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# Proud to Be Pride: A Content Analysis of City Websites

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**Abstract:** In today's society cities on a global scale are competing for resources and publicity. According to Richard Florida's creative capital theory, highly educated, creative people are the driving force behind regional economic growth. Creativity has become a main keyword in urban marketing around the world. What the "creative class" is looking for in a place is openness to diversity of all kinds. Hence cities are trying to attract the creative class by communicating this trait. How is diversity in general and gay friendliness more specifically communicated through websites promoting cities? That is the overriding question posed in this article. The article examines the official websites of three of the five largest cities of each continent. Inspired by the work of Florida the studied websites are seen as examples of how gayness works as a form of cultural capital. The results indicate a variation in how gay friendliness is presented globally, indicating the need for awareness on the part of city marketing officials as to how material is produced and what interests are represented in the final content. The results also suggest that the communication of gayness can be understood as the production of cities as sites of creativity, cosmopolitanism and coolness.

**Keywords:** Cities, Diversity, Websites

## Introduction

In the last few decades, economic globalization with its extensive flow of people, capital, technology, services, and goods, has generated increased competition between different places (Florian 2002).

In a competitive global market city branding is growing in importance for cities aspiring to get ahead in the competition for capital, investment, and people. As a strategic instrument to advertise a city's competitive advantages (Zhang and Zhao 2009), city branding is applied to associate a place with desirable traits in the eyes of relevant target audiences (Kavaratzis and Ashworth 2005). City-branding strategies today often stress ideas and stereotypes of culture and creativity (Vanolo 2008). Mirroring an overall paradigm shift from a technology-driven to a creative paradigm, the cultural identity of a city has come to serve as a currency for competitiveness. As urban managers increasingly focus on establishing cities as brands in a bid to position them on domestic and international markets (Sáez, Perriáñez, and Mediano 2013), the official websites of cities become important tools for brand construction and communication. Despite various advantages of official websites (accessibility of information, provision of relevant information, handling of complaints, low cost, and customer service), research on the role of websites in urban management has been scarce (Sáez et al. 2013).

However, in recent years researchers have highlighted the importance of taking Internet into consideration both in destination branding in general and more specifically in nation branding and city branding (see for example Buhalis and Law 2008; Doolin, Burgess, and Cooper 2002; R.K. Gertner, Berger, and D. Gertner 2007; Stepchenkova and Morrison 2006). From being a question of just being present on the world wide web, recent studies indicate that a shift is occurring, from a brand manager in control of the brand through (planned) information on the city website to a more interactive situation where stakeholders, through social media, become part of the branding. This shift however may be connected to increased costs due to consultancy etc. (Björner 2013; Christodoulides 2009). Also, the challenges of using social media in destination management organizations have been brought up in studies. For example

Munar (2012) indicates that the organizational culture and the social media culture are not always consistent.

Thus, there might be significant consequences for the city branding work when stakeholders need to be invited into the process of creating a city brand, making the city brand manager, and other city tourist representatives, only some of many participants who can influence the outcome of such processes (Blumrod and Palmer 2013). Not only the process but also the way the brand is communicated on the Internet might be affected. Studies focusing on the content of city websites have shown that municipal websites can even be seen as a communicative genre of its own (Paganoni 2012). Also, Hays, Page, and Buhalis (2013) claim that less-visited destinations seem to be more active when it comes to using social media and find more innovative ways to communicate with (potential) tourists.

