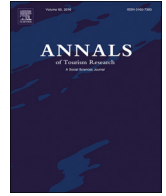


Contents lists available at [ScienceDirect](https://www.sciencedirect.com)

## Annals of Tourism Research

journal homepage: [www.elsevier.com/locate/annals](http://www.elsevier.com/locate/annals)

## Gay neo-tribes: Exploration of travel behaviour and space

Oskaras Vorobjovas-Pinta

Tasmanian School of Business and Economics, University of Tasmania, Private Bag 84, Hobart, TAS 7001, Australia



## ARTICLE INFO

*Associate editor:* Gordon Waitt*Keywords:*Gay travel  
Neo-tribes  
Space  
Travel behaviour  
Ethnography  
Critical studies

## ABSTRACT

This research seeks to understand space as a point of coherence around which neo-tribes form. In doing so, it draws upon neo-tribalism as a way to conceptualise belonging, connectedness, and affinity. Using ethnographic methods including semi-structured interviews and participant observation, this research investigates whether gay travellers experience a sense of connectedness to other gay travellers, certain spaces, and specific activities in relation to their sexual identities. Space becomes a connective thread and a point of coherence around which neo-tribes form. Findings reveal that space acts as a performance site, where the collective neo-tribal identity can be manifested.

## Introduction

Academic literature has established that sexual identity may both limit and empower multiple leisure activities and spaces (see [Browne & Bakshi, 2011](#); [Johnson & Samdahl, 2005](#)). It has been widely observed that there is an integral relationship between one's sexuality and space (see [Binnie & Valentine, 1999](#); [Blichfeldt, Chor, & Milan, 2013](#); [Hughes, 1997](#); [Therkelsen, Blichfeldt, Chor, & Ballegaard, 2013](#); [Waitt & Markwell, 2006](#)), yet the complexity and bi-directionality of this relationship has not been explored within tourism studies. Consequently, there is scope to expand understanding of leisure and travel activities through the integration of insights gained from geographical inquiry into human sexualities (for example, [Caluya, 2008](#); [Gorman-Murray & Nash, 2014](#); [Waitt & Gorman-Murray, 2008](#)). In the tourism studies field, gay space has been understood as validating gay identity through its sense of fellowship and freedom from antagonism and discrimination ([Hughes, 2002](#)). Similar narratives surrounding 'space' have dominated the gay travel and leisure literature for the past three decades ([Blichfeldt et al., 2013](#); [Clift & Forrest, 1999](#); [Hughes, 2002](#)).

Positivist enquiry has come to occupy an increasingly vexed position within the field of tourism scholarship. Over the past decade, positivism has been challenged as the predominant basis of constructing tourism knowledge, with critical and reflexive discourses leading the current debate ([Ateljevic, Harris, Wilson, & Collins, 2005](#); [Ren, Pritchard, & Morgan, 2010](#); [Wilson & Hollinshead, 2015](#)). In light of this epistemological shift, this study has used neo-tribalism to improve understanding of gay travellers as ephemeral and as sentiment- and ritual-oriented.

Existing scholarly enquiry reflects a limited imagining of LGBT people as a diverse and mutable grouping, seeking out myriad spaces for myriad purposes. The validity of a singular LGBT – and largely gay male-derived – traveller profile has not gone unchallenged in the tourism literature: lesbian travellers ([Therkelsen et al., 2013](#)), older gay men ([Hughes & Deutsch, 2010](#)) and rainbow families ([Lucena, Jarvis, & Weeden, 2015](#)). This paper adopts a small target approach; its exploration of a niche and far-flung environment became an ethnography of a space dominated by gay men, at least during the period the fieldwork was conducted. Nonetheless, depth of understanding of the complicated and sometimes contradictory motivations of these gay men challenges simplistic conceptualisations of the LGBT travel market.

The neglect of space's function in governing and delimiting the behaviour of gay travellers bears some responsibility for the

*E-mail address:* [Oskaras.Pinta@utas.edu.au](mailto:Oskaras.Pinta@utas.edu.au).

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annals.2018.05.008>

Received 15 August 2017; Received in revised form 24 May 2018; Accepted 29 May 2018

0160-7383/© 2018 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

homogenisation of the genre within scholarly literature. This paper's contribution is to demonstrate the instrumental role space plays as the point of coherence for a particular group of gay travellers, who may be productively theorised as a neo-tribe. Neo-tribal theory characterises space as an anchoring point towards which members with shared sentiment, rituals and symbols are drawn (Cova & Cova, 2002; Hughson, 1999; Maffesoli, 1996). Inquiry into specific and situated LGBT travel spaces – such as the gay resort where this ethnographic research was conducted – counteracts the homogenisation evident in much research into LGBT travel. The entirely secluded context of the gay resort, and the tribe which formed around it, further presents an opportunity to expand upon neo-tribal theory's explanatory power into space and its borders, divisions, and territorial possession.

