

## Exploring the potential economic benefits of a Queer inclusive Puerto Rico with focus on the Visitor Economy

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### Introduction

Homophobia and discrimination towards the LGBTQ+ or Queer community still exist today, but companies and governments have understood that they play an important role in the continuing battle for equity. Consumers now not only want to know what companies have to offer, but what they stand for too. When expressing their support towards the Queer community, businesses contribute to creating a more open and inclusive environment. These marketing tools are most certainly not enough to eradicate oppression and discrimination, but there is a positive contribution insofar as they promote openness and inclusivity. However, it is still problematic that much of this “corporate support” does not equally represent every group within the Queer community. Some companies preach inclusivity through social media yet their support is essentially limited to occasional advertising targeted to the gay cisgender male.

At the other end, some businesses organize campaigns to help and positively impact the most marginalized segments within the Queer community. One would expect, for example, that a business that actually impacts Queer youth living under poverty through charities or campaigning, would gain more support from the Queer community relative to companies that simply wish to cater some of their ads to homosexual white males because of their above average spending capacity in some cities. Somewhere in between these extremes, perhaps some of the businesses focused on targeting the above-average disposable income of gay cisgender men have concluded that it is more effective to actually impact the Queer community through charity work or organizing, while making sure to include all sectors and not just simply gay cisgender men. Studies have shown that, as members of a broader stigmatized community, gay men have a greater collectivist tendencies and sense of sameness and shared identity (Hildebrand et al., 2013). Yet, it is clear many businesses support some members within the Queer community more than others. One of the general objectives of this study is to provide research that may be useful for the political and economic empowerment of all members within the Queer Community. Nevertheless, we acknowledge that many of the examples identified in this paper focus mostly on the gay cisgender male populace, which is usually the target of most private sector marketing and research. This is undoubtedly a

limitation, and more work needs to be done by both media companies and academia, such that the Queer community in all its diversity is truly represented in media and academic research.

Gay cisgender male consumers have been researched by corporate marketeers with terms such as the “dream market,” due to the potential revenue they could gain, and have referred to their spending capacity as “pink dollars” or “dorothy dollars” (Åkestam, Rosengren and Dahlen, 2016). Firms that target the “dream market” usually consider these consumers to have a high income coupled with progressive views that affect the products they choose to consume. “Dorothy dollar” consumers may prove loyal towards brands that support the Queer community, preferring the “gay option” when it comes to substitute goods (i.e., buy alcohol from a gay bar as opposed to any other bar). The “Dorothy dollar” has evolved from a peripherality to being a significant market in the United States and United Kingdom. However, as previously noted, it may take more than just waving a flag in front of a store or advertising as queer-friendly to attract those “Dorothy dollars”.

In other words, Queer consumers see past superficial advertisements (i.e., slapping a rainbow on their products) (Hildebrand et al. 2013). In order to truly stand out and build unwavering loyalty from Queer consumers, a company would likely need to be actively supporting public policies that improve the health, security, and well-being of Queer people, as well as providing sponsorship for leading non-governmental organization (NGOs) and charities that impact the Queer community. The same may apply for governments.

Some businesses and governments have started to promote or market their city, state, or country as a Queer-friendly destination to potential “Dorothy Dollar” gay tourists. In some cases, this is driven by Queer-owned businesses working to grow together and/or in cities known for its social movements standing up for and protecting the rights, safety, and economic opportunities of the Queer community. In these cases, Queer tourists or visitors provide an inflow of economic activity that is channeled into the economic empowerment, or economic development, of the Queer community in that particular place, and thus also the development of the locality’s economy in general as well. The aim of this paper is to seek and explore case studies of economies that have benefited from being inclusive and successfully attracted the economic support of the LGBTQ+ or Queer community. These cases will be discussed in the context of restoring economic development while promoting openness and inclusivity in the case of Puerto Rico. This research is timely given that Puerto Rico’s official Destination Marketing Organization, “Discover Puerto Rico”, have also targeted “Dorothy tourists” by

publishing a short “LGBTQ Travel Guide to Puerto Rico” on their website. Experiences in other economies may prove insightful for improving ongoing or design new initiatives.