Hence, as pointed out by recent research (Christodoulides 2009), in an era of this Web 2.0, there is a need for studies that emphasize not only the content but also the interactive dimensions of city branding and the use of social media (Björner 2013). Christodoulides (2009, 142) even claims that a post-internet branding “is about facilitating conversations around the brand.” Also, the Internet makes it possible to interact with different interest groups and different tourist groups (Palmer 2004) and to include user-generated content (Hays et al. 2013). However, recent studies indicate that social inclusion in branding that would mirror diversity may still be limited (Paganoni 2012; Pearce 2012). Though there are studies dealing with ethnic dimensions in city marketing (Avraham 2004) and discussing stereotyped representations of gender and ethnicity on the websites of municipalities (Paganoni 2012), city image or city branding studies focusing on diversity in general seem to be limited. Marketing research focusing on gay-friendly market communication and its effects on target and non-target market segments has dealt with various aspects and produced varying results. The risk of alienating non-target consumers has been the focus of some studies (Bhat, Leigh, and Warlow 1998; Greenlee 2004; Oakenfull and Greenlee 2005). While negative reactions among non-target consumers have been reported by some researchers (Puntoni, Vanhamme, and Visscher 2011), others have found no adverse reactions (Tuten 2005).

The results of an earlier study on the websites of the capitals of the Nordic countries show that gayness as an example of diversity is used in different ways (Gillberg and Adolfsson 2014). Even though the cities might be seen as culturally similar, the study reveals differences in how the Nordic cities present themselves regarding gayness, both in terms of the character of the language used and in terms of the amount of information posted. Therefore, this study focuses on how this diversity is treated in city branding in an era of global Web 2.0. The aim is to describe and analyze how diversity, here represented by gayness, is used in a city-branding context. The contribution of the study will in part consist of diminishing the knowledge gap recognized by earlier studies on the use of different Internet tools including online branding (social media and websites), as well as of trying to understand the co-creation of city brands among various audiences (Björner 2013; Florek, Insch, and Gnoth 2006), which here is limited to the gay community. In order to fulfill this aim, a content analysis of how the websites of some large cities incorporate gayness was conducted. The study was limited to three of the five largest cities on each continent. The cities do not represent their entire respective continents but are chosen with the aim of achieving a broad geographical spread. Further studies are needed to explore whether differences can be connected to

geographical locations and/or other dimensions such as the online activity level of cities more generally.

## **Earlier Studies and Theoretical Concepts**

The emergence of creativity as a central category in city branding and planning is largely attributable to Florida's creative capital perspective (2005). Having been popularized by Florida (2002; 2003; 2005) and other researchers, the idea of the "creative city" in the early 2000s was incorporated into city planning and urban-marketing policies around the world (Florida 2002; Landry and Bianchini 1995; Zimmerman 2008). According to this theory, creative people—constituting the "creative class"—are the driving force in regional economic growth. Members of the "creative class" base their location decisions on the degree to which places exhibit creativity, tolerance, excitement, innovation, inclusion, and openness to all kinds of diversity. To attract these economic front-runners cities must portray themselves as possessing creative qualities.

Researchers have criticized Florida's model for being normative and building on assumptions that lead to discrimination toward small cities and communities (Lewis and Donald 2010). From a place branding perspective Zenker (2009) suggests that urbanity and diversity as well as open-mindedness are important in attracting the creative class. Drawing on Bell's and Binnie's assertion of gayness as cultural capital that is used to attract members of the creative class (Bell and Binnie 2004) our study focuses on (re)presentations of gay friendliness as a measure of diversity. Using diversity and creativity, rather than the creative class as such, as a central hub we set out to analyze the content of some city branding websites. For its impact on academics and policy makers alike we deem creativity a relevant and useful concept to use. Employing Vanolo's construction of a creative brand (2008, 377) we focus on the general idea of diversity—and on how this idea is communicated through different components: visual and physical elements, slogans and narratives, and events.

