# Sexual and gender diversity in small cities: LGBT experiences in Girona, Spain

Jose Antonio Langarita Adiego<sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup> University of Girona, Girona, Spain.

Faculty of Education and Psychology, Plaça Sant Domènec, 9 17004 Girona,

### josan.langarita@udg.edu

Jose Antonio Langarita Adiego holds a PhD. in Social Anthropology. He is an associated professor at the University of Girona, where he works at Applied Social Sciences Desearch Group. His interest includes the intersection between sexuality, gender and space and space and discriminations by gender expression, gender identity and sexual orientation. To has published his works in various international journals in English, French and Spanisson well as books and book chapters. He has been the principal investigator in several projected under Diversity in Childhood.

## Sexual and gender diversity in small cities: LGBT experiences in Girona, Spain

Big cities have become the preeminent area for studies on sexual and gender diversity. Major Western cities dominate the panorama of stories, discourses and practices regarding sexual and gender diversity in urban studies. However, many LGBT people reside outside of large cities. This paper intends to challenge the hegemony of the 'big city' as the intrinsic center of production of discourse what is meant by 'LGBT' and to analyze how social relationships amo people emerge in the environment of a medium-sized city. To this end, ethnographic research, including interviews and participant observation, was conducted for my research. One of the main conclusions from work is that, despite the fact that big cities play a dominant role in the struction of LGBT lifestyles, aspirations and desires, there are other LGET narratives outside of big cities that deserve to be considered in order to provide a more complex and nuanced understanding of sexual and gen dissity. This research challenges big city is associated with isolation. the assumption that LGBT life outside loneliness and discomfort, as the demonstrate that many LGBT people who live outside the big city are content about their everyday lives.

Keywords: LGBT studies; Groan sexualities; small cities; LGBT experiences; homophobia; Urban studies

### Introduction

Urban studies that have focused on the experiences of LGBT people have done so in the content of big erties (Aldrich 2004; Bell and Binnie 2004; Black et al. 2002; Hubbard and Wilkim on 2015; Kanai 2014; Nash 2013; Sibalis 2004; Higgs 1999; Gorman-Murray and Nash 2017; Nash and Gorman-Murray 2017). Furthermore, in some of these studies, the big city has been presented as *the* location for LGBT people's lives, the 'natural' destination of sexual minorities from rural areas and small cities eager to find a community of reference to connect with (Weston 1995; Baley 1998; Abraham 2009). Some authors go so far as to claim that LGBT people can only achieve a fulfilling life in the 'big city' (Doderer 2011). Likewise, there are those who suggest that the big city is where the modern gay identity is constructed, and it is what shapes the lifestyle of men

who have sex with other men (Bech 1997; Chauncey 1994; Hindle 1994). However, there are at least four problems worth noting in connection with these assumptions. The first is that big city experiences are not uniform for all LGBT people; there are significant differences between the experiences of gay, lesbian, bisexual or trans people which merit further investigation (Nash and Gorman-Murray 2015; Nash 2010; Podmore 2001; Podmore and Chamberland 2015; Doan 2010, 2007; Browne and Lim 2010). The second problem is that differences also exist in the interplay between other forms of oppression (Casey 2016, Callander, Newman and Holt 2015, Irazábal and Huerta 2016 and Rosenbeg 2017). Third, not all big cities share the same social and cultural features. Financy and rather obviously, not all LGBT people live in big cities.

