

# TRAVEL DESTINATIONS OF POLISH LGBT COMMUNITY

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**ABSTRACT:** *The article covers some aspects of tourist activity of Polish LGBT community. In an anonymous poll, 442 people participated who represented 4 LGBT communities, i.e. gays, lesbians, bisexuals and transsexuals. The authors focused their considerations on the presentation of the most popular travel destinations of the analysed community, in terms of domestic and foreign travel. Additionally, selected aspects of tourist trips were examined, i.e. types of accommodation facilities used by the respondents, means of transport, the trip organisation methods, and the most frequent trip purposes. The findings of authors' own study describe tourist behaviours of LGBT community in Poland.*

**Key words:** *LGBT, tourist activity, domestic tourism, outbound tourism, space, Poland*

## INTRODUCTION

Tourism is a complex and, at the same time, a common phenomenon. Nowadays, the participation of various social groups in tourism may be stressed (Alejsiak, 2009; Lubowiecki-Vikuk and Paczyńska-Jędrycka, 2010; Lubowiecki-Vikuk, 2011). Moreover, tourist activity is undertaken by the representatives of virtually all regions and countries.

It is interesting to note that it is also the sexual orientation that is becoming an element of the diversification of offers. It is even said that LGBT tourism is one of the most attractive and fastest growing niche markets in the world, quite resistant to economic turbulences (Otero Paradela, Alén González and Domínguez Vila, 2014). According to the research carried out in the year 2000 by the Tourism Intelligence International, tourism of non-heterosexual people already constitutes 10% of the world tourist market. According to the data from the Gay and Lesbian Travel Association (GLTA), this is currently over 12% of the world tourist market (Borzyszkowski, 2012).

All the above factors contribute to the fact that LGBT community tourism is becoming a more and more popular subject of research for a lot of scholars (Hughes, 2006;

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Melián-González, Moreno-Gil, and Araña, 2011; Southall and Fallon, 2011; Borzyszkowski, 2012; Therkelsen et al., 2013). This surge of interest is reflected in the study of various aspects, among others, the destinations of tourist trips understood as the spheres of tourist activity which directly refer to the localisation aspects of the sites of rest and recreation (Lubowiecki-Vikuk and Miedzińska, 2011), which in broader perspective constitutes the space of tourist activity (Liszewski, 2009). The aspects connected with expenditure incurred by the tourists, as well as their satisfaction with travel destinations are also becoming a frequent subject of research.

This article presents the results of authors' own research covering selected aspects of tourist activity of Polish LGBT community. The primary objective of the study is to identify trends in choosing travel destinations by the examined group, in terms of domestic and international tourism. In addition, it analyses selected aspects of the organisation of tourist trips, i.e. kinds of accommodation facilities used by the respondents, the types of means of transport, the organisation of trips and their basic purposes.

## DATA AND METHODS

### Tourist travels

The issues of tourism and tourist trips are reflected in numerous scientific studies. The basic nomenclature in the scope of tourism was developed and presented by the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO). The majority of countries in the world (including the UNWTO members) apply this nomenclature in the different aspects of the modern social and economic life in relation to tourism. It concerns the methodology of the processing and collection of statistical data in the area of tourist movement. The UNWTO nomenclature is also generally accepted by many scholars who deal with tourist issues. Given the above, tourism comprises the activities of persons travelling to and staying in places outside their usual environment for not more than one consecutive year for leisure, business and other purposes. Tourism refers to all activities of visitors, including both "tourists (over-night visitors)" and "same-day visitors" (*Recommendations...*, 1994). Tourism can also be defined as: "(...) a social phenomenon which involves the movement of people to various destinations and their (temporary) stay there" (Sharpley, 2002); "(...) a commercial phenomenon of industrial society which involves a person, either individually or in a group, travelling from place to place (the physical component of tourism), and/or journeying from one psychological state to another" (Hall, 1998) or "(...) encompassing all travel with the exception of commuting" (Gunn, 1994).

