Giorgi (2002) argues that gay space gives queer people visibility, and in turn, offers itself to the gaze of tourists. It has been proven that in the process of creating a queer homeland,

alliances must be sought and preserved between queer and non-queer people. Gay space should be safe places for celebrations of gays, not exclusionary spaces, as their creation is complex and includes non-queer allies (Howe, 2001). A queer homeland may be both understandably and morally tied to tourism, as if all places offered the "playing and praying" possible in gay spaces, they may not exist as a point of queer congregation (Howe, 2001).

2.4. Targeting the Gay Market

Gay people have become a very appealing market segment, it has been argued that this is because homosexuality is no longer ostracised, to the contrary, its visibility, self-confidence and social acceptance have improved significantly (Penaloza, 1996; Wood, 1999). Baletta (1972) has argued that in the early 1970s publishers and advertisers began to see the gay community as a lucrative entity and started focusing more on gay consumers (cited in Um, 2012). Originally there was a fear of alienating heterosexual tourists but in the 1980s gay ads were becoming more common, but with the beginning of the AIDS epidemic this approach took a hit (Um, 2012). Nevertheless, tourism operators claim that the 1990s were seen as the golden age for LGBT tourism, due to the alleged gay marketing moment, when "coming out meant coming out in terms of purchasing power" (Puar, 2002: 105).

Nowadays the consolidation of gay culture, the greater media coverage and the transformations in law have all contributed to the creation of a climate of greater tolerance, consequently more enterprises are willing to associate themselves with the gay market (Cope, 2000). Another reason for companies to target the gay segment is that this market is considered to be unwavering and not likely to change in size or buying power, if anything it is believed to expand as a consequence of growing acceptance of societies towards LGBT people (Fugate, 1993). However, the most important reason for marketers to target this segment is that it is believed to have a significant spending power (Burnett, 2000). Homosexuals are regarded as an ideal market because they have been said to be well-educated with higher than average discretionary income (DeLoizeer and Rodrigue, 1996). To the extent that Schulz (1994) has described the segment as "the closest thing to a recession-proof market" (cited in Pritchard *et al*, 1998). These assumptions are based on the fact that gay people are more likely to fall in the DINK category (Double Income No Kids), and therefore have more time and disposable

income as well as being more likely to live for now rather than saving for the future (Cope, 2006).

The increased interest in the gay segment has been defined as the 'gay marketing moment' (Gluckman and Reed, 1997). Homosexuals have been regarded as an emerging lifestyle segment, therefore entailing the presence of a specific lifestyle that would allow marketers to target gay people successfully and economically (Fugate, 1993). Lifestyle marketing is a tool to understand the source for patterns of consumption, this is because lifestyle is believed to reflect the way in which people lead their life and spend their time and money (Scott and Parfitt, 2004). It has been argued that supposing that sexual orientation would by itself be enough to isolate a market segment, is regarded as one-dimensional and reductive (Hughes, 2005). On the other hand Hughes (2005) admits that there is a significant consistency in the findings of previous studies about gay people. Also Bell (1991) argued that there are risks in identifying a social group on the basis of one criterion, in this case sexuality, when other key features need to be considered, for example gender, ethnicity and social class. He does however admit that frequently LGBT people use sexuality as a prevailing criterion for self-definition.

Stereotypes of gay people often assume that the queer community is a homogeneous market segment, formed by early adopters, hedonist and aesthetes. This has been proven to be untrue as the homosexual population is as diverse as society as a whole (Stuber, 2002). Badgett (2001) has identified some 'myths' regarding the economic position of gays and lesbians, she has demonstrated through a series of studies in the USA that gays and lesbians are not always affluent and well-educated, that many do have family responsibilities and they are not typically consumption-oriented with spending patterns that are ostentatious and status-ridden. The image of high-spend, self-indulgent, fashion-conscious, trend setting individuals will be representative of a certain share of the entire homosexual population but there are evident issues when they are presented as or assumed to be 'typical' (Gluckman and Reed, 1997). Existing studies on gay and lesbian tourism have been said not to be representative of the whole gay population, as the samples are always somewhat biased, either because respondents are self-selecting or because the samples were opportunistic and convenient (Hughes, 2002a; Hughes, 2002b; Clift and Forrest; 1999; Clift, Callister, and Luongo, 2002, Melián-González *et al.*, 2011). Nevertheless in the 2006 Mintel study, a gay-specific tour operator has explained

that homosexuals do not have higher disposable income, but they dispose of it differently and they have a higher-than-average tendency to take holidays (Cope, 2006).

