

# Tourism Geographies

An International Journal of Tourism Space, Place and Environment

ISSN: (Print) (Online) Journal homepage: [www.tandfonline.com/journals/rtxg20](http://www.tandfonline.com/journals/rtxg20)

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**To cite this article:** Friederike Beeth & Heike Schänzel (10 Oct 2024): Queer tourism geographies and placemaking: beyond homonormativity, *Tourism Geographies*, DOI: 10.1080/14616688.2024.2412557

**To link to this article:** <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616688.2024.2412557>



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Published online: 10 Oct 2024.



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# Queer tourism geographies and placemaking: beyond homonormativity

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## ABSTRACT

Queer spaces emerge as a response to the restrictive nature of homonormativity, which compels queer individuals to conform to dominant cis-heteronormativities. This underscores the need for in-depth knowledge about queer spaces, particularly those that extend beyond the experiences of gay men. This study explores how lesbian and queer women as mobile transnationals create space for themselves in Copenhagen, a city recognised as the world's most gay-friendly place. It employs an interpretivist research paradigm utilizing a critical feminist and queer geography lens. Findings from observations and interviews reveal the absence of a specific lesbian space in Copenhagen; instead, numerous queer spaces are characterised by fluidity, safety, community and their welcoming approach towards LGBTQIA+ travellers. Lesbian and queer women do not become visible through physical spaces but through the strong networks they have created for themselves. A queer space offers a sense of safety within a public setting for the community that gathers there. Additionally, lesbian and queer women actively reshape and conquer existing cis-heteronormative spaces through material and immaterial practices such as exclusive online community spaces or through hosting queer events in spaces such as churches. The study addresses the absence of feminist and queer perspectives in a discourse on sustainable tourism geographies. It provides policymakers with insights and recommendations for creating inclusive, queer-friendly spaces.

## ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 13 November 2023  
Accepted 30 September 2024

## KEYWORDS

Homonormativity; queer spaces; LGBTQIA travel; queer geographies; queer tourism geographies; lesbian placemaking; queer placemaking

## 1. Introduction

I mean, if women cannot have space, imagine queer women (Maria).

All women want to feel safe in the spaces they inhabit. Yet, women continue having to act in male, heterosexual spaces. Not much has changed since Valentine (1995) and Pritchard and Morgan (2000) claimed that public spaces are masculinised and

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dominated by cis-heteronormativities, making women more vulnerable to male violence and harassment. Those fears impact both heterosexual and queer women's daily life (Su & Wu, 2020; Yang et al., 2017) as they feel the need to use coping mechanisms such as calling their friends and family on their way home to feel more comfortable (Su & Wu, 2020; Valentine, 1995).

Scholars (e.g. Holland-Muter, 2019; Pritchard & Morgan, 2000) have voiced their frustration regarding the lack of consideration for women in city planning and other marginalised groups. This neglect is evident in intersectional studies like Holland-Muter's (2019), highlighting how women experience Cape Town, touted as a gay capital but characterised by the complexities of representation that become visible in discrimination and violence against lesbian and queer women. The research uncovers various lesbian and queer life-worlds, demonstrating the enduring influence of racialised and class-based heteronormativities in women's lives, challenging them to establish their place in the city. Holland-Muter's (2019) work is among the limited studies that explore the daily lives of queer women within their cultural and societal contexts.

Lesbian and queer women not only experience those power relations in public spaces as residents but also as travellers making them vulnerable to male violence (Su & Wu, 2020; Wilson & Little, 2008). Their safety perception influences their travel decision considerably (Booking.com, 2023). Up to 40 countries officially worldwide criminalise private, consensual sexual activity between women by law, and the number of places with unrecorded cases of arrest and threats without any jurisdictional justification is expected to be even higher (Human Dignity Fund, 2024). However, only a few tourism scholars have recognised the power dynamics that construct and maintain space and the relevancy gendered spaces hold in tourism studies (Pritchard & Morgan, 2000).

Copenhagen, a leading European city in LGBTQIA+ inclusivity, has been recognised as the world's most gay-friendly city and place on earth (Copenhagen2021, 2021). Denmark, known for its progressive policies, was the first country to allow same-sex partnerships in 1989 (Visit Copenhagen, n.d.) and is home to the world's oldest gay bar in its capital (Visit Denmark, n.d.). Since 2009, same-sex couples can adopt (Visit Denmark, n.d.), and in 2012, the country introduced same-sex marriage in churches and city halls, resulting in a notable increase in marriages, particularly among women (Statistics Denmark, 2023).

This study addresses the research gap on queer women's geographies diverging from the predominant focus on gay men, such as mapping gay bars (Brown & Knopp, 2016; Provencher, 2007) or analysing gay neighbourhoods that are male-dominated (Ghaziani, 2021; Kelly et al., 2014). It addresses the void in female perspectives within tourism studies, which have concentrated mainly on employment (Movono & Dahles, 2017; Pastore et al., 2021) and host-guest relationships involving cis-gendered heterosexual individuals (Bauer, 2014; Brooks & Heaslip, 2019). Academia still fails to represent the experiences of other marginalised groups, including trans individuals (Arayasirikul & Wilson, 2019; Rogers, 2019; Rossiter, 2016), non-binary people (Cheung et al., 2020; Lampe et al., 2020), and rainbow families (Cherrington et al., 2021; Hanssen, 2012) which sustains the male bias in research (Pritchard & Morgan, 2000).