It is accepted that every tourist activity can be classified as one of the three forms of tourism: (a) domestic tourism, involving residents of the given country travelling only within this country; (b) inbound tourism, involving non-residents travelling in the given country; (c) outbound tourism, involving residents traveling in another country (*Recommendations...*, 1994). The qualification of basic objectives accepted within the framework of tourist trips is also of an essential significance. It is accepted that the most important

ones include the following: leisure, health, educational/study, business tourism, visiting friends or relatives (VFR), religion and sport (*A Practical Guide...*, 2007). Pike (2008) points out that apart from typical holiday trips, a number of other motivations and purposes of undertaking tourist activity can be distinguished. Among others, this author included for example business travel, including attendance at conferences or exhibitions or trade fairs, attendance or participation in sporting events, the arts and entertainment, visiting friends or relatives, sex and romance, gambling, educational field trips, adventure sports, hunting and fishing, spiritual events and pilgrimages and day excursions.

### Situation of LGBT in Poland

An essential question from the perspective of an analysis of the LGBT community (also with regard to the tourist activity) is an attempt to assess the volume of this segment. It is estimated that people with non-heterosexual orientation constitute 2-6% of the population. According to K. Podemski, a sociologist from Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, the percentage of homosexuals in Poland amounts to ca. 3%. The members of the Economic Society for Gays and Lesbians (ESGL) claim that there are ca. 2.3 million of gays and lesbians in Poland, i.e. 6.1%. Other sources show that this is ca. 5% of the society, i.e. ca. 2 million of people, out of which men constitute the majority. Taking into consideration the estimates by Hughes (2006) and ESGL (Poznań..., 2011) and Makuchowska and Pawłęga (2012), it can be accepted that the percentage of people with a non-heterosexual orientation in Poland is similar to the world average.

As mentioned above, over the past few years, an increase has been observed in the scientists interest in LGBT related issues in the countries of Middle and East Europe. It is quite the same in the case of the Polish LGBT community. Important studies include the following papers: Tornquist-Plewa and Malmgren (2007), Gruszczynska (2009), Graff (2010), O'Dwyer (2010, 2012), Binnie (2013). Furthermore, selected analyses and information concerning LGBT are available, which are developed by various non-government organizations, whose main objectives include the protection of LGBT rights and fight against homophobia. However, there are still no complete and systematic studies in Poland on the subject of the purchasing power of those consumers who represent sexual minorities. The first more essential data appeared in the year 2007 in a report compiled by the Economic Society for Gays and Lesbians: "Let them see us: gays and lesbians in marketing research". The people who use Internet portals for sexual minorities on regular basis were the respondents in the research. The main conclusions from the report include the following: average incomes in this group were by 40% higher than the society in general, 78% of the LGBT Internet users studied or possessed a university degree, 84% resided in the towns with over 100 thousand of residents (39% of the whole society), 51% of professionally active LGBT took up managerial positions (*Global Report...*, 2010).

The LGBT Polish segment is facing many problems. In the common opinion, homophobia and lack of tolerance towards the psychosexual otherness is evident in the country (Kulpa, 2014; ECRI Report..., 2015). Obviously enough, certain solutions aimed at a limitation of the phenomenon were introduced on the highest levels of the government administration. Certain issues of the equal treatment of LGBT result from specific le-

gal regulations and institutional solutions (among others, appropriate provisions contained in the Labour Code, the appointment of the Government's Plenipotentiary for Equal Treatment in the year 2008, the so-called Anti-discriminatory Act from the year 2011). In spite of these solutions (which are certainly favourable to LGBT), clear signs of homophobia or just inappropriate care in relation to LGBT can still be seen in the country (among others, in the year 2011, the Polish Parliament accepted an amendment to the act on supporting the family and the foster custody system that bans homosexual people the function of foster family and running family foster homes) (Śmiszek and Szczepłocki, 2012). To this day, no act on partnerships has been passed (in spite of numerous attempts). The problem of intolerance on the part of the Polish society towards LGBT is clearly visible. This is confirmed by the results of the research carried out by Abramowicz (2012) in the year 2011 on a sample of 11,144 people. It results from these studies that as many as 12% of the respondents were the victims of physical abuse and 44% of mental abuse, 6% experienced worse treatment at work in connection with their sexual orientation. A similar situation is evident in many countries of the Middle and East Europe. For example, Takács, Mocsonaki and Tóth (2008) show that most of the Hungarian gays and lesbians feel discriminated against in different areas of life, especially by the Hungarian media, the legal system in general and by political organizations.