## Literature Review

Gudelunas (2011) has noted that advertising, corporate employment policies for gays and lesbians, sponsorship for LGBTQ+ charity events, and interpersonal recommendations are factors that contribute to a brand or company achieving gay-friendly status. Marketing professionals must understand that entering this market requires a commitment that goes beyond simply placing ads in the LGBTQ+ media segment. This audience expects sponsorship, a commitment to equality on the part of the brand or company, and a long-lasting effort to supporting the community (Pinto et al., 2020). In other words, the queer community is very aware of where and what they spend their “pink” money on. Companies who wish to gain stronger support from the queer community must engage in these broader investments to promote inclusivity. However, while inclusivity from companies and corporations may benefit the queer community, there are risks to going “gay friendly.” It has been reported that heterosexual consumers may not take kindly to gay-oriented marketing and advertising, most noticeable in the case of heterosexual male consumers (Ram et al., 2019). Therefore, marketing towards the LGBTQ+ community might drive off heterosexual customers that react negatively and as a result reduce, rather than increase, profits. Therefore, explicit, direct advertising for the queer community can be seen as a double-edged sword.

A solution to bypass the tug of war between catering to the LGBTQ+ community and maintaining the heterosexual consumers are implicit campaigns. Heterosexual consumers are less resistant to queer campaigns when they are unfamiliar with the markers of gay and lesbian identity and culture (Ginder & Byun, 2015). Incorporating implicit queer imagery into advertising through mainstream media outlets are an effective way to reach queer consumers without the drawback of losing the attention of heterosexual consumers. Examples of an implicit approach could include endorsement from a non-heterosexual celebrity or product placement in queer media. Unfortunately, such practices also implicitly support heteronormativity and the invisibilization of the queer community in mainstream media.

One industry particularly linked to “pink dollars” is tourism. With the mighty informative power of the internet, tourists can target specific areas, activities, events, and places that suit their traveling needs and wants. In other words, it is now much

easier for travelers to track down locations or events before they even land on their destination. This allows tourists to plan and optimize their visits and spending. There is a well-documented relationship between countries and their progressive policies towards queer people and the economic benefits for their tourism sector, along with the increasing social benefits as a result from the image of tolerance, inclusiveness, and diversity (Pedro & Liberato, et al., 2018). In sum, through the internet, and through social media, queer travelers can pinpoint countries that welcome them with open arms. Progressive laws, movements, policies, and marketing are sought out by the community to make sure they land where they will be safe, or at least able to express themselves more freely than they would be in their own countries or other potential destinations. Hotels, restaurants, and the tourism sector in general all benefit from using online tools to market themselves globally as businesses that welcome and support the queer community.

To better understand the potential impact and relevance of the queer community towards the economic growth of Puerto Rico, we explore the local marketing, advertising, policies, movements, tourist incentives and queer history of countries and cities that hold progressive views that permit the community to participate in economic activity while feeling safe, secure, and able to be themselves in different establishments (e.g., a bar, place of business, borough, town, etc.). The following section details the case studies that will be evaluated and the justification for selecting these specific locations. Finding quantifiable data has proven an arduous task, but historical events may provide some insight for future considerations in terms of advertising, events and even sponsorships or laws and policies for Puerto Rico.

### Case Studies

#### New York

The 1969 Stonewall Riots in Greenwich Village are considered the genesis of modern gay rights movements. After a police raid on a bar turned violent, Gay-powered riots flocked the streets around the Stonewall inn and introduced an era where the queer community discovered that united, they could fight back the discrimination, oppression, and brutality of authorities, leading to the politization of these conflicts. The Gay Liberation Front (GLF) is one of many such political organizations born from events such as the Stonewall Riots and other riots around the world (Matzner, 2015).

The queer movement accelerated just a year later when one of the first gay parades was held around Greenwich Village. Periodic protests and gay parades kept going and by 1986, discrimination based on sexual orientation was banned from housing,

employment, and public services. In 2003, the gender expression Orientation Non-Discrimination Act was introduced in the state legislature, adding gender identity and expression as protected classes against discrimination. In 2011, New York became one of the early states to legalize same-sex marriage.

With enough added regulations to procure stability and safety for the queer community, New York is one of the leading states with queer public employees and, combined with California, give home to over 30% of estimated queer government employees (Sears, Mallory, & Hunter, (2009). This provides a good example of how inclusive laws let queer people add to the potential workforce of a state when in safe, accepting environments, and how these exact same laws let queer folk openly represent and show how important they can be.

Cognizant of its history and the potential of “Dorothy dollars,” New York City actively promotes itself as a Queer destination through NYC & Company, the city’s official marketing, tourism, and partnership organization. Inclusivity has helped to promote economic development in New York City, as it has become one of the most popular Queer destinations (Rosenberg & Dunford, 2011). Similarly, inclusive companies that are able to demonstrate they are allies have the support of the resident Queer population, which holds one of the largest disposable incomes in the city (Presser, 2012).