While the discourse on gender equality in sustainable tourism and development is not new, practical implementation on a destination level is still lacking (Kalisch & Cole, 2023). Therefore, three leading concepts are discussed in this study regarding the existing power relations that manifest in homonormativity. Literature is presented on how homonormativity affects women's lives and ways to conquer it. By introducing the concept of queer worldmaking, the different practices of placemaking are highlighted and then applied to LGBTQIA+ travellers' behaviours and perceptions of a destination.

By using qualitative methods, this study addresses the question of how mobile transnational lesbian and queer women make a place for themselves in Copenhagen and provides insights into how they experience public spaces considering homonormativity. The sample group focuses on queer cis-gendered women with different cultural backgrounds who temporarily migrated to Copenhagen due to life events such as studies or job offers. This study responds to Kalisch and Cole's (2023) call for tourism geographers to analyse and highlight the diversity of women's perspectives. Similar to the approach of Holland-Muter (2019), the study includes the perspective of women that identify as lesbian, gay, queer, bisexual, or pansexual. The term queer is used here as a critical umbrella term to describe the experiences of the informants. A queer approach positions sexuality within multifaceted constellations of power that influence queer geographies (Oswin, 2008). It is both a self-designated and a political term that acknowledges the fluidity of sexual identities (Brown, 2012).

The study makes a twofold contribution, as it sheds light on the placemaking processes of mobile transnational queer females in Copenhagen by applying a feminist lens to queer geographies and tourism research. Findings provide valuable insights for tourism geography scholars and tourism professionals that aim to learn more about queer placemaking, and the different life worlds from a female perspective.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1. Homonormativity

In contemporary society, queer individuals are expected to replicate and adapt to heterosexual norms and values to receive acceptance and privilege (Brown, 2012). The concept of heteronormativity describes the privileged heterosexuality that society has created, placing it above all other non-heterosexual orientations and any gender presentation that is viewed as unconventional and outside of the associated binary conception of gender (Browne, 2006).

Heteronormativity is so widespread that it has been adopted within the lesbian and gay community as 'homonormativity'; a concept coined by Duggan (2002), which refers to the societal expectation that LGBTQIA+ individuals should conform to and uphold heterosexual norms and values. Those who refuse to assimilate receive less acceptance, rights, and privileges, often leading to the concealment of their sexuality (Robinson, 2016). This aligns with the Foucauldian perspective, which suggests that since society views sexuality as something to be confessed and examined, it compels individuals to hide it (Foucault, 1990). This is illustrated by the prevailing concept of

*coming out of the closet*, where individuals feel the need to disclose their LGBTQIA+ identity.

Instead of challenging patriarchal heteronormativities, homonormativity sustains them, impacting individuals outside of the male bias (Brown, 2012). This affects public spaces as people must realise that the spaces they live in have been produced heterosexually, based on dominating heteronormativities (Bell & Binnie, 2004). A space is never automatically heterosexual but becomes one because of the process of applying heterosexual views and norms (Binnie, 1997). Consequently, lesbian and queer women, as well as other individuals that do not comply or assimilate to the patriarchal norms, suffer from less visibility, less privileges, and less consideration and are often challenged to find a suitable space for themselves in the existing structures.

Scholars emphasise that women, regardless of their sexuality, share common concerns about male sexual violence in public spaces (Schänzel & Porter, 2023; Yang et al., 2017). Not much has changed since Wilson and Little (2008) reported how women's fear affects their perception of public space as they create avoidance strategies to deal with unwanted whistles, verbal harassment, or actual physical assault. Women's daily lives are still significantly impacted by sexual harassment, gender-based violence, and racial and sexual discrimination (Drysdale et al., 2022; Kalisch & Cole, 2023; Unipan, 2021). Various tourism studies agree that female travellers, when accessing tourist destinations, are susceptible to specific risks like physical dangers related to discrimination, sexual harassment, and assault (Yang et al., 2017; Kalisch & Cole, 2023). Additionally, factors like race, gender presentation, and location can significantly shape an individual's perception and experience of safety (Holland-Muter, 2019). For instance, Holland-Muter (2019) pointed out that homosexuality is often viewed as un-African and contrary to religious beliefs, resulting in a high rate of hate crimes, violence, and discrimination, especially in less-resourced townships and informal settlements in Cape Town.

While the concept of homonormativity is well-recognised among scholars, studies (e.g., Luo et al., 2022; Mahawatte, 2023) often limit their discussion to cis-gendered white gay men, neglecting the experiences of other marginalised groups. Rather than being genuinely inclusive, 'gay spaces' or 'gay villages' in cities tend to shift towards favouring gay men, stigmatising other queer individuals as unwelcome, resulting in diminished visibility for those who do not conform (Bell & Binnie, 2004; Drysdale et al., 2022).