According to Mintel’s research of 2006, homosexual tourists are after the same things as their heterosexual counterpart, such as relaxation, sightseeing, culture, going to the seaside, restaurants, shops and being themselves. Therefore it is crucial for suppliers to not resort to gay stereotypes when targeting the gay market as most of them will perceive this attitude as patronising (Cope, 2006). Ersoy *et al* (2012) argue that many of the gay holidays on offer replicate a fun-loving, gay 18-30 years old culture. In Hughes and Deutsch (2010) research the results showed that many of products of gay tour operators reflect a youth-oriented gay scene, therefore with low quality hotels, cheap restaurant but many possibilities for sexual encounters.

Stuber (2002) has theorised the most common marketing mistakes that companies and tourism operators can make, as well as the success factors.

Table 1 Marketing Mistakes and Success Factors (Stuber, 2002: 118-119)

Marketing Mistakes	Success Factors
<i>Isolating:</i> handling gay/lesbian issues as a separate project disconnected from (general) marketing activities	<i>Strategic approach:</i> identifying the linkage of brands, products and strategic marketing with gay/lesbian values and realities
<i>Simplifying:</i> reducing gay marketing to gay specific issues (the scene, gay events, sexual issues) and overemphasising gay aspects of a product	<i>Inclusive approach:</i> dealing with diverse sexual orientation as one natural fact among many
<i>Stereotyping:</i> getting stuck in clichés about gay men and lesbians, their lifestyles and preferences	<i>Comprehensive approach:</i> thinking also about gay/lesbian employees, business partners and other stakeholders
<i>Miracle agenda:</i> expecting quick wins with low budget	<i>Openness and loyalty:</i> making sure gay marketing is as public as any other marketing issue, standing firm in the face of criticism
<i>Mimnimising:</i> starting with no long-term strategy plan and no inside community expertise	<i>Credibility:</i> getting involved in the community – associations, networks, even politics
<i>All commercial:</i> focussing on advertising and	<i>Co-operation:</i> teaming with other companies or

sales, ignoring below-the-line, the internet and image-related factors	non-profits for within or outside the community - join forces (and budgets)
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2.5. Gay Tourism in Gran Canaria

According to Moner *et al.* (2007) the most popular types of tourism amongst homosexuals are urban and coastal tourism. In a study conducted by Waitt and Markwell in 2006, the results showed that Gran Canaria was placed ninth in the European destinations for gay tourism and ranked as one of the leading for sun and beach gay destinations in Europe along with Mykonos and Ibiza. Organised gay tourism began to arrive on Gran Canaria in the 1990s, even though gay tourists had been coming to the island for some time before that (Melián-González *et al.*, 2011). Nowadays there are many centres devoted entirely to gay tourism and a lot more that can be branded as gay-friendly.

According to Melián-González *et al.* (2011) the gay tourists market is very important for Gran Canaria as its average expenditure is notably higher than the overall average of tourists to both Gran Canaria and the Canary Islands as a whole. Other data concerning the socioeconomic profile and the features of the holidays of the homosexual segment are comparable to those of the average tourist visiting the islands, with the exception of those related to the fidelity to Gran Canaria (Melián-González *et al.*, 2011). Gay tourists appear to be more loyal to the destination than the common visitor of Gran Canaria, as a matter of fact, the results of the research of Melián-González *et al.* (2011) show that the gay tourists had been to the island few times before and they also planned to visit again Gran Canaria.

According to MINTEL's research (Cope, 2000) Gran Canaria has a well-developed offer for the gay segment that is mainly concentrated in the south of the island, in specific in the Yumbo centre, which is a commercial centre in Playa del Ingles. This centre has around 40 gay bars, plus clubs, restaurants, saunas and a sex shop and every place has different characteristics, aimed at different types of tastes, even though the area has a very male bias. Gran Canaria also has Europe's largest gay beach and its climate is mild and sunny even during the winter months (Cope, 2000).

Melián-González *et al.* (2011) have also analysed the resources available in Gran Canaria that are considered important for the gay segment and designed a graph to show how they performed.