### San Francisco (California)

San Francisco is one of the more prominent LGBTQ+ communities in the United States, and an important one in terms of its history. The city holds various LGBTQ+ events like The National Queer Arts Festival, which promotes social justice and the artistic and financial development of queer art and culture. The Castro Street fair is a festival held at The Castro, the social center of the city and the main gay neighborhood in San Francisco. The pride parade held in San Francisco in 2019 was described as “the largest gathering of queer people and allies in the nation” in the parade’s official website.

San Francisco also publishes LGBTQ+-centric magazines and newspapers like the Bay Area Reporter, San Francisco Bay Times, San Francisco Sentinel, Curve, and Girlfriends. California is one of the richest states in the U.S, and San Francisco is among the richest cities in California (Stebbins, 2019).

How the queer community thrived in San Francisco was rocky at the start. In 1916, the military created what is known as the “Blue Discharge” where they publicly

booted queers from the military. Although it was not dishonorable, queers suffered from discrimination when they returned home and found themselves staying in the port towns they were left at (Ramirez, M. H., & Sterzing, P. R. 2017). This conglomeration was the start of what formed the community we see today.

Like New York City, San Francisco has positioned itself as one of the leading queer destinations. The city is featured in most LGBTQ travel guides and is actively promoted as a queer destination by the San Francisco Travel Association (the city's Destination Marketing Organization or DMO). Plenty of businesses are affiliated members of the city's DMO. The fact that the organization actively promotes San Francisco as a queer destination is evidence that the private sector is aware of the economic benefits of such a strategy.

## Canada

Canada houses around 1 million people that identify as LGBTQ+, 30% of them being around 15 and 24 years old while only 7% of the community being 65 or older (Boisvert, 2021). The number of monumental developments and legal changes for the last two decades have permitted more liberty for expression and coming out as part of the LGBTQ+ community. Policy changes such as same-sex marriage and gender identity protection contributed to the growth of same-sex couples (Boisvert, 2021). By international comparison, Canada ranks low on World Values Survey's measures of homosexual negativity and was the first country outside Europe to legalize same-sex marriage in 2005 (Waite et al., 2019).

In the 1960s, a homophobic practice was implemented by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), directorate of Security and Intelligence's A-3 Unit, where they produced a map that included red dots anywhere where homosexual activities were common. The map was quickly filled in red and disposed of.

The 1970s was a decade of activism for Canada, with liberation groups such as Community Homophile Association of Toronto, the Front de libération homosexuel in Montreal, and the Gay Alliance Toward Equality and the Vancouver Gay Liberation Front (GLF). In 1971, the first public protest was held in Ottawa on Parliament Hill called We Demand Rally.

Canada is a significant player in the LGBTQ+ tourism market. For example, Travel Gay Canada (TGC) is an LGBTQ+ tourism association that helps LGBTQ+ travelers with products and services, and informs them about travel opportunities and

expectations. The Canadian Gay & Lesbian Chamber of Commerce (CGLCC) is a non-profit industry association that helps represent LGBTQ+-owned businesses and promotes economic growth through public and private sector engagement. In contrast with New York City and San Francisco, Canada clearly has a more robust set of institutions to promote economic development through queer-inclusivity. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that the queer community has its own distinct tourism association.

## Illinois

Northalsted (aka Boystown) in Chicago, IL stands out as a noticeable “gayborhood,” with a robust selection of LGBTQ+-themed stores such as trendy restaurants, bars, dance clubs, and clothing stores (Capon, 2019). It is also the home of “The Legacy Walk,” an outdoor museum celebrating LGBTQ+ history and heroes. The award-winning Legacy Project is committed to challenging the social and cultural marginalization of LGBTQ+ people (Keehnen, 2012). Illinois offered optional sex education and implemented an LGBTQ+ curriculum that requires public school to educate students on the importance of LGBTQ+ contributions to Illinois and the United States history (HB0246). In May 2021, the Senate Bill 818 made K-12 sex education mandatory in schools, starting in August 2022.

As in New York City and San Francisco, Chicago’s DMO (Choose Chicago®) actively promotes the city as a queer destination. As of 2019, the office of tourism in Illinois estimated that 7 per cent of visitors to Chicago identified as LGBTQ+, while the average in the United States is approximately 3 per cent. In other words, Chicago’s economy is also benefiting from queer tourism that results from its inclusive policies and strategic marketing.

