

# LGBT tourist decision-making and behaviours. A study of Millennial Italian tourists

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81

Received 10 May 2022  
Revised 20 June 2022  
Accepted 21 June 2022

## Abstract

**Purpose** – Sociological researches about tourism of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people are growing in number. These studies are carried out mainly in Anglo-Saxon countries, although nowadays tour operators, travel agencies, cruise and airline companies have started to reserve more and more services and promotions to this group of travellers all around the world. To fill this gap, the paper presents the results of a research that involved 650 Italian LGBT Millennial travellers.

**Design/methodology/approach** – Using the exploratory technique of multiple correspondence analysis, the research focussed on the study of decision-making processes, finding out the factors that drive young LGBT people to prefer one destination over the others, distinguishing motivations between pull and push factors.

**Findings** – For Italian LGBT Millennials, tourism means more than just recreation. Tourism could also represent a strategy that gives them temporary escape from social prejudice and inequality, since tourist experiences provide an opportunity to re-build LGBT people's sexual identity and enjoy social freedom that LGBT people are deprived of whilst being at home.

**Originality/value** – The analysis allowed to underline some differences. Even if LGBT people share the burden of being as a member of a sexual and gender minority, LGBT people attribute a slightly different meaning to tourism, considering distinct push and pull factors.

**Keywords** Millennials, LGBT, Tourist behaviour, Generations, Italy, Travel decision-making, Multiple correspondence analysis

**Paper type** Research paper

## Introduction

Sociological researches about tourism of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people are growing in number. These studies are still carried out mainly in Anglo-Saxon countries, although nowadays tour operators, travel agencies, cruise and airline companies have started to reserve more and more services and promotions to this minority group of travellers all around the world (e.g. Guaracino, 2007; Coon, 2012; Weeden *et al.*, 2016).

Since 2013, the issue of tourist destinations chosen by the LGBT community in the world has been the subject of the Spartacus Gay Travel Index (Spartacus, 2019), which ranks all the states of the world based on their level of inclusiveness towards the LGBT community.

An overview of the existing empirical research on LGBT people as tourists reveals that a considerable number of studies emerged in the 1990s and early 2000s and concentrated on such issues as the economic power of gay travellers (e.g. Holcomb and Luongo, 1996; Hughes, 2005). Other common topics include sexuality and holiday choices (e.g. Hughes, 2002; Casey, 2009; Blichfeldt *et al.*, 2011; Carr, 2016), gay and lesbian tourist experiences (e.g. Poria and Taylor, 2002; Poria, 2006; Ro *et al.*, 2017) and the configuration of LGBT leisure spaces (e.g. Pritchard *et al.*, 2000, 2002; Huges and Deutsch, 2010; Melián-González *et al.*, 2011). LGBT



tourists have also been categorised as “rainbow trendsetters” (Vargas, 2010), searching for gay-friendly social life, culture, sights, comfort and relaxation. A recent study conducted on a sample of over 5,000 LGBT respondents residing in the United States of America reports some of their travel motivations: “vacation”, “work”, “culture”, “family holidays” and “honeymoon” (CMI, 2019).

Demographic, motivational, behavioural and identity-related aspects of LGBT travellers may be more complex than this literature describes. In fact, as Vorobjovas-Pinta and Hardy (2016) observe, a great deal of literature on LGBT tourism could be not entirely appropriate.

The line of this reasoning depends on several factors: first, social, political and cultural environments in which LGBT people live could change over time. For this reason, the spatial-temporal context of the studies is fundamental to understanding adequately the results of each research. Second, some studies bring together LGBT people presenting a homogeneous picture of their profile as tourists. In other words, they do not consider that subjects’ experiences and preferences may vary according to specific demographic characteristics, such as gender and age (Valentine and Skelton, 2003; Corbisiero, 2013).

Finally, most of the LGBT tourism literature looks at the G (and a bit of the L) letters of the acronym, overlooking transgender and bisexual travellers (e.g. Kinnaird *et al.*, 1994; Clift and Forrest, 1999; Pritchard *et al.*, 2000; Puar, 2002; Hughes, 2006). This trend may depend on interconnected reasons of visibility and number. In fact, the male gay community is more visible than others and consequently it appears easier to sample. However, bisexual and transgender people are less numerous. This leads many researchers to investigate only the gay population or to erroneously over-generalise the results of research regarding gay men only to the entire LGBT community.

