Geographies of (in)equalities: space and sexual identities

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Abstract

In a brief period of time Portugal has experienced considerable progresses in equality legislation concerning discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation. Notwithstanding these significant legal changes towards equality, social discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation is a pervasive reality, lesbian and gay visibility in public spaces remain residual, and individuals still endure a great deal of distress. In this paper I investigate the multidimensional dynamics of visibilities of lesbians and gays in public spaces in Portugal, exploring same-sex public displays of affection and analysing physical and online spaces of lesbian and gay visibility. In doing so, I explore the dynamics of power associated with the implicit codes of behaviour in public spaces that discriminate homosexual visibility.

1. Introduction

This paper is the account of the first task of the research project "*Reconceptualising Public Spaces of (In)Equality: Sensing and Creating Layers of Visibility*" that explores the impact of public authoring of user-generated content - using pervasive digital technologies and collaborative web mapping - on lesbians and gays' agency and empowerment. In particular it investigates how the creation of visible layers of homosexual local references in a hetero pervasive reality relates to social identity and belonging. The research project consists of three tasks: '*Mapping the landscape'* - to map physical and online spaces of lesbian and gay visibility in Portugal and to explore same-sex displays of affection in public spaces; '*Sensing the landscape'* - to identify significant dimensions of space and places in terms of lesbian and gay social identities; and '*Creating landscapes'* - to explore how creating and sharing digital layers of personal experiences, thoughts and emotions, can empower people who experience discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation.

'Mapping the landscape' aims to capture the multidimensional dynamics of visibilities of lesbians and gays in public spaces. Based on original empirical research this paper: analysis the geographical distribution of LGBT friendly commercial spaces in Portugal; examines how

lesbians and gays negotiate their visibility (sexual orientation disclosure) in public spaces; and explores online Portuguese spaces of lesbian and gay visibility.

To focus on behaviours (same-sex public displays of affection) rather than on identity discourses, stresses out the significant relation of sexual orientation disclosure with space, and uncovers some dissonances in lesbians and gays discourses of self-identity. Portugal can be understood as a case study opportunity for the reason that public displays of affection are rather common and constitute a Portuguese cultural trait, as in other southern European countries. In this cultural context it is more perceptible that lesbians and gays conscientiously restrain from having same-sex displays of affection in public spaces.

2. Space and sexual identities

Space and social identities are mutually constituted. Space is an essential part of the constitution and reproduction of social identities. Moreover, social identities, meanings and relations produce material and symbolic or metaphorical spaces (Cloke, Philo & Sadler, 1991; Massey, 1999; Smith, 1993).

Geographical space is not an objective structure but a social experience imbued with interwoven layers of social meaning. These meanings shape the way spaces are produced and used, and how spaces can feed back into shaping the way in which people categorize others and identify themselves (Smith, 1991).

As Doreen Massey (2005:107) argues, because space emerges through relations which are active practices, material and embedded, space is made of a dynamic simultaneity, constantly disconnected by new arrivals, constantly waiting to be determined (and therefore always undetermined) by the construction of new relations. Space is always under construction and in a process of becoming.

To theorise space as the product of social relations, leads us to the understanding that public space is not an emptiness which enables free and equal speech. Public space, from the greatest square to the smallest public park, is a product of heterogeneous and sometimes conflicting and unequal social identities/relations. Identities are produced within the complex power-geometry of social/spatial relations, and in turn the way in which individuals experience and imagine spatiality reshapes the power-geometries of social/spatial relations (Massey, 2005).

Social identities (such as class, gender, sexuality and race) are socially constructed, not taken for granted as given or fixed, and therefore they can be contested, resisted and (re)negotiated (Valentine, 2001; West & Fenstermaker, 1995).

This research focuses on lesbian and gay sexual identities because of their strong relation to spatial dimensions. These identities depend on particular spaces for their construction, and spatial visibility has been and still is particularly important in the development

of lesbian and gay civil rights movements (Mitchell, 2000). Sexual identities depend to some extent on particular spaces for their production, and space is also produced through the performance of identities. An individual's sexual identity may be read as lesbian or gay from the space they occupy, or a person may only feel able to "come out" and identify as gay in a lesbian or gay space. (Mitchell, 2000; Valentine, 2001). Pride marches, self organized neighbourhoods with lesbian and gay friendly ambience, specific public places announced to be safe and discrimination-free, and the negotiation of place-related identities (sexual orientation disclosure only in specific places), all have a common attribute: space.