Despite this, the history of sexual diversity in the West, name tives of LGBTQ communities continues to be constructed and associated with hig cities. Large international events, June 28 parades, and the spaces of socialization (bars, clubs, shops, neighborhoods) aimed at LGBT populations, help to maintain LGBT visibility as a predominantly big city phenomenon. This has led to the idea that LGBT people who live outside of metropolitan centers have made a nor decision and have yet to find liberation. Wienke and Hill (2013, 1257) observer that the impression is that rural gay men and lesbians are at a disadvantage, both socially pd psychologically, when compared to their urban counterparts.' Likewise, snalls towns and rural areas are presented as more intolerant about gender and strug diversity than the big cities, where LGBT people appear to find a greater lev of acceptance (Binnie 2004). In this way, the classic dichotomy of urban and rural studies are reproduced, with the rural representing the opposite of the use is a dichotomy that has little to do with reality. It has already been challenged arious academic works (Champion and Hugo 2016; Bryant and Pini 2011 and t is to minimize or overlook the role of small cities. Indeed, Halberstam (2005)goes so far as to use the notion of 'metronormativity' to refer to the privileges associated with metropolitan centers where such normativities are reproduced. Nevertheless, compound words that include normativity remain problematic. Podmore (2016) believes – in the case of lesbians – that the notion of metronormativity leads to a questionable and reductive dualism between the rural and the urban. Meanwhile, Brown (2012, 2008) criticizes Duggan's notion of homonormativity (2002), considering that the analyses regarding sexual and gender diversity are too complex and contradictory for them to be theorized through a concept that pretends to reconcile a whole mass of situations that are overrun by social reality.

In any case, a gradually increasing number of studies are appearing that dispute the hegemony of the big city as a space for LGBT people. This work calls into question the discourses, representations and practices that associate LGBT exclusively with large urban environments (Bell 2000; Browne 2011; Kuhar and Švab 2014; McPhail 2008; Mcglynn 2018; Herring 2010; Rodó de Zárate 2015; Abelson 2016; Gray, Johnson, and Gilley 2016). These studies represent a change in direction from the conventional concepts of sexuality in urban spaces, focusing on scenarios far from the big cities. Furthermore, by incorporating territoriality into these intersectional analyzes, many of them are broadening and enriching the debate on the relevance of space in the chaping of social, cultural and sex-gender relationships (Johnston 2018).

One issue not yet fully explored is how the big city narrative acts as a producer of subjectivities among LGBT people in small cities. In this article, following perspectives, such as those advanced by Browne (2008) and Kazyak (2011), me aim is to explore the impact of the big city on the subjectivities of people who live in small towns or cities. The focus of our study is the city of Girona, in the norm east of Spain, which has a population of 99,013.

We focus on people who live in Giron, igner than those who have left to larger cities. This is not to deny the existence of the so-called 'sexile' of LGBT people to big cities, or to other countries, wherea greater degree of acceptance of sexual and gender diversity may be found (Guzman 1997; Martinez-San Miguel 2011). The migratory processes of LGBT people to big cities have been widely documented and discussed (Langarita Adiego and Selguero Velázquez 2016; La Fountain-Stokes 2004; Annes and Redlin 2012; Carrille and Pontdevila 2014; Chávez 2011; Hibbins 2005; Smith 2012). Neverthelesses will is not for everyone; not all LGBT people leave their towns for the big city. Reducing small-town LGBT life to the phenomenon of sexile helps to keep the experiences of the LGBT people in such towns and rural areas invisible, which is precisely what this article hopes to challenge and overcome.

### Methodology

The results presented in this article are derived from a research project called DIVERCITY. Preventing and combating homo- and transphobia in small and medium cities across Europe. Our qualitative work is based on in-depth interviews (involving 17 LGBT people and 11 stakeholders in the city); two discussion groups (one with five LGBT participants, and the other with eight stakeholders) and various observation

sessions in the city and in a bar, which was a LGBT meeting place but is now closed, as well as in political organizations of LGBT collectives and associations. The observation sessions consisted of regular visits to the only openly LGBT-friendly bar in the city. During these visits, contact was made with some of the informants who were later interviewed. Contacts were also made through participation in various public events of protest and awareness-raising carried out by LGBT organizations in the city and attendance, as a guest member, of the meetings of Girona City Council's LGBT committee, which brings together LGBT organizations and other social agents of the city to address issues of interest to LGBT people at the local level. In addition, gay or notated online social networks (such as Grindr) were also used in order to initiate contact with potential participants for the research.

The interviews and the discussion groups were both suided using a semistructured script, thus facilitating the organization and monitoring of the information gathered. In looking for LGBT participants, diversification with a were followed in order to find people with a range of different socio-demographic characteristics, sexual orientations and gender identities or expressions. Diversification criteria were also followed in selecting stakeholders from a range of professions and types of services, public administrations or representative organizations. Likewise, the discussion groups themselves were configured to consider the sociodemographic diversity of the participants and their sexualities in the case of the stakeholders, the types of organizations and the positions of those who participated are listed in Tables 1 and 2. Both the interviews and be discussion group conversations were transcribed and coded in order to facilitate organizatios.

