Illusive Inclusion: Destination-marketing, managing Gay Pride events and the problem with cosmopolitan inclusivity

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ABSTRACT

As macro-level shifts in global capitalism push cities into increasing competition with one another, events play a vital role in tourism development. For locations seeking to differentiate themselves, 'cosmopolitanism', indicating a perceived openness towards cultural difference, has become key to contemporary destination marketing. Within this discourse, embracing LGBT+ communities has been successfully used to signal cosmopolitanism. LGBT+ Pride events combine both, providing tangible evidence of cosmopolitanism and consequently, a way to attract visitors, too. This article, however, complicates this relationship through an investigation of Pride within the tourist town of Sitges, in Spain. The findings here show that instead of exemplifying cosmopolitan inclusivity, Sitges Pride ultimately functioned to exclude parts of the same community that it purported to represent. In so doing, the article suggests that Sitges' Destination Management Organisation, the local council, and event organisers need to make sure Pride is inclusive and attempts to appeal to all constituents.

1. Introduction

The early to mid-1990's saw substantial political and socio-economic changes as a result of the neoliberal restructuring of global capital, the impacts of which theorists across the social sciences attempted to explain using concepts such as the 'network society' and the 'knowledge economy' (Castells, 1996; Drucker, 1992). One key effect of this movement towards a technologically enabled, 'knowledge-based' economy has been the re-establishment of an emphasis on cities, operating as the inter-connected points through which global capital ebbs and flows (Castells, 1996, 1997). As this trend has continued, it has resulted in increasing competition between urban centres as they jostle for a position to best enable them to take advantage of all that such economic shifts have to offer. Perhaps unsurprisingly, place-marketing narratives have as a result, become a vital part of contemporary economic development strategies at both local, national, and international levels (Baerenholdt & Haldrup, 2006; Bell, 2007; Frey, 2009; Richards, 2016).

As these place-marketing strategies have evolved, the concept of 'cosmopolitanism' - used to articulate a particular set of cultural values that places an emphasis on a perceived openness towards specific forms of cultural difference - has come to operate as a form of 'soft power' within them (Nye, 2004, p5). Conceived of in this way, cosmopolitanism has become a key means by which to frame and develop the attractiveness of cities, seemingly paradoxically offering distinction, but in a recognisable (and crucially, therefore, in a cross-culturally transferable) register (Maitland, 2007). Urban locations have subsequently been pushed to compete against each other based on their ability to represent themselves as places that can best enable the kinds of 'exciting encounters with 'difference' upon which this type of cosmopolitanism relies (Binnie, Holloway, Millington, & Young, 2006; Young, Diep, & Drabble, 2006).

A significant form of 'difference' that has become increasingly emphasised within cosmopolitan place-marketing narratives has been to claim an openness towards alternative sexual identities, so that (homo) sexuality operates in the same way ethnic and cultural diversity does within this discourse. In particular, the marketing of locations based on a perceived acceptance of homosexuality provides an important mode of demonstrable cosmopolitanism so that 'gay culture occupies a pivotal role within the production and consumption of urban spaces as cosmopolitan' (Binnie & Skeggs, 2004, p40. See: Brown, 2006; Rushbrook, 2002).

At the same time, as ideas of cosmopolitanism within place-marketing narratives have gained increasing traction, events themselves have taken on a new life, becoming a vital part of public policy, not least in relation to strategies of urban regeneration (Getz, 2009). Cultural events in particular, have been able to do so, because they can provide a tangible means by which cities can display their cosmopolitan

credentials, offering the opportunity to experience cosmopolitanism in 'real time'. Yet, as the role of events within place-marketing strategies has expanded, and the importance of events-based destination marketing within public policy has increased, the consequences of their practical implementation – both intended and otherwise – have begun to be explored too.

It has become increasingly apparent for example, that such modes of culture-led regeneration can often lead to gentrification by favouring centrally-focused, property-based development that creates spaces of community exclusion even as it purports to do the opposite (Atkinson & Easthope, 2009; Vanolo, 2008). Similarly, as events have become a key part of place-marketing across the globe, this has in many ways created a sense of dilution. As multiple places seek to use cultural events as a mode of displaying cosmopolitan difference, becoming ever more reliant on exactly the same strategy to underpin their tourism development, it ultimately ends up undermining their impact. The concept of cosmopolitanism itself has also been heavily critiqued, not least for the sense of elitism underpinning it, with its initial incarnation relying heavily on a notion of the cosmopolite as a 'citizen of the world' moving freely beyond the boundaries of normative social structures (Breckenridge et al., 2002; Hannerz, 1990; Nussbaum, 1994; Vertovec & Cohen, 2002).

This has been increasingly complicated by research that has examined 'vernacular', 'subaltern', and 'already-existing' cosmopolitan*isms* instead (See: Kothari, 2008; Nava, 2002; Werbner, 2006). Finally, as attempts to understand the social impacts of event-driven tourism (at all scales) has evolved, there has been a concomitant recognition that this must incorporate an attempt to try to account for modes of inclusion and exclusion (both during and after events occur), whether intended or otherwise (Smith, Osborn, and Quinn, 2022; Wilks, 2013). As a result, it has been forcefully argued that there is also a 'need to delve below the surface of these social impacts and examine the many processes at work in the determination of these impacts', which in bringing the strands outlined above together, is what this article seeks to do (Wilks, 2013, p3. See: Lugosi, 2021).

