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Article

Motivations, Choices, and Constraints of Italian Transgender Travelers: A Study of Tourism Dynamics within the Rainbow

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Abstract: This study explores the motivations, choices, and constraints shaping tourism behavior among transgender individuals living in Italy. Employing a mixed-methods approach, the research begins with quantitative data collection and analyses, followed by qualitative insights to uncover the multifaceted reasons that drive transgender individuals to engage in tourism. These motivations range from seeking personal authenticity to cultural exploration and community connection. This study also examines the intricate interplay of choice and constraint in shaping transgender travelers' tourism experiences, highlighting the challenges they face and the strategies they use to cope with the obstacles they face within the tourism context. Given Italy's persistent stereotypes and prejudices against gender and sexual minorities, this research provides a critical examination of the intersectionality of gender identity and tourism within a challenging cultural and legal landscape. The findings contribute to a deeper understanding of transgender travelers' tourism experiences and offer valuable implications for industry stakeholders, policymakers, and scholars. By amplifying the voices of Italian transgender travelers, this study aims to foster greater inclusivity and recognition of their diverse needs and experiences within the tourism sector.

Keywords: Italy; social sciences; travel motivations; tourism; transgender; travel



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1. Introduction

Since the mid-20th century, the global tourism sector has experienced significant growth and diversification. The increasing globalization of economic and political networks has broadened the range of accessible destinations, enriching the variety of travel experiences available today (Richards 2007). This globalization has made it easier to reach remote and previously under-explored locations, allowing travelers to seek out unique, off-the-beaten-path experiences. The literature on tourist destination choices underscores the complexity of the decision-making process, influenced by factors such as personal experiences (Cohen 1979; Wu et al. 2011; Masiero and Qui 2018), motivations (Hsu et al. 2009; Zhang and Walsh 2020), and destination images (Zhang et al. 2018).

Demographic shifts have also had a profound impact on tourism, as the industry has evolved to meet the changing needs and preferences of an increasingly diverse global population (UNWTO 2023). In response to new demographic trends and cultural shifts, specific market segments have emerged. For example, the aging population in many Western countries has spurred the growth of health tourism and other niche markets catering to older adults, who often have more disposable income and leisure time (Amoretti 2021; Lesthaeghe and van de Kaa 1986; Novelli 2007). Additionally, changes in family structures—from extended families to nuclear and multigenerational ones—have influenced travel behaviors, leading to the rise of intergenerational tourism, where family groups, including grandparents and grandchildren, travel together (Godbey 2003).

Within this broader context, LGBTQ+ tourism has emerged as a distinct niche. The LGBTQ+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer) community encompasses a diverse range of sexual orientations and gender identities.

Including LGBTQ+ individuals in tourism research is crucial due to the unique challenges they encounter in traditional travel settings, such as discrimination, prejudice, and safety concerns (Corbisiero and Monaco 2022a; Moreira and Jung de Campos 2019; Stuber 2002). Studying the travel behaviors and preferences of LGBTQ+ individuals contributes to a more inclusive and equitable tourism industry that meets the needs of diverse travelers (Pritchard et al. 2000; Puar 2002). Inclusivity in tourism not only promotes social justice but also enhances the overall quality of the tourism experience for all participants by fostering a more welcoming and supportive environment. Additionally, research into LGBTQ+ tourism sheds light on the economic significance of this demographic. Research has consistently shown that LGBTQ+ travelers represent a lucrative market segment with considerable purchasing power (Guaracino and Salvato 2017; Holcomb and Luongo 1996; Kotlíková 2013; Nast 2002). This perspective is still critically debated today, especially in terms of social class differences. Duggan's theory (Duggan 2002), for instance, argues that homonormativity reflects the ways in which the gay middle class needs to occupy a safe place within the neoliberal system. More broadly, the concept is used to examine how the privileging of niches of homosexuality, especially gay men, has had implications for Pride events (Kenttamaa-Squires 2019), the processes of urban change (Doan 2007), and tourism hospitality (Corbisiero 2016).