In light of the above, the Osservatorio LGBT’s staff of the University of Naples Federico II decided to study young LGBT Italian tourist choices to investigate what decision-making processes drive them to prefer one destination over the others, distinguishing motivations between pull and push factors, stressing analogies and differences amongst LGBT people. The push factors are related to the socio-psychological sphere and concern individuals and their evaluations based on personal preferences and expectations. Pull factors, on the other hand, are external to the individuals and concern the characteristics of the destinations (e.g. Crompton, 1979; Iso-Ahola, 1980; Shaw and Williams, 2004; Sirakaya and Woodside, 2005).

Italy can be considered an interesting case study since in this country LGBT people are still victims of discrimination and social stigma (e.g. Monaco, 2020; Monaco and Nothdurfter, 2021; Scandurra *et al.*, 2020). More specifically, the Italian case appears contradictory: even though Italy is signatory to many relevant international conventions promoting human rights, LGBT rights are not always supported by the state (e.g. Rinaldi, 2013; Pedote and Poidimani, 2020; Corbisiero and Monaco, 2021). Although a civil union law was passed in 2016 (Cirinnà, 2017), same-sex couples cannot marry or adopt children. Furthermore, transgender people without surgery have been given the right to change their legal gender on documents only since 2015. The most current controversial issue in terms of Italian law is the lack of an anti-discrimination act. In the absence of national legislation, anti-discrimination regulations are effective only at the level of local government (Corbisiero and Monaco, 2013).

The research focusses on Millennials, a generation born in the 1984–1996 period (Strauss and Howe, 2008). According to recent research (e.g. GenForward, 2018; Berger, 2018; Jones, 2021), the degree of LGBT identification is increasing amongst the younger generations. Millennials promote a more fluid sexuality, challenging stereotypes based on gender and sexual orientation (e.g. Corbisiero *et al.*, 2022; Savin-Williams, 2021; Worthen, 2021). In addition, they are oriented to making sustainable choices. They believe that their green choices and behaviour can contribute to changing the world (e.g. Taylor and Keeter, 2010; Seemiller and Grace, 2016, 2018; Varkey Foundation, 2017; Ruspini and Bernardi, 2018).

Furthermore, thanks to their adequate digital literacy, they have access to a range of information and knowledge about the world which makes them more independent and wise tourists than previous generations (e.g. Monaco, 2018; Pencarelli *et al.*, 2020; Floros *et al.*, 2021).

The recent research on tourism shares the idea that “the generational shift represents a major force that will shape the future of tourism” (Corbisiero and Ruspini, 2018, p. 1), since young people anticipate the main societal changes through their behaviours and choices. They could orient the social change, because they are the leader of our times (e.g. Corbisiero *et al.*, 2020; Gardiner *et al.*, 2014; Glover and Prideaux, 2008; Slivar *et al.*, 2019; Tilley and Houston, 2016; Yeoman, 2008).

In this sense, studying how young LGBT people behave and make decision in tourism could help to understand the social meaning attributed to travel by people living in a minority. In other words, this research field could represent a key issue in the late-modern development of tourism research.

### Materials and methods

The survey to investigate Italian LGBT Millennials’ destination choice and tourist behaviour was conducted using so-called computer-assisted web interview (CAWI) technique.

A 40-item questionnaire was constructed through Qualtrics and made available online to collect the participants’ data.

The questionnaire was divided into four sections. The first section was devoted to collecting the main participants’ socio-demographic information, including age, sexual orientation, gender and area of residence. In the second section, respondents were asked to report tourist habits and preferences, such as commonly used means of transport, number of trips in a year, duration of trips, main travel companions and preferred destinations. The third section of the questionnaire was about “push factors”. Participants had to indicate the main socio-psychological elements that affect their motivation to visit a tourist destination. In the final part of the survey, respondents had to answer questions about “pull factors”, indicating the main resources and characteristics that determine the attractiveness of a destination.