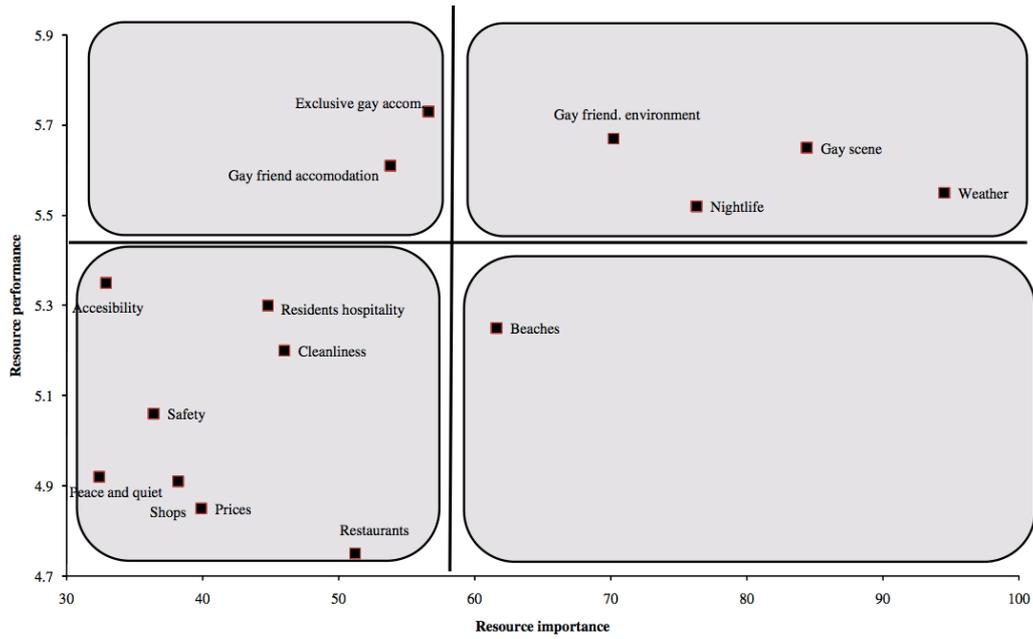


Figure 3 Valuable resources and their condition on Gran Canaria (Melián-González et al., 2011: 1032)

The figure is divided in four quadrants stemming from two axes indicating the average score for the state of those assets on Gran Canaria and the mean relative frequency with which they were regarded as the most influential for the gay market (Melián-González et al., 2011). Area I (upper right-hand quadrant) shows those resources perceived as pivotal by gay tourists that performed well on the island. The resources contained in the area II (lower right-hand quadrant) are those which are also perceived as important but were not at a satisfactory level according to the respondents to the research of Melián-González et al. (2011). Lastly, the other two quadrants show those resources that are considered of secondary importance, although some received a below average score (Area IV), others had an above average score.

3. Methodology

This study offers an in-depth analysis of the way gay tourism is performed in Gran Canaria, with the aim of establishing the relevance of gay spaces in this particular context. Representativeness is not the aim of this thesis and the results of this study do not claim to describe the gay tourism industry as a whole, or to be applicable to all transnational queer people. Guarancino (2007) stresses that there is a need for broader and more in-depth understanding on gay tourism, which can be achieved only through qualitative research. In tourism research, the qualitative approach is said to shed light on behaviours, concerns, and attitudes that are not easily acquired from quantitative analysis (Walle, 1997; Riley and Love, 2000). As a matter of fact, qualitative research deals with the complexity of the reality but with more limited numbers (Finn, Elliott-White and Walton, 2000). Therefore, qualitative research is the best way to approach research in the tourism field because of the attention on the reasoning behind actions and feelings, which can change greatly depending on each individual (Seale, 1998). Usually qualitative research requires an inductive approach, which uses gathered evidence to draw a conclusion. Altinay and Paraskevas (2008) list the advantages of this approach; it helps to explain why a particular phenomenon is taking place; it acknowledges that the researcher is part of the research progress; it allows the researcher to investigate topics that have little existing literature to support them; and it uses empirical evidence at the start of the reasoning process that can be easily applied.

3.1. Sampling

The purpose of this study was to determine what role gay spaces play in Gran Canaria as a tourist destination with particular reference to gay exclusive resorts and the method chosen was a small number of semi-structured interviews. The sample used in this study was non probabilistic. The sample for the interviews was gathered from websites such as Gran Canaria Gay Stay (2013) and the Spartacus International Gay Guide (2013), which is one of the most popular gay travel publications amongst gay travellers around the world, consisting mostly of Western European and North American authors. It gives information about gay life, important legislation and the local recreation scene from a gay perspective, information are also suggested by locals regarding restaurants, hotels, nightclubs, recreation facilities and other establishments that are either exclusively gay or gay friendly (Ivy, 2001). Most of the businesses consulted

consisted of bungalows complex, which were are situated in the areas of Maspalomas, Playa del Inglés, San Bartolomé de Tirajana, San Agustín and Meloneras.