The main topic of research within this field revolves around understanding the motivations, choices, and constraints of LGBTQ+ travelers. However, it is important to note that the focus has predominantly been on gay men (Vorobjovas-Pinta 2021). While studies examining the travel behaviors and preferences of gay men have provided valuable insights into LGBTQ+ tourism dynamics, a significant gap remains in understanding the experiences of other gender and sexual minorities within the tourism context, particularly transgender travelers (Vorobjovas-Pinta and Hardy 2016). This gap is critical because transgender individuals face distinct challenges that differ from those experienced by other members of the LGBTQ+ community, particularly in relation to gender identity and expression. Transgender individuals possess a gender identity that differs from the sex assigned to them at birth, and this identity can manifest in various ways, including transitioning to a different gender. It is important to acknowledge that an individual's journey towards gender affirmation is unique and highly personal, reflecting their individual needs, desires, and resources. For many transgender individuals, gender affirmation involves a process of social transition, which may include changing their name and adopting pronouns aligned with their gender identity. Some transgender individuals may also feel the need to modify their gender expression by adopting aesthetic features and behaviors that are traditionally associated with the gender they identify with. For others, the gender affirmation process may involve more profound and permanent changes, such as hormonal therapies or surgeries (Corbisiero and Monaco 2024). This social category necessitates complex intersectional analyses, which partly accounts for the current lack of a comprehensive understanding of transgender individuals' experiences in tourism. Consequently, further research is essential to develop a deeper understanding of the constraints faced by transgender people in tourism contexts.

Global studies on transgender people have illuminated the pervasive impact of social stigma and transphobia on their lived experiences. Transgender individuals face a myriad of challenges stemming from discrimination and violence across various social contexts, including, but not limited to, family, school, neighborhood, work, and clinical settings. This discrimination manifests in both interpersonal interactions and institutional practices, perpetuating systemic inequalities and marginalization (Bradford et al. 2013; Chang and Chung 2015; Padilla et al. 2016; Rodríguez-Madera et al. 2017; Scandurra et al. 2017; Wirtz et al. 2020; Zanin and de Freitas 2023). In conservative and heteronormative contexts, these challenges are particularly pronounced. Italy, like many other countries with conservative social attitudes and entrenched gender norms, presents unique obstacles for transgender

individuals seeking affirmation and acceptance (Scandurra et al. 2020). Traditional gender roles and expectations shape societal perceptions and attitudes towards gender diversity, often reinforcing binary notions of masculinity and femininity while marginalizing non-conforming identities (Garro et al. 2022; Monaco 2020, 2024; Rosati et al. 2024). This cultural backdrop creates an environment in which transgender individuals may find it particularly challenging to access services and environments that affirm their gender identity, including within the tourism sector.

Thus, despite the country's commitment as a signatory to the international human rights convention, the Italian LGBTQ+ community continues struggling with persistent discrimination and social stigma (Corbisiero and Monaco 2022b; Monaco and Nothdurfter 2021, 2023), underscored by inconsistent support, as evidenced by the failure of the civil union law in 2016 to grant equal rights for marriage and adoption, and the absence of legislation addressing discriminatory acts toward people belonging to gender and sexual minorities.

In light of these challenges, the present study aims to fill a critical gap in the social science literature by specifically examining the travel experiences of Italian transgender individuals within the context of tourism. This research focuses on identifying the social and individual factors that influence the travel decisions of transgender travelers, their perceptions of safety and acceptance in various destinations, and the role of tourism in their broader journey of gender affirmation. By doing so, this study seeks to contribute to the development of more inclusive tourism practices that recognize and address the unique needs of transgender individuals.

2. Materials and Methods

The research was conducted by the research group of the "Osservatorio LGBT+", a scientific center within the Department of Social Sciences at the University of Naples Federico II. This multidisciplinary research team specializes in the study of LGBTQ+ issues and is committed to advancing knowledge and understanding in this field.