Firstly, the research setting is described and the importance that ideas around 'cosmopolitanism' played in both the way that the town is marketed to tourists, as well as in relation to the way that British migrants described the town, is outlined. The role that being recognised as a tourist location that is accepting of those who articulate an alternative sexual identity plays in relation to cosmopolitan place-marketing discourses is highlighted. This is then linked directly to the way that attitudes towards homosexuality specifically, have evolved across Western liberal democracies in the past three decades. Finally, Sitges first ever Gay Pride is used as a case study to show that the reality is somewhat more complex, as the very event that was supposed to emphasise the town's cosmopolitan credentials, functioned to ultimately exclude sections of the community that it was supposed to actively represent. As a result, the findings add to current understandings of the wider social impacts of cosmopolitan place-marketing narratives, and particularly those that emphasise cosmopolitanism through a perceived openness towards homosexuality. They also suggest that there are clear implications for Destination Management Organisations, local councils, and event organisers, who need to enable involvement in planning and promotion to a broader expanse of the LGBT+ community, to make sure Pride is inclusive and appeals to all potential constituents.

2. The research setting

Around 35 km from Barcelona, lying on the East coast of Spain, is the tourist town of Sitges. Formerly a tiny fishing village, by the turn of the 19th century, Sitges became a key location at the centre of the Catalan *Modernisme* movement, by playing host to a wide variety of important artists and literary figures of the era, from G. K. Chesterton and Federico Garcia Lorca to Santiago Rusiñol and Salvador Dali (Binkhorst, 2007; Boone, 2007). As a result, the town evolved into a bustling cultural hub, renowned for its outstanding artistic heritage, which contemporarily

plays a fundamental role in the way that the town is marketed, providing a key layer of its cosmopolitan narrative (Binkhorst, 2007, p132; Boone, 2007). Although part of the incredibly popular group of tourist destinations on the Spanish coastline known as the *Costa Dorada* or 'Golden Coast', which gained particular prominence in the 1970's, Sitges worked hard to retain a sense of cultural tradition, evoked in part by its abstention from the kind of mass tourist development that has come to dominate in other coastal regions in Spain (Boone, 2007).

This is evinced most tangibly, perhaps, by a calendar of fiestas and cultural events (including the town's world famous 'carnaval') that is repeated annually with minimal variation, and which thereby lends a sense of authenticity to its cosmopolitanism. Another vital part of the town's cosmopolitan locational identity is the widely internationally diverse migrant populace that constitutes 21% out of the town's approximately 29,000 inhabitants (IDESCAT, 2019). Within the group of international migrants living in Sitges, around 700 are Brits, making them the largest nationality represented (IDESCAT, 2019). It was amongst this population of British migrants that just over twelve months of ethnographic fieldwork was undertaken.

2.1. Research methods – data collection

I had previously lived and worked in Spain, spoke relatively fluent Spanish, and was familiar with Sitges, a place that I had visited many times before. I was particularly interested in Sitges for this project because of its cosmopolitan reputation, one that was both heavily touted in the town's place-marketing materials, and that contrasted heavily with images of other parts of Spain associated with British tourism. What became immediately apparent (and as will be discussed in more detail in the next section) was that this particular understanding of cosmopolitanism was one of the primary concepts through which Brits in Sitges defined the location too. Drawing directly on the 'cosmopolitan' place-marketing narrative also provided a means through which they sought to themselves in opposition to what they spoke of (disdainfully) as 'Benidorm' – a term used to cover parts of Spain especially on the South-Eastern coast stereotypically associated with mass tourism, seen to embrace the recreation of a 'Britain in the sun' (O'Reilly, 2000). British people therefore arrived in Sitges with the absolute intention of demonstrating their own sense of cosmopolitanism – which they spoke of explicitly - through a desire for integration, most obviously by learning to speak at least Spanish (if not Catalan) and to embrace local culture, which was well evoked and maintained within the town.

However, this overlooked the desires of Sitgetans themselves, so much so that almost all participants British found locals unwilling to engage with them in a way that they had imagined. This meant that Brits ended up primarily socialising with one another, and occasionally other (English speaking) Western European migrants. My own interactions with people in the town during the twelve months I lived there, although more expansive, eventually mirrored that of other Brits, which became a key focus of research. Whilst there is not enough space to discuss this process in depth here (See: Author A) this means that the sample on which the paper is based, is limited in two key ways.

Firstly, local points of view are not part of this analysis; the focus is on British participants and their experiences of life in Sitges. Local perceptions are discussed in detail elsewhere (See: Author A). Secondly, not being a gay male, I did not have the opportunity to participate in some aspects of gay male life in the town. However, this did not prevent discussion of such places, where deemed to be important by participants themselves. Despite being a young, white, British woman, I found that the people in the town were incredibly friendly and willing to share their experiences with me and showed genuine interest in my curiosity about their lives. Without hesitation, I was warmly welcomed into various social circles, which initially began during a two-week pilot study. These initial connections then paved the way for a 'snowball' sampling approach. The people I met in bars, restaurants, cafes, and other small businesses and community groups, mostly owned by British migrants,

introduced me to others in their social networks (Denscombe, 2010).