Although the research has used only a small sample, the interviews came to a saturation point, which means that the results became repetitive, and that no new matters would arise (Creswell, 1998; Crouch and Mckenzie, 2006). Although the study did not have the aim of reaching out to a representative sample, efforts were made to collect information from as many different perspectives as possible. Considering the limited number of interviews, eight, the goal of this thesis is not to be conclusive in regard to gay spaces in general, but to isolate concerns, issues, and trends regarding gay exclusive resorts in Maspalomas.

3.2. Data Collection and Interview Design

The method used for this research is semi-structured interview. Semi-structured interviews are usually undertaken after exploratory research, this type of data collection technique was used because it allowed more control of the process, helping prioritise questions and keep the conversation focused, and it maximises the reliability and validity if the data collected (Altinay and Paraskevas, 2008). Informal and in-depth interviews are generally done with a small numbers of people being interviewed in profundity, even on more than one occasion. The amount of information collected is normally substantial, and it is gathered from limited amount of people (Veal, 2006). Therefore in- depth interviews are characterised by their length, depth and structure, and they attempt to probe more deeply than is possible with questionnaire. Moreover with the in-depth interview the interviewee is encouraged to talk, argue and share own experiences, and the interviewer can ask to explain something better or ask supplementary and probing question.

The questions are open-ended with some probing questions that allow an in-depth investigation of the phenomenon. According to Boyce and Neale (2006) the most significant advantage of in-depth interviews is that they provide much more detailed information than what is available through other data collection methods, such as surveys. They also may provide a more relaxed atmosphere in which to collect information, people may feel more comfortable having a conversation with the researcher as opposed to filling out a survey.

To carry out the semi-structured interviews an interview guide was elaborated with a range of more general questions until more specific questions (Altinay and Paraskevas, 2008).

Guidelines for interviews were adjusted through the research process, these guidelines were drawn from literature and from previous interviews. The interview was structured around broad topics and the respondents were given as little input as possible in order not to influence their answers, only when necessary the focus was brought back to the intended topic. For the interview guide of this research see Appendix 1.

Once the gay resorts were individuated, they were firstly contacted over the phone, in the case where the manager was not available for a phone interview the questions were submitted via email. All the correspondences were later followed by a phone conversation giving the chance to discussing in more depth some relevant issues. Eight semi-structured interviews were carried out. The respondents were explained the objectives of the investigation and were informed of the anonymity of their participation before the interviews. The interviews were never carried out in person due to the inability to undertake an on-sited investigation, one of them was conducted via FaceTime, three via Skype and four over the phone. The time dedicated to each interview ranged from fifteen to forty-five minutes and only two of them were taped as many of the interviewee did not wish to be recorded, though they were willing to answer some questions.

3.3. The Case Study

The current research is based on the case study of Gran Canaria, defined by Robson (2002: 178) as a “*strategy for doing research which involve an empirical investigation of a particular contemporary phenomenon within its real life context using multiple sources of evidence*”. Case study as a method of qualitative research is preferable because if a phenomenon is studied within a context, and it becomes possible to develop and evaluate existing theories (Baxter and Jack, 2008).

Maspalomas is part of the Maspalomas - Costa Canaria tourist region, an area also known by locals as el Sur, which also includes the nearby town of San Agustín, Playa del Inglés and Meloneras. It is located on the southernmost tip of Gran Canaria, it is the largest tourist town in the Canary Islands, and it is one of the most popular gay tourism destinations in Europe (Clift and Forrest, 1999; Cope, 2006).

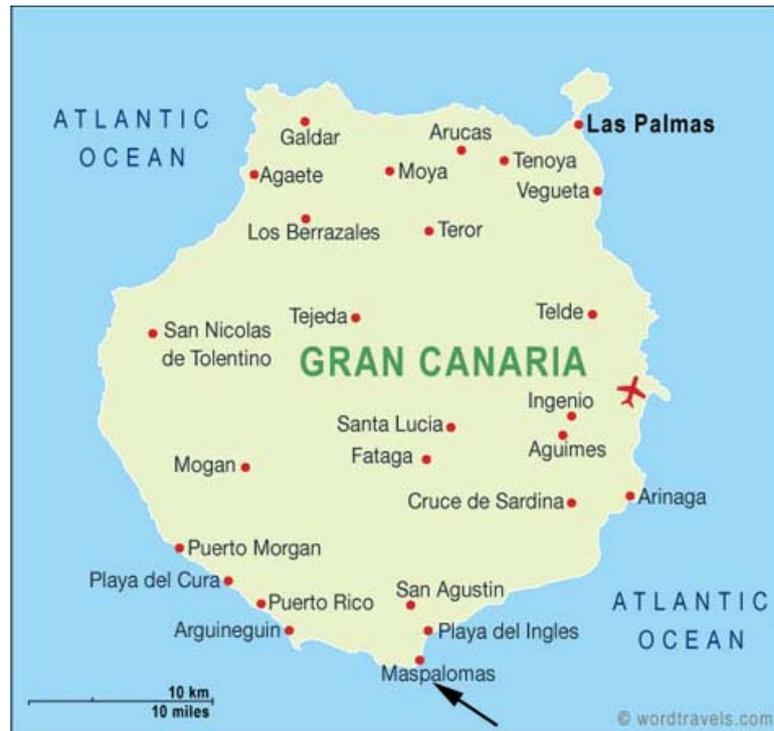


Figure 4 Map Of Gran Canaria (World Travel, 2013)