## **2.2. Queer worldmaking**

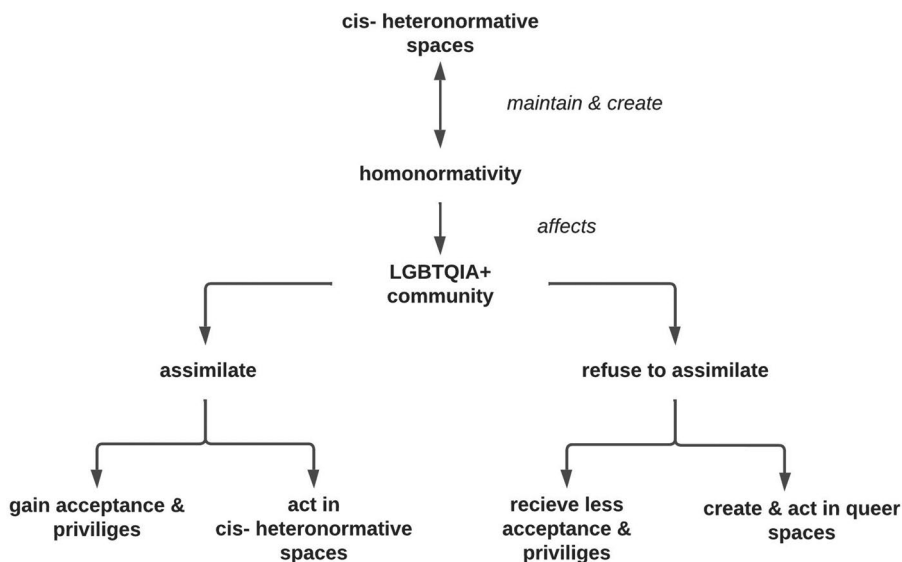
In response to the ongoing oppression of patriarchal cis-heteronormativities, queer spaces have emerged (Zaino et al., 2021). This aligns with Foucault's (1990) idea of power as productive, wherein the regulation of sexuality gives rise to something new. However, Foucault's views are criticised for believing there is a transgression zone with definitive spaces of liberation, as those spaces still exist within power structures with different nuances and no clear-cut form (Paddison et al. 2002). A space envisioned as free from heteronormative influences, such as a queer space, remains embedded within restrictive power dynamics. This utopian perspective fails to accurately represent the lived experiences of lesbian and queer women. Scholars continue to misrepresent queer life-worlds as they express that

homonormativity forces individuals to create queer spaces in opposition to heterosexual spaces instead of in everyday life within existing structures (Brown, 2012; Oswin, 2008).

In response to existing power dynamics, queer worldmaking encompasses the practices of placemaking among queer individuals, illustrating how they must improvise in their daily lives to create a culture that suits them while living in a world that marginalises them (Berlant & Warner, 1998). As outlined in Figure 1, queer people resist and reshape dominant patriarchal identities and practices to construct a more inclusive world (Holland-Muter, 2019). The term *queer* acknowledges the fluidity of sexual identities as it challenges heteronormativity and engages in discourse about social boundaries (Browne, 2006).

Oswin (2008) calls queer placemaking a reterritorialisation of heterosexual space since LGBTQIA+ individuals claim back spaces and visibility in the existing structures. This means that they create spaces that make them feel welcome, comfortable, and safe, providing them with a community and respectful treatment that they do not necessarily experience outside of a queer space. While gay men tend to have a stronger infrastructure in cities in the form of bars or night clubs, women lack those commercial places (Drysedale et al., 2022). Drysdale et al. (2022) refer to the placemaking practices as invisible lesbian, queer women acting in invisible places, when compared to how gay men territorialise space in the global North.

The placemaking processes of lesbians and queers can be found in different scenarios in everyday life when queer life-worlds are being produced. The spaces do not have to be physical buildings; they can be private and secret networks, or communal and public. In comparison to gay men, lesbian and queer women tend to focus on strong social networks and on the revolution of the values they believe (Adler & Brenner, 1992; Holland-Muter, 2019).



**Figure 1.** Conceptual framework on homonormativity and the creation of queer spaces (Author's work).

In response to heterosexual spaces and patriarchal structures, individuals seek a community that shares similar experiences of exclusion (Holland-Muter, 2019). Lesbian and queer women seek community in different ways and participate with diverse intentions, but it is often the wish for identification and sharing experiences with other marginalised groups that bring the community together (Holland-Muter, 2019; Unipan, 2021). Lesbian and queer women create meaning through fluid structures (Unipan, 2021; Valentine, 1995). This is why it might be difficult for people outside the community to detect those practices, and scholars must acknowledge the fluidity of their findings.

However, the term *queer worldmaking* requires a critical approach, as Berlant and Warner (1998) confined it to the heterosexual and homosexual binary, contradicting the principle that queerness is rooted in the recognition of identity fluidity (Brown, 2012). Under their definition, all other LGBTQIA+ members could be excluded, conflicting with the original notion of queer spaces as inclusive. Megarry et al. (2022) suggest that their research, based on a sample primarily drawn from American and Australian populations, indicates a potential generational divide in the understanding of the terms 'lesbian' and 'queer' across different age groups. While these findings are open to interpretation, it is crucial for studies to employ such terms with care and to engage with the fluidity of sexual orientations, as some women may identify as gay, lesbian, queer, or choose not to adopt any label at all.

### **2.3. LGBTQIA+ travellers**

Research underscores that tourism experiences are inherently embodied and gendered, and gendered tourist bodies navigate places and interact with individuals according to social, specifically, gendered scripts (Yang & Schänzel, 2023). Travel can be an opportunity for queer people to escape the heteronormative environment they live in (Pritchard et al., 2000; Prayag et al., 2024). These travellers tend to consciously seek those queer-friendly spaces when travelling as it enables them to display identity-related behaviour without fearing getting arrested or judged (Lewis & Prayag, 2022). Travel offers individuals the opportunity to escape societal expectations and redefine their identity in new environments. It provides a space to explore their self-identity and form connections with like-minded communities, fostering confidence in their sexual orientation (Prayag et al., 2024).