## Portugal

In Portugal, tourism, and all travel-related revenues account near 10 per cent of the country's gross domestic product (Andrade, Breda, & Dinis, 2019). The increase of activity in the tourism sector has made it possible for more employment and export services around the country over the last two decades (Andrade et al, 2019). It is important to note that over the last twenty years Portugal has been making accelerated progress towards LGBTQ+ rights, albeit it being a conservative country. As of 2019, Portugal ranked #7 on ILGA Europe’s Rainbow Map and is among the 20 most visited countries in the world, receiving an average of 13 million foreign tourists annually. Porto, located in the north of Portugal and the second largest city in the country, has been selected three times as the “Best European Destination” contributing greatly to

the tourism capital of the country. Even though it is still a conservative region, the high acceptance of the LGBTQ+ community has aided greatly in marking Porto as one of the most popular queer tourism destinations in Europe (Andrade et al, 2019).

Comparing "la isla del encanto" with LGBTQ+ friendly jurisdictions

Strengthening the tourism sector has been highlighted as critical for Puerto Rico's economic recovery in the Commonwealth's 2022 Certified Fiscal Plan. The capital city of San Juan is the most populated city in Puerto Rico. It is usually where the visitors land to begin their stay and are immediately introduced to the liveliness of the people and the enchantment of the island. However, a search in queer travel guides will immediately point you towards towns like Cabo Rojo and Rincón, which are on the opposite southwest corner of the island. The island lacks public transportation systems, and visitors would need to rent a vehicle and drive for various hours to arrive at these locations.

Puerto Rico holds two annual pride parades. One is a march in San Juan, and the other is a celebration of pride in Boquerón, Cabo Rojo. Aside from these events, there is not much to offer for a queer focused vacation outside the city of San Juan. Furthermore, while San Juan has more gay-oriented experiences to offer relative to the rest of the island, it still lags behind cities or neighborhoods such as the case studies discussed in this paper. "Discover Puerto Rico" the island's DMO and has published a travel guide that presents the island as the "top-gay friendly destination in the Caribbean."

While violence against the queer community isn't as high as other countries and laws give homosexuals nearly as much rights as heterosexuals, there are many factors that limit what could be a truly inclusive island. There are those that still oppose recent laws that help the queer community, and some even turn a blind eye to current problems by refusing to acknowledge them with commonly heard phrases like "Puerto Rico isn't homophobic anymore".

The history of the queer community in Puerto Rico and political progression for the cause has been there but has been largely understudied. On the other hand, it is also worth noting that many of the bills that promote equity and inclusivity have been passed in the U.S mainland and passed down to Puerto Rico due to our colonial relationship. For the most part, locals let "queers be queers", but the lack of education in the island prevent heterosexual Puerto Ricans from becoming true allies. Furthermore, local television and radio broadcasts still hold certain discriminatory and



offensive standpoints, most notably when they make explicitly homophobic and hateful comments under the guise of “comedy”.

At the moment, Puerto Rico is a tolerating nation, but not a fully accepting one. It is not surprising to see a political division when it comes to laws that impact the queer community. One of the major political parties, Partido Nuevo Progresista (PNP), has a history of homophobia in their speeches and legislative agenda. When an anti-discrimination bill aiming to ban discrimination based on sexual orientation was introduced in 2009 and referred to the Senate, the President of the Senate at the time, Thomas Rivera Schatz (one of the PNP’s most prominent leaders), vocalized opposition to the legislation and said it would not be approved. Around the same time, then-Governor of Puerto Rico Luis Fortuño indicated that discrimination laws should have exemptions for organizations that object to homosexuality on the grounds of religious beliefs. In 2013, a Senate Bill (238) was introduced to ban discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity with the Senate approving 15 to 11. In the House, it was approved 29 to 22, but it had been amended to only affect employment discrimination. Both legislative bodies in Puerto Rico wanted to pass religious freedom bills that tried to permit discrimination against the queer community in 2017 and 2019. None of these bills were passed, but the constant political threat towards queer rights makes it difficult to convey to potential queer visitors that the island is an inclusive and tolerating destination.

To make matters worse, many religious sectors in Puerto Rico felt the PNP was not doing enough to combat queer activism and progress, leading to the emergence of a new, even more conservative party: Proyecto Dignidad (PD). In the last general elections of 2020, PD surfaced to defend heteronormativity and the idea of the traditional family. One of the key figures and spokesperson for PD that openly fights gender equity has written columns with negative opinions towards transexual or transgender people and has made antifeminist speeches. A worrying revelation is that even though it was its first elections, Proyecto Dignidad has been voted third place for governance in some municipalities, rising above already existing, more progressive political parties like Movimiento Victoria Ciudadana (MVC) and Partido Independentista Puertorriqueño (PIP).