Sexual orientation has another relevant characteristic to this research – the possibility of invisibility. People can decide not to disclose their sexual orientation, and invisibility is a common option on a context of social discrimination (Ferreira, 2008). Although there have been significant legal steps towards equality in European Union, discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation is still a widespread reality. Lesbians and gays invisibility is simultaneously a consequence and cause of inequalities in their everyday lives, and contributes to their disempowerment (Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2009).

Sexuality is a process of power relations which mediates our everyday interactions, rather than a feature of private life (Valentine, 1993b:246). Hegemonic discourses, such as heteronormativity, are literally inscribed in space. As an example, relevant to this research, the performance of non-normative identities in public space, such as lesbian and gay sexual identities, disrupts and therefore exposes the way in which the street is commonly produced as "naturally" or "normally" a heterosexual space (Bell, 2001; Valentine, 2001).

2.1. Sexual orientation and civil rights in Portugal

Homosexuality was first decriminalised in Portugal in 1852, but it was made a crime again in 1886. From this date and throughout the dictatorship years, Portugal became more oppressive of homosexuals. After the revolution in 25th of April, 1974, Portuguese society has become increasingly accepting of homosexuality, and in the past decade civil rights concerning sexual orientation have improved substantially.

The more important landmarks of Portuguese legislation concerning sexual orientation civil rights are:

- 1982 - Portugal decriminalizes homosexuality;
- 1999 - Homosexual and bisexual people are able to serve openly in the Military Service;
- 2001 - Recognition of same-sex unions (same rights as opposite-sex couples with the exception of adoption);
- 2003 - Labour Code rights (access to work and employment, protection against discrimination in work and sexual harassment);
- 2004 - Sexual orientation is included in the Portuguese Constitution within the Principal of Equality (article number 13);

- 2005 - The Portuguese Institute of Blood officially allows men who have sex with men to donate blood, however, this decision will be annulled in 2009 by the President of this Institute;
- 2007 - Penal Code rights (equal age of consent for same-sex and opposite-sex couples, protection against violence and hate crimes);
- 2009 - Inclusion of sexual orientation subjects in sexual education in schools (Law of Sexual Education);
- 2010 - Marriage is extended to same-sex couples (same rights as opposite-sex couples with the exception of adoption);
- 2010 - Approval in Parliament of a law allowing men who have sex with men to donate blood.

The Portuguese reality of lesbians and gays has rapidly changed in recent years; a consistent and significant set of legal measures were adopted: from the decriminalization of homosexuality in 1982 to same-sex marriage law in 2010. It is a remarkable change, framed by the revolution of 1974 that ended a long period of dictatorship and brought noteworthy social changes to Portugal in extensive and diverse areas of life, including sexuality. In 1986 Portugal joined the European Union (EU), and that fact had a significant impact on equality legislation. The principle of equal treatment constitutes a fundamental value of the EU, and the fight against discrimination together with the promotion of equality is an EU policy priority.

Portugal has wide-ranging anti-discrimination laws and is one of the few countries in the world to include in its Constitution a ban on discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation. Nevertheless, there are some Portuguese legislation's areas that remain discriminatory on grounds of sexual orientation. Parenthood is one of the areas that remain discriminatory. Although single lesbians and gays may adopt, joint adoption of children is restricted to opposite-sex couples. Also, in vitro fertilisation (IVF) is currently not available for either single women or lesbian couples.

Legislative measures can contribute to social change, but discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation is still a widespread realty in Portugal. The Eurobarometer *Discrimination in the EU in 2009* (European Commission, 2009), shows that the majority of Portuguese (58%) believe that sexual orientation is the main reason for discrimination in Portugal, ahead of ethnic origins and disability (both 57%) and age (53 %). The percentage of Portuguese who points to sexual orientation as the main discriminating factor is 9% above the average of the 27 countries of the European Union (EU), where such discrimination appears only in fourth place (47%), behind ethnic origins (61%), age (58%) and disability (53%).

3. Researching lesbian and gay visibilities

Knowledge is produced in specific contexts or circumstances and the acknowledgment of the situatedness of knowledge leads to the recognition of the importance of the "position" or "positionality" of the researcher, of her/his specific embodied locations (Rose, 1993; Valentine, 2002). In this perspective it is important that researchers are self-reflexive assuming explicit positions in order to overcome false notions of neutrality. In this context it is relevant that I

acknowledge my experience in equal opportunities nationwide programs and in particular my work as a LGBT activist.