This can be linked to the movement of transnational mobility. A large part of global tourism could be linked to these movements, especially when considering how migrants travel between their homes and new countries (Coles et al., 2012). When talking about mobile transnationals, scholars look at how people's everyday routines are shaped by their places and the constraints they face. In tourism and migration, researchers study how migrants create social and cultural connections in different locations. They move around temporarily and experience life in multiple places, forming different identities and social ties (Coles et al., 2012). In the context of lesbian and queer women, they navigate through various cultural and social environments, searching for spaces they can safely express themselves in. Research emphasises the importance of not treating LGBTQIA+ travellers as a homogeneous group, but instead recognising the intersectionality of factors such as economic status or place of origin (Prayag et al., 2024).

Various scholars (e.g. Su & Wu, 2020; Wilson & Little, 2008; Yang et al., 2017) analysed self-identified females' perceived safety and experiences, especially solo female travellers, emphasising their vulnerability to male harassment. All research has in common that no matter how women identify or label themselves, they are all vulnerable to male harassment. For instance, transwomen report that they encounter discrimination ranging from misgendering to sexual harassment and even verbal and physical violence, with a significant fear of violence, including murder (Monterrubio et al., 2020). Women experience unwanted attention from men whistling, shouting, and commenting on their appearance and fear physical assault from men when entering public spaces (Wilson & Little, 2008). The above scholars conclude that women are being sexualized no matter their appearance, their sexual orientation, when, or where.

This is why Kalisch and Cole (2023) stress that tourism as a 'people-centered industry' should prioritize communities that manage the social environment especially marginalised groups, instead of focussing on profit, growth, and privatisation. The actual queer spaces in a destination continue to be overlooked, especially from a community perspective. Studies focus firmly on the binary and heterosexual perspective, highlighting a dearth of research on the travel experiences of lesbian and queer women as well as other LGBTQIA+ individuals. The few scholars that explore *gay tourism* tend to generalise the experiences of men and women (e.g., Vorobjovas-Pinta, 2021; Hartal, 2019) or solely focus on the gay men's perspective (e.g., Hattingh & Spencer, 2020; Bailey, 2022). Scholars often overlook the experiences of marginalised groups within the LGBTQIA+ community. Trans, agender, or non-binary life-worlds remain largely unaddressed, yet they are crucial for establishing an inclusive queer space.

### 3. Methodology

This study adopts an interpretivist research paradigm, utilizing a critical feminist and queer geography lens to explore the complex and nuanced experiences of lesbian and queer women in Copenhagen. This approach enables the researcher to emphasise the individual narrations of participants, resulting in co-creating knowledge on the phenomenon (Tashakkori et al., 2021). Queer theory questions any normative social orderings of identities and subjectivities that are divided into the heterosexual or homosexual binary. It challenges any dominant view that labels homosexuality or queerness among women as unnatural or deviant (Browne & Nash, 2010).

Through qualitative interviews and observations, this methodology seeks to uncover and interpret the subjective realities of those whose voices are often marginalized in 'traditional' research. Interviews and observation notes stem from a 10-days stay in the city in May 2023. Since there is little data about queer women's perspectives on placemaking, the methodological approach using semi-structured in-depth interviews and observations enables the researcher to draw a more comprehensive picture of women's perception of Copenhagen (Heale & Forbes, 2013). This qualitative approach provides deeper insights, similar to Holland-Muter's (2019) and Unipan's (2021) studies.

As part of a more critical turn in tourism studies, the position of the researcher and the researched must continually be assessed to incorporate cultural politics in a discourse on power. A reflexive researcher acknowledges research as an interactive

process shaped by their experiences (Ateljevic et al., 2005). Observations are influenced by the experiences of the researcher, a cisgender female, who is white, femme presenting, identifies as queer, does not speak Danish, and comes from Berlin, Germany, a country in which the rights of LGBTQIA+ members are protected by law (Equaldex, 2023). To acknowledge the intersectionality of the research topic, it is essential to recognize that gender non-conforming experiences vary significantly based on factors such as identity, space, and academic status (Kiguwa, 2019). Consequently, the observations presented pertain to specific life-worlds and might not represent the experiences of other individuals in Copenhagen.

### **3.1. Data collection**

Copenhagen was chosen for this study for its perceived queer-friendliness. Twelve Interviews were conducted from 22. May until 6. In June 2023, the researcher stayed ten days in the area to conduct most interviews in person and two online. Informants were purposively recruited through a post in a popular Facebook group for lesbian and queer women, and further interviews were scheduled through a snowball approach (Clark et al., 2021) as informants referred to other lesbian and queer women willing to participate. Mainly women responded who temporarily moved to Copenhagen and labelled themselves as lesbian, bisexual, pansexual, and queer (Figure 2). Participants' ages ranged from 21 to 37, and they had lived in Copenhagen for different periods, meaning that not all of them spoke Danish. They said they like living in the city but are not determined to stay forever. Additionally, it must be mentioned that informants often struggled to find suitable labels for their sexual orientation, highlighting its fluidity. As part of the constructivist approach, all informants were given pseudonyms.