The two favourite hotspots there are Maspalomas and Playa del Ingles, where most of the gay hotels are located. The former has miles of beaches and sand dunes, the latter is home to the famous Yumbo Centre, a shopping centre during the day and a huge gay entertainment centre at night, with dozens of restaurants, bars, shops and clubs. Gran Canaria caters for almost every need for gay entertainment and it is a very cheap destination because it can be reached with most low cost carriers from everywhere in Europe, furthermore the whole Canary Islands are duty free. These are some of the many reasons why so many people return again and again to the island (Gay Welcome, 2013).

The gay Scene is concentrated on the Av. Tirajana, the Cita-Centre and especially the famous Yumbo-Centre, where gay men from all over the world come throughout the year. Here all needs are catered for, because there is a concentration of exclusive gay spaces, which range from sophisticated restaurants to heavy sex clubs with slings and bathhouses. The club hosts, who are just as international as their guests, they jointly organize a Gay Pride, with official approval of the local government, which is growing every year, both in terms of attendance and importance (Spartacus, 2013).

The Yumbo Centre is one of the most important and popular shopping and leisure centre in the whole Gran Canaria, it comprises over two hundred enterprises, including shops,

restaurants and bars, as well as a park and green areas with a main plaza, where all major events and parties, such as the Carnival and Gay Pride, take place. (Yumbo Centrum, 2013). The main feature that makes the Yumbo Centre so unique is the LGTB community, which over time has changed the centre into a meeting point for gays and lesbians from all over the world, even if there is a higher concentration of males (Cope, 2000). According to its website this is one of the few places that accepts the combination of both gay people and straight people, a place to be shared with complete liberty, tolerance and respect, including events and parties (Yumbo Centrum, 2013a).

Every year between the end of February and the middle of March, Maspalomas gets a colourful exhibition to celebrate its famous carnivals. During the following weeks there are shows, festivals, floats and parties all over the place filling the roads with thousands of people in carnival costumes and dancing to the Latin music, creating an atmosphere of fun and liberty. Major events take place on the main stage in the Yumbo Centre. One of the most outrageous known shows is the drag queen night with international interests (Yumbo Centrum, 2013b). As for carnival also Gay Pride takes place in the Yumbo Centre: pride is celebrated every year during the second week of May drawing at least 100.000 LGTB people from all over the world. In 2013, the event attracted approximately 200.000 people of different nationalities and took place from the 4th to the 12th of May 2013 under the motto 'Travel.....Back to the Future' (Yumbo Centrum, 2013b).

Booking the holiday through the website www.gaymaspalomas.com allows tourists to get a "fidelity card" for free. This card is called Gay Maspalomas Card and gives a lot of discounts in the majority of Gay bars, clubs, shops and restaurants. The card is personalised, valid during the period of stay in Gran Canaria and for the number of people who are included in the booking (Gay Maspalomas, 2013).

4. Discussion of Findings

4.1. What do tourists seek in gay spaces in Gran Canaria?

The gay market has the characteristic of being very diverse, with many homosexuals interested in the same things as their heterosexual counterparts, and therefore with no interest in engaging in a gay-centric holiday, but with the sheer interest in travelling. According to some respondents many tourists do not feel the need to frequent the gay scene in order to find refuge from an unaccepting society but they choose a gay specific holiday simply for the purpose of meeting like-minded people.

“it was about offering a true product. A gay resort for gay men; owned and operated by like-minded. Isn't the world as a whole more consumer conscious? All in search of "the genuine article"! Gays can be the most discerning of them all!”

Hence the development of gay exclusive spaces is not always related to the demand of gay tourists to be separated from an hetero-normative world that ostracise them but is mainly linked to the fact that in a gay exclusive resort the gay tourists live without pressure, constraints nor limits. It has been argued that gay spaces provide a place where queer people can interact with each other creating a collective gay identity. Many gay districts have become landmarks for gay people and are regarded as homelands, where the LGBT community can gather.