Having been piloted and revised, questionnaire was distributed on social networks, mailing list and websites for duration of nine months in 2019. More specifically, the survey was disseminated on online groups and social pages dedicated to the Italian LGBT community and on general tourism platforms. In all cases, a research presentation message was initially communicated: to inform the participants about the survey introduction and the eligibility criteria (Italian residents born between 1984 and 1996 with self-recognition as lesbian or gay or bisexual or transgender people). The research objectives, terms and conditions and references of the project staff were clearly stated on the introduction page of the survey. Participants were also informed of the anonymity of their responses and the right to stop the survey at any point for any reason if they wanted. The researchers decided to administer the survey online on the basis of the following three methodological considerations: first, LGBT people are part of the so-called “hidden” populations (Matthews and Cramer, 2008) because they can be victims of stigma (e.g. Pachankis and Bränström, 2019; Monaco, 2022). Recruiting hidden populations online is easier than meeting them in person; second, the research group decided to conduct an online survey to ease the bias of “social desirability” (e.g. Krumpal, 2013; Lupton, 2015; Snee *et al.*, 2016) and to enable the respondents to answer the questions anonymously and voluntarily, without fearing that they will expose themselves to the public; finally, the researchers agree with theories that argue that online surveys allow the construction of larger and more heterogeneous samples than traditional ones (Hine, 2005). On this point, the researchers thought that disseminating

the survey online would enable them to reach a large number of people (e.g. Bauman, 2011; Daniels and Gregory, 2016; Dolata and Schrape, 2018; Surratt, 2001).

Answers provided in electronic form were automatically saved in the database, thus reducing the number of missing answers, imputation errors and time for data cleaning and analysis.

To distinguish the main pull and push factors amongst the Italian LGBT Millennials, the exploratory technique of multiple correspondence analysis (MCA) has been applied. It is part of a family of structural equation modelling (SEM).

MCA was developed in France by Benzécri (1973) as a special case of correspondence analysis (CA) applied to large tables presenting a set of qualitative characteristics for a population of statistical individuals. In the social sciences, MCA became known through the work of the late Bourdieu (1979), who argued for the existence of an internal link between his view of the social as spatial and relational, captured by the notion of field and the geometric properties of the MCA.

This statistical method is very common in social research for its flexibility and applicability since it allows to analyse the pattern of relationships of several categorical dependent variables. Its use is particularly appropriate in studies where a large amount of qualitative data is collected, often paired with quantitative data, and where qualitative variables may become sub-optimized in data analysis. MCA extracts the most important structuring information from the dataset, providing a synthesis displayed as a graph in which points (categories) close to the mean are plotted near the MCA plot's origin and those more distant are plotted farther away. In the two-dimensional graphical display of the data, categories with a similar distribution tend to group together, whilst dissimilarity results in distance (e.g. Beh, 2004; Greenacre, 2007; Le Roux, 2014; Hjellbrekke, 2018).

### Sample

The study involved 650 participants. The average age of the participants was 28.94 years (Standard Deviation (SD) = 5.64). As reported in Table 1, 455 people (accounting for approximately 70% of the sample) self-reported a homosexual sexual orientation, 184 people (28% of the sample) defined themselves as bisexual and 11 as heterosexual (2% of the sample). Into this last category, there were only transgender people.

As regards educational level, 39.69% ( $n = 258$ ) of the sample had a high school diploma, whereas 30% ( $n = 195$ ) had a bachelor's degree. Most participants were employed ( $n = 546$ ; 84%).

The respondents mainly lived in Campania, Emilia-Romagna, Lazio, Lombardy, Piedmont and Veneto regions. Since these are some of the largest regions in Italy, this result was as expected, even though there is no actual updated census of LGBT people living in Italy. According to the last (even if now dated) institutional demographic study aimed at collecting data from the LGBT population in Italy (ISTAT, 2012), ten years ago in the country lived 1 million of LGBT people, in addition to another 2 million people who claimed to have had sexual or affective same-sex relationships in past. Otherwise stated, around 3 million people did not conform to the heterosexual norm in Italy, which accounts for 5% of the national population. In

**Table 1.**  
Distribution of the  
sample

	Cisgender men	Cisgender women	Transgender men	Transgender women	
Bisexual	46	131	5	2	184
Heterosexual			7	4	11
Homosexual	257	190	5	3	455
	303	321	17	7	650

reality, these numbers might even be higher, considering that sexual orientation can be a sensitive topic and many people tend not to declare it for fear of being discriminated against. In addition, it is safe to argue that LGBT statistics are notoriously unreliable, partly because sexual attraction or behaviour may not necessarily be consistent with identity (Butler, 1990; Crooks and Baur, 2016; De Rosa and Inglese, 2018) and also because sexual orientation can be changeable throughout one's life (e.g. Savin-Williams *et al.*, 2012; Weiten *et al.*, 2016; Monaco, 2022).