A mixed-methods approach was employed to gather comprehensive data on transgender travelers' experiences, combining both quantitative and qualitative techniques to ensure a well-rounded analysis. In 2021, data collection took place through a combination of surveys and semi-structured interviews, following an explanatory sequential process (Creswell and Plano Clark 2017). The quantitative component involved an online survey designed to capture the participants' socio-demographic information, travel preferences, and experiences while traveling. The survey targeted a diverse sample of transgender individuals across Italy, with a focus on ensuring a broad representation in terms of the participants' age, gender identity, geographical location, and socio-economic background. Given that transgender individuals are often considered part of hidden populations due to societal stigma and discrimination, traditional recruitment methods may not effectively reach this group. Hidden populations include various marginalized groups, like undocumented immigrants or homeless individuals, along with those involved in illegal activities. As a result, these groups encounter difficulties in being included in research studies and accessing the necessary support services. To address these challenges, the recruitment process for this study utilized internet-based methods, which are particularly effective in reaching hidden populations (Ellard-Gray et al. 2015). Specifically, participants were recruited through LGBTQ+ organizations, online forums, and social media platforms, utilizing purposive and snowball sampling techniques to reach a wide and varied audience.

In total, 25 respondents completed the survey, providing an initial dataset for quantitative analysis. Of the participants, 17 identified as transgender men, and 8 identified as transgender women. Their average age was 21 years old.

To complement the survey data, the qualitative part of the study involved semi-structured interviews aimed at providing deeper insights into the participants' lived experiences and perceptions of travel. Interviews were conducted with a subset of survey respondents who expressed an interest in further participation, comprising 12 individuals

(8 men and 4 women). This subset was selected to reflect a range of demographics and travel experiences within the broader sample. The interviews were guided by a semi-structured interview protocol, which allowed for flexibility in exploring the participants' narratives while ensuring consistency across interviews through a set of core questions. Each interview lasted for 60 min and was conducted via video conferencing to accommodate participants from different regions. The interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed.

Throughout the research process, ethical considerations were paramount to ensuring the well-being and confidentiality of participants. Informed consent was obtained from all of the participants prior to data collection, and measures were taken to protect the participants' privacy and anonymity throughout the study. The research adhered to the ethical guidelines and standards set forth by the University of Naples Federico II and the relevant professional associations. Complete anonymity of the data was ensured in the study, and the participants were informed about the confidentiality of their responses. They were also informed of their right to discontinue the survey at any point and for any reason if they wished to do so. In the first step of the qualitative analysis process, researchers immersed themselves in the dataset by comprehensively reviewing both quantitative and qualitative material, gaining a holistic understanding of its content. Following familiarization, the researchers proceeded to code the data, systematically labeling relevant segments that pertained to the research question. This coding process was iterative, with codes being refined and revised as new insights emerged from the combined dataset. Subsequently, the researchers organized the coded segments into potential themes, grouping together those with shared characteristics or meanings. This organization involved comparing and contrasting different segments of both the quantitative and qualitative data to identify overarching concepts. At a later stage, the researchers conducted a thorough review to ensure that they accurately captured the content and insights from both types of data. The defined themes were then named and described, providing clear and concise representations of the combined dataset's findings. The researchers subsequently engaged in a final analysis to interpret the themes, exploring their significance in relation to the research question and considering any variations or sub-themes that emerged across the quantitative and qualitative material. Throughout the analysis process, the researchers maintained reflexivity, thinking on their biases and interpretations to uphold the integrity and validity of the analysis. Finally, the researchers reported the findings of the thematic analysis, presenting the themes, supporting evidence, and interpretations derived from both the quantitative and qualitative data in a cohesive and informative manner. This comprehensive approach ensured a rigorous and insightful analysis that integrated diverse forms of data to generate rich and meaningful findings.

3. Results

The majority of the respondents reported having undertaken at least one trip in the previous year, indicating a relatively active travel lifestyle among the sample group.

Within the context of transgender travel experiences, this study identified three key themes that emerged from the data: the expectations, fears, and coping strategies that accompany their tourism experiences.