Similar problems are observed with respect to the tourist attractiveness of Poland to LGBT visitors. Poland is not recognized to be an attractive destination for LGBT tourist trips. This confirms the results of the research carried out on a sample of 138 countries, which were analyzed with respect to 14 positive and negative categories (i.e. anti-discrimination legislation, marriage/partnership, adoption allowed, LGBT-marketing, equal age of consent, religious influence, HIV-travel restrictions, anti-gay laws, homosexuality illegal, pride banned, locals hostile, prosecution, murders and death sentences). Poland, with regard to LGBT friendliness ranked only on 90th position (ex aequo with 15 other states). It is worth emphasizing that out of European countries only Belarus (118), Vatican (127) and Russia (134) ranked lower. Post-communist countries generally were found on quite distant positions: 21. (ex aequo Czech Republic, Estonia, Slovenia), 40. (ex aequo Bulgaria, Croatia, Hungary), 49. (ex aequo Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Slovakia), 60. (ex aequo Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Moldova, Montenegro), 76. (ex aequo Armenia, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, Macedonia, Ukraine) (*Gay Travel...*, 2014).

No research in the scope of the LGBT tourist activity was carried out in Poland, and partial and occasional interest in this issue was visible only in the subject matter of diploma dissertations by students in few Polish universities. It can be accepted that the social and cultural, as well as religious determinants of the Polish society are the cause of this state of affairs. It is to be assumed that this study is the first of this type which concerns the problem of the Polish LGBT tourist activity. The problem is that an essential significance of tourism can be assumed a priori in the hierarchy of the needs of the LGBT community. One of the few studies on the Polish market which were carried out in the year 2008 on a sample of 409 people from the LGBT community in four Polish agglomerations (Warsaw, Wrocław, Kraków and Tri-City Area: Gdańsk, Gdynia, Sopot) demonstrated that the most essential values and spheres of their lives include the following: friends (95% of responses), love (95%), health (94%), sex (94%), money (89%), attractive appearance (88%), work (87%), entertainment and play (85%),

family (84%), professional career (73%), helping others (67%). Politics (22%), religion (19%), national tradition (19%) were the least frequently indicated (*Sytuacja mniejszości...*, 2008). In the research, tourism was not explicitly indicated. Nevertheless, it can be assumed that “entertainment and play” corresponds to it in part.

## Methodology

In the exploration of the phenomenon under examination, the method of induction was applied, and further the method of CAWI (Computer-Assisted Web Interviewing): based on a computer aided data collection technique (interview). An assumption was accepted that the LGBT environment possesses a significant share in the penetration of the internet (Benotsch et al., 2011). On the basis of the author’s own research and a review of literature in the area of research issues, an attempt was made to formulate general conclusions concerning (expected) behaviours and tourist preferences of the LGBT environment in Poland. In general, the behaviors of this type are realized in leisure time.

By choosing the CAWI method, it was the authors’ intention to maintain the intimate space of the environment examined. Due to the fact that non-heterosexual people constitute a research group that is hard to access, the features of the post-modern society and globalization were taken into consideration; where the Internet is gaining significance in daily life, and at the same time it is becoming a tool of modern interdisciplinary research (Kincaid, 2003; Zajac and Batorski, 2009). Apart from that, more comfortable conditions, i.e. time that is convenient to the respondent, are favourable to the participation in the research. Additionally, the capital intensity of the realization of this type of research does not pose greater limitations. The CAWI method is not an ideal research method. In Poland, 33.1% of households still do not have an Internet access (Batorski, 2013). However, an assumption was accepted that the LGBT environment possesses a significant share in the penetration of the Internet. An electronic questionnaire was constructed and an Internet address was assigned to it, which in the form of an invitation to the participation in the research was made available on special dedicated Internet forums, community and dating portals as well as on the official websites of selected associations and organizations that act for the LGBT environment.

442 people participated in an anonymous online research. They were the representatives of 4 LGBT environments, i.e. gays, lesbians, bisexuals and transsexuals (Table 1). It is worth emphasizing that it is the first research of this type in Poland that covers all the representatives of LGBT communities. The research group is not a representative sample; in spite of the shortage of reliable LGBT socio-demographical data, an effort was taken to carry out the research of this kind bearing in mind its limitations but also the awareness that the initiative begun may be continued in the form of further research in this area owing to the emerging studies that are increasing in numbers concerning the social and cultural issues of the “gender” sexual identity. This research is not of a decisive nature, while it is to provide some explanations.