## Results

### *The LGBT tourist's gaze*

About 70% of the sample said they had made at least one trip in the previous year. The trip lasted about five days on average.

Overall, the young people sampled prefer travelling principally in the company of friends (32%). Male groups are mainly composed of people who share the same sexual orientation (64% of cases), whilst lesbian travellers mainly travel in mixed groups (67%).

In line with the results of research conducted on 200 Italian Millennials (Monaco, 2018), LGBT young people also show a strong interest in travelling alone (27%), embodying the idea of a more intimate and subjective mobility. Family members (22%) and partners (16%) are indicated as other preferred travel companions.

Respondents had also to indicate if there were some destinations that they would have liked to visit, but they avoided. Amongst the main destinations not visited by Italian LGBT tourists, Russia and other Eastern European countries such as Poland, Hungary and Turkey were on top of the "blacklist". Middle Eastern and some African countries were also on the list because of their laws relating to gender and sexual minority.

Another significant finding reveals that 27% of the participants show preference in travelling out of Italy. This data could be explained by the fact that Millennials want to experience different cultures in foreign countries whilst they are still young. However, some specificities of the Italian context allow to argue that this choice could be also conditioned by the fact of belonging to a sexual minority. In fact, in some Italian tourist destinations, public displays of affection between same-sex people in places such as beaches are still subject to discrimination, social disapproval and, more generally, to prejudices. The Italian news coverage has reported in recent years episodes of homophobia towards young same-sex couples at some Italian beaches (e.g. Prunas *et al.*, 2015; Rinaldi, 2020). Last but not least, this result could be explained by the fact that LGBT tourism in Italy lacks a real coordination as well as structured promotion (Corbisiero and Monaco, 2017).

Regarding tourist travel, the most preferred means of transport indicated is train (35%), followed by plane (26%), car (20%) and bus (18%). The least used means of transport was ship. Looking in detail at the answers given by transgender people in the sample, one would find it possible to detect a different situation. Indeed, unlike most of the sample, they declared to travel mostly on buses and cars. This differing data can be better understood by looking at other noteworthy difference: young cisgender Millennials stated that they mainly choose means of transport based on price (35%) and comfort (27%), in line with several studies that pointed out that in times of economic crisis, young people do not give up travelling, but they are more price-conscious, looking for discounts, offers and promotions (Coşkun and Yetkin Özbük, 2019; Olen, 2019; Pham *et al.*, 2018). On the contrary, transgender people in the sample indicated as first considered parameter the possibility of preserving their privacy (33%) followed by comfort (25%) and, only as third reason, competitive price (22%). Thus, the research highlighted that Italian transgender Millennial make some tourism choices different not only from other members of the LGBT community, but also from most of their peers. These seemingly counter-trend data are actually clarified by the fact that the tourism experience for transgender people can also generate stress or discomfort. In fact, in several

situations transgender people could be forced to come out, mainly in cases where their physical appearance does not match the grammatical gender of the name in their passports or on their tickets. As reported elsewhere, coming out exposure can represent a huge impediment for transgender travellers who have not made the transition or are still in the process of doing so (e.g. Hopkins, 1996; Monaco, 2019). Such considerations make it more understandable why they prefer to travel via private means, such as cars or buses, for which Account-based Ticketing is very often not required, even at the cost of longer travelling time or higher fare.