The data collection was stopped after 12 interviews as the answers became repetitive, and a data saturation point was reached, which is typical for in-depth interviews as saturation is usually reached between 9 to 17 interviews (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022). Interviews were held in English, which is not all informants' mother tongue, meaning they might express themselves differently than they would in their first language (Clark et al., 2021). Additionally, the researcher's presence might influence the interviewee's responses, and not every participant might be equally articulate (Creswell, 2009).

As sexual identity is a very personal and highly subjective topic, it is essential to mention that this study cannot cover and represent the experiences of, for example, Black and People of Colour, rainbow families, or individuals who identify as non-binary or transgender. Instead, the results give an in-depth understanding of the sample group. Due to its intersectionality, only a few relevant factors can be discussed in the given framework. The author encourages scholars to take those factors upon themselves in future research projects.

### **3.2. Data analysis**

All interviews were recorded and then digitally transcribed verbatim. In the following steps, the transcripts were revised manually, and the researcher familiarised herself with the data before further analysing through coding, identification, categorising,

| Name       | Age | Pronouns             | Sexual orientation | Place of birth           | Occupation          | Been in Copenhagen since |
|------------|-----|----------------------|--------------------|--------------------------|---------------------|--------------------------|
| 1 Amelia   | 32  | She/ her             | Lesbian            | Krakow, Poland           | Project Coordinator | 13 years                 |
| 2 Mia      | 30  | She/ her             | Bisexual           | Volos, Greece            | Student & DJane     | 3 years                  |
| 3 Olivia   | 37  | She/ her/ they /them | Lesbian            | Saint Petersburg, Russia | Surgeon             | 8 years                  |
| 4 Sofia    | 22  | She/ her             | Lesbian            | Vermont, USA             | Student & Barista   | 5 months                 |
| 5 Emma     | 23  | She/ her             | Lesbian            | Silkeborg, Denmark       | Student             | 2 years                  |
| 6 Ella     | 23  | She/ her             | Lesbian            | Vietnam                  | Student & waitress  | 20 years                 |
| 7 Ava      | 31  | She/ her/ they       | Queer              | Chelmsford, UK           | Meteorologist       | 4 years                  |
| 8 Carlotta | 24  | She/ her             | Bisexual           | Madrid, Spain            | PhD student         | 3 years                  |
| 9 Hannah   | 21  | She/ her             | Bisexual           | Biberach, Germany        | Student             | 3 months                 |
| 10 Zoe     | 22  | She/ her             | Queer & pansexual  | Strasbourg, France       | Student             | 7 months                 |
| 11 Maria   | 29  | She/ her             | Lesbian            | Bologna, Italy           | Operations manager  | 6 years                  |
| 12 Lea     | 30  | She/ her             | Pansexual          | Paris, France            | Consultant          | 3 years                  |

**Figure 2.** Informant's key information.

and creating themes that captured the content (Clark et al., 2021). Finally, themes were examined carefully and put into a thematic framework accordingly. A thematic analysis should be applied reflexively as it allows the researcher to systematically and deductively code and categorise data by reflecting on feminist and queer concerns (Braun & Clarke, 2019).

As part of a qualitative content analysis, the first codes were created using a directed approach, and Unipan's (2021) place-making categorisation was implemented for guidance. The first theme emerged regarding types of space & placemaking strategy. Then, further codes were created through the conventional approach of deriving codes directly from the text data. Coding was based on an inductive thematic approach (Clark et al., 2021). Finally, four themes were created (Figure 3): fluidity, safety, community, and LGBTQIA+ travellers.

## 4. Findings

### 4.1. Fluidity

When searching for lesbian, queer places, it quickly becomes apparent that Copenhagen is lacking in offering places for the city's nightlife and day-to-day activities. There is only one lesbian bar that has been open consistently over the past years, as many

| Theme               | Codes   |
|---------------------|---|
| Fluidity            | Material- constant<br>Immaterial- constant<br>Transient- immaterial               |
| Safety              | Safety and wellbeing<br>Public display of affection<br>Facing negative encounters |
| Community           | Gay men<br>Seeking space<br>Support mechanism                                     |
| LGBTQIA+ travellers | Marriage<br>Blending locals and travellers  |

**Figure 3.** Thematic framework informing the study.

places shut down or continue targeting either a wider audience or only gay men. However, that bar is small, and informants report losing interest. In contrast to one lesbian bar, there are six bars and clubs that are either exclusive to or dominated by gay men, which creates the challenge for women to find a suitable space for themselves. As stated, earlier Maria summarises the issue that if women do not have space, queer women will especially not have space.

Informants face challenges in finding spaces specifically designed for them, as lesbian and queer women recognize the absence of dedicated physical spaces within the city. The findings reveal that women desire more permanent spaces in both nightlife and everyday life but are currently restricted to venues hosting specific events like parties, concerts, or educational workshops. Rather than a single designated space, women have come to accept the reality of having various temporary events. These events are deliberately tailored to cater to lesbian and queer women, as well as non-binary individuals.

There is a ton of different events that are happening in different venues in the city, and there's a lot of venues who would host queer events but wouldn't call themselves a gay bar. So, and that has changed [...] And now I kind of feel like we accepted that we'll just have events. (Amelia)

One example of the fluidity of spaces is the event location of a queer choir. Churches are often used for public events and are hosted without any interference from the pastor. By association, churches and, in general, religion are controversial topics in the community, as queers have frequently experienced exclusion and discrimination from religious institutions. Olivia loves to sing in a choir, a group diverse in queer identities, and for them, it is common practice to sing in churches as communal spaces. While this might appear normal to locals, people from the outside might react more surprised. The church or other event locations are not explicitly designed for lesbian and queer women, but they can be reshaped in a queer space.