Although most tourism research into the subject has been conducted in LGBT-targeted destinations (Vorobjovas-Pinta & Hardy, 2016), it has focused on the motivations and behaviours of travellers, but not the organising and segregating function of space. The unspoken assumption in much of the literature is that LGBT spaces are more inclusive than wider society, and that the experience of this inclusiveness can be generalised across the entire spectrum of LGBT people. The anonymity of these spaces is assumed to enable the specific motivations, mores and desires of travellers who seek them.

What if, instead, LGBT spaces organise around and perform a specific set of values and travel motivations? And if, rather than imagined inclusivity – as opposed to the hegemonic constraints of heterosexual society – gay space serves to concentrate people with increasingly convergent desires and motivations? By neglecting the way in which space organises and enables the habits and mores of the neo-tribe, research into LGBT travellers has generalised what should remain specific, while reducing space to scenery rather than substrate.

This research seeks to interrogate space by foregrounding its specificity and integral role in accommodating travellers with common values, desires and aspirations. It connects a specific, small, and transient community with the strange, secluded, expansive, and exclusive space it occupies.

Through this introduction and the following literature review, the term 'LGBT' (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender) is used predominantly to reflect the breadth of discussion in the literature and to enable a more inclusive definition. In the later discussion of methodology and results, the paper uses 'gay' and 'gay men' to reflect the largely male and homosocial environment in which the research was conducted.

## Literature review

### *Conceptualising neo-tribes*

Neo-tribal theory represents a guide for understanding the social aspects of travel. This paper suggests that the motivations and social behaviours of gay travellers can be conceptualised within this framework, and its analysis capitalises upon the spatial characteristic of neo-tribal theory as a uniting force. Neo-tribalism was first introduced in the late 1980's by the French sociologist Michel Maffesoli. In the mid-1990s, neo-tribal theory was consolidated as an alternative to the theory of subculture. The theory was primarily applied in sociology (see Bennett, 1999; Hughson, 1999) and later in marketing (see Cooper, McLoughlin, & Keating, 2005; Cova & Cova, 2002), and, more recently, in tourism and leisure studies (see Goulding & Shankar, 2011; Hardy & Robards, 2015; Weaver, 2011).

A neo-tribe is defined as a network of heterogeneous individuals – with regard to age, income, sex, sexual orientation, etc. Disparate individuals are united through a 'linking value' emerging from shared passions or emotions. Neo-tribes may be organised around ephemeral identities, which include brands and services (Cova & Cova, 2002; e Silva & dos Santos, 2012). Neo-tribal theory's suggestion of structural fluidity, reflexivity, and foremost of blended individuality has stood in stark juxtaposition with the deterministic identity and the class-based stratification of subcultural theory (Bennett, 1999).

A neo-tribe is characterised by four aspects: shared sentiment, rituals and symbols, fluidity in membership, and space (Vorobjovas-Pinta, 2018). Shared sentiment reflects the common desire to seek out others with shared interests, sensibilities and passions. Such pursuit is theorised as forming and distorting patterns of consumption (Aubert-Gamet & Cova, 1999; Cova & Cova, 2002). Neo-tribal groupings propelled by these shared sentiments hold particular and situated rituals and symbols in common; this affirmative signage emphasises exclusive and intimate belonging. While rituals and symbols establish belonging, the fluidity of tribal membership is reflected through the differing walks of life from which individuals come to form a group for a shared purpose. While neo-tribes are demarcated by rituals and symbols, by the shared sentiments they suggest, and the spaces their memberships inhabit, the tribes themselves remain fluid and mutable aggregations of people. These demarcations are as such located in both temporal and spatial dimensions (Hardy & Robards, 2015).

While fluidity in membership, shared sentiment, and tribal rituals and symbols have been addressed in the literature (Hardy & Robards, 2015; Vorobjovas-Pinta, 2018), space has been addressed obliquely. Malpas (2012) notes space becomes a canvas and conduit for cultural and social values of the tribe, while in turn, its physical delineations and specificity shapes and alters the values of its occupants. Hetherington (1998) describes space as a 'performance site', where the collective neo-tribal identity is openly manifested. Hughson (1999) asserts that neo-tribal emergence relies upon the collective human colonisation of a particular space, and that 'awareness of the social and cultural geography of relevant spaces is [...] crucial to the study of neo-tribes' (p. 14). Aubert-Gamet and Cova (1999) argue that spaces are 'anchoring places' which serve as situated shelters for tribes; and that tribes 'gather and perform [their] rituals in public places, assembly halls, meeting-places, places of worship or commemoration' (Cova & Cova, 2002, p. 605). These statements reflect the authors' interpretations of Maffesoli's seminal work, but do not rest their theoretical expansions upon empirical interrogation of space. This research bridges that gap, and provides an opportunity to expand upon the spatial characteristic of neo-tribalism on the basis of empirical inquiry.

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/7416209>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/7416209>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)