Varies diamels were used to recruit participants. With regard to LGBT people, emails or telephone numbers of possible participants were provided by some of the NGOs in the very but also by people we met during participant observation sessions in the city, both public and online, resulting in snowball sampling which brought us into contact with new participants. In the case of stakeholders, access was achieved through the search for specific services run by local and regional administrations and LGBT organizations. This research has followed the ethical research standards for social science and all participants gave their informed consent regarding their involvement. Any references that may identify the individuals involved have been anonymized, when these participants have so requested. The field work was carried out over a period of 14 months between December, 2015 and January, 2017.

### The context

The city of Girona is the capital city of the Province of Girona. The city is home to a large proportion of the province's most important services, such as district hospitals, public administration and the area's public university, which makes it an important hub for the people from the rest of the province when it comes to administrative arrangements, cultural and leisure activities, study or work. The city is known for its strong support for Catalan independence, and its streets are replete with slogans and posters demanding the independence of Catalonia, as well as the release of Catalan political prisoners. Els where in Catalonia, the city of Girona is generally seen as a markedly bourgeois ch that has a high purchasing power. GDP per capita for the year 2016 is, in fact, synificantly higher in the city ( $\in$ 38,200 p.a.) than it is in Catalonia as a whole ( $\in$ 30,100 p.a.), according to the Statistical Institute of Catalonia (IDESCAT). However, the City is home to people from very different social groups, with different economic means. Although the quantitative economic data indicates that the prosperous, Girona has neighborhoods where levels of poverty remain very high and which are far-removed from the picture of bourgeois contentment, tribuled to the city. Furthermore, there is the adjoining town of Salt (pop. 29.83) which while having its own municipal council, has very close economic and social ties who Girona. Even so, the GDP per capita of Salt is considerably lower ( $\notin$  30,000 in 2016), being more in line with the average figure across Catalonia.

Girona has very few LGBT organizations and, as in the rest of Spain, the representative capacity of such organizations and their ability to attract members is in decline. In 2010 Girona City Council created the LGBTI Municipal Council, a consultative by dealing with local LGBTI issues that comprises representatives of local LGBTI organizations, councilors from the political parties represented in the city hall, labor union representatives and representatives of some of the city's institutions, such as the University of Girona, among others.

Official discourse and action concerning sexual diversity is limited in the city, and tends to only involve symbolic celebrations of special days for the LGBT community, such as the International Day Against LGBT-phobia (May 17<sup>th</sup>), LGBT Pride Day (June 28<sup>th</sup>), or World AIDS Day (December 1<sup>st</sup>). The fact that Girona is only 100 kilometers away from Barcelona means there is mutual influence between the cities. Many LGBT people travel to Barcelona for work or study but also at weekends to openly experiment

with their sexual identity or gender expression. However, the one and a half-hour drive, the expense and restricted schedules of public transport – the last train from Barcelona to Girona leaves before 10:00 in the evening – reduces the influence of Barcelona on Girona; and means, for example, that a 'night out' in the big city is not always viable.

Girona is a small city and forms of social control are very significant in the lives of people, since there is little anonymity among the inhabitants of the city. Friends or acquaintances are almost always to be found in public areas. In short, sexual expressions that are not heterosexual or gender identities that are not cisgender, *f* are rarely visible in the city, although they have increased in recent years.