The research was carried out over a period of three months (January to March 2014), and was completed the moment the winter tourist season finished. The Internet questionnaire form included questions concerning participation in tourism over the last year.

**Table 1.** Number of the subjects studied (n=442) within given category of socio-demographic variables

Variables		n	%
Sex	Male	227	51.4
	Female	215	48.6
Age	18-19	100	22.6
	20-29	223	50.5
	30-39	84	19.0
	40-49	26	5.9
	50+	9	2.0
Place of residence	Village	28	6.3
	Town up to 20 thousand residents	39	8.8
	Town from 21 thousand to 100 thousand residents	81	18.3
	Town from 101 thousand to 500 thousand residents	97	21.9
	Town above 500 thousand residents	197	44.6
Education	Primary/vocational	56	12.7
	Secondary	190	43.0
	Higher	196	44.3
Civil and legal status	Person living alone	242	54.8
	Person possesses partner of the same sex, they live together	91	20.6
	Person possesses partner of the same sex, they live separately	98	22.2
	Heterosexual relationship	11	2.5
Social and professional group	Pupil/student	236	53.4
	Person runs their own business	30	6.8
	Permanent professional work	168	38.0
	Casual work	44	10.0
	Senior citizen/pensioner	4	0.9
	Unemployed person	16	3.6
Sexual orientation	Homosexual	335	75.8
	Bisexual	103	23.3
	Transsexual person	4	.0
Income	Up to PLN 1500*	146	33.0
	PLN 1501-2500	97	21.9
	PLN 2501-3500	60	13.6
	PLN 3501-4500	35	7.9
	Over PLN 4500	49	11.1
	No incomes	55	12.4

Note: \* 1000 PLN » 238 EUR (dated 21 August 2015)

Source: own study based on research n=442

## RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

It was noted that over half (55%) of those polled undertook tourist activity at home more than once. This on average constitutes 5.6 trips over the last year. National tourist destinations are presented in Figure 1. As a rule, these are municipal agglomerations (Warsaw, Cracow, Gdańsk, Gdynia, Sopot, Poznań, Wrocław) and/or fashionable health tourist resorts that are chosen by all Polish people and foreign tourists (Zakopane, Kołobrzeg, Giżycko). As a rule, long trips (5 days and more) constituted 72.8%. The remaining fraction participated in short trips, out of which every fourth respondent participated in the so-called weekend tourism (2-4 day trips).

On average, the examined people travelled 2.8-times to European countries in the period analyzed. At the same time, every second person examined was on a tourist trip to European countries. As a rule, long trips (5 days and more) constituted 72.8%. The remaining fraction participated in short trips, out of which every fourth respondent participated in the so-called weekend tourism (2-4 day trips). On average, the examined people traveled 2.8-times to European countries in the period analyzed.

14.7% of those polled went outside Europe in the analyzed period. Short trips constituted a rarity (8.3%) although if they were undertaken, they usually lasted 2-4 days. The remaining respondents (91.7%) participated in long trips (5 days and more). Among this