The motivational factors driving Italian transgender individuals' travel experiences revealed both notable similarities and distinct differences compared to general tourism trends. According to the survey data (see Table 1), the most prevalent motivation among transgender travelers was the desire to escape the monotony of daily routines, with 85% of participants citing this as a significant driver of their travel behavior. Following this, 68% of respondents indicated that seeking opportunities for socialization was a key motivation, reflecting the importance of social interactions and the desire to connect with others while traveling. This is consistent with broader tourism trends (Richards and Wilson 2006), but the data also highlighted the unique importance of socializing in safe and accepting environments for transgender individuals. Exploring new destinations was cited by an

equal number of respondents, mirroring the general tourist's desire for discovery and enrichment. However, for transgender travelers, this exploration was often coupled with the pursuit of environments in which they can express their identities freely. In line with this, 64% of respondents emphasized the importance of connecting with LGBTQ+ communities, indicating that travel serves not only as a recreational activity but also as an opportunity to seek solidarity and support within the LGBTQ+ network. This motivation reflected their need for spaces that provide a sense of belonging and acceptance. The pursuit of gender affirmation was identified by an equal number of respondents as a crucial factor in their travel decisions. This included the ability to present their gender identity authentically and without fear of judgment. Similarly, respondents highlighted the importance of access to gender-neutral facilities, underscoring the necessity of inclusive and safe accommodations during travel.

Table 1. Motivational factors.

Motivational Factor	
Escaping the monotony of daily routines	85%
Seeking opportunities for socialization	68%
Exploring new destinations	68%
Connecting with LGBTQ+ communities	64%
The pursuit of gender affirmation	64%
Access to gender-neutral facilities	64%

Through the interviews, participants elaborated on these aspects, emphasizing that tourism provides an opportunity to break free from the monotony of everyday life and experience excitement. This finding confirms the importance of travel as a means of seeking novelty, a motivation that is common among tourists in general but is particularly pronounced in this group. Moreover, participants underscored the importance of connecting with others and building relationships while exploring new destinations. One participant defined tourism as a "Unique setting for social interaction, offering opportunities to meet new people or forge friendships". According to another person, exploring diverse landscapes, both within Italy and beyond, could be described as a "Means of discovery and personal enrichment". Italian transgender participants disclosed various factors, specifically linked to their gender identity, that influence their travel decisions. For many respondents, the opportunity to express their gender identity freely in a new environment is a big motivating factor. As expressed during the interviews, travel provides a space for individuals to present themselves authentically "Without fear of judgment or discrimination". This includes "Dressing according to the gender identity", "Using the preferred name and pronouns", and "Engaging in activities aligned with the gender expression". These possibilities contribute to an increase in a sense of empowerment and validation. Access to gender-neutral facilities and accommodation emerged as another crucial consideration for some Italian transgender travelers. More than five participants indicated that the availability of these venues significantly increases their feeling of safety and comfort. Finally, over half of the interviewees declared that tourism serves as a tool to connect with LGBTQ+ communities and organizations far from their home. Illustrative of this aspect are the words of one participant, who said that "Meeting other transgender people allows to find solidarity, support, and a sense of belonging".

Focusing on the concerns that transgender tourists encounter during their travel experiences is another key aspect to consider in order to better understand the unique challenges they face while traveling. According to the survey data (see Table 2), the primary concerns for transgender travelers revolved around the social, cultural, and legal climates of destinations. Of the respondents, 80% expressed apprehension about visiting places where LGBTQ+ rights are not recognized or protected, which highlighted a significant fear related to the legal landscape of potential travel settings. Of the people involved in the study, 76% reported concerns about hostile or discriminatory societal attitudes towards

gender minorities. Additionally, 68% of the respondents highlighted the fear of scrutiny or invasive questioning about their gender identity during security checks and interactions with authorities.

Table 2. Primary concerns.

Concern	
Lack of recognition or protection of LGBTQ+ rights	80%
Hostile or discriminatory societal attitudes	76%
Scrutiny or invasive questioning during travel	70%

Through the interviews, participants provided insights on these concerns, sharing their experiences. Many transgender women specifically mentioned the heightened anxiety they feel in unfamiliar environments, particularly in regions known for unfavorable attitudes towards transgender people. This anxiety is not limited to international travel. Many respondents indicated that they prefer to travel abroad rather than within Italy, as Italy is not widely considered a safe country. Both transgender men and women confirmed their profound discomfort and anxiety about the possibility of being subjected to invasive questioning or scrutiny during travel, especially at security checkpoints or when interacting with authorities. A participant said that “This fear is exacerbated by the need to potentially disclose intimate details about the gender affirmation journey”. This situation can lead to feelings of exposure and vulnerability. The anticipation of negative reactions or discrimination from authorities or fellow travelers further undermines their sense of safety and security, which was described as “Critical for a positive travel experience”.