## Construction of sex-gender narratives and practices: Over-representation of the big city?

Urban environments produce a set of narratives that help to e each city's way of life. These narratives, which have a markedly heterosexua. focus in terms of production and control (Bell and Valentine 1995), are configured via c untless cultural, social, economic, demographic and environmental element ts, among others. In recent decades, LGBT narratives have become more visible, especially in big cities. Big cities provide increased opportunities in terms of leisure, socialization, anonymity and sexual partners (Hubbard 2012). However, above all, they tend to centralize the representations, discourses and ret 'LGBT'. In other words, despite the manifold experiences practices of what is considered and lifestyles of LGP orle, the manner in which such narratives are conceptualized and propagated is presented by the idea of the big city. There are numerous narratives ic city as the only option for making life livable for LGBT people. For that postulate the words of Castells (1983, 138), San Franciso is the place 'where exam le. in xuals migrate for a few hours or many years to find themselves and to learn a homos language of freedom, sexuality, solidarity, and life - to 'come out' and to become gay'. Not only is the city turned into a space of socialization, liberation and anonymity, but it also becomes a place of political statements and the creation of LGBT subjectivities and the production of 'what we are'. In short, big cities have become the places that define what is known as LGBT. It is in the big cities where collective demands, the agendas of equality, lifestyles and media spaces promoting visibility are being constructed. That is why so many LGBT people see migration to the big city as an opportunity to participate in what they are meant to be, or should be, in order to achieve happiness or to join the community that, supposedly, they belong to. In the case of Girona, the idea of the big city and what it represents is associated fundamentally with Barcelona, 100 kilometers away, and 38 minutes by train.

Attempts are often made to transpose the big-city conceptions of LGBT life to smaller cities too, by constructing success stories based on the phenomenon of migration. This is the case of Pol, one of our participants who, when talking about an ex-partner who migrated to Barcelona said that 'he went off to live in Barcelona and become totally free'. However, we need to ask whether such liberation can be an immediate, permanent and individual act? When LGBT people get off the train in Barcelona, are the lready liberated? Can liberation be reduced to a distance of 100 kilometers? In reality liberation is a subjective exercise associated with values, expectations and experience, but which, in turn, is mediated by social, cultural, geographical and diachronic contexts. There is, therefore, no unique form of liberation, no definitive state of feng 'liberated', and no unique space to become so. The big cities are not an essential element of sexual liberation for LGBT people. Big cities are still a possible senario for the accumulation of experiences and identity construction, but but can also occur in other spaces. Indeed, Girona itself can become be a space where others an find 'liberation', as is the case with Pau, who considers his arrival in the city from his homeland as helping him to be more open since: 'When I arrived six years xoo, I saw many lesbians, I mean, lesbian couples who were holding hands. That a big surprise for me, and a very pleasant one.' In ous say that Girona exports sexiles, but it is also welcoming terms of productivity, we of LGBT people from o er territories. This statement is not intended to put those who leave and those where we on an equal footing in order to finally defend some kind of LGBT migration, but rather to challenge the idea that LGBT people self-regulation in from small c migrate en-masse to the big city to become part of the dynamics of such because the reality is that there are also LGBT people in small cities and rural places. environments. What happens is that their experiences are not made visible. That is to say, it is false that migration is an inevitable life project for LGBT people. Some people do migrate as a means to find sexual liberation, but many others cannot conceive of spending their lives among the great urban sprawl.

The big city in the West is seen as a dynamic place, while the small city, in contrast, is thought to be static and stuck in the past. However, the reality is that the dynamics of social transformation affect all urban environments, regardless of their size.

Over the years, no society remains the same (Podmore 2016). Changes arise throughout the different phases of our lives, our personal experiences and social relationships, as they do through political initiatives, the demands of LGBT organizations and transformations in laws, among other things. In this sense Laura refers to this change in Girona when she explains that: 'Nowadays, yes, I do sometimes give Rebecca a kiss, or I take hold of her like this [makes a gesture with the hand] and, before, I couldn't do that naturally. I think there has been a lot of progress in Girona and in Barcelona as well.' In fact, Xavier recounts that Girona in the 1980s was a gloomy, provincial city, with no gays or lesbians visible at all: 'The gays and lesbians of Girona either lived a double life or lived utside the city [...]. People used to go to Barcelona at weekends and then return on Monday as if nothing had happened. Things have been evolving; the whole of extalar society has evolved.' Many of the other people interviewed also mentioned these changes, in visibility compared to highlighting the major transformation and significant increase earlier periods.