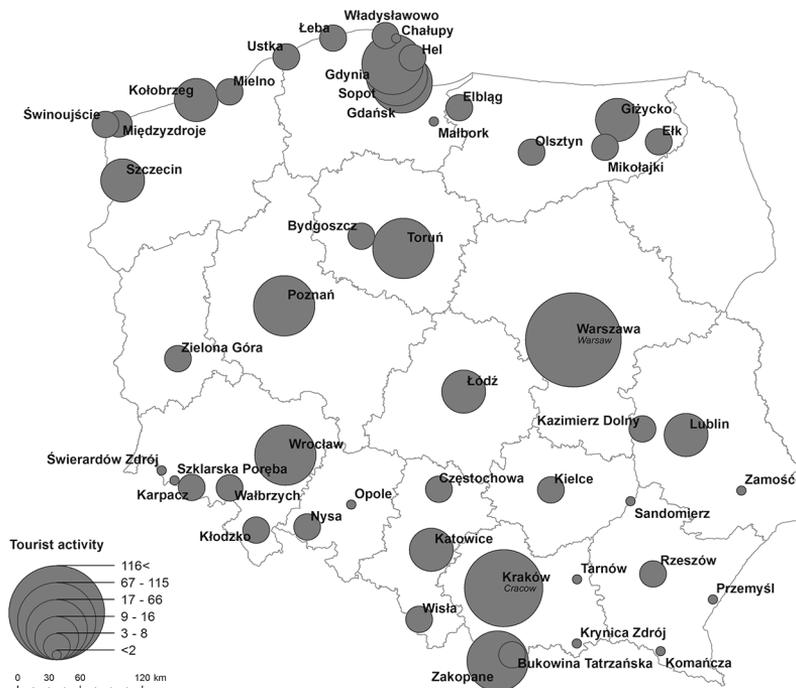
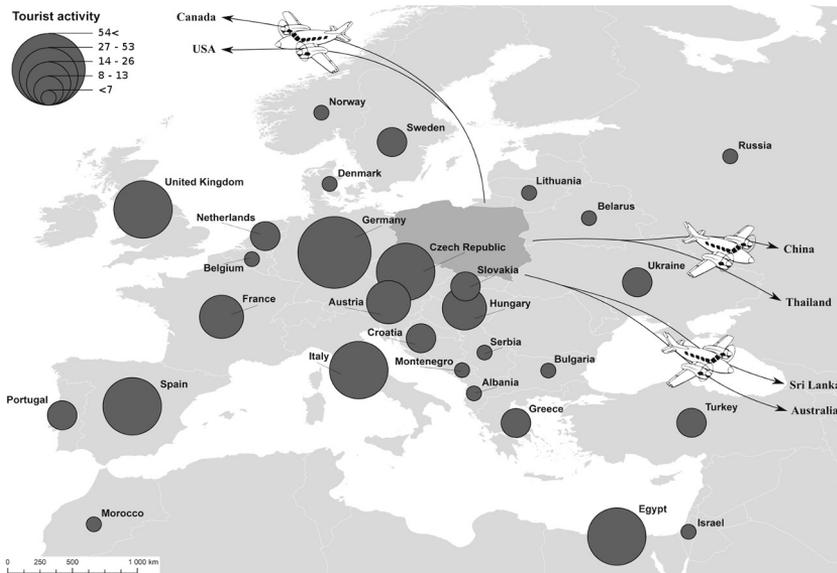


Figure 1. National space of the tourist activity of respondents

Source: own study based on research n=442

group of respondents, it was observed that, on the average, they left 1.3 times for extra-European countries over the past year.

European and extra-European destinations of the tourist trips that the examined people went on are presented in Figure 2. It can be seen that these are not only the states bordering Poland (among others Germany and the Czech Republic) but also Great Britain, Italy, Spain or Egypt. Basing on the research, it was established that most frequently these were the states capitals, the places connected with the settlement of relatives and/or friends as well as popular holiday health resorts (Costa Brava, Sharm El Sheikh). Few respondents participated in inter-continental trips (to the United States of America, Canada, China, Thailand, Sri Lanka, and Australia).



**Figure 2.** European and extra-European space of the tourist activity of respondents

*Source: own study based on research n=442.*

In the light of the author’s own research, it is evident that the respondents occasionally use hotel services provided in hostels (2.0%). More frequently, they rent a flat/house or an apartment (5.9%). Their relatives and/or friends’ flat (53.4%) and the hotel (49.8%) are the preferred places of accommodation. Furthermore, they choose other hotel facilities, such as: B&B/Inn, agri-tourism farm, hostel/shelter youth, or campsite/campground (Table 2).

The subjects in the poll, in order to realize the tourist trip, used various means of transport (Table 2). There is a close connection between the distance of the respondent’s destination and the place of their permanent residence. However, the airplane did not constitute any significant competition in relation to the most frequently selected means of transport, which was one’s own car. The choice of the appropriate type of the means of transport is the consequence of the way in which the trip was organized. Almost 87% of the people examined organized their trip on their own, hence no wonder that they