Hankinson (2001) distinguishes between two strategies that cities can use to differentiate themselves. The first one focuses on the tangible aspects of the city—design, infrastructure, services and history. The second strategy centers on intangible aspects, such as the city's personality, the values and attitude of the residents, its knowledge level, or the city's links with the rest of the world. Also, many studies deal with website evaluation by looking at usefulness and effectiveness from different perspectives, such as functionality and usability (Ip, Law, and Lee 2012; Lee and Kozar 2012; Lu and Yeung 1998; Wang and Senecal 2007), human-computer interactivity (F. Haldal, Sjøvold, and A.F. Haldal 2004), and visibility (Holliday 2002; Kaaya 2004). Several studies conclude that interactivity is underdeveloped on tourism websites (Fernández-Cavia and Huertas-Roig 2009). The question of interactivity and diversity in a city branding context also calls for a focus on the authorship of texts posted on city websites (Pearce 2012). Researchers have indicated that websites are often anonymously authored (see for example Paganoni 2012; Pearce 2012). Still, in an interactive context several voices might be brought into the process of creating a city brand (Bjørner 2013). A rather static (conservative) and scripted website seems to live alongside a more personalized approach through web links (Pearce 2012). However, Paganoni (2012, 26) suggests that in a city brand context "the discourse of social inclusion is frequently subsumed within that of corporate rhetoric" often generating a rather promotional approach and a somewhat stereotyped visual repertoire that can

leave out existing inequalities, whereby marginalized groups of the city residents are at risk of being unmediated voices. Kavaratzis (2012, 7) emphasizes the need to “rethink place branding towards a more participation-oriented practice” and, in doing so, highlights the participatory orientation in marketing at large. Therefore, in this study the existence of interactivity is included as part of the content analysis.

As Pearce (2012) has pointed out there can be ethical considerations connected to the storylines and characters that various authors choose to use when for example dealing with ethnicity and social exclusion. Consequently, besides authorship, the characters of the stories posted on the websites are also of interest in order to understand diversity, or more specifically gayness, in city branding. According to Munar (2011) it is important to recognize not only narrative in texts but also audio versions of narratives when focusing on destination branding efforts and user-generated material. These audio expressions can be both narrative and musical. However, this study is limited to text material only.

## **A Note on Methods**

The first step in our data collection process consisted of pinpointing our study context—the official city websites of three of the five largest cities on each continent (except for Antarctica). We wanted to achieve a large enough sample to have every continent represented and as our initial search revealed that not all major cities had their own website, we picked our three cities from a sample of the five largest cities on each continent. We decided to limit our study to cities with a population exceeding one million. To be able to identify our study object we first had to arrive at a city definition. Consulting several online resources we soon discovered that multiple concepts of a city were employed, resulting in a variety of cities being labeled the largest ones. Looking further into city measurements we found three main concepts used to define urban areas and populations: city proper, urban agglomeration and metropolitan area (Bairoch 1988; Bloom et al. 2010).

We settled for the concept of “city proper” as this definition seemed a relatively narrow and clear-cut measure well suited to our project’s aims. As stated by Bloom et al. (2010, 2) the concept of city proper “is determined by legal and administrative criteria, and typically comprises only those geographical areas that are part of a legally defined, and often historically-established administrative unit.” Hence, our chosen definition does not include suburbs. Having settled for a city definition the next step consisted of arriving at a way of distinguishing the continents. Continents can be categorized in several different ways, with categorizations ranging in number from three to seven continents. We chose to employ the seven-continent system for our study. Once Antarctica had been excluded, we were then left with the following six continents: Africa, Asia, Australia, Europe, North America and South America. For each continent we derived the five largest cities from a list employing the measure of city proper ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_cities\\_proper\\_by\\_population](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_cities_proper_by_population)). The list we settled for was the first hit appearing when google searching for “largest cities in the world by city proper.” For our purpose we found it useful as it provided an extensive list of 84 cities, thereby covering most of the cities needed for our sample. Due to an insufficient number of residents, Australia was not represented on this list and we instead had to consult a list specific to Australia ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_cities\\_in\\_Australia\\_by\\_population](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_cities_in_Australia_by_population)) to retrieve our Australian sample. When consulting this list we encountered another problem.

Using the city proper measure no cities came close to reaching our condition of having a population exceeding one million. To reach our minimum population condition we instead consulted population statistics using the urban and metropolitan measurements. Both measurements yielded the same results with Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane being named the continent's largest cities.