### Myth and reality of violence outside the bincity

Although LGBT representations, liscours and practices are over-represented by big city ideas, this does not mean that all such practices and representations are simply replicated in all the cities around world; they also involve reintegrating and resignifying local notions of sexuality in socialization processes (Cáceres Feria and Vacuez del Aguila 2014). Personal trajectories, social class Valcuende del Río 2014: taken into account (Manalansan 2015). In terms of sexual and origin must also b diversity, the big cive becomes universal and individual at the same time, without one wher. That is to say, the big city may be the space for LGBT contradicting but the way this representation occurs is different in each city (Muller representatio sitges, for example, with a population of 28,969 is a town in which gay tourism 2016). has a very significant economic and social impact (Institut Català d'Estadística 2019). The town is represented in the collective imagination as being very LGBT-friendly with high numbers of tourists, especially gay, who come to the town in summer in search of spaces of socialization, representation and recognition. In contrast, despite having a significantly higher population than Sitges, Girona is not perceived as particularly LGBTfriendly. This is because the representation of sexual diversity has been constructed in totally different ways in Sitges and Girona. Therefore, when considering the sexual representation of urban geographies, we must reflect not only on the Western dynamics

constructed in big cities, but also the local dynamics that construct the social and cultural character of each territory.

In this sense, there is no doubt that the size and type of the city you live in has a considerable influence on the way relationships and experiences between people are shaped. Nevertheless, what is problematic is the idea that there exists a direct relationship between the size of the town and the degree of hostility towards LGBT people. None of the people interviewed recounted any actual physically violent situations; however, all of them have suffered, at some point in their lives, have experienced some degree of discrimination and distress motivated by the fact that they are LGBT people. report distressing situations in the public space: 'I was saying goodbye to a girl, like, 'Bye. Hope it all goes well" and I gave her two or three little kisses here [she plints to her neck], okay? And a waiter who saw us said -You made me all horny just looking at you'(P2). Other people have avoided talking about their gender identity in family settings in anticipation of negative consequences: 'My family does not how about it. But if they did know, I wouldn't get any support. [...] They say really ad things about trans people. If I tell them I'm one... who knows what' happen. Other participants talked about discrimination in the workplace, such Marc, who described his experience in the company he worked for, where heard constant stream of derogatory comments relating to sexual and gender diversity and 'you couldn't express yourself as you really were. You had to hide; they made jokes and you had to keep it hidden. [...] But you end up getting used to hiding it because, if you don't, what can you do?' Another work-related Pau. He is a social worker and, in his work, he frequently hears problem was described b homophobic and most comments, and he is directly affected by the homophobes but, he at up with it because you are the professional. You could maybe say says, 'you have t the end of the day, you are the one attending to that person'. There are something bu also the se who have experienced discrimination in school environments, such as Pol, who lived through episodes of bullying at school for years. There were even forms of violence dressed up as teaching good manners, such as when Neus, was told by a relative to 'be more feminine' to help her make her sexuality more coherent with her gender. Yet, despite the distress caused by such episodes, none of the participants established a direct relationship with the size of the city. In fact, Diana explains that, in Girona 'I have not had any problems beyond the typical one of people who look at you on the street because they don't know what is going on. But that is just as typical here as it is in Barcelona.' The manner in which violent episodes arise is highly varied, and affected by a range of

circumstances and contexts, but in our study no data was found associating hostility towards LGBT people with the fact they took place in a small city. This leads us to believe that the root of anti-LGBT feeling is not in the size of the city but in the patriarchal structures, the logic of binary gender and the heterosexuality imposed on social relations. Migrating to Barcelona, away from their hometown environments, may mean escaping from some of the violence and hostility which can occur in the proximity of family or local communities, but in no way does it free the individuals from the social structures that support such violence and hostility.

### Livable lives in small cities

The stories of our participants were not restricted to violence botivated by their sexual orientation or how they felt or expressed their gender. They also recounted episodes of solidarity, understanding, mutual recognition, as well as pleasure and wellbeing. Therefore, we should ask ourselves: To what extent loes the context of being in a small city influence these experiences? What are the particularities of LGBT experiences in small cities?