2.2. Research methods – data analysis

During a period of twelve months living in the town, more than 200 British individuals were engaged with, and slightly more than 100 semi-structured interviews were conducted (See: Appendix 1). The interviews were grounded in long-term, in-depth participant observation, resulting in extensive initial thematic analysis. As the fieldwork progressed, ongoing re-analysis of crucial themes facilitated the opportunity for respondent validation, allowing for the emergence of new themes (Denscombe, 2010 See: Appendix 2). For instance, after residing in Sitges for several months, I noticed that homosexuality was frequently discussed. This prompted me to review the initial interview data and recognize the importance of this aspect of the participants' stories about the town's cosmopolitanism (See: Appendix 2). I was then able to confirm the thematic relevance of this topic with other participants.

The study aimed to gain insights from a diverse range of British participants, with inclusion criteria based solely on being over 18, British, and living in Sitges. As a result, the participants included teachers at an international school located in a nearby town, entrepreneurs, local small business owners, retirees, high-level male professionals whose wives mainly stayed in Sitges while they commuted to Barcelona daily, and independently wealthy individuals, many of whom were internationally renowned. Except for two individuals from Northern Ireland, three from Scotland, and one family who self-identified as British-Asian, all were white and English. The group was 60% female and 40% male, with one-fifth of the participants (both male and female) identifying as homosexual. From the earliest interactions with British people in the town and throughout the data collected, it became evident that the association of Sitges with cosmopolitanism and the significance of homosexuality in establishing this identity were deeply ingrained in the participants' accounts of the town (See: Appendix 2).

3. Findings and discussion: Sitges and cosmopolitanism – from place-marketing discourses to participant beliefs

Cosmopolitanism plays a vital role in the long established and continuing attractiveness of Sitges as both a tourist and migration destination. Within this discourse, it is used to attract the kinds of tourists and migrants who identify as 'cosmopolites' in the terms defined most famously, by Hannerz as those with an "intellectual and aesthetic stance of openness" towards (especially cultural) difference (Hannerz, 1990, p239). This interpretation of cosmopolitanism has faced substantial criticism throughout academia, not least because of its elitist implications, which ignore the kinds of 'everyday' interactions that often go unremarked (See: Calhoun, 2002; Kothari, 2008; Nava, 2007; Werbner, 2006). Nonetheless, it was precisely this elitist understanding of cosmopolitanism that British migrants drew upon, because they perceived themselves to have actively pursued the uniqueness that the village provided, with Sitges conversely seen as a location that would (at least in theory) permit them to exhibit the openness towards difference essential for what they deemed as "authentic cosmopolitanism" (Hannerz, 1990, p239). That they did was no accident, because the term (and the values it is used to emphasise) are fundamental components of the way that the town is marketed, particularly in relation to private companies, as the following excerpts from some popular holiday websites show:

> Sitges has been, for many years, one of the most exciting and dynamic towns on the Mediterranean coast. Because of its cosmopolitan character, its extraordinary leisure, dining and cultural offer and its lively night life, Sitges has become one of the most popular destinations on the Catalan coast. Sitges is 35km South of Barcelona with excellent access either by rail or road.

(BlauSitges, 2019)

> A former fishing village, its geographical situation -35 km (22 miles) from Barcelona…and its natural beauty make Sitges a wonderful spot to enjoy a vacation by the sea…Cosy, cosmopolitan and with an open-minded population, Sitges is an idyllic town for visitors….

(Sitges-Rentals, 2019)

At the same time, the use of cosmopolitanism to construct a specific image of the town's identity has been used to great effect by Sitges' town council too, who have used it liberally throughout their own place-marketing narratives, as their website shows:

> Sitges has always been a place which has enchanted artists, tourists and visitors from all over the world…it is a cosmopolitan town which (sic) has attracted residents from more than 70 nations…Sitges is easy to access in all aspects, since it is just 35km south of Barcelona, to which it is connected by excellent road…and railway links.

(Sitgestur, 2019)

As the examples above highlight, cosmopolitanism is used as a kind of catch-all term to draw together a number of key themes; that the town has close links to Barcelona, a city with its own recently enhanced cosmopolitan appeal; an enduring artistic heritage and perhaps most importantly of all; that this identity is traditional and authentic as a result. Taken together, these elements are seen to make it the perfect home to an 'open-minded' population that its annual calendar of festivals and events have been fundamental to evoking. These aspects have allowed the town to prosper from the desire to market urban locations based on claims to cosmopolitanism, which has been particularly important to those cities newly pushed to the forefront of global capitalism, those that have not necessarily been considered in this way before (Binnie et al., 2006; Russo & Scarnato, 2018; Shaw, 2007).

To do so successfully has in no small part relied on being seen as a location in which tolerance and acceptance of ethnic, cultural and social distinctions are openly expressed, which then supposedly acts as a magnet to "attract 'global talent', financial capital and tourism" (Glick Schiller, Darieva, & Gruner-Domic, 2011, p402. See: Binnie et al., 2006; Rushbrook, 2002; Szerszynski & Urry, 2002; Young et al., 2006). In the promotion of the town's cosmopolitanism, there is one symbol of cultural difference that has played a key role perhaps above all others - Sitges' enduring and seemingly open embrace of a highly valued and highly visible gay community.

3.1. Findings and discussion: the evolution of a marketised 'community'

Sitges' ability to harness cosmopolitanism within its events-based destination marketing strategy, has been undoubtedly influenced by the evolution of more progressive and accepting social attitudes across the last three decades towards homosexuality amongst Western liberal democracies (Giorgi, 2002). As a result of these socio-cultural shifts, homosexuality has come to offer a prized example of a specific difference that is able to act as a reference point that is used to signal an openness or toleration of cultural diversity more generally. This move towards incorporating and emphasising toleration of sexual diversity within place-marketing narratives has proven to be such a successful factor in the re-branding of destinations, that it has begun to extend beyond locational boundaries, connecting places to other regions across the world, in the process (Giorgi, 2002).