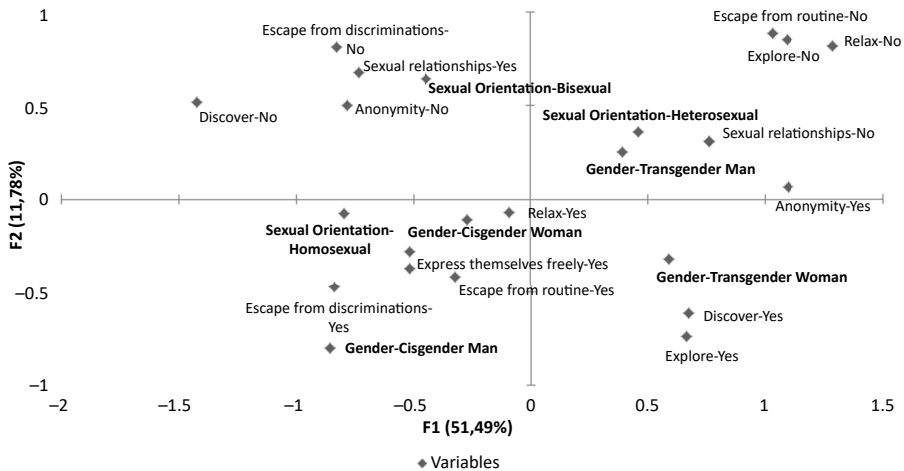
The overall analysis of the data showed that sampled Italian LGBT Millennials sometimes make some seemingly contradictory choices in travelling. For example, even if more than half of them reported to be sensitive to environmental sustainability issues, very often they do not practice sustainable forms of tourism. For example, they avoid destinations closer to their permanent places of residence. Although the most part of the participants are aware that longer trips can have a greater negative impact on the environment, they do not feel comfortable practicing tourism near their homes because they do not consider those places in line with their expectations or vacation needs. Thus, whilst they ideally belong to a generation that is repeatedly showing a green consciousness (Cavagnaro *et al.*, 2018; McDonald, 2015; Syngellakis *et al.*, 2018), probably also due to limited rainbow geography, they are not always in a position to practice sustainable tourism. Similarly, although they claimed to be thrifty consumers, they sometimes have to spend a lot visiting tourist destinations where they feel most welcome.

*Push factors*

As anticipated, MCA was used to investigate the links between the respondents' sexual identity and both push and pull factors. MCA interpretation consists of assigning a meaning to the factorial axes, depending on the variables they are formed, and interpreting the relationships between modalities using the factorial axis meanings.

The present MCA model about push factors explains 63.27% variability between the two first factors (51.49% for the first and 11.78% for the second).

Figure 1 is a representation of the dataset as a "cloud" of points, allowing for a comparison of their "correspondences" (associations) at a category level. It illustrates the contingencies of individual modalities along the first two factors. Sexual orientations and gender identities are



**Figure 1.**  
Representation of push factors



marked in bold. Factor 1 (26.83% of inertia) was mainly defined by the search of a holiday on the one hand, and the willingness of escaping (from routine and discrimination) on the other hand. Factor 2 (16.84% of inertia) was mainly defined by the contrast between the willingness to discover and explore new destinations, and the limited interest in touring the territories on the other.

Looking at the factorial map, one would find it possible to associate distinct push factors with specific groups of people within the sample of Italian LGBT Millennials.

More specifically, for some categories of people such as bisexual individuals and transgender men, the main travel's push factors are not so different from those of any other holidaymaker: "need to escape from the daily routine", "see the world", "relax" and "discover new things".

At the same time, research data suggest that other young members of the Italian LGBT community also rely on specific push factors, which appear to be wholly or partly related to their sexual identity. Amongst these there are "the desire to socialize with subjects that share the same sexual identity" and "the desire for freedom of expression", strongly expressed by lesbian women and gay men.

Finally, transgender women on holiday mainly seek "anonymity" and "security". Therefore, for them, safety represents one of the main influencing factors of their tourist choices. In line with other research (e.g. Fraser, 2006; Begun and Kattari, 2016), young Italian transgender women also seem to prefer places far from their home to temporarily stay with people who do not know about their history. It could be considered as a strategy to guard against prejudice, harassment and violence.

#### *Pull factors*

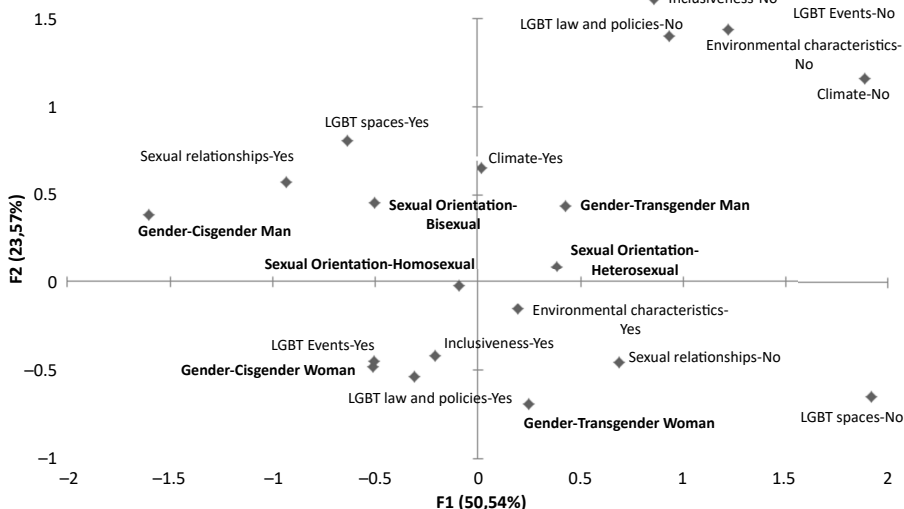
The analysis of pull factors allows to further explain the link between sexual identity and tourism decision-making, highlighting other differences amongst the various LGBT subjects.