To answer these questions, we pred to refect on at least three elements which, in my view, are essential to understanding the specific case of Girona. We also need to reexamine some of the myths associated with small cities in terms of sexual and gender diversity. The first element is the high degree of public exposure to acquaintances, and the resulting social control anong co-inhabitants. Although it is difficult to measure the exact extent of public e posure among the inhabitants of a city, in reality, people in Girona are quite commonly seen or recognized by someone they know in public spaces. This significant effects how LGBT people express themselves in public, since there is ance regarding gender norms and sexual orientation. The LGBT people constant surv of Gird a know this and thus deploy a set of measures that favor anonymity, or at least contribute to invisibility: not showing affection in public, avoiding certain attitudes, behaviors or practices that may 'betray' their sexual orientation or gender identification, or not going to places in the city that are associated with LGBT people. Nevertheless, this level of control and recognition also provides a greater sense of security for some LGBT people in the city because it also limits the options for aggression in public places. If an attack occurs, it is much easier to identify the perpetrators than it would be in a big city, because there is an increased chance that the victim or a bystander will be able to identify them. And this is not an insignificant factor if we take into account that, according to a

survey by the Fundamental Right Agency (2014), 53% of the most serious hate crimes committed in Europe against LGBT people take place in cafeterias, restaurants, pubs, clubs, public transport, street, squares, car parks or other public spaces. In contrast, the public visibility of LGBT people tends to permeate a large part of their social life, although it is true that coming out is a complex, recurring experience for all LGBT people and 'the closet is structured in such a way that you are never simply either in or out' (Eribon 1999). In small cities like Girona, LGBT people have more difficulties with resignification once their sexual orientation or gender identity is known by their wider social circle, since it can soon become vox populi and affect their professional ca hinder access to jobs, for example. In this sense, Arnau, a top executive in the sity admits that he must 'tread very carefully' at work with the idea of being Ay. Social control regarding sexuality and gender is a lived reality for some of our interviewees in Girona. Foucault (1976) assures us that the only possible history of sexually is one of its control and regulation. In the same vein, Plummer (1984, 228) chims that 'there is no society where sexual experiences proceed untrammeled by social regulations – complete sexual freedom exists exclusively in the libertarian's freedom and the moral reformer's nightmare'. For this reason, thinking of social control as a small-town issue, is little more than another way of negating the complete set of control that operate across society as a whole.

The second of the elements we must analyze concerns access to sexual relationships and interactions. It should be pointed out, however, that the importance given to sexual relationships varies significantly among the participants, depending on whether they are leshian gays, bisexuals or trans, as well as on other aspects, such as age, the person's visibility, and other interests. For example, Maria, a bisexual woman , 'sex is unimportant regarding the person; what's important is the reports that. es, their values, what they feel about me'. In contrast, among gay men, person them. er present. Carles explains that 'Fucking is easy. The complicated thing is having sex is e a drink afterwards.' Along the same lines, Maxi, who has a very active sex life, says he has no problems finding sex whenever he wants it in Girona. Also, Pau declares that 'the biggest community in Girona is the sexual community [...] just go on Grindr [the mobile dating app for men] and you can meet half of Girona. If you want sex, you'll get it right away.' Another participant, Martín, said much the same thing. The difficulty in finding sexual partners in a small city has long been used to explain sexile to a big city, but what many of the participants in this research are saying shows that, in a city like Girona, men who want to have sex with other men can do so without any great difficulty; they see access to sexual relationships as a relatively simple activity. Of course, in both large and small cities, the internet and mobile apps have become the principle tools for finding sexual partners. Therefore, although sex remains an important issue, especially for men who have sex with other men, people who live in small cities have strategies that allow them access to sexual relationships.