The last key aspect that emerged from the analysis was related to the coping strategies that transgender travelers use to manage their concerns during travel. The results (see Table 3) indicated a clear preference for familiar destinations, with 60% of participants stating that they choose to visit places they have already been to. This suggests that transgender travelers often seek safety and comfort in destinations where they are aware of the social and cultural environment and feel less at risk of encountering discrimination or hostility. Additionally, 56% of respondents highlighted the importance of getting advice from peers who have gone through similar travel experiences, showing that personal recommendations and shared experiences are highly valued. Half of the participants (50%) indicated that they rely on technology to manage their travel experiences, specifically using apps and online platforms tailored to the LGBTQ+ community. These technologies provide valuable information about LGBTQ+-friendly destinations, establishments, and services, helping transgender travelers make more informed and confident decisions when planning their trips.

Table 3. Coping Strategies.

Strategy	
Visiting familiar destinations	60%
Seeking advice from peers	56%
Using technology	50%

The interviews offered a more nuanced understanding of how transgender travelers navigate the challenges they face. For many transgender women, the most common strategy is to visit places that are known or considered to be safe when alone or to travel with companions, especially to destinations where they anticipate potential risks. In this case, traveling in groups provides them with a greater sense of security, allowing them to feel safer in unfamiliar environments. According to one participant “This strategy also reduces the likelihood of encountering discrimination, harassment, or violence”. In contrast, transgender men reported giving more importance to peer-to-peer advice. This strategy plays a crucial role in decision making, particularly when selecting destinations, accommodations,

and activities that are considered safe and welcoming. Additionally, respondents confirmed that technology plays a significant role in helping them manage their journeys. Four transgender men specifically pointed to their use of LGBTQ+-focused apps and social networks, which they rely on for exchanging information and recommendations with other travelers. One participant said, "These virtual environments offer a sense of community and support, allowing users to share advice on safe destinations, LGBTQ+-friendly accommodations, and potential hazards to avoid". Another participant explained, "These virtual environments provide opportunities to exchange information, advice, and recommendations", helping them feel more prepared and secure in their travel decisions. In addition to technology, some travelers, regardless of gender, opt to use private transportation as a coping strategy, choosing personal vehicles or buses instead of trains or planes. This decision is largely motivated by a desire to maintain control over their personal space and reduce the likelihood of encountering scrutiny or discrimination, particularly during security checks. While these forms of transportation may be less convenient or involve longer travel times, they provide a level of privacy and autonomy that many transgender individuals prioritize. As one participant noted, this choice "safeguards privacy and autonomy", allowing them to travel discreetly and avoid situations where they might feel exposed or vulnerable.

4. Discussion

As the global population grows, particularly with an expected rise in wealthy individuals in developing regions, global tourism is poised for continued growth. Nevertheless, it is imperative to recognize the accompanying changes, particularly the evolving demographic composition of the world's population, which emerges as a critical factor shaping the tourism system. This impact extends to various aspects, including the types of journeys pursued, the origins of travelers, selected destinations, and transportation or accommodation preferences, reflecting a notable shift in travel behavior over time, and highlighting the increasing variety of options and a more equitable distribution of tourist arrivals on a global scale (Bowen 2022; Urry 2012).

Accordingly, a growing number of countries are actively opening their borders to tap into the potential profits of the tourism industry. Well-managed tourism policies, coupled with advancing international integration, serve as robust platforms for sector development, leading to more substantial revenues. Nevertheless, in this endeavor, countries are mindful not to overlook the ongoing demographic changes that influence the socio-economic development of societies. Marketing and communication strategies must address the emerging needs and desires, presenting new perspectives and challenges for offering tourism experiences that are tailored to diverse customer profiles.