Statistically, the MCA model about push factors explains 74.11% variability between the two first factors (50.54% and 23.57% respectively). As for push factors, on the Euclidean space the contingencies of individual modalities along the first two factors are represented (Figure 2). Factor 1 (27.84% of inertia) was mainly defined by the search of a LGBT inclusive environment on one hand, and the disinterest in specific rainbow policies and initiatives on the other. Factor 2 (21.66% of inertia) was mainly defined by the contrast between the enjoyment of the natural beauty (such as sea, mountains, hills and so on) and the lack of interest in the specificities of the territory.

Transgender participants in the sample are the tourists mainly attentive to the "climate of the territories", the "environmental characteristics" and the "accommodation".

The data collected also highlight some other differences in terms of gender. For example, regardless of sexual orientation (both cis- and transgender) men appear more interested than women in visiting "LGBT facilities" (such as night clubs, bars and saunas) and involving in "LGBT events" (such as parades, festivals and movie nights). On the contrary, young women sampled appear more oriented towards gender-sensitive destinations in which "inclusive social contexts" and the "laws and policies that protect LGBT people" exist. These findings are in line with an exploratory study conducted by researchers from the Italian University of Urbino (Bartoletti and Giannini, 2019), which is based on qualitative interviews with 29 gay men and 26 lesbian women. Unlike men, partnered lesbian women defined as not relevant the existence of gay-friendly spaces and facilities in tourist destinations.

A small number of partnered people also indicated that they used to choosing destinations in order to celebrate their honeymoon. In Italy, same-sex couples cannot marry, but since 2016 same-sex partners have been able to register a civil partnership, which is often celebrated with a trip. Rainbow honeymoons have been a significantly growing phenomenon over the past few years (e.g. Portelli, 2004; Corbisiero, 2016; Waitt and Maxwell, 2014).



**Figure 2.**  
Representation of pull factors

Further important information was provided by LGBT parents (2.3% of respondents). They declared that their choice of tourist destination depends above all on the presence of services and facilities. The LGBT-parent families hope that they can resort to these services and facilities to protect their children as much as possible from discrimination or discomfort.

## Discussion

Italian Millennial travellers live in a social and cultural context in which public acceptance towards LGBT coexists with the discrimination and stigmatisation against it due to a lack of national legislation. For young Italian LGBT people, spending their daily lives in areas dominated by heterosexism and homophobia inevitably leads to the desire to escape or to live their identities elsewhere in complete freedom, at least for the duration of the holiday. In line with other studies (e.g. Murray, 2012; Kenttamaa Squires, 2019), this research found that for Italian LGBT Millennials tourism is more than just a kind of recreation. It could also represent a strategy for a temporary escape from prejudice and inequality. In other words, the research data allow to claim that tourist experiences mean a lot for Italian LGBT Millennials because they provide a golden opportunity for establishing their sexual identity and enjoying social freedom far from home.

The analysis also allowed to underline some differences. In fact, even if LGBT people share the burden of belonging to a sexual and gender minority, they attribute a slightly different meaning to tourism, considering different push and pull factors.

Lesbian women are more attentive to the social climate of destinations, so they do not have to hide their sexuality in public spaces. They prefer more welcoming countries, where LGBT people can feel safer. Thus, in evaluating a destination from a tourist perspective, young Italian lesbian women contextually consider, together with their own desires, the legislative framework and the social and cultural openness of destinations. Very often, the (alleged) level of inclusiveness of a destination has a preponderant weight on other consideration, leading them to shift their attention to other areas of the world which are more open to LGBT or which are simply considered less dangerous.