The following cities were included in our study:

In Africa: Lagos, Cairo, Kinshasa

In Asia: Beijing, Karachi, Shanghai

In Australia: Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane

In Europe: Istanbul, Moscow, London

In North America: Mexico City, New York City, Los Angeles

In South America: Santiago, Sao Paulo, Bogotá

Once we had identified our sample of cities we set out to look at the official tourism websites of the included cities. In line with Holliday's (2002) visibility criteria this was done by conducting a google search for "official tourism website" followed by the respective city name. Whichever website appeared at the top of the result list was assumed to be the "official" city website. In this stage of the process we encountered another classification issue—how to define a city's official tourism website. Should it be defined by the producer/owner/creator/originator of the website, by the impression the website makes on presumptive tourists/visitors, or by something else? In the websites claiming to represent our included cities we found a variety both in terms of hosts and targeted audiences. We decided to let this diversity be reflected in our sample. Hence both websites hosted by local governments and private corporations within the travel industry are represented in our material. Our chosen websites also show a variation with regard to target audience, including sites catering almost exclusively to a tourism audience as well as a few that seem to be catering mainly to residents while also containing elements geared towards temporary visitors.

Some of our included cities proved not to have any official tourism websites. Rather than proceeding further down our list of cities on the concerned continent to find a replacement, we chose to interpret the absence of websites as part of our results.

Our empirical material was downloaded from the included city websites on the sixth and seventh of July 2014. The material was retrieved from the English versions of the respective websites and was saved and processed according to the following: The start page was screen-dumped and, in addition, saved by selecting all content and scrolling down to the bottom of the page. The two methods of saving served the purpose of allowing us to study details while also experiencing the start page the way it is depicted for online visitors. We started our processing of the data by looking for any mentioning of the words "gay" and "diversity" on the start pages. We then proceeded to search the respective websites, by typing in the words "gay" and then "diversity" in the website's search field. Not all websites had a search feature, in which cases we were not able to search for our two keywords. As we were interested in the level of interactivity on the chosen websites, the lack of search fields on some websites was considered an interesting part of our results.

Content analysis was then used to analyze the collected data. Content analysis has increasingly been used by researchers to study themes such as diversity, commercialization, and utilization of technology on the Internet (McMillan 2000). While

the changing content can be problematic when applying content analysis to a digital context, rapid data collection and downloading websites have been suggested as ways of overcoming such difficulties (Kim and Kuljis 2010). Choi, Lehto, and Morrison (2007, 128) say that content analysis is exploratory by nature. According to them, a limitation in such studies can often be the limited languages used in the analysis. This limitation is relevant to our study since we have only analyzed sources in English.

Govers, Go, and Kumar (2007) say a narrative focus in a post-positivist approach can be one possible path in studies of destination image measures. However, a literature review made by Law, Qi, and Buhalis (2010, 306) also shows that a narrative approach is not extensively used in website evaluation studies. In this study we have been inspired by Vanolo's (2008) categories—visual and physical elements, events and slogans and narrations to show in what contexts gayness is expressed.

## Findings

The city websites of Beijing, London, New York City, Los Angeles, Santiago, Sydney, Brisbane, and Melbourne all produce results for “gay” and “diversity” when using their website search tools. Below is a recital of these websites in terms of their “gay” and “diversity” search content.

The Beijing city website produces hits for both “gay” (2) and “diversity” (3). None of the “diversity” hits are applicable to our study as all three of them refer to the word “diver.” The search for “gay” yields two hits—one about HIV infection having risen among gay men, and the other one referring to the professional track and field sprinter Tyson Gay.

A search for “gay” on the London city website yields 112 hits. Featured articles include “Gay and Lesbian London,” “Gay-Friendly Hotels in London,” “Top 10 Gay and Lesbian Clubs in London,” and “Gay and Lesbian Bars in London.” A search for “diversity” produces 236 hits. Among these are posts about a dance group, a food market, a Lebanese restaurant, an art exhibition showcasing contemporary art from Africa and Latin America, and a post about celebrating the ancient Hindu festival Diwali in London.