Most of the laws that protect the community are also recent, starting from 2015 with same-sex marriage and joint adoption. As mentioned earlier, some of this progress was a byproduct of progress in the U.S, and not necessarily local politics. For example, the Pew Research Center reported that only 45% of Puerto Ricans supported same-sex marriage in 2014, a lower share than Puerto Ricans that reside on the mainland. The

right to change one's legal gender came in 2018, and conversion therapy was banned through Executive Order in 2019. Considering their recent establishment, it will most likely take time for the people of the island to grow accustomed to new laws. Meanwhile, Proyecto Dignidad is using the seats it has won in the legislative assembly to combat further legislation that supports women or the queer community.

It's worth noting that the median age of the population is around 44 years old, the second oldest territory in the U.S (Instituto de Estadísticas de Puerto Rico, 2018). When the average of the population is 44 in a poor and still developing country, it is not surprising to see some resistance and opposition to progress. Puerto Rico is a cultural, traditional, and prideful island. Most of the progressive views in the island come from the younger generations that attempt to educate their elders. Social Media has helped young Puerto Ricans in their search for queer history that has been mostly invisible. On the other hand, many of our elders still consume information from the propaganda of conservative political parties (PNP, PD). In this sense, it is not surprising they voted for and gave entry to members of PD into the legislative assembly.

In other words, Puerto Rico is not a bad tourist destination for the queer community, but it is still very rough around its edges; an ironic statement considering that many queer-friendly spots are located on the shores of the island. Referring to the pink dollar, gay cisgender males are usually the target for recent advertisements around the island, but Lesbians, Transexuals, and Non-binary individuals are still being left behind. On the other hand, due to the pressure and activism from various local feminist and progressive social movements, in January 2021, the governor of Puerto Rico, Pedro Pierluisi issued a state of emergency due to murders, assaults, and rape of transgender/transsexual individuals in Puerto Rico. As previously mentioned, a constant struggle for the queer community in Puerto Rico also stems from the older population's religious views. Although laws are already in place to protect the queer community, heteronormative customs and tunnel-visioned religious practices stand in the way of the potential power of this repressed community. There is still homophobia observed in media and daily life. Most notably in the rural and more conservative areas of the island, "coming out" is still met with discrimination and a wide array of social repercussions with friends and family. As such, it is reasonable to assume that the Puerto Rican economy may not be maximizing the potential benefits of the local "pink dollar" either.

Spreading the progressive advances that towns like Cabo Rojo have achieved throughout the rest of the island may spur economic activity fueled by the queer community's purchasing power. A town or neighborhood that decides to be gay-friendly

and start up establishments tailored to the queer community may also see increases in its revenue from the tourist sector. One of the easiest ways to determine whether a place is queer-friendly is to find out how many people from the community live there, collecting and compiling data of queer people in the island would be a good start to understanding what their untapped economic potential could be. In addition, promoting equality and safety may help increase the number of habitants in Puerto Rico to come out as queer. To stay in the competitive market, developing a queer friendly tourist destination is an important market strategy (Sousa et al., 2018).

Finally, there is much Puerto Rico can learn from the case studies discussed in this paper. First, one commonality that stood out was the use of DMO's to promote the destination as queer friendly. Therefore, it is positive that Puerto Rico's DMO has already adopted this strategy, but it is important it is preserved in the long term and expanded. Local governments, such as the local government of Cabo Rojo (where the Boquerón Pride Celebration is held) should also seek to promote inclusivity more systematically to further strengthen the town's position as a top destination for queer tourists. Puerto Rico would also benefit from policies such as those implemented in Illinois, where sex education and a LGBTQ+ curriculum were incorporated into the public education system. Another important lesson, in this case from Canada, is that a robust set of institutions may be useful as well. The queer community in Puerto Rico should aspire to establish an LGBTQ+ tourism association that helps queer travelers with products and services and informs them about travel opportunities and expectations; as well as a business associations composed of queer-led businesses. Finally, it is clear many of these jurisdictions capitalized on their long history of activism to become leading queer-tourism destinations. As previously mentioned, the history of queer activism in Puerto Rico is vastly understudied. The history of queer activism needs to be rescued, well-documented, and incorporated into our public education curricula.

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