Gay men especially appreciate destinations that have a tourism offer specifically dedicated to them. In this sense, for them tourism is also an opportunity to socialise with



people who share the same characteristics. In line with other international studies, it can be argued that “gay holidaymaking can be seen as a process of exploring gay identities, in that it is about how male-to-male sexually inclined men learn to participate in particular gay sexual cultures through the spatialised practices of holidaymaking, which may provide the emotional distance from home that facilitates identity change” (Cox, 2002, p. 134).

Transgender people plan their trips with the aim of protecting themselves as much as possible. Consequently, they choose to travel by means of transportation that they consider safer and that do not force them to come out, even if this means making longer, uncomfortable or expensive journeys. In addition, they prefer to travel to destinations where no one knows them, so that they can freely express themselves, without fearing people’s judgement. This last assumption is particularly true for transgender women, who experienced several discrimination and prejudices in their daily lives.

Finally, bisexual people sampled seem not to be very conditioned by their sexual orientation. Their decision-making in a trip is mainly influenced by the characteristics of the locations they want to visit. In addition, they want to be treated equally regardless of their sexual identity (e.g. Poria, 2006). This may probably be true since, during their life, bisexual people can also have romantic or sexual relationships with partners of the opposite sex. In this circumstance, even in the most hostile contexts towards sexual minorities, they are less likely to struggle with heterosexist social expectations.

## Conclusion

The decision-making processes of the Italian LGBT Millennials are conditioned by factors not only related to the general tourist demand, but also to other specific dimensions which influence their choices compared to those of the mainstream population.

Research data presented in the previous pages deny many assumptions improperly associated with LGBT tourism. For example, this kind of experience cannot be superimposed on tourism for sexual pleasure. Surely, for many LGBT people, being in a place where there are other people who share the same sexual orientation and can freely live their identity increases the chances of having intimate relationships, but this does not appear to be the main reason behind Italian LGBT Millennials’ travels. Tourist experiences offer LGBT people the opportunity to be who they are actually are and enjoy the so-called “gayness”, namely the freedom to live peacefully their holiday in homophile and tolerant social contexts (Holcomb and Luongo, 1996).

On the basis of the data, the ideal destinations for Italian LGBT Millennial travellers are those that propose a general tourist offer in which there is a context of acceptance and openness and where there are also (but not only) events, initiatives or services designed especially for LGBT people.

Nowadays, the geography of the world in terms of LGBT rights is very fragmented. In five states of Africa and Asia (Mauritania, Sudan, Iran, Yemen and Saudi Arabia) homosexuality may end in penalty execution. According to the geo-political analysis produced by the International Lesbian and Gay Association (ILGA, 2022), in 55 countries around the world (including 27 in Africa), gay people can be sentenced to up to 14 years in prison. As for transgender people, except for Argentina, Belgium, Colombia, Denmark, Ireland, Malta and Norway, to change their gender on official and bureaucratic documents, they must agree to undergo specific procedures, such as a psychiatric visits or irreversible sterilisation.

Even when LGBT identity is not condemned by law, sometimes people belonging to gender and sexual minority can be exposed to higher risks of violence, stress and discrimination, due to low social acceptance or to gender-based prejudices (William Institute, 2021). Indeed, social acceptance is very often conditioned by normative ideas and often quite superficial visions about specific issues of behaviour and visibility (Hekma and Duyvendak, 2011; Nothdurfter and Nagy, 2017; Reddy *et al.*, 2019).

As [Sassen \(1991\)](#) suggests, globalisation, which characterises contemporary society, has made all people “citizens of the world”. All the people in the world are ideally equal to enjoy economic and cultural relationships in any part of the globe. However, the lack of genuinely equal opportunities also undermines the full enjoyment of the right to mobility. When LGBT citizens decide to visit destinations not inclusive toward sexual minorities, they still feel insecure. This situation can only be avoided if they keep secret their sexual orientations or gender identities or lie about them.

### **Social and practical implication**

As the research data revealed, tourism can be considered as a tool that allows LGBT people to realise their identity. In this sense, LGBT tourism could possibly represent an opportunity for forcing the most intolerant countries of the world to increase social inclusion, learning from countries that have already implemented rainbow-oriented policies, initiatives and events for some time.