Aligned with this perspective, the "Global Code of Ethics for Tourism", adopted during the 1999 General Assembly of the World Tourism Organization (WTO) and endorsed by the United Nations, emphasizes that sustainable tourism development is crucial for ensuring the universal right to mobility and travel. This involves breaking down tangible and intangible barriers, emphasizing a transformative vision that promotes universal equal rights for tourism travel, and inclusivity that is offered regardless of gender identity or sexual orientation.

Based on the data collected, this research identified that for transgender travelers, their identity formation is often intertwined with their gender affirmation journey and their tourism preferences result from a blend of technical considerations, such as accessibility and safety, and deeply personal convictions and needs related to their gender identity. Thus, the present study highlights the importance of recognizing diversity in the motivations, choices, and constraints influencing the travel behavior of Italian transgender individuals. It reflects a complex interplay of personal, social, and environmental factors. From the desire to escape the monotony of daily routines to the pursuit of social connection and exploration of new destinations, transgender travelers are driven by a diverse array of motivations that parallel those of cisgender tourists. However, the unique considerations and obstacles that are specific to the transgender experience, such as concerns about gender affirmation,

legal recognition, and safety, significantly affect the travel experiences of transgender individuals.

Several key themes emerged from the findings, shaping the discussion on the intersection of the demographics, participation in LGBTQ+ groups, and travel choices. One notable aspect highlighted in the data is the fear of travel scrutiny and the need to disclose the intimate details of one's gender affirmation journey during security checks or interactions with authorities.

Another noteworthy finding surrounding transgender travel experiences is the emphasis on a destinations' openness towards LGBTQ+ individuals, highlighting the importance of inclusivity in places choices. Contexts that actively promote diversity, tolerance, and the acceptance of gender and sexual minorities often emerge as preferred destinations for transgender travelers seeking affirming and welcoming environments. These destinations not only offer legal protections and cultural acceptance but also provide resources and support networks for transgender individuals, enhancing their sense of safety and belonging during their travels. In contrast, the lack of legal protections and cultural acceptance in certain destinations can create a sense of vulnerability and insecurity among transgender travelers, significantly impacting their ability to fully enjoy and engage in travel experiences. Instances of discrimination, harassment, or violence based on gender identity can have profound negative effects on the mental and emotional well-being of transgender people (Monterrubio et al. 2021). Consequently, transgender travelers may opt to avoid destinations where they fear that their rights are not recognized or respected, limiting their choices and opportunities for exploration (Vorobjovas-Pinta 2021).

In light of these findings, there is a clear imperative for destinations and tourism industries to take proactive measures to increase the sense of welcoming and security for transgender travelers. One key strategy is to implement policies and initiatives that promote diversity, equity, and inclusion within the tourism sector (Kama et al. 2019; Monaco 2022). Additionally, destinations can collaborate with local LGBTQ+ organizations and advocacy groups to develop resources and support networks specifically tailored to the needs of transgender travelers, such as LGBTQ+ cultural centers, gender-affirming healthcare services, and safe spaces for socialization and community building (Calvo and Trujillo 2011; Statham and Scuzzarello 2023).

Furthermore, destinations can leverage their marketing and promotional efforts to position themselves as inclusive and welcoming destinations for transgender travelers (Algueró Boronat et al. 2024). By highlighting their commitment to diversity and acceptance, cities can attract a broader range of visitors and distinguish themselves as leaders in LGBTQ+ tourism. This may involve displaying diverse representations of gender and sexual identities in tourism materials, promoting LGBTQ+ events and festivals, and featuring transgender-friendly businesses and accommodations in destination marketing campaigns.

While efforts to promote inclusivity and diversity within tourism are commendable, there is a risk of "rainbow-washing", where destinations superficially present themselves as LGBTQ+-friendly without genuinely addressing their systemic issues or providing meaningful support to LGBTQ+ communities (Dixon 2024; Kelly 2020). Rainbow-washing occurs when destinations prioritize marketing their image as LGBTQ+-inclusive solely for economic gain, without making substantive changes to their policies or infrastructure to support LGBTQ+ individuals. To avoid rainbow-washing, destinations must engage in an authentic dialogue with LGBTQ+ communities, address systemic inequalities, and actively work towards creating safe and inclusive environments for all travelers, going beyond marketing slogans and requiring concrete actions to dismantle discrimination and promote equality in all aspects of city life.