Contrary to physical spaces, lesbian and queer women heavily depend on dedicated online groups like Facebook groups for lesbian, queer women, and non-binary individuals. There is specifically one group that all informants knew of, which is used to communicate with others and find any queer events happening in the city. Members must first introduce themselves to be then admitted to the group, which ensures

safety and exclusivity to both queer locals and travellers. This group can be the first touchpoint for foreigners with Copenhagen as a queer space and with its community. Findings show that queer spaces do not have to be material or constant but are often transient and immaterial.

#### 4.2. Safety

One of the most discussed topics is the perception of safety and well-being as informants not only describe their experiences as women but as queer women, and findings show these differ significantly. Most women agree that Copenhagen appears to be safe as a female, especially during the night and compared to where they grew up. They feel mostly comfortable in public spaces, especially at night and in any chosen outfit.

Here, nothing ever happens. No one even looks. Like there was just such a consent [consensus] with people wearing whatever they want. And, you know, revealing clothing is not an issue, and nudity is not an issue. (Zoe).

However, the findings reveal that the perception of public places is not uniform across the entire country and varies for individuals, influenced by different factors. For instance, Emma emphasises that having a utopian view of Denmark as entirely safe for women is inaccurate. She is particularly conscious of her identity as a queer woman, and publicly displaying affection with her partner raises concerns about outing themselves, causing her stress. Additionally, her partner, who presents as masculine and is a Person of Colour, further contributes to their reluctance to engage in public displays of affection. This may explain why lesbian and queer women tend to be more reserved in public spaces and often feel more comfortable showing affection in perceived safe environments like queer clubs rather than in public.

So, I personally, I don't feel safe when I walk around by myself at night like that. I have never felt safe, alone by myself. [...] I also don't really feel like we never hold hands in public or we never kiss in public. I think even sometimes out loud calling each other babe in public. [...] \_\_\_ is also black, and I think for us, it's a little bit of a double awareness or a wanting to protect ourselves. And I think the only times when we had any form of PDA [public display of affection] has been in a gay club. (Emma)

Informants agreed that, especially in the nightlife, queer clubs or clubs that have designated queer-friendly areas are essential as they transmit the feeling of safety and comfort. Even though Copenhagen appears to be queer-friendly, inappropriate incidents still happen. Hannah describes when she and her date were harassed in a non-queer club.

But there was a guy, I mean I was with this girl, and on the dance floor, we were kissing. And he was just coming up to us straight away and was like, Yeah, you shouldn't kiss each other, you are too pretty. Just give the men in the room a chance. (Hannah)

This example showcases one example of how lesbians and queer women get approached when displaying affection. This is why informants report using different strategies to conquer public spaces. They describe having an 'in-built scanner' enabling them to analyse their surroundings for potential threats, or they call someone on the

phone while walking home. Those practices are not specific to Copenhagen or lesbian and queer women. They highlight the challenges all females continue to experience in public.

### **4.3. Community**

Participants, who have lived in Copenhagen for various durations, share a common sense of feeling at home, which is attributed to the city's prevailing normality and mutual respect within society, including governmental support. This feeling stems from the belief in having the same opportunities as straight couples, fostering a sense of equality. Moreover, the community plays a crucial role in creating a dependable source of emotional support. Maria says that community is 'a place where you definitely feel safe to express any kind of opinion.'. She continues to describe that she comes from a place where she did not have such a big community, which is why she appreciates finding like-minded people in Copenhagen.

Lesbian and queer women actively seek community, which in Copenhagen is described as small and close. Since they do not have a designated space, they share spaces with other LGBTQIA+ members who experience the same problem. Predominantly, bars and clubs target gay men, resulting in either exclusive spaces or spaces that are supposed to be open to everyone but are dominated by them. However, informants report that they do not enjoy these spaces. Mia states, 'For me, it's not that common to mingle with gay men.' And Sofia adds: 'I noticed even last week when we went to Rust [queer-friendly club], there were gay men complaining that there were so many women. [...]. I wouldn't go to those male dominated spaces. They're very sexual.'

Informants all agreed that queer spaces minimise the risk for women of finding themselves in a threatening situation, and it simultaneously gives individuals the feeling of not being alone if something were to happen. A queer space is often considered as a safe space as queer women can rely on being protected in their surroundings. They are built on the principles of community and mutual respect, including addressing individuals according to their preferences and using their chosen pronouns. Informants believe that the community members would protect and support each other in the event of an issue.

Although you don't know the people, you still feel like it's, I don't know, a nice place. And it's also in a way that you kind of know people are going to stand up for each other. [...]. I feel like there's something else in, when they attack someone, they are attacking everyone. (Carlotta)

### **4.4. LGBTQIA+ travellers**

When asked about tourism, informants clearly expressed their understanding of why LGBTQIA+ members would travel to Copenhagen. Some first travelled for leisure and then temporarily moved to Copenhagen. Even though the city does not advertise itself as such, it has an image of being queer-friendly, which informants mostly agreed with. The sense of safety attracts travellers along with the city's variety of queer activities, as informants report often mingling with travellers in the city's nightlife.

Visitors consciously ask locals for tips online and aim to blend with the community during their stay. Travellers then end up in the same queer spaces local lesbian and queer women go to.