**Table 2.** Selected elements of the organization of the respondents' tourist trip

Element	n	%	
Type of hotel facility*	hotel	220	49.8 <sup>a</sup>
	B&B/Inn	101	22.9
	campsite/campground	40	9.0
	agri-tourism farm	42	9.5
	hostel/shelter youth	42	9.5
	relatives and/or friend's apartment	236	53.4 <sup>b</sup>
	hostel	9	2.0
	rented flat/house/apartment	26	5.9
Type of means of transport*	air transport	140	31.7
	rail	167	37.8 <sup>c</sup>
	coach/bus	188	42.5
	(own) car	232	52.5
Way the trip is organized	On one's own	383	86.7
	Organized by travel agency	59	13.3

Notes: \* respondents could select more variants of answers than one, hence points do not sum up to 100.0; <sup>a</sup> – men vs. women ( $\chi^2=10.48$ ;  $df=1$ ;  $p<.005$ ); <sup>b</sup> – women vs. men ( $\chi^2=23.11$ ;  $df=1$ ;  $p<.000$ ); <sup>c</sup> – men vs. women ( $\chi^2=4.86$ ;  $df=1$ ;  $p<.05$ )

Source: own study based on research  $n=442$

travelled by bus, coach or rail. This manner of planning the trip translates into the level of tourist expenditures, which proves that the environment analyzed, although with a significant rate of tourist activity, presents fairly individual and at the same time rational (economical) tourist behaviours.

Acquaintances and/or friends (35.5%) frequently accompanied the examined subjects on their tourist trips. 27.4% of the respondents travelled with a partner, and 15.6% spent this time with family members. Every fifth person polled travelled on their own.

The analyses of the tourist behaviors of the environment examined included the purposes of their trips. As presented in Figure 3, the respondents generally travel for the purpose of leisure & recreation, visiting relatives and/or friends and sightseeing (78.3%, 51.8%, and 46.4% respectively). The low percentage of those polled, especially women that travel for health purposes (1.8%).

The information presented above shows some characteristics associated with tourist activity of Polish LGBT community. First of all, it suggests the high popularity of domestic travel. Quite important are also foreign travel destinations, but mainly those to European countries. The above data also show a clear dominance of specific accommodation facilities that benefit the respondents (i.e. mainly hotel and stay with relatives and friends). Similar conclusions can be drawn on the basis of analysis of means of transport and the organisation of trips. The travel purposes of the examined group also point to the dominance of a few specific themes, mainly: leisure & recreation and visiting relatives and/or friends (over 50%).

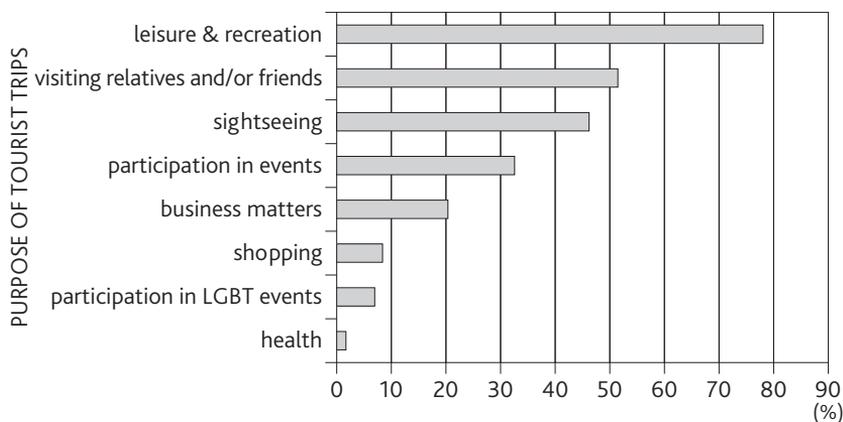


Figure 3. Purposes of respondents tourist trips

Source: own study based on research n=442

### The group examined and the Polish society

Interesting conclusions follow from a comparison of trip destinations. They are quite similar especially in the scope of national tourism. Both LGBT and the whole of society opt for the most popular and attractive regions in Poland<sup>1</sup>. In the case of LGBT, these are: Mazowieckie (with the capital city of Warsaw), Małopolskie (with Krakow and attractive mountain resorts, e.g. Zakopane), Dolnośląskie (including Wrocław and mountain resorts: Karpacz, Szklarska Poręba) and seaside regions: Zachodniopomorskie, resorts: Kołobrzeg, Mielno, Świnoujście) and Pomorskie (Triple City: Gdansk, Gdynia, Sopot and traditional resorts: Łeba, Ustka, Władysławowo, Hel). In the case of the whole of the Polish society, the situation is similar: for the total number of national tourist trips (42.45 million in the year 2013) these five regions generated a total of 24.6 million of trips, i.e. 57.9% of all national trips (*Podróże Polaków...*, 2014). Thereby, it can be found that the destinations of national trips are similar in the case of LGBT and the Polish society: the most attractive and popular regions (seaside, mountain and big cities) dominate. The results of the research conducted by the Polish Economic Society for Gays and Lesbians with Polish LGBT Internet users are quite different. They demonstrate that Krakow (14%) is the most popular tourist town in Poland, and it is exceeded only by trips to the mountains (16%) and by the Baltic Sea (23%) (Jędrzyński, 2008).