While the website of New York City produces 261 hits for “diversity,” only 31 are clickable. The clickable posts include an event exploring “queer feminist artists’ responses to dominant notions about the body from the 1970s to present day,” an event about spiders, an article highlighting the first anniversary of the same-sex marriage law, and features on city neighborhoods such as Harlem and Williamsburg. A search for “gay” renders 18,400 hits, only 19 of which are clickable. The features include “gay-friendly restaurants, nightclubs and neighborhoods,” “NYC Gay History,” “The Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender Community Center,” “NYC Pride 2014,” “National Gay and Lesbian Chamber of Commerce NY.”

The city website of Los Angeles yields 69 results for “gay.” The hits include listings such as “Gay Los Angeles: Weho,” “LGBT Nightlife in LA,” “Ten Gay LA Landmarks” and “Gay Los Angeles: Shop ‘til you drop.” The search “diversity” renders 206 results. Among these are posts on performing arts, art and design, and how to get around in Los Angeles without a car.

The Santiago city website yields 83 results for “gay.” Many of these are not available in English. A “series of gay and lesbian film,” “Gay Pride Day,” and “GaliciaGay Spring

Festival” are among the listings available to English speaking readers. A search for “diversity” on the Santiago website yields no results.

The Sydney city website yields 19 results for “gay” and 394 results for “diversity.” Found among the matches for “gay” are posts about “Bingham Cup Sydney 2014—The Gay Rugby World Cup,” a “Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras,” and “Planetdwellers—Gay and Lesbian Tours of Australia.” Sydney’s top match for “diversity” is a “Gundagai Riverfest” inviting visitors to experience Gundagai’s history, heritage, and cultural diversity. The second match markets a Caravan Park where wildlife is highlighted, and the third match is an art gallery showcasing “Australia’s leading contemporary and Aboriginal artists.”

The Brisbane city website yields three results for “gay” and 24 results for “diversity.” The three results for “gay” pertain to nightlife and hotels. The “diversity” hits include features on a Buddhist temple, a temple using traditional Chinese architecture, a performing arts center and a multicultural festival.

The Melbourne city website yields 26 results for “gay” and 121 results for “diversity.” The results for “gay” include the festival “Outrage HIV Justice Film Festival,” a gay social event with live drag shows and dinner, and an all-male choir. “Diversity” listings comprise a world music festival, an exhibition of the history of Aboriginal Victoria, a free annual community cultural festival, and a Japanese restaurant.

None of the three biggest African cities proved to have a city website directed at both residents and visitors. In addition, Bogotá in South America did not have a website. Table 1:1 below shows the results related to the presence of a city website and search tool as well as if the words gay and diversity generate any search results. Also, the use of social media on the city websites is stated in the table.

Table 1.1: Content of City Websites. Source(s): The Authors.

	City website	Results in search tool: “Gay”	Results in search tool: “Diversity”
Africa			
Kinshasa	No	-	-
Cairo	No	-	-
Lagos	No/Yes (a state government page only, geared towards residents)	-	-
Asia			
Beijing	Yes	Yes	Yes
Karachi	Yes (mainly for residents, with a small section geared at visitors)	-	-
Shanghai	Yes	-	-
Australia			
Sydney	Yes	Yes	Yes
Melbourne	Yes	Yes	Yes
Brisbane	Yes	Yes	Yes



Europe			
Istanbul	Yes	-	-
Moscow	Yes	-	-
London	Yes	Yes	Yes
North America			
Mexico City	Yes (travel agent host)	-	-
Ney York City	Yes	Yes	Yes
Los Angeles	Yes	Yes	Yes
South America			
Santiago	Yes	Yes	No
Sao Paulo	Yes (run by travel agent network)	-	-
Bogotá	No	-	-

The presence of search tools and social media tools were used as a measure of the level of interactivity of our chosen city websites. There seemed to be a connection between social media presence and the prevalence of search tools on the studied websites. Apart from Beijing all websites offering a search tool also exhibited social media tools. Among those websites not providing a search tool, the websites of Istanbul, Mexico City, and Sao Paulo did provide social media tools. Moscow, Karachi and Shanghai provided neither search tools nor social media tools. These results are presented in detail below in Table 1:2. The prevalence of search tools and social media tools also seems to relate to the degree to which intangibles are used to present and depict the cities.