This research uses the LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender) acronym, but it only addresses issues related to sexual orientation, not including the analysis of issues related to gender identity. This option relates to a specific characteristic of sexual orientation relevant to this study: the possibility of invisibility. The expression "lesbian and gay" is used for simplicity's sake, although this research also includes bisexuals.

The methodological approach was based on online research methods (Fielding, Raymond & Blank, 2008): participative website - to produce a comprehensive list of LGBT friendly commercial spaces in Portugal, and to identify their geographical distribution; online survey - to explore same-sex public displays of affection; and website analysis - to map online Portuguese spaces of lesbian and gay visibility. Semi-structured interviews were used to explore the online research methods results (Limb & Dwyer, 2001).

The participants' recruitment used "snow ball" method of contacting respondents via other respondents. My active participation in LGBT associations gave me easier access to this research's participants.

The **participative website**[1] (a list of LGBT friendly commercial spaces, with user comments feature) aimed to create a comprehensive list of LGBT friendly commercial spaces in Portugal, and to identify their geographical distribution. Commercial spaces are a changing reality. Bars and cafes open and close quite often. Mapping these spaces countrywide is a challenging task and we have to take into consideration the time spam of the data collection. This research used a participative methodology in order to grasp people's perception on these spaces, besides websites and publications' information. The initial list of LGBT friendly commercial spaces, was drawn from Portuguese LGBT related websites and leisure guides[2]. According to the research objective only bars and clubs were included, because they are spaces where people can mingle and interact, allowing the public display of affection. All listed spaces were georeferenced in Google Maps[3] providing a visual representation of their geographical distribution. The participative website was publicized using Portuguese LGBT mailing lists, blogs, websites and social networks. People were invited to comment on each listed space and to suggest new spaces. The participative website was open to comments from March 21st to April 4th 2010.

The **online survey** aimed to explore same-sex public displays of affection (such as kissing, caressing and hugging). The survey items are identified in table 1.

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[1] http://sites.google.com/site/lgbvisibility/

[2] Portugal Gay (http://portugalgay.pt/guide/); Lisbon Guide (http://www.lisbon-guide.info/gay_lesbian/cafes_bars); Leisure Guide (http://lazer.publico.clix.pt/default.asp?id=29); Patroc Gay Travel Guide Europe (http://www.patroc.com/lisbon/bars.html); Portal Sair+ (http://www.sairmais.com/dossier/lisboa-gay-bares-e-discotecas-b7b4a018a8/)

[3] LGBT friendly spaces Google map (http://maps.google.com/maps/ms?ie=UTF8&hl=pt-PT&msa=0&msid=109329779124830060402.0004814d1ec777871e66a&ll=39.690281,-4.262695&spn=8.14757,19.665527&z=6)

Survey focus: same-sex public displays of affection (for example: kissing, caressing, hugging)	
▪ Personal attitude	open answer
▪ Frequency of behaviour	▫ In specific public spaces areas (near/away from local of residence/place of work)
	▫ LGTB friendly/non friendly commercial spaces
	▫ Open air public spaces
▪ Friendliness degree of "LGBT friendly commercial spaces" towards	▫ Women/men
	▫ Lesbians/gays/bisexuals/heterosexuals
	▫ Same-sex persons public displays of affection

Table 1 - Survey items

The call for participation on the online survey was publicized using Portuguese LGBT mailing lists, blogs, websites and social networks. Three calls for participation were issued at regular periods. The online survey was opened during the period from April 5th to May 31st. The survey received 288 valid answers. In line with the research objective, survey results analysis only considers the answers of respondents identifying themselves as homosexuals or bisexuals. From a total of 288 valid answers we have 256 that identify themselves as homosexual or bisexual. Respondents' geographical distribution was concentrated on large urban areas. Ages ranged from 16 to 61 years old, with the largest percentage between 20 and 29 years old; 161 of the respondents were women and 95 men; 203 identified themselves as homosexuals and 53 as bisexuals.