Gay exclusive resorts have different functions and meaning according to each tourist and the factors that push them to leave their hometown or home country and the pull factors that attract them towards the holiday destination. Some will be looking for a quality resort where to have a holiday with like-minded, other will be in the quest of relations both sexual and romantic. Often in the context of work and everyday life, queer people cannot assert their sexual identity. They then look for gay exclusive spaces and within these micro-environments they can more openly live their sexuality: they find an opportunity to be themselves outside the context of a ‘heterosexual hegemony’. They are protected by an invisible border, in many cases uninterested in the beauty and the cultural originality of the "outside". Homosexuality is increasingly moving from the private sphere to a more public one, with the creation of a social reality based on a tourist and commercial offer, but at the same time this offer is somewhat isolated from the mainstream offer. It has been argued that the tourism offer for gay people is somewhat limited and that a wider variety of tourism products should be available for those gay

tourists that are less interested in the gay scene and sexual adventures (Clift and Forrest, 1999). One of the respondents has commented on this issue saying that:

“We have been trying to promote a lot of excursions on the island, or to the other islands, but they don’t really care a lot. When they go on holiday they look for sun sex and fun. That’s basically it. It’s a little bit maybe sad but I have to tell you, I have to be sincere with you, it’s like that.”

Existing analyses of sexual behaviour of gay men on holiday suggest that the quest for sexual encounters is a strong motivation for travel. It is extensively presumed that for many young, unattached tourists, holidays provide a liminal setting that diminishes inhibitions and offer greater prospects for sexual activity (Clift and Forrest, 1999). Monterrubio (2009) argues that it is relatively obvious that those homosexual people that visit a destination with a renowned gay name will be driven by the interest of socialising and presumably engaging in sexual encounters with new partners. Another respondent felt very strongly about the motivation of the guests for choosing a gay exclusive resort:

“They’re only interested in sex. That’s it. They don’t wanna see other things of the island, like nature and so on. Most of them leave the resort just to go to the Yumbo Center. Only very few people, maybe the couples, ask for a rental car to go and explore the island.”

As a matter of fact one of the interviewees that had chosen to place his resort further away from the Yumbo centre, in a quieter area closer to the sea, offering higher quality accommodation for the same price as his competitors that were closer to the city centre, has found that these assets were not as important as location and opportunities for sexual encounters.

“But I assure you, if I had to go back, I don’t know, maybe I would look for something, which was not as nice and a little bit more strategically located close to the discos, because that is [chuckles] where most of the gay clientele want to be: out at night at the disco and than back to the hotel very easily.”

It needs to be emphasised that it has been argued that the prospect of casual sex whilst on holiday is not a phenomenon bounded just to the gay populations but it is believed to exist to the same extent also amongst heterosexuals (Ryan and Hall, 2001).

According to the interviewees gay exclusive resorts are important for Gran Canaria in many ways. It has been highlighted how the creation of activities aimed specifically at the gay clientele encourages other enterprises in the area to become gay friendly, hence creating a more accepting and equal society. The development of a gay tourism industry has played an important role in creating a modern tourist image of the island, giving to Gran Canaria a new international visibility and a strong identity, even in comparison with the other Canary Islands. An example of the ability of capitalism of transforming a marginalised society into an economic business: opening new spaces of “amusement” by fulfilling the request of gay spaces. It is evident how the concerns regarding the economy and the identity are converging, and this convergence is advantageous.

4.2. How is the isolation of gay exclusive spaces perceived?

Concern has been expressed regarding exclusively gay destinations, they are said to isolate travellers and, in a way, force them to spend their holiday in a setting, which is limiting in its isolation (Southall, 2009). In relation to the globalisation and acceptance of the different other, the creation of gay exclusive resorts may seem paradoxical, but in fact rests on grounds other than those of tourism in general: safety and the legality of sexual practices such as nudity, and more generally, the search for a space where individual and collective gay identity can be performed. Sexuality is a pivotal feature for the formation of gay identity.

“we need to have gay exclusive [resorts], because people come there also to meet people, to meet other gays [...] they want to feel that in the resort they can really act as if they were in their own private place.”

Isolation is the best way to escape from hetero-normativity. Gay exclusive resorts are also important because they give gay people the ability to experience a context where they can be public about their sexual orientation. Most of the respondents have also confirmed that this factor is key for many tourists choosing to stay in an exclusively gay resort. Their guests seek a place where everybody is homosexual so that there would be no chance of encountering homophobic people or rejection. Furthermore gay exclusive places respond to a demand from the market, as integrated or hybrid forms are not appreciated by many customers.