From this critical point of view, the implementation of a tourist offer for the LGBT target can play an important role in attributing value to destinations, leading the least progressive countries on a path of openness and deconstruction of gender-based stereotypes and prejudices (e.g. [Pearce, 2005](#); [Markwell and Waitt, 2009](#); [Ram et al., 2019](#)). To achieve this goal, it is important that the tourism destinations do not look at the LGBT community exclusively as a target market for economical profit.

Thus, openness to LGBT issues should not just be window dressing. The phenomena of “rainbow-washing”, in which some destinations reinforce the illusion of social inclusion for LGBT people without promoting real equality respecting differences, are not uncommon ([McLean, 2019](#); [Wulf et al., 2022](#)).

On the contrary, LGBT tourists must be respected as citizens. Accordingly, destinations that want to attract young LGBT tourists must guarantee rainbow events, parades, services, facilities, but, even more, rights and policies. They should not offer “ghettos” to sexual minorities; instead, they should act as oases of safety, protection and inclusiveness (e.g. [Concannon, 2008](#); [Lugosi, 2007](#); [Luongo and Callister, 2002](#); [Southall and Fallon, 2011](#); [Guaracino and Salvato, 2017](#)).

To this end, destinations could listen to the local LGBT population, trying to understand what difficulties they face in their daily lives, so that they can be more inclusive.

This is the orientation that the most famous rainbow locations have taken over time where LGBT spaces, for citizens and tourists, are not destinations within the destination, but constitute one of the many spaces in which the LGBT community can stay openly and safely. The most significant examples are San Francisco and New York in America and Paris, London, Berlin and Amsterdam in Europe. All these cities not only have rainbow neighbourhoods and services for the LGBT population, but they are also characterised by a more general, inclusive and welcoming context towards minorities. They have law that bans discrimination against sexual orientation or gender identity, making LGBT citizens and tourists feel safe. Clearly, large metropolises, being traditionally traversed by rapidly changing, multi-ethnic and super-diverse social flows, have been better able to work for challenging and deconstructing heteronormative ideologies. This does not mean, however, that other smaller or peripheral territories and areas cannot also replicate this kind of model. In this scenario, the most inclusive rainbow cities could, for example, serve as a model or guide them in a collaborative way in order to contribute to the empowerment and liberation of LGBT people. What may seem apparently simplistic or optimistic, however, in fact requires not only the willingness on the part of the territories to invest in developing their infrastructure designed for LGBT, but also the involvement of various (institutional and non-institutional) players who must come into contact and exchange with each other on tackling the issue in question.

Currently, in this regard Italy still lags far behind due to longstanding political, social and cultural resistance (e.g. [Lingiardi, 2016](#); [Corbisiero and Monaco, 2021](#)). The hostility towards the LGBT community has negative consequences both socially and economically, prompting some tourists not to appreciate the beauty of the country and forcing them to travel elsewhere.

### Limitations and future research directions

Although initially the goal of the research was to critically analyse the tourist decision-making and behaviours of Italian sexual and gender minority people, the group of respondents who participated in the study did not cover the full spectrum of these identities.

Thus, future perspectives could focus on other sexual identities (such as queer, pansexual and/or asexual).

The non-probabilistic sample limits the external validity of the findings. To mitigate such limitation, the research group decided to circulate the survey not just on websites and social network managed by LGBT associations or devoted to the Italian LGBT community, but also on major platforms, sites and social networks dedicated to tourism or for young Italians, with the aim of recruiting in these virtual spaces other people on target outside the traditional LGBT circles.

In addition, though online survey has no geographical restraints, it may deny the access to the computer illiterates or digital illiterates.

In general, methodologically, it is important to start a critical reflection on the methods to recruit and sample the LGBT population on the problems connected with the interpretation of the collected results and on the language used for describing the experiences of the research participants (e.g. [Meyer and Wilson, 2009](#); [Price, 2011](#)).

In view of these considerations, it is safe to argue that future research that intends to use the web as a channel for data collection should probably take into consideration also off-line channels for the recruitment (e.g. [Lobe, 2008](#); [Monaco, 2022](#)).

Finally, to broaden the understanding of the investigated phenomena, future studies should use a mixed methods research approach (e.g. [Tashakkori and Teddlie, 1998, 2003](#)), involving the benefits of qualitative and quantitative research within the same study (e.g. [de Lillo, 2010](#)).

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LGBT tourist  
decision-  
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