Interesting conclusions can be drawn in the case of a comparative analysis of the foreign destinations of tourist trips. Both in the case of LGBT and the whole Polish society, European destinations dominate. In the case of the other group, almost 90% of trips took place on the territory of Europe (*Podróże Polaków...*, 2014). It is interesting to note that in the case of trips realized by the whole Polish society, countries that border Po-

<sup>1</sup> 16 regions, the so-called provinces are distinguished in accordance with the administrative division as of the year 1999.

land are of an essential significance: they generated an average of 30% trips (*Podróże Polaków...*, 2014). Similarly as in the case of LGBT, several West European countries play an important role, i.e. Spain, France, Italy and Great Britain: here, the participation in the case of the Polish society was 29% (*Podróże Polaków...*, 2014). Other countries, too, particularly those situated in the Mediterranean Basin, e.g. Egypt, Turkey and Greece are characteristic and popular destinations for both groups. The results provided by the Polish Economic Society for Gays and Lesbians are similar. They demonstrate that the most popular foreign trip destinations for gays and lesbians are other Middle European states (18%), Germany (14%) and Spain (12%) (Jędrysiak, 2008).

### The group examined and other LGBT environments

The available sources indicate the most popular destinations of the tourist trips of the LGBT community. Research carried out in Canada demonstrated that the friendliest destinations for the LGBT community in the world are: the Netherlands (31% of answers), Canada (20%) and Great Britain (8%) (Roth, 2010). In the case of the sexual tourism of gays, the most popular destinations include the Greek Lesbos Island, Bangkok and Pattaya (Thailand), Tel Aviv (Israel), San Francisco (the United States of America), Sydney (Australia) and a number of European cities (*Sextourism*, 2010). Other sources inform that Amsterdam, Barcelona, Paris, Sydney, San Francisco, London, New Zealand, Cape Town, New York, Bahamas, Costa Rica, Canada, Thailand, Mexico, the Hawaii Islands and Brazil are the most important tourist destinations in the world for gays (Tebje, 2004). In the case of the sexual tourism of lesbians, the most popular destinations include the Greek island of Lesbos, Tel Aviv (Israel) San Francisco, Philadelphia, Dallas, Fort Lauderdale (the United States of America) and Sydney (Australia) (*Sextourism*, 2010). As previously mentioned, in the case of Polish LGBT community, these directions differ slightly. Above all, in foreign tourism, European destinations dominate mainly due to their vicinity but also due to the diversification of tourist product both in the respect of price, quality and assortment. It is worth emphasizing that both in the case of the Polish LGBT environment and LGBT environments from other countries, the groups analyzed very often go on trips to (big) cities. Urban tourism is of a huge significance to all LGBT environments regardless of the country of their origin (Brown, 2013; Prat Forga, 2014).

## CONCLUSIONS

The obtained results of authors' own study may raise some disbelief. Despite the fact which was presented earlier that Polish society quite often manifested homophobic behaviours towards LGBT community, it is holiday destinations in Poland which are the most common destinations of tourist trips in this segment. This would suggest that Polish LGBT community undertaking tourist activity, less frequently faces undesirable behaviours towards them. Away from permanent place of residence – choosing the most popular, Polish tourist regions, including large urban agglomerations – they feel quite

comfortable and at ease. They use inexpensive accommodation services (relatives and/or a friend's apartment or hotel) or low-budget transport services (car or coach/bus). Consequently, it is not necessary to create special tourist offers for the LGBT segment. However, it is worth noting that the places of their recreation and entertainment should be friendly and approving of the needs and behaviours of the presented social group.

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