The acceptance of alternative sexualities operates as a sign of contemporaneity within these place-marketing narratives because it "fits neatly into a broad neoliberal ideology that values cosmopolitan credentials" through being "ideologically at least…able to make a place particular and thereby act as a form of cultural capital, whilst at the same time be positioned as a transnational form of identification linking people and places across both space and time" (Author A). For British migrants in Sitges, it was undoubtedly the most important and obvious

element used to evoke the town's cosmopolitanism:

> I think it's safe here, quaint…It's very cosmopolitan, you can tell, it's very designer, the little shops. I think the gays here really create that feeling because having so many of them around, it sort of shows all of that, that freedom of choice, like you can be who you are without any negativity, or being threatened, given abuse.
>
> Marnie, teacher

> Is Sitges cosmopolitan? If we think of the dictionary definition of cosmopolitan then, well, it's definitely gay friendly….
>
> Matt, TEFL teacher

The link made by participants that these quotes exemplify highlight the extent to which British migrants' perception of Sitges was steeped in the elitist concept of cosmopolitanism referred to above. But the quotes by Marnie (a straight woman) and Matt (a gay man) also reflect the prominence of alternative sexual identities within cosmopolitan place-marketing narratives. This has occurred not least, following a shift in contemporary identitarian conceptualisations that moved away from collectivised, class-based identities, placing a self-reflexive, self-governing individual as the central subject in the neoliberal world instead (Beck, 2005; Giddens, 1991, 1993). This is a historically (and contextually) specific understanding of individualism that differs in particular from both Romantic and Enlightenment conceptualisations through its reliance on performance through consumption practices, enabled as commoditisation expanded into realms of everyday living that had previously been seen to exist outside the arena of exchange (Weeks, 2010. See: Giddens, 1991, 1993). Consumption seemed to be able to offer a means through which identities could be articulated as postmodernism took hold, and the boundaries that had previously provided a sense of grounding, of identitarian coherence, became unmoored (Binnie & Bell, 2000). Homosexuality was undoubtedly a beneficiary of this shift, as alternative sexuality became recognised as the basis of a viable community that could be marketed to, as indeed it was from the early 1990's with homosexual men in particular, gaining the focused attention of advertisers (Weeks, 2010).

This meant that from its outset, the construction of a mainstream community based on alternative sexual identities was reinforced by an unambiguous commodification that saw businesses large and small begin to explicitly target people identifying as homosexual (and perhaps in a key sense creating that sense of homosexuals as a community in the first place) with consumer services and goods (Escoffier, 1997, p24). This was enhanced further, by being rooted in specific locations 'in the form of visible spaces of consumption – so-called gay villages' (Binnie & Bell, 2000, p6. See: Weeks, 1981, p285). The creation of openly 'gay' places was fundamental too, in establishing a clear relationship between consumption and politics, precisely because it gave space to enable gay people to claim (sexual) citizenship rights as consumers (Gabriel & Lang, 1995). This ability to combine alternative sexual identities with consumerism would become known by the moniker of the 'Pink Economy' and it was this element of then contemporary capitalism that gay villages came to visibly represent (Binnie & Bell, 2000).

Within those spaces, homosexual men (and gay male couples in particular) were constructed as 'model consumer citizen[s]' not least because they were deemed to have relatively large disposable incomes, notably captured in the acronym 'DINK's' standing for 'Dual Income, No Kids' (Binnie & Bell, 2000, p97). Criticisms however, soon appeared as it seemed clear that this construction of the Pink Economy was ultimately underpinned by an ideal-typical version of homosexuality in which 'gay' ultimately referred to high-earning, white, homosexual men in a way that overwrote the tangible relationship between people's socio-economic positioning (and therefore their ability as consumers) and their subsequent capacity to articulate a consumption-based, gay identity (Binnie & Skeggs, 2004). As will be explored in detail below, gender, race and socio-economic class intersect with sexual identities in ways that are multifaceted and complex; intricacies that are in many ways

obscured within the narrative of the Pink Economy and the structure of male homosexuality upon which this formulation relied (Binnie & Bell, 2000).

In fact, there is little doubt that articulating an alternative sexual identity has potential material impacts that are much easier to contend with for those positioned at the top of the class structure, as opposed to those at the bottom (Binnie & Bell, 2000). It is important to note that the consequences of this form of identity-making are two-fold; it suggests 'that economic muscle (or at least perceived economic muscle) may bring about real material change, but at the same time reminds us that such change is neither available to nor welcomed by everyone' (Binnie & Bell, 2000, p106. See: Binnie & Skeggs, 2004). Yet if it is accepted that shifts in global capitalism mean that consumerism can now offer a basis for the construction and embodiment of subjective identities, then there is little doubt that this formulation of the ideal-typical gay male is a key icon of those shifts (Binnie & Bell, 2000; Evans, 1993; Weeks, 2010). And if there is one element in particular that signifies these changes, then they are undoubtedly encapsulated by the evolution of a singular event above all others - Gay Pride.