In addition to policy and marketing initiatives, destinations can invest in infrastructure and amenities that cater to the specific needs of transgender travelers (Monterrubio et al. 2023). This may include the provision of gender-neutral restrooms and changing facilities in public spaces and tourist attractions, the implementation of inclusive signage and wayfinding systems, and the availability of gender-affirming healthcare services and

support resources. By creating environments that are accessible, affirming, and respectful of diverse gender identities, places can enhance the overall travel experience for transgender individuals and foster a greater sense of safety and belonging.

The data also revealed that gender identity can significantly influence an individual's preferred means of transport, revealing other aspects of travel preferences. Some transgender individuals declared to opt to travel using private means of transportation, such as personal vehicles or buses, rather than relying on public transportation or air travel. While this may provide a sense of autonomy and control over their personal information and identity, it also comes with logistical and environmental challenges and longer travel times. The prioritization of privacy and discretion underscores the importance of creating inclusive and respectful travel environments that safeguard the dignity and autonomy of transgender travelers (Olson and Reddy-Best 2019).

Not least, the spread of new technologies has increased the complexity of the decision-making process. With unprecedented access to information, facilitated by extensive and easily accessible data, today's tourists can adeptly discern the destinations that closely match their preferences, consistently refining their choices (Cem 2013; Pan et al. 2021; Sema 2013). This dynamism not only brings about a constant evolution in the chosen destinations but also influences the pace of this change (Corbisiero et al. 2022; Monaco 2021; Vorobjovas-Pinta and Dalla-Fontana 2019).

5. Conclusions

The findings of this study offer valuable implications for various stakeholders within the tourism industry, policymakers, and scholars alike. Firstly, tourism industry stakeholders have a critical role to play in creating more inclusive and welcoming environments that cater to the diverse needs and preferences of transgender travelers. This includes implementing training programs for staff to raise awareness and sensitivity towards transgender issues, ensuring the availability of gender-neutral facilities and accommodations, and actively promoting destinations that are known for their inclusivity and the acceptance of diverse gender identities. By prioritizing diversity, equity, and inclusion in their policies and practices, tourism businesses can attract a broader customer base and enhance the overall travel experience for transgender individuals. This responsibility extends beyond traditional urban destinations to also include rural and unusual holiday places.

Moreover, policymakers have a central role in shaping the legal and regulatory frameworks that govern travel and tourism. It is essential for policymakers to enact laws and policies that protect the rights and ensure the safety of transgender travelers, including anti-discrimination legislation, gender recognition laws, and measures to address hate crimes and violence based on gender identity. Additionally, policymakers should foster greater collaboration and information-sharing among government agencies, tourism boards, and advocacy groups to develop comprehensive strategies for promoting transgender-inclusive tourism and addressing the specific challenges faced by transgender travelers in diverse contexts.

For scholars and researchers, there is a pressing need to continue advancing the understanding of transgender tourism experiences through rigorous empirical research and theoretical inquiry. This includes conducting further studies to explore the motivations, choices, and constraints of transgender travelers across different cultural contexts, as well as investigating the intersectionality of gender identity with other dimensions of identity, such as ethnicity and socio-economic status. In addition, there is a substantial lack of data on individuals belonging to numerically less-conspicuous sexual or gender minorities, other than LGBT people. Future perspectives should expand to explore sexual identities such as queer, pansexual, and/or asexual orientations. A more profound comprehension of how these dynamics influence the tourism demand, service provision, and human resources engagement is a clear priority for industry decision makers, as well as tourism management and policymakers.

Central to this imperative is the need for flexibility in tailoring tourism products to meet the specific requirements of diverse segments. Successfully addressing the challenges of and capitalizing on the opportunities within the travel behavior of the LGBTQ+ community necessitates deliberate adaptation, grounded in accurate socio-demographic data, the consideration of social and cultural norms, and the respect for personal values and beliefs. This approach is essential to foster more inclusive and welcoming travel experiences that align with the specific needs and preferences of all travelers.

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