“When gay people go on holiday are a little picky and especially people from the north of Europe are very, ehm, a little bit more, ehm, I would say, it’s not so easy for them to accept a mixed place. They want to be on their own, they want to feel free if they’re a couple or if they want to get to know new people or whatever, and they felt much freer on a gay exclusive hotel.”

Only a few respondents had some reservations about straight people in gay spaces, which were not linked to heterosexuals diminishing the meaning of gay spaces, rather to the ease of their guests. One of them stated that an issue could arise with straight people in gay exclusive resorts, for example if one of their guests approached a person that would turn out to be heterosexual, it would put the gay person in an uncomfortable situation of embarrassment when rejected.

One of the respondents received many complaints when he was not being strict enough with the gay men only policy. He eventually got to the compromise of allowing women and heterosexuals to visit the resort but not to stay in the hotel as guests. He also put up a notice in every room with the plea not to discriminate their heterosexual counterpart, as that is what gay people also demand from others. Another respondent stated that in the resort people of all sexual orientations were welcome but their guests were mainly gay men.

“We have had some guests that weren’t gay men, like lesbian women and straight couples, but it would happen maybe twice a year. [...] For example when a woman walks in, the guests might start to look at each other wondering what is she doing here. But we [the management] don’t discriminate, we allow anyone in, but I don’t see why straight people would wanna come.”

This attitude of the guests could be explained by Tatchell (1997), who argues that many in the gay community want to uphold these barriers because they are too committed to their gay identity as it defines everything about them: their sense of personhood, place and purpose.

Studies of gay leisure spaces have conceptualised the clustering of these spaces as a way of homosexual people to challenge the heterosexual connotation of public space, empowering those people who are rejected and marginalised (Binnie and Valentine, 2000). Most of the respondents did not see any issues in the concentration of gay spaces in a confined area; to the contrary, one described it as merely ‘*more practical*’. One of the interviewees when presented with the issue of segregation said:

“maybe that answer depends on your own personal perception of homosexuality in the community. I don't feel like I'm being pushed into a ghetto, or that I need a safe space to feel liberated.”

This attitude can be explained by the type of homosexuals that visit these resorts, which may fall mainly in the category of the so-called ‘good homosexuals’. These people do not feel rejected in the society in which they live and in the gay scenes, hence they do not even contemplate the issue of the meaning of gay spaces. Furthermore it has been argued that those homosexuals that are not confident about their sexuality or are not ‘out of the closet’ will be underrepresented conversely to those who are comfortable partaking in gay life and are most likely overrepresented (Blichfeldt et al, 2012).

4.3. What is the future of gay tourism in Gran Canaria?

As with gay tourism in general, gay tourism in Gran Canaria has existed for decades, initially it started in a more discreet way isolated from mainstream travel in regard of targeted products, services and marketing with few gay exclusive resorts catering for the niche:

“gay tourism in Gran Canaria [...] has always existed from the 70s onwards, but it was in a more discreet and more, how can I say, very primitive way. And I went there [in 1998] we were one of the first exclusively gay hotel but gay tourism was already very well established”

Since its inception gay tourism in Gran Canaria continued to flourish and as a consequence the number of gay enterprises on offer grew exponentially.

“in these ten years I say it grow so enormously and before in the commercial centre, where all the [gay] clubs are, there were like ten clubs, and now there are forty or fifty clubs, so it has grown a lot.”

It can be said that in Maspalomas the predominant type of holiday is the gay-related one, where gay spaces are regarded as one of the factors influencing the choice of destination. It is considered as equally important to other features such as climate, nightlife, a gay-friendly environment and good restaurants (Melián-González et al., 2011).

At the present time homosexual and heterosexual tourism coexist in Gran Canaria, as a matter of fact, respondents find that there is not a real segregation between the heterosexual and the homosexual worlds in Gran Canaria. Another respondent has mentioned the phenomenon of mixing of homosexuals and heterosexual in the same scene.

“Gay spaces are invariably the best spaces, so everybody wants to visit them. For example, London with Soho, ehm, New York and The Village, Sydney has Oxford Street than there is Miami with South Beach, the Greek Islands have Mykonos. Even here, on our mini continent, if we can call it that, of Gran Canaria the best area to socialise is in Playa del Inglés.”

In a way this is the proof of a more tolerating society but at the same time this can be linked back to the ‘degaying’ of gay spaces, with heterosexuals invading the spaces that the gay community had struggled to conquer, these places are regarded as imagined homelands. According to Howe (2001), gay spaces should be accepting of everyone, as their appropriation occurred also thanks to their heterosexual normative allies. As a matter of fact none of the respondents seemed to think that straight people in gay spaces were diluting the original value of these places, conversely, they defended the right of homosexual and heterosexual to mix and to co-exist harmoniously in the same spaces.