The **website analysis** aimed to map online Portuguese spaces of lesbian and gay visibility. The first step consisted on the selection of the websites[4] to analyse. We used a three level selection methodology (Figure 1). Considering the analysis focus is on lesbian and gay visibility, the first level of selection consisted on LGBT Portuguese associations' websites. The second level consisted on associations' websites links, and the third level consisted on links from associations' websites links. The

1st level
LGBT Associations

2nd level
Associations'
Websites links

3rd level
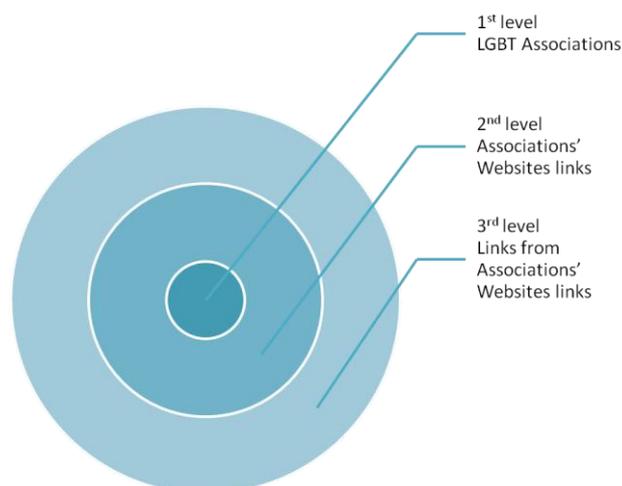Links from
Associations'
Websites links

Figure 1 - Websites selection methodology

following criteria were applied to the websites sample: to be a Portuguese website; to have explicit content on sexual orientation issues; and to have been updated after April 2009 (websites analysis occurred on April 2010). Afterwards, another criterion was applied: to be referenced on at least two websites. This criterion intends to restrict the websites sample to those which are more popular. Considering the objective is to map online spaces of lesbian and gay visibility to the public eyes, social networks (such as Facebook or Twitter) were not included since they are restricted to its members. The analysis grid dimensions and indicators were

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[4] Meaning: websites and blogs

based on previous websites analysis researches (Ferreira, 2007; Silva & Ferreira, 2008; Schneider & Foot, 2005). After the usability test and grid reformulation, the final version was designed (Table 2).

| Identification	Site information	Homepage	Content	Links
Title	Website responsible/s	Homepage highlights	Personal	Links to other websites
URL	Website author/s	Graphic LGBT iconography	Sexual	Links to LGBT related websites
Type	Website's content author/s	Homepage items	Social and political	Links to non-LGBT related websites
Target public	Contact/s	Menu items nº and content	Academic / scientific	Links to LGBT associations
Nº of references on other listed websites	Website description		Entertainment	Broken links
	Website objectives	**Communication**	Commercial / business	
	Website update date	Communication features	Dating services	**Observations**
	Website creation date		Activities	
			Resources	
			Not related to sexual orientation issues	

Table 2 – Websites analysis grid items

Websites were explored using the analysis grid within one week frame. The temporal factor is particularly important when analysing the World Wide Web, because it is a complex and rapidly changing reality, and to grasp a snapshot of a specific area is a challenging task (Schneider & Foot, 2005). The LGBT websites sample analysed had 49 websites: 9 LGBT associations' websites, 17 informal LGBT groups' websites and 23 personal blogs. The LGBT websites analysis occurred from April 24th to April 30th.

The **semi-structured interviews** purpose was to support the exploration of the results of participative website, online survey and website analysis. Some interviews were face-to-face and some were online. Semi-structured interviews allow the researcher to draw on the interplay of the multiple views and voices of participants in a situation and to construct knowledge of the dynamics of that situation. Through semi-structured interviews it is possible to obtain both reflective narratives and more spontaneous responses, in order to acquire a deeper understanding of participants' lived experiences (Illingworth, 2006). Online semi-structured interviews have particular aspects to look after. The trustworthiness of the outcomes depends on the possibility to establish the authenticity of participants' perspectives. The recruitment method can contribute to assure participants' identities (James & Busher, 2009). The semi-structured interviews were conducted with 8 participants: 6 online and 2 face-to-face. The semi-structured interviews were conducted during June 2010. The participants' ages ranged from 20 to 48 years old; 4 women and 4 men; 3 lesbians, 4 gays and 1 bisexual; from diverse geographical locations, professional occupation and education level. The decision between face-to-face or online interviews was made based on participants' geographical location or time availability.

4. Is public space LGBT friendly?

One of the objectives of this research was to explore same-sex displays of affection in public spaces. The online survey had a specific question on this issue and the semi-structured interviews' information provided a more in depth analysis. Comments to survey answers and quotations of interviews' transcripts[5] are presented along side with results explanation.