The third element we now discuss is the idea of LGBT loneliness associated with small cities, which is found in many of the narratives generally about LGBT life. We must first acknowledge the many obstacles that LGTB people have had to face in trying to make the best of their lives in Girona, and that some have found it too difficult to construct LGBT support networks and, consequently, have gone into sexile in Barcelona. It is, nevertheless, also true that others have organized their social life without their sexual orientation or gender identity creating difficulties. While LGBT blacks of socialization and representation in the big city include LGBT bars and organizations promoting sexual liberation, in cities such as Girona, LGBT people seek other strategies that allow them to live their lives outside the classic LGBT circuits. Many of the people interviewed have found other spaces and groups with whom where heir affinities and pursuits, where they can express themselves freely as **LEBT** people, regardless of whether the group is wholly or partially LGBT, or predominantly beterosexual. In other words, LGBT people also find areas of solidarity in social networks that are not exclusively LGBT orientated. The so-called 'LGBT community' as a place of refuge is not really an option for many of H wever, this does not mean they are condemned to social the inhabitants of the city isolation. Assuming that he natural' space for LGBT socialization is confined to LGBT bars and collectives of en voted in the big city, is a mistake that, once again, makes invisible many over experiences and, to paraphrase Butler, livable lives. As Carles says that doesn't make LGBT social life difficult, but it doesn't promote it, 'Giro a is a either

However, for some of the people interviewed, Girona is still 'a very straight and conservative city' (Nora). Many of them still find difficulties or limitations in expressing their sexual orientation or gender identity in certain areas of their lives, they are also aware that if they lived in a large city, they would have to face other kinds of challenges. That is why LGBT people find a variety of reasons to live in a small city like Girona. There are experiential reasons, described by Sara, for example, when she says Girona 'has produced the most wonderful and the most painful things of her life', showing that, for her, the links with a territory do not depend on its beauty or its material resources, but above all on the relationships that have been established there. There are environmental reasons: 'It is so green and there are no buildings. We live in an area with a small forest next door, it doesn't feel like we are in a city; no cars, no noise at night, it is very quiet. I'm in love with Girona!' (Claudia). There are practical reasons, since there are plenty of public services, restaurants, bars, etc., and it is easy to maintain contacts with daily social networks: 'I can afford myself the luxury of meeting up with my friends almost every day. I go to the bar on my own and I always meet friends' (Arnau). There are reasons related to safety, since some feel that 'there aren't really any problems of discrimination' (Ona). There are geographical reasons, because it means you can live a quiet h e in a small city relatively close to Barcelona. As Neus says 'Girona is not perfect but there are many things I like. I know the city, I can manage here, and I really like he surroundings.' Yet, Pau emphasizes that in Girona 'there is no gay neighborhood with a concentration of LGBT people, like there is in Barcelona or Madrid. We are more spread about here, and I find that logical [...]. In Girona you can't feel part of a community [of LGBT people] because there is no community.' So, the dominant discourse associated with the LGBT community is connected to the imaginary on he og ity, yet has a tenuous connection with other experiences of sexual and get r diversity among people who do not aspire to live in large urban environments.

### Conclusions

The dominant discourse hat associates LGBT communities with large metropolitan centers works to make invisible, disparage and underestimate the experiences of LGBT people who to not five in these social settings. LGBT experiences are highly diverse, they occur in pultiple locations and cannot be reduced to an only large urban center. The hegemony of the big city in academic study and discussion of sexual and gender diversity must be reconsidered to include other contexts where the 'LGBT community' can be found; it must include places where such a community is neither operative nor, indeed, representative of the diversity of experiences, discourses and social practices. Experiences of sexuality and gender are not only shaped by the recurrent questions that permeate sociology, anthropology or feminist and LGBT studies which, depending on the disciplinary or political view, prioritize the typical variables of social class, gender, age, sexual orientation or culture. When analyzing the dimensions of power that shape sexual

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and gender relationships, as Johnston (2018) pointed out, we must also incorporate urban and territorial references as variables that shape the experiences and circumstances of LGBT people. Integrating territorial references implies considering the global and local dynamics of each urban context as it intersects with class, race, gender and sexual orientation. Only then can we carry out a more careful and rigorous analysis of social realities.