Gay Pride has it origins in 1969, when outside *The Stonewall Tavern,* a gay bar in Manhattan, a group of lesbian, gay and transgender people famously struck back against the campaign of police harassment that they had long been subjected to, precipitating a series of demonstrations that would come to be known as *The Stonewall Riots* (Johnston, 2007). The Stonewall Riots triggered similar events, which began to be repeated annually through 'Gay Pride' marches and parades, spreading beyond New York, to other places across the globe, as LGBT+ people began to make claims for equal rights in relation to their sexual identities. Gay Pride events have continued to evolve in the years since and today, such events function in contextually specific ways (Johnston, 2007).

Across Western Europe and North America, the commercialisation and commodification of sexual identities enacted and, in some senses, forged through the success of Gay Pride parades and tangentially related events, has led to their assimilation into the mainstream. This assimilation has been predicated on the public performance of 'new forms of neoliberal cultural citizenship' that such events have enabled (Johnston, 2007). At the same time, as Gay Pride events have increasingly become incorporated into place-marketing discourses – just as they have in Sitges - these same celebrated identities may actually come to foster a "kind of 'homonormativity' where once transgressive political displays are now corporatised, regulated and controlled" (Johnston, 2007). As will be explored below, this can lead to unintended social impacts, wherein the opposite to the desired outcome may actually be achieved.

3.2. Findings and discussion: Sitges and gay pride

Walking through the streets of Sitges, especially in the summer when tourism is at its peak, it is almost impossible not to notice the prominence of the town's gay community. Posters publicising gay events cover venues across the town and rainbow flags hang prominently in shop windows, but perhaps even more obviously there is the sheer volume of men wandering the streets hand-in-hand and undertaking other forms of public intimacy, making the freedom they feel to do so explicit. And it is this sense of the acceptance and visibility of homosexuality within the town that is deemed to highlight what makes Sitges 'different' beyond just a locational identity and marketing campaign, representing instead a cosmopolitan way of living. The reality was of course, somewhat more complex. British migrants who had lived in the town for a longer period of time suggested, for example, that the town's place-marketing narrative tended to reflect the attitudes of those leading the *Ayuntamiento* (local council). *W*hen it was controlled by those with a more conservative outlook, it led to attempts to reframe Sitges' cosmopolitanism away from being based on a tolerance towards alternative sexual identities, as opposed to when it was run by a more progressive *Ayuntamiento*, when this embrace of homosexuality would be pushed to the fore, instead.

In the mid-2000's for example, several gay participants stated that the *Ayuntamiento* had attempted to re-brand the town as being what they described as more 'family friendly'. This directly impacted those who owned gay spaces in the town, which suddenly found licences to serve alcohol became much harder to obtain and harsher noise restrictions being implemented. Owners of businesses that had been impacted by these changes came together and established a lobbying group, hoping that by representing their views as a whole would give them more power to fight back against the restrictions being imposed. In the end however, participants told me that the ability to market Sitges as 'cosmopolitan' owed too much to its reputation as a place tolerant towards alternative sexualities to do without it and the *Ayuntamiento* was ultimately forced to back-track. The town's gay tourism, alongside the positive impact that the presence of an accepted gay community had on attracting other types of tourist was vital to Sitges' continued success.

In order to re-establish a connection to the gay community, the *Ayuntamiento* subsequently invited a number of journalists from renowned gay media organisations to stay in the town and to write about their experiences there. This in many ways concretised the relationship between Sitges' cosmopolitanism, and its reputation as a gay tourist hot spot once more. Given this link, I remember being somewhat surprised to learn that in spite of the town's long-standing reputation of openness towards homosexuality (despite the few times attempts had been made to diverge away from it), that it was not until 2010 that Sitges held its first ever Gay Pride event. This seemed even more strange given the importance of events and festivals within the town that the entire annual calendar revolved around. Yet when I discussed this with participants, they felt that the reason behind this was obvious:

> I don't think you need Pride parades anymore. I mean really, what's the big deal? I don't think people care, especially not here."
>
> Alastair, retiree

> I don't see why they even need to have one here, Pride is supposed to be to fight for equality, it's [homosexuality] already accepted here, you don't need Pride.
>
> Hans, businessman

What Alistair (a gay man) and Hans (a straight man) were suggesting, was that somewhere like Sitges, whose entire locational reputation and identity was tied up in a cosmopolitanism that had an acceptance of homosexuality at is foundation, Pride events just were not needed. This in turn stemmed from a belief that Pride events were needed in places where intolerance and a lack of acceptance towards those articulating alternative sexual identities occurred. Pride events should, in other words, be political in focus. For British migrants in particular, Pride was understood to be a means of political demonstration that worked to give voice to a minority community in order to assert claims for equal rights. As such, Pride events should be fully inclusive to the LGBT+ community as a whole and they should also be used to support gay orientated, non-profit / charitable organisations. For British participants, it soon became clear that Pride as envisaged within Sitges, was in many ways the opposite of this, as Jamie (a gay man) argued:

> Well to be honest, I really don't like the fact that they've called it Pride because traditionally, Pride events entail rights, politics, and this isn't organised around gay rights at all. This is about businesses making money, that's its only function. I mean compare it to other Pride events, is there going to be a lesbian float? Is there going to be anything for PFLAG (Parents Families and friends of Lesbians and Gays)? A raised platform so that disabled gay people can watch the parade? Of course not! They should just call it *Big Gay Party Week* or something! I wish they hadn't used the name Pride because this is just about business.
>
> Jamie, TEFL teacher

Participants just could not fathom how a Pride event - not least one

that had been supported with local authority money – could be held without either aim. But perhaps more importantly, there was another aspect of the way that Pride was being advertised in Sitges that upset many gay participants; the almost total lack of diversity on show in its promotion. The way that the event had been marketed would inevitably, many participants felt, result in a consequent lack of diversity in participation, not least during the main parade part of Sitges Pride; a fear that was eventually born out.