Especially last summer, we went out a lot to queer spaces and all the nightlife, and there were so many tourists. We met so many queer couples, queer friend groups that came to Copenhagen. And they wanted to experience the queer spaces here and were really happy with that [...]. (Emma)

LGBTQIA+ travellers enjoy doing things they cannot do in their home country. It is easy to find and enter queer spaces in which both locals and visitors blend and form bonds. Foreigners benefit from queer activities in the nightlife, the overall queer-friendliness among society, and the legal framework, as there is a trend of marriage tourism for travellers to get legally married in Copenhagen.

[...] So, people come here just to get married and then go back. [...] It is something comfortable here. (Olivia)

Copenhagen is known to be popular for tourists to get married, especially among queer individuals that benefit from the same-sex marriage laws and the little paperwork that comes with it. Informants report being invited as witnesses of travellers who decided to get married since one requirement is to have spent at least 24 hours in the city.

## 5. Discussion

It emerged from the findings that there is no specific lesbian space in Copenhagen since lesbian and queer women come together with other queer individuals in queer spaces, which brings up the question of relevance relating to lesbian spaces. Earlier, Adler and Brenner (1992) and Valentine (1995) stressed that women become less visible than men since they do not aim to dominate space. While gay men actively participate in the city's nightlife, lesbian and queer women struggle to assimilate themselves into those norms. Gay men tend to take up more physical space in cities with various gay bars, while lesbian and queer women do not have such spaces, but focus on the networks and friendships they have established for themselves (Adler & Brenner, 1992; Holland-Muter, 2019). By refusing homonormativity in the shape of the city's nightlife, lesbian and queer women become more invisible.

Instead, spaces for queer and lesbian women are fluid and created through events and workshops but also through immaterial practices like social media groups and language. Findings highlight that queer spaces are not created in opposition to heterosexual spaces but are embedded in them (Brown, 2012; Oswin, 2008). Public spaces, including churches, have the potential to transform into queer spaces. This demonstrates that locations traditionally associated with heteronormativity can be adapted into welcoming environments for queer individuals. This is noteworthy because religion is often used as a basis for exclusion or even hate crimes against LGBTQIA+ individuals (Holland-Muter, 2019). This complexity underscores the challenges in defining a queer space, especially for those outside the community, and why scholars grapple with establishing precise definitions for such spaces.

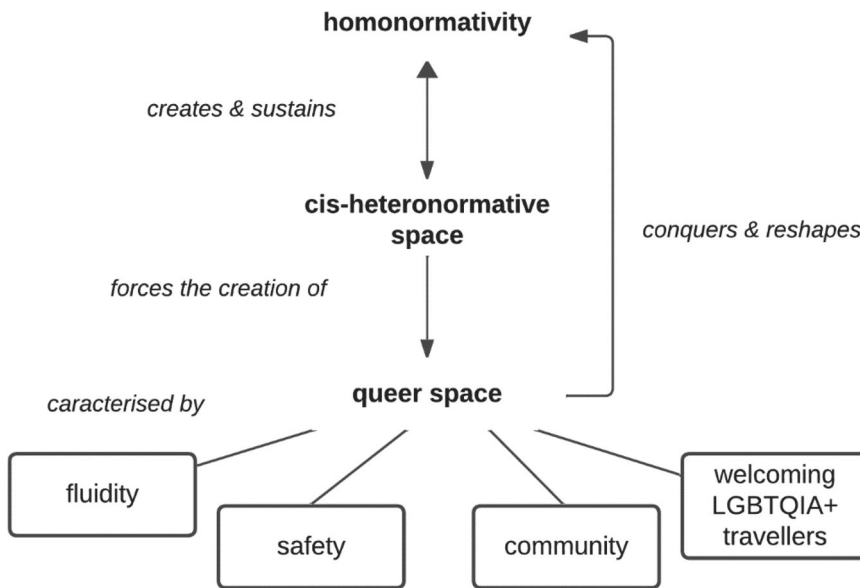
Heterosexual and queer women experience the fear of male violence (Valentine, 1995; Yang et al., 2017). While some perceive the city as safe for queer individuals when walking alone at night or choosing outfits, there are significant variations in experiences. These findings align with Holland-Muter's (2019) findings on the vulnerability of lesbian and queer women in public spaces, with safety perceptions influenced by factors such as race and gender presentation. Copenhagen's overall sense of safety does not eliminate the occurrence of incidents. Informants report the need to scan their environment for potential threats, and may refrain from public displays of affection due to past inappropriate comments in heterosexual spaces, a concern less prevalent among heterosexual women.

The study findings highlight the importance of queer spaces, which provide a safe space from negative encounters, not just for women but for all queer individuals. So far, few tourism scholars have recognised the power dynamics that construct and maintain space and the relevancy gendered spaces hold in tourism studies (Pritchard & Morgan, 2000). Informants' reports of unwelcome comments while displaying affection with a same-sex partner outside designated queer spaces drive their preference for inclusive environments where they can connect with a like-minded community. The community seems to be one of the reasons why mobile transnationals choose to stay in Copenhagen. Women feel a sense of belonging when surrounded by others who have experienced similar inequality within society (Unipan, 2021).