“I think the two things have grown together, I mean, gay and heterosexual tourism. [...] there is so much space and place for everybody, there are, you know, commercial centres full of clubs for heterosexual people and mixed and whatever and so I don’t think nobody cares really about that [the respective tourism counterpart] it’s very very well, ehm, mixed I would say, and tolerated in this case.”

It has been argued that since the first gay exclusive structures were born many things have changed, and many of the reasons why these realities exist, have begun to decline. In the past, the reason for choosing a gay exclusive resort was anonymity, people that were not open about their sexuality would find shelter there. The visibility of gay community and the recognition of the legal rights of queer people are increasingly growing in an increasing number of countries. According to Tatchell (1997) these achievements will create a paradox: the integration into mainstream society of the gay community will lead LGBT people to put less emphasis on their gay identity and therefore making the existence of places and destinations intended to preserve and protect the ‘difference’ unnecessary. This vision is only partially shared by the respondents as they acknowledge the possibility that in the future there might be more space for mixed places but they predict that the demand for gay exclusive places will continue.

“I think that things will always go on like they are going on now, maybe there would be more mixed places in the future, when gay attitudes will be more widely accepted by the heterosexual

public, or widely known, and so there would be less need of a private place to do that. But more or less, I think it's a desire of having a place to party or to stay or to relax with people with the same interests and attitudes as you have that would make this kind of tourism go on."

This position can find its basis on the freedom and sense of community that gay exclusive resorts offer. In gay space, homosexual people do not have to explain themselves, and they can establish social networks, and thus the gay centric holiday as a form of vacation is not likely to disappear.

5. Conclusions

The aim of this research was to determine the role of gay spaces in Gran Canaria as a gay destination, it has been proven through both the existing literature and the primary research that a flourishing gay scene is pivotal for the success of a destination within the gay market segment. Gay exclusive resorts in particular are important for a destination as it caters for those gay people that do not feel confident in a mixed environment, or that prefer to be surrounded by other likeminded people. Gay spaces are seen as a place for the congregation of the gay community and are considered as an imagined homeland. The uses of gay spaces have different facets: another key aspect of gay exclusive spaces is the opportunity for sexual encounters. It has been observed by the local entrepreneurs that often the possibility of sex is of fundamental importance, hence the need for gay exclusive resorts. In a hetero-normative world gay spaces supply homosexuals with a place where homosexuality is the norm and there is no risk of rejection and homophobia. On the other hand it had been argued that with the increasing acceptance and visibility of homosexuality the necessity of gay exclusive spaces will disappear, due to the integration of the queer community into mainstream society, gay spaces would no longer play the role they used to. Nonetheless the respondents argued that this scenario could be possible but not likely as in the future there will always be the need for sheltered environments as gay exclusive resorts.

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Appendix

INTERVIEW GUIDE	
Interview Question	Probing Questions
1. When and how did you start your business?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why did you decide to market the hotel as gay-exclusive/friendly? • Has it always been a gay-exclusive/friendly hotel? • If it started as just gay friendly did it alienate other tourists?
2. How do you promote the hotel?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Which distribution channels do you use? • What other marketing strategies do you use? (e.g. sponsor gay events)
3. Who are gay tourists?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In what way are they different from heterosexual tourists? • E.g. 'good homosexuals'
4. Who are your customers?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do they seek? i.e. liberated zone/gay utopia, homonormalisation, [...] • Have you ever received complaints because the expectation they had were not met?
5. What do you think about exclusive gay spaces in tourism?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potential/benefits • Pitfalls/problems
6. What is typical/What represents places designed for gay tourists?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Places in general, i.e. resorts, beaches, bars, saunas, [...] • What do they look for in these spaces?
7. What is a gay exclusive resort?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How is it different from a gay friendly one?

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What meaning do you and gay tourists attach to this places? Is it the same?
8. How do you think gay spaces affect the image of a destination?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In a positive way? (Shows acceptance of minorities; gays often perceived as trendsetters; [...]) • In a negative way? (Alienating other tourists)
9. How did gay spaces change Gran Canaria as a tourist destination?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you think that some tourists may avoid Gran Canaria because perceived as a gay destination? • Is Gran Canaria universally recognised as a gay destination or is it gay only to those who know?
10. What is gay life in Gran Canaria like?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is it relegated in gay spaces such as night clubs, gay bars and resorts? Or is there a large gay community ('out' lifestyle)?
11. How are gay spaces perceived among local community, businesses, DMOs, tourism board, [...]?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do gay spaces create controversy?