Finally, this research allows us to abandon the idea that *sexile* is the inevitable course of action that LGBT people must take if they are to cope with the sexual orientation or gender identity. Although we recognize that many LGBT people and up choosing life in the big city, it is not necessarily the obligatory destination of them all, nor is it something that all LGBT people residing in small cities ral areas desire. There are many factors involved in choosing where to live and altho sexual and gender issues play a fundamental role, they are not the only one involved. Social control permeates the experiences of LGBT people. However, atten pting to devise a scale that measures such social control as greater or lesser tepe ding on the size of the city in question is, besides being tendentious, inclusion ect for this type of research. The subjectivity of each person in their own come plays a key role and this must be factored in, if a rigorous analysis is to be made. Therefore, it is time to put an end to the negative predictions of what awaits LGBT eople who do not reside in large cities. Despite the difficulties, many of them ind sufficient reasons to live in small cities where they find coexistence and also, sometimes, of recognition. their spaces of socialization, of



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Table 1: Socio-demographic letails of the LGBT people who were interviewed and/or participated in the group discussions (\* denotes people interviewed / ‡ denotes discussion group participante)

Name	Category	Gender	Age	Education	Occupation	Origin	Marital	Years in
		identity					situation	Girona
Carles *	~	Men	25	Higher education	Professional	Catalonia	Single	25
Neus *	Lesbian	Women	31	Higher education	Professional	Catalonia	Single	31
Pol *	Gay	Men	32	Secondary	Technician	Catalonia	In partnership	3
Ricardo *	Gay	Men	52	Primary	Technician	Honduras	Single	13
Diana *	Trans	Women	41	Primary	Technician	Catalonia	Single	3
Maxi *	Gay	Men	41	Secondary	Technician	Brazil	Married	6

Nora *	Lesbian	Women	58	Primary	Personal service worker	Catalonia	Married	23
Sara *	Lesbian	Women	35	Higher education	Professional	Spain	Married	2
Marc *	Gay	Men	48	Higher education	Unemployed	Catalonia	Single	48
Lucia *	Trans (partner Carlota)	Women	51	Secondary	Technician	Spain	Married	28
Carlota *	Heterosexual (partner Lucia)	Women		Unknown	Unknown	Catalonia	Married	Uknown
Ona *	Lesbian	Women	26	Higher education	Professional	Catalonia	Sirvle	3
Maria *	Bisexual	Women	23	Secondary	Professional	Cataloria	n partnership	2
Laura *	Bisexual	Women	55	Higher education	Professional	<b>x</b> pain	Married	6
Claudia *	Lesbian (partner P14B)	Women	24	Secondary	Elementry	Ćatalonia	In partnership	5
Carlota *	Bisexual (partner Claudia)	Women	30	Secondary	Elementary occupation	Catalonia	In partnership	5
Arnau *	Gay	Men	R	Higher education	Manager	Catalonia	Single	40
Sofia ‡	Lesbian	Women	40	Secondary school	Technician	Catalonia	Single	20
Martín ‡	Gay	M	30	Primary school	Services worker	Catalonia	Single	30
Pau ‡	Ga	Men		Higher education	Professional	Catalonia	In partnership	6
Mireia ‡	Lesbian	Women	22	Higher education	Unemployed	Catalonia	Single	5
Joana ‡	Queer	Queer	19	Secondary School	Student	Catalonia	Single	2

Table 2: Main details of the stakeholders who were interviewed and/or participated in the group discussions (\* denotes people interviewed / ‡ denotes discussion group participants)

Name Role in service	Service
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Martina *	Police	Autonomous Police
Esteban *	Doctor	Heath Center
Guillermo *	Psychologist	Youth Health Service
Aitana *	Service coordinator & Psychologist	HIV detection and
		guidance
Xavier *	President of local section	Gay NGO
Lucas *	School director	Primary School
Miguel *	Owner	LGBT Business
Marta *	Decision maker	City council
Ernesto *	Social worker	City council
Aniol *	Journalist	Local medi
Manuel *	Prosecutor	Justice Services
Alejandra ‡	Women Section coordinator	Anien
Eudald <b>‡</b>	Regional coordinator of LGBT issues	Ministry of Labor, Social
		Affairs and Family
Anna ‡	Police (Victims Support coordinator)	City Council
Carla ‡	Victim support services	Ministry of Justice
Dolores ‡	Psychologist	Institut Català de les dones
		[Catalan Institute for
		Women]
Carmen ‡	Psychologist	Health network
Nestor ‡	Source secures coordinator	City council
Isabel ‡	Cooremator of Health program	City council
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