3.3. Findings and discussion: Exclusive inclusivity? From promotion to participation

The promotion of Sitges' first ever Gay Pride was prominent throughout the town, with posters advertising different events taking place during the weekend dedicated to Pride, and in flyers spread liberally in public establishments. Yet it soon became clear that a large number of British participants were unhappy with the kinds of images that were being used consistently across this marketing material and the kinds of messages that it suggested, not least what many felt was an overtly sexual emphasis, as Antony (a gay man) stated:

> I don't know why they want that to be what represents us, it makes me so angry! I mean, all the cruising grounds, all that stuff, I know it's common knowledge, but it shouldn't be all that defines the gay scene, it shouldn't be the only thing the public knows us for!
>
> Antony, photographer

The sexualisation of Pride was striking; cruising grounds (many of which existed prior to the event) were outlined on maps handed out to attendees, and during the event itself, specific outdoor areas were newly designated for gay men to have sex in that were partitioned off and signposted, including an 'outdoor dark room'. To other participants, this overt sexualisation was made worse, when cross-cut with a glaringly obvious lack of ethnic diversity on show in promotional material. Meredith, for example, had actually complained to the event organisers about both the sexualised nature of the promotional material, as well as the lack of ethnic diversity of those depicted in the promotional material. As she put it:

> It's not only that it's all just boys in their pants, all over each other, it's that it's only young, white boys in their pants all over each other!

Sitges' Gay Pride was due to take place over a long weekend and there were a multitude of different parties and events scheduled to occur around the main parade through the town itself. To British gay people living in the town, it seemed obvious that all of the images used in the marketing and promotion of Pride were similarly composed and more importantly, constructed in a way that was inherently lacking in inclusivity – they felt that the images used were overly sexualised and lacked evidence of racial /ethnic diversity - traits that they deemed to be essential to a true Gay Pride event. There was however, one element of LGBT+ representation that seemed even more obvious to British migrants; in the marketing and promotional material spread liberally throughout the town, as well as in all of the online content used on the official website; women, it seemed, were invisible.

This was first pointed out to me by a lesbian business owner called Meredith, who had contacted the organisers of Sitges Pride alongside another gay female business owner in the town, with a view to trying to arrange to have some specifically lesbian-orientated events that they wanted to host, advertised via the official Sitges Pride website and included in other promotional materials. Having contacted the person responsible for collating and publishing the website, Meredith was advised that she just had to send the relevant information that she would like to be included through to him, and it would be added to a list of all lesbian focused events, which would be made available via a separate list, on a dedicated page that would be able to be accessed directly from the Sitges Pride home page.

Yet having sent the required information through, no further

response was received and by the time the website was published, the details of Meredith's event had not been included. The other woman who had wanted to host an event at the restaurant she owned did actually manage to have information about her proposed lesbian night included on the website, but the date published was not correct, and she had been unable to have the correct information added. As the event itself drew closer and advertising of it increased across all channels, it was clear that women were hardly visible on any of the marketing material produced, nor seen at all on the official website and perhaps somewhat inevitably, this impacted the extent to which women attended or participated in the events themselves. As two British lesbians put it:

> The idea that [a bar] was going to open for women between six and eight, well, to be honest, I thought it was a bit of a cheek! I mean, six to eight, that's basically at the time when no-one else will be around isn't it? There was hardly anything for women at all, a BBQ in someone's garden, a meal in a restaurant…it was a total insult! They basically gave us the crap left over after the boys had had their fun!
>
> Jo, Lecturer

> Oh, let's be honest, the whole thing was for the guys!
>
> Estelle, Promotions

Once the weekend of events was over, Sitges Pride remained a hot topic of discussion amongst British migrants in the town and I was surprised by the levels of disappointment they expressed. It seemed that a vast proportion of participants, both those who identified with an alternative sexual identity and those who did not stated that the events had ultimately not met the expectations they had for what a Gay Pride event should be. Kyle, a gay musician I spoke with summed it up clearly, stating that:

> I think it probably only really seemed to get people who would have come on holiday anyway, to come over a bit earlier. Lots of the gays who came would probably have come anyway, I think… I mean, it was a good week, but it wasn't a Pride! It was more of a gay party! I mean, normally at a Pride you have banners, rainbow banners, you have local police getting involved, it's more political, here it was just to advertise the bars.
>
> So, do you think that, maybe it didn't really work, having Pride here? I think that the bars who publicised well did really well out of it, but it wasn't a Pride as I know it.
>
> Kyle, musician

Perhaps even more surprisingly, disappointment in Sitges Pride spread beyond the town itself. At the time, *The Pink Paper* was one of the most important and well-read gay news organisations in Britain, and just after the events had finished, they published a report covering it on their website. Below the article a number of comment soon appeared and it was clear that people writing on the message board in relation to its coverage held similar views to the British migrants I spoke to in Sitges:

> 14/07/2010 17:10:19.
> All of the publicity I saw leading up to the event in Sitges contained only images of men, 90% of the people on the floats were men, I thought that pride was about equality? There was no money raised for any charities, it was just a commercial money spinner…pride lost it's [sic] heart in Sitges.
> 15/07/2010 09:42:22
> Whilst well organised I have to agree with the poster below - this Pride was.
> NOT gay pride. It was purely commercial. The idea of a gay fiesta weekend in.
> Sitges is BRILLIANT, but please don't sully the name of the Pride movement with rampant commercialism - call it something else…
>
> (Pinkpaper, 2010)

The people commenting here felt, in other words, that Sitges Pride was exclusionary, apolitical, and overly commercialised, which they were extremely disappointed about. In particular, it was patently obvious that the lack of representation in the way that the event was marketed, ultimately impacted upon participation; it created a lack of diversity in attendance that reflected the way that it was advertised. In a key sense, Sitges Pride concretised a form of 'homonormativity', which as outlined above, is a term used to describe the normalisation of certain identities and lifestyles within the LGBT+ community that reinforces social hierarchies and privileges certain individuals over others (Duggan, 2002; Markwell & Waitt, 2009; Valentine, 2016). As has been found in relation to contemporary Pride events elsewhere (See: Jarvis, 2018; Markwell & Waitt, 2009; Valentine, 2016), Sitges Pride ended up being an event that – on the surface at least – was recognised as one that should highlight openness and inclusivity (and thereby would supposedly represent the town's cosmopolitanism), but which ultimately ended up being an event that excluded significant parts of the very same group of people that it was supposed to represent and in particular, privileged a stereotypical male homosexuality over other members of the LGBT+ community.

4. Conclusion

Although it is clear that festivals and events have long played a key role in driving urban tourism, as macroeconomic factors have shifted, so too have the importance, impact, and opportunities that event-driven tourism has the potential to offer. Festivals and events in urbanised spaces traditionally functioned as a means for people to engage in activities that strengthened social bonds, as they simultaneously offered momentary respite from their day-to-day lives. Yet whilst elements of this perhaps remain, in their modern guise, festivals and events have also taken on a new role in relation to changes in the way that cities themselves have been pushed to operate in relation to contemporary global capital (Featherstone, 1992). As neoliberalisation has pushed the *individual-as-experience-seeking-consumer* to the forefront of the economy (Pine & Gilmore, 2011), festivals and events taking place within them have come to offer the perfect foil to the archetypal city, operating as a highly valued backdrop to display all that such places have to offer (Sorkin, 1992; Waitt, 2008; Zukin, 1993).

As this idea has evolved, an elitist understanding of cosmopolitanism has been central to it, offering a platform through which cities can emphasise their attractiveness in a way that allows them to compete with other cities, and crucially, to do so in a recognisable way (Maitland, 2007). The multiple and diverse impacts of these shifts are only just beginning to be explored, but there is little doubt that "events are microcosms of society…they can be considered reflections of or responses to societal norms at the time they take place" (Finkel, Sharp, & Sweeney, 2018, p1). Considering events in a more nuanced way, that recognises the complex interactions between the experiences of different participants, offers an important lens through which to comprehend the impacts of globalised (and continually globalising) touristic practices, of which events like Pride have become a key part (Lugosi, 2021).

This is a vital process to understand, as cities have been pushed into competition with each other, and being able to represent the location as cosmopolitan has come to stand for being a place that actively embraces (and therefore enables visitors to interact with) cultural diversity, which has been vital to contemporary tourism development strategies (Binnie et al., 2006; Young et al., 2006). Within this discourse, homosexuality has become totemic, a highly valued form of cultural 'difference', so much so that gay culture is now an essential means by which urban spaces are constructed as being cosmopolitan in the first place (Binnie & Skeggs, 2004. See: Brown, 2006; Rushbrook, 2002).

It is clear that this has been the case in Sitges, which has been able to re-package its heritage to articulate a form of cosmopolitanism that enables it to take advantage of contemporary marketing narratives, whilst simultaneously maintaining an aura of authenticity; it has been able, in other words, to show that the cosmopolitan values that are

contemporarily so highly valued, have been a long-standing part of the town's cultural heritage. Its annual calendar of festivals and events have been central in enabling Sitges to do so, offering tangible evidence of - and the ability for visitors and inhabitants alike to experience - its cosmopolitanism, first-hand. It seemed to make sense then, for Sitges to stage its own Gay Pride event as a way to tie these threads together and thereby cement its cosmopolitan reputation.

Yet from the outset, for British migrants in particular who had grown up with a very specific understanding that Pride events should be political, inclusive and charity focused, it seemed un-necessary because they felt that in living in Sitges, they already had the kinds of rights that Pride events were meant to be a tool to fight for. It simultaneously seemed to participants be both overly commercialised and exclusionary creating a paradoxical 'hierarchy of welcome' wherein the same people the event was purported to represent, were excluded as Pride became commodified (Smith et al., 2022; Mazzilli, 2021). This meant that despite ostensibly being an event meant to celebrate the LGBT+ community in a town famously accepting of those with alternative sexual identities, gay men who were older, or non-white, and those who did not participate in the overt sexuality being promoted, as well as lesbians of all ages felt excluded.