*Table 1.2: Interactivity of City Websites. Source(s): The Authors*

	Search tool	Social Media Tools
Africa		
Kinshasa	-	-
Cairo	-	-
Lagos	-	-
Asia		
Beijing	Yes	No
Karachi	No	No
Shanghai	No	No
Australia		
Sydney	Yes	Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, YouTube, Instagram, blog
Melbourne	Yes	Facebook, Twitter
Brisbane	Yes	Facebook, Twitter, Instagram
Europe		

Istanbul	No	Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, Vimeo, Instagram, Tumblr
Moscow	No	No
London	Yes	Facebook, Twitter, blog, posts
North America		
Mexico City	No	Facebook, Twitter
New York City	Yes	Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, Instagram, Tumblr
Los Angeles	Yes	Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, YouTube, Instagram
South America		
Santiago	Yes	Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Skype
Sao Paulo	No	Facebook, Twitter
Bogotá	-	-

The city websites showing a high level of interactivity (measured in terms of search function and social media presence) tend to build their portrayal of their cities on intangibles (Hankinson 2001) to a higher degree than the websites with a lower level of interactivity. City websites resting on tangibles typically focus on historic, religious and cultural sites as well as on what to visit, do, see, eat, and drink in the cities presented. City websites using intangibles in the portrayal of their city tend to focus on the city's personality, unique traits, and prevailing mentality and overall atmosphere.

Diversity narratives seem to be more prevalent in terms of scope and accessibility in the websites that use intangibles to describe and promote their cities. The websites where the gay and diversity themes are more prevalent are commonly characterized by a depiction of the city using a mix of intangibles and tangibles while the websites where these themes are absent or scarce generally build their depiction of the city mainly on tangibles (things to do, see, and visit).

Gay listings focus mainly on nightlife, cultural events geared to a LGBT audience (Pride festivals) and venues of particular interest to the LGBT community such as gay-friendly establishments (hotels, restaurants, clubs). Some of the websites feature historical legislative events of importance to the gay movement, and link gay friendliness in their city to history, tradition and a local propensity for progressiveness. Resources such as community centers and chamber of commerce connect the LGBT posts to the local business and civil community. The posts geared at an LGBT audience address the website visitors in the capacity of both tourists, and members of the local civil and business community.

The depiction of "diversity" on our included city websites spans a range of themes including cultural and ethnic diversity, heritage, nature and wildlife, and art and culture. Gayness is also included among the diversity themes with many posts appearing among both the "gay" and the "diversity" search results.

## Discussion

According to Florida (2005) and other researchers creativity may be an important dimension of city management as well as city branding of today (Sáez et al. 2013). In this case we have limited our discussion to gayness as a possible display of creativity.

Our results indicate that diversity and gayness, as topics on city websites, are used in different ways. The cities included can be seen as culturally similar or different, representing different parts of the world. The results demonstrate a variation in the display of gay themes and whether the words gay and diversity are part of interactive features on the web, in our case if the words generate search results in a search engine on the city website.

The content analysis of the largest cities of each continent shows that the cities present and handle gayness somewhat differently. Following Vanolo's (2008) categorization of creativity brands these differences can be related to visual and physical elements, events and slogans and narrations. The depiction of gay as part of an inherent global, cosmopolitan character is one shared by several of the studied city websites. The narration is often related to city nightlife and issues of interest to tourists such as hotels and restaurants. Events such as festivals are mentioned as well as an institutionalized gay nightlife. In some cities the presence of gayness is rather cosmopolitan in character, presenting festivals or gay community activities as part of the recurrent scene of social life in the cities. These cities are in our case often placed in English-speaking countries and the national language as such is therefore cosmopolitan in character. The inclusion of gay individuals as part of city life can also be seen as a presentation of the city as a cool place, as related to Florida's (2014) concept of tolerance. As such, the city indicates openness to various groups of people, giving room for creativity in the city.