Copenhagen attracts visitors who travel as a form of experiencing the city as locals, which confirms Pritchard et al.'s (2000) study. LGBTQIA+ travellers seek queer spaces that provide comfort, safety and community, which Copenhagen can undoubtedly offer. They aim to experience everything they cannot do in their home city, including getting married. Queer spaces provide a welcoming environment for LGBTQIA+ travellers, fostering opportunities for community interactions and connections. However, it becomes frustrating having to compliment Copenhagen. It should be considered normal under the common understanding that everyone feels welcomed and safe in a public space. Kalisch and Cole (2023) stress that the focus should always be on caring for the community, not profit and growth, especially in tourism. Copenhagen, or at least particular spaces within the city, should be queer spaces that are primarily great for locals and then also attract travellers to join, but never the other way around. Additionally, this study highlights the critical importance of language in that labelling a city as gay-friendly does not automatically mean it is queer-friendly.

Based on the study findings, two theoretical implications can be concluded. First, there is a demand for constant physical and safe queer spaces which allow lesbian and queer women to meet in their community. The second and most important implication is to focus on the local community and their satisfaction with their city. Policymakers must ensure that lesbian and queer women feel safe, have space, and enjoy living in Copenhagen. Provided that the local community continues to experience Copenhagen as an overall queer-friendly space, this feeling transmits onto the experience of travellers that share the same spaces.

This study aligns with scholars emphasising the importance of considering power dynamics when analysing a place. To do so effectively, scholars must begin by comprehending homonormativity and then transcending it. The process of establishing queer space is illustrated in [Figure 4](#). Homonormativity, along with prevailing patriarchal,



**Figure 4.** Theoretical framework: Creating queer space in the city (Author's work).

heteronormative norms in society, gives rise to and sustains cis-heteronormative space. Simultaneously, cis-heteronormative space is maintained through the predominant homonormativity in society. Lesbian and queer women often find these heterosexualised spaces unwelcoming, prompting them to forge their own queer spaces.

This study primarily focused on four defining elements of such spaces: the fluid nature of queer spaces, which can manifest as tangible or intangible; safety, a pivotal concern for women within queer spaces; a strong sense of community, which shapes their feeling of belonging in the city and how welcoming queer spaces are towards LGBTQIA+ travellers. By crafting these inclusive spaces, lesbian and queer women challenge homonormativity and reshape the environment they inhabit.

## 6. Conclusion

Including the voices of lesbian and queer women, the study provides novel insights into homonormativity and the queer placemaking processes of mobile transnationals in Copenhagen. Scholars must first understand the effects of homonormativity to then move beyond it. Homonormativity and the dominating patriarchal, cis-heteronormative norms in society create and sustain cis-heteronormative spaces (Brown, 2012). Through the chosen interpretivist research paradigm and applying a feminist and queer geography lens, it becomes apparent that lesbian and queer women find these heterosexualised spaces unwelcoming and oppressive, compelling them to create their own queer spaces (Zaino et al., 2021). They refuse domineering homonormativity and use queer worldmaking processes to create a place for themselves in Copenhagen by reshaping the city's landscape. Four elements define such a queer space: fluidity, safety, community, and the welcoming approach towards LGBTQIA+ travellers.

LGBTQIA+ travellers escape the heteronormative spaces they live in through travel and mingling with the local community. They seek a like-minded community that

allows them to display identity related behaviour without getting judged or fearing getting arrested (Lewis & Prayag, 2022). However, findings highlight that informants struggle to find a place designated for lesbian and queer women in Copenhagen. Gay men experience greater visibility, especially in the city's nightlife, while women are creating more transient places for themselves, such as temporary events or immaterial spaces like social media groups. Contrary to the Foucauldian approach, research shows that queer spaces are embedded within power dynamics and strongly influenced by the fluidity of identity, which makes it difficult to define such a space (Unipan, 2021). Hence, to understand a queer space, policymakers must first acknowledge its fluidity.

Community is a pivotal factor in women's comfort and sense of belonging. Their chosen communities offer support, uniting individuals who share similar experiences of discrimination and exclusion due to their sexual identity (Holland-Muter, 2019). It is also one reason mobile transnationals decide to live in Copenhagen, and future scholars must further elaborate on the role of transient communities in shaping spaces.

This study underscores the significance of queer spaces in providing safety. A community-oriented approach fosters a unique care dynamic among individuals, contributing to the perceived safety and comfort among locals and LGBTQIA+ travellers. While informants generally feel safe during both daytime and nighttime in Copenhagen, safety concerns persist, mainly when intersectional factors like race or gender presentation come into play. Policymakers must recognise these varying perceptions of safety to create sustainable solutions for women's comfort in public spaces. This then strengthens to the overall welcoming feeling LGBTQIA+ travellers experience when entering queer spaces in the city. Therefore, the Danish capital deserves its title as the world's most gay-friendly city, but only partly. LGBTQIA+ travellers are not a homogenous group, and lesbian and queer women are not immune to negative, inappropriate encounters with men as they still occur.

This research emphasises the importance of including female, queer voices in academic disciplines such as tourism geographies, where diverse narratives from lesbian women and other LGBTQIA+ members are underrepresented. Scholars need to incorporate queer theory and an understanding of identity fluidity to adapt to evolving societal norms and challenge existing patriarchal structures.

Further research must consider various life-worlds that are imperative to gain a comprehensive understanding of the experiences of lesbian and queer women, as well as trans and non-binary individuals when travelling. One's bias and privilege must be considered when conducting queer theory, including reflecting on power relations as part of more critical tourism geography practices.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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