For British migrants in Sitges then, far from being an event to celebrate cosmopolitan diversity, it ultimately ended up achieving the opposite, instead. As a result, the findings complicate current understandings of the wider social impacts of cosmopolitan place-marketing narratives, and particularly those that emphasise cosmopolitanism through a perceived openness towards homosexuality by showing that this is not automatically the case. They also suggest that there are clear implications for Destination Management Organisations, local councils, and event organisers, who need to enable involvement in all aspects of the event, from planning through to promotion, by a broader expanse of the LGBT+ community, to make sure Pride is truly inclusive and appeals to all potential participants.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Laura Dixon: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Visualization, Validation, Supervision, Software, Resources, Project administration, Methodology, Investigation, Funding acquisition, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization.

Declaration of competing interest

None.

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Appendix 1. General demographic and thematic questions

Demographic data was gathered at the outset of interviews relating to the following categories: age, gender, level of formal education, current employment status and ethnicity. Semi-structured interviews then followed. This meant that questions asked did not follow an exact script, and specificity of questions / follow-up questions were determined during the interviews themselves. However, all interviews focused on the following categories with example questions outlined below:

1) Description of Sitges
How would you describe Sitges?
What are the key characteristics of the town?
What are the things you like most / least about Sitges?
2) Motivation to migrate
What made you decide to migrate?
What made you choose Sitges in particular to migrate to?
Did you consider any other destinations in Spain, or elsewhere?
How do you feel about migration now?
4) Social identities
Are there any aspects of your identity that migration has made you more aware of?
Has your perception of yourself changed?
How has migration impacted your sense of Britishness / being British?
5) Interpersonal relationships
How easy has it been to meet people in Sitges?
Where do you socialise?
How does this compare to your social relationships in Britain?
Do you still maintain ties in the UK?
6) Perception and experiences of locals
Do you have many relationships with Locals?
Is integrating into the local community important to you?
What steps would you recommend new arrivals from the UK take, if they want to establish relationships with Sitgetans?
7) Concepts of LGBT+ community
Are you aware of the LGBT+ community in Sitges?
What role do you think the LGBT+ community plays in the town?
What are your thoughts about Sitges Pride?

Appendix 2. Coding from interview to theoretical coding

Interview Quotation	Initial Coding	Focused Coding	Theoretical Coding
"I think it's safe here, quaint…It's very cosmopolitan, you can tell, it's very designer, the little shops. I think the gays here really create that feeling because having so many of them around, it sort of shows all of that, that freedom of choice, like you can be who you are without any negativity, or being threatened, given abuse." Marnie, teacher	Sitges as Cosmopolitan	Link between Male homosexuality and cosmopolitanism In Sitges	Subaltern Cosmopolitanism
"Is Sitges cosmopolitan? If we think of the dictionary definition of cosmopolitan then, well, it's definitely gay friendly…" Matt, TEFL teacher	Sitges as Cosmopolitan	Link between Male homosexuality and cosmopolitanism In Sitges	Subaltern Cosmopolitanism
"I don't think you need Pride parades anymore. I mean really, what's the big deal? I don't think people care, especially not here." Alastair, retiree	Gay Pride	Pride and Politics / Social Justice	Commercialisation of Pride Events
"I don't see why they even need to have one here, Pride is supposed to be to fight for equality, it's [homosexuality] already accepted here, you don't need Pride." Hans, businessman	Gay Pride	Pride and Politics / Social Justice	Commercialisation of Pride Events
"Well to be honest, I really don't like the fact that they've called it Pride because traditionally, Pride events entail rights, politics, and this isn't organised around gay rights at all. This is about businesses making money, that's its only function. I mean compare it to other Pride events, is there going to be a lesbian float? Is there going to be anything for PFLAG (Parents Families and friends of Lesbians and Gays)? A raised platform so that disabled gay people can watch the parade? Of course not! They should just call it Big Gay Party Week or something! I wish they hadn't used the name Pride because this is just about business." Jamie, TEFL teacher	Gay Pride	Pride and Politics / Social Justice	Commercialisation of Pride Events
"I think it probably only really seemed to get people who would have come on holiday anyway, to come over a bit earlier. Lots of the gays who came would probably have come anyway, I think… I mean, it was a good week, but it wasn't a Pride! It was more of a gay party! I mean, normally at a Pride you have banners, rainbow banners, you have local police getting involved, it's more political, here it was just to advertise the bars." "So, do you think that, maybe it didn't really work, having Pride here?" "I think that the bars who publicised well did really well out of it, but it wasn't a Pride as I know it." Kyle, musician	Gay Pride	Pride and Politics / Social Justice	Commercialisation of Pride Events
"The idea that [a bar] was going to open for women between six and eight, well, to be honest, I thought it was a bit of a cheek! I mean, six to eight, that's basically at the time when no-one else will be around isn't it? There was hardly anything for women at all, a BBQ in someone's garden, a meal in a restaurant…it was a total insult! They basically gave us the crap left over after the boys had had their fun!" Jo, Lecturer	Gay Pride	Male Focus of Pride Events	Lesbophobia
"Oh, let's be honest, the whole thing was for the guys!" Estelle, Promotions	Gay Pride	Male Focus of Pride Events	Lesbophobia
"I don't know why they want that to be what represents us, it makes me so angry! I mean, all the cruising grounds, all that stuff, I know it's common knowledge, but it shouldn't be all that defines the gay scene, it shouldn't be the only thing the public knows us for!" Antony, photographer	Sexuality	Gay Male Sexuality	Homosexuality and Hypersexualisation
"It's not only that it's all just boys in their pants, all over each other, it's that it's only young, white boys in their pants all over each other!" Meredith	Sexuality	Gay Male Sexuality	Homosexuality and Hypersexualisation

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