Differences in the presence and content of city websites in some part of the world can be seen as an indicator of a general lack of equity in the world as well as a brand democracy (Anholt 2006). Poorer access to technology and the Internet may limit the opportunities for both officials and citizens to communicate to a wider audience. Perhaps the absence of city websites is an indication of this. In other words, the limited presence and use of technology can be an indication of larger trends related to opportunities in terms of taking part of a global conversation and democratic influence in the world. The limited use of social media on city websites can also be interpreted as a reflection of limited opportunities to be part of the creation of narratives about city life, something that has consequences for both tourists and citizens as narrators and presenters of the city in texts, or visual and audio presentations, which can all be part of destination branding and images (Munar 2011). As researchers have discussed, social media presence can be seen as important in a post-internet era (Björner 2013; Christodoulides 2009) as it provides the opportunity to communicate with many different audiences for various goals. The results of this study indicate that, on a global mega city scene, social media use is still limited. Also, gay as a representation of diversity in a city context is not put on the front page, however, to what extent this is a consequence of stereotypes and a conservative city identity or the present use of technology and interactivity on city websites globally is not possible to say based on this study. Perhaps, even for the largest cities of the world, there are difficulties in implementing social media as such, due to for example organizational culture (Munar 2012).

It is beyond the scope of this study to explore the connection between the content of the websites and city branding as practice. We can discuss variations in the content rather than the practices behind for example who is involved in producing texts and what groups of professionals and citizens are excluded from the branding process. However, this exploratory study of city websites indicates that gayness, as part of city branding, seems limited in a global perspective. Several of the cities do not use official city websites at all as a branding tool and among those that have a city website the

communication with a gay community is rather limited as the theme has no central position on the website and in many cases is not possible to search for using a website search tool. In the absence of search tools audiences interested in for instance gay-related content can experience that they are a non-target group for the city's ambitions to communicate with potential visitors or residents. Further studies may go beyond the content of the city websites and study cultural differences among large cities when it comes to branding practices and what professionals and citizen groups that are involved, or excluded, from those city processes. For example as indicated by Gillberg and Adolffsson (2014) gay individuals sometimes play an active part in the narration.

Some practical implications can be identified based on the results of the study. First, being part of a global community of large cities where city websites and branding are part of a global communication, it is perhaps surprising that not all cities have an official website. It can be due to technological and democratic differences in the world or perhaps cultural differences when it comes to the status and use of websites in general (Anholt 2006). Nevertheless, a city website is a possible way to communicate not only with potential visitors or investors, but also with tourists and citizens. A lack of a search tool limits the possibility for the reader to find information that is not presented on the website's start page and thereby the possibility for the reader to identify as part of many different audiences and communities of the city. Thereby, the visitor of the website becomes a rather standardized entity without a voice or interest of his/her own. Without search tools or other interactive services on the websites, the cities can miss the opportunity to communicate with target groups, for example, as in our case, those interested in gayness. Previous studies on gayness also indicate that marketing communication seems to have the potential to create different responses from non-target groups as well (Puntoni et al. 2011; Tuten 2005). A well-developed search tool can offer the city a way to reach many target groups.

Second, cities that do not interact beyond a search tool may also lose in recognition in relation to coolness, creativity and cosmopolitanism (Florida 2014). Just as a standardized way of communicating can exclude certain groups or communities from the city website and its information, a non-interactive presence on the Internet can lead to a conservative image and an exclusion from a global conversation, where the digital version of the city might sometimes be as important as the analog version of the city.

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