The online survey question had a rating scale (from 1=never to 5=always) of frequency of same-sex public displays of affection (Graph 1). The question included the additional explanatory text[6] (kissing, caressing or hugging) to the expression "public displays of affection".
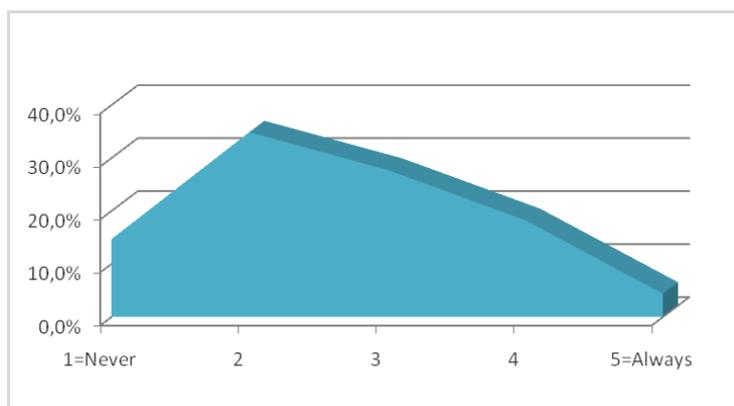
Graph 1 – Answers to the survey question "Do you have same-sex public displays of affection?"

Almost 50% (49,6%) of the answers are on the scale points 1 and 2. Only 22,6% answered with a 4 or 5. The rating average is 2,6 (inferior to the medium value). This result indicates that same-sex public displays of affection are not frequent for survey's respondents (homosexuals and bisexuals).

I usually have these behaviours on private spaces, for instance at home, or public spaces known to be LGBT friendly. Gay, 25 years, Lisbon

Only in LGBT friendly spaces or public spaces where there is no one at the time. Bisexual, 32 years, Aveiro

I would like to have these behaviours more often without being afraid of comments. Lesbian, 36 years, Porto

Fear of discrimination is the most strong and common reason for lesbian and gay's deciding not to have public displays of affection.

If my sexual orientation was public it might endanger my parents' jobs, since Fafe is a very narrow-minded, ignorant and homophobic city. Gay, 18 years, Fafe

From the moment that I got a job I worry more about having these behaviours in public spaces where I eventually may be seen. Lesbian, 27 years, Lisbon

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[5] All quotations are direct transcripts of oral language, translated from Portuguese to English
[6] All online survey's questions regarding same-sex public displays of affection had this explanatory text

I am not visible because of the Portuguese mentality, mostly of my family. I don´t have bisexual behaviours in front of just anyone … if some day I am to be visible, it is because everything has changed! Who knows, some day … Bisexual, 34 years, Faro

Some respondents point out that they should not confront people because society is not yet ready to deal with same-sex public displays of affection.

We respect mostly children elder people. Children because for them it would be awkward to see two women together, because of the heterosexual society they live in. Elder people because they were educated in the idea that: "women are made for men, because this is what God wants". Lesbian, 41 years, Lisbon

Some mention the importance of their partner personal attitude towards visibility; it is always a two person's decision.

We avoid doing it in our parents' presence or in the presence of people that we don´t want to disclose our sexual orientation to, or that may feel uncomfortable or make us uncomfortable. My girlfriend has more problems with visibility than me, and I try to respect her. If a family with children is around, for instance, she may be more cautious. Lesbian, 25 years, Lisbon

Others consider that they have the right to express their feelings regardless of other people reaction or society's respect for diversity.

Although it is frequent to see people chocked with same-sex public displays of affection, I don´t think I should be deprived of demonstrating my affection publically, just as any other heterosexual couples. Gay, 36 years, Lisbon

Nowadays people still are very narrow-minded towards homosexuals, and even if I feel a bit bothered with others' people reactions I am not going to give up of hugging or kissing my girlfriend in public spaces. I have the same rights as hetero couples. Lesbian, 32 years, Porto

Analysing the results according to age did not reveal any differences. This is an interesting data, if we consider recent legal changes in Portugal in the last 10 years. Since 1996 Portugal has witnessed a significant increment on LGBT associations and comprehensive legal changes have occurred (Santos, 2005). Nevertheless it seems that public space remains a space of invisibility to same-sex public displays of affection.

It is still very problematic; visibility in public space is the last thing to change, it is not the first, and in Portugal this is quite evident. In large countries with large cosmopolitan cities, there is a process of internal migration that allows the complete removal from your place of origin and that allows visibility. If you have a culture or social structure that is based on the complete autonomy of people in the market as the U.S. or in the dependence of the state as the Nordic countries, you're free to do lots of things, including being visible as an homosexual; but not in Portugal. Here there is a dependency on family, economical and emotional, that makes visibility very, very difficult. If you join all these factors, which in Portugal are all negative, not a cosmopolitan country, family dependence, little individual autonomy in the market and poor protection of the state, you have people unable to be visible. It is exactly in this kind of countries that it is important to have legislative changes to promote social changes. It is still a terrible situation, but it is now beginning to have some changes. Gay, 48 years, Lisbon

Analysing the results of diverse sexual orientations it is noteworthy to stress that lesbian and bisexuals have a higher rating average in this question (Graph 2), indicating a higher frequency of same-sex public displays of affection in these groups when compared to gays. Nevertheless all the rating averages are inferior to the medium value (3).
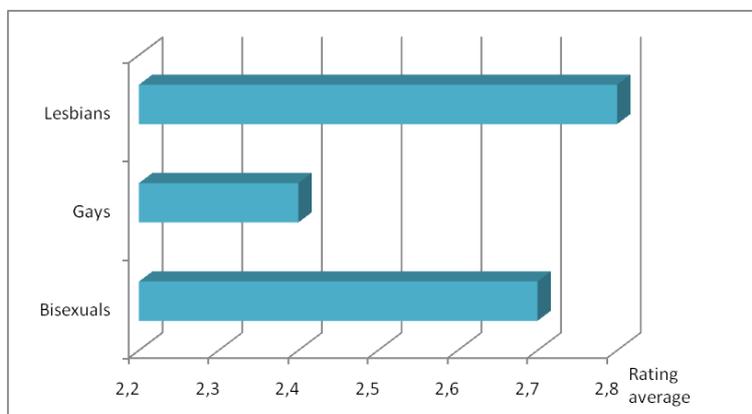
Graph 2 – Rating average of diverse sexual orientations to the question
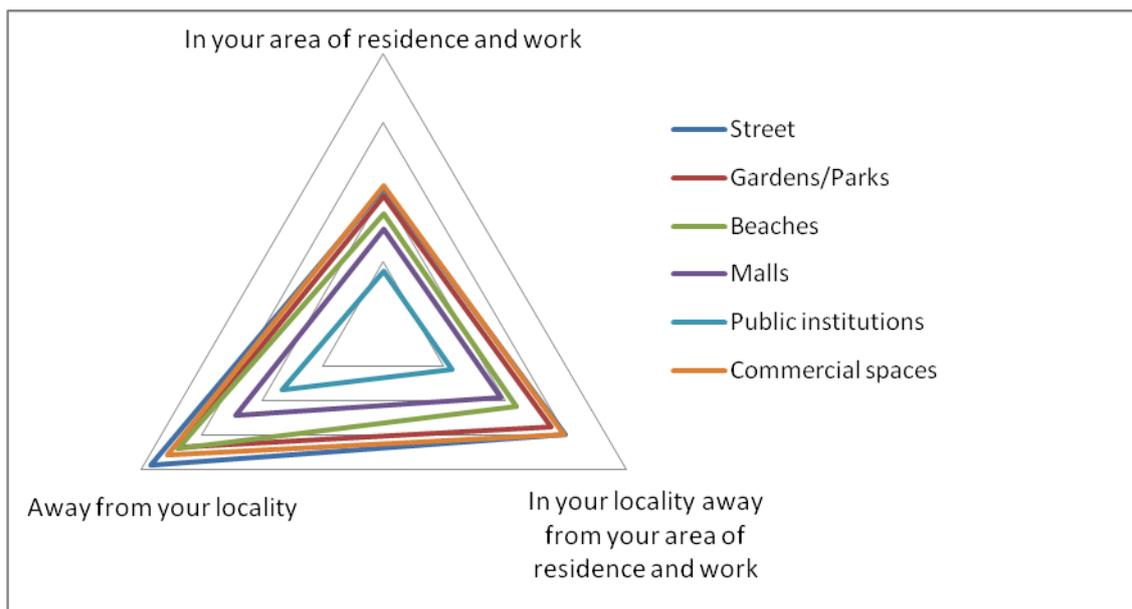"Do you have same-sex public displays of affection?"

In Portuguese society, affective behaviours between women are more common than between men. It is usual to see two women hug and hold hands. Women greet each other with a kiss on the face, while men hold hands. This cultural context may facilitate public displays of affection between women, although this does not mean that lesbians feel comfortable or safe.

> *I know that if I am on the street and I hold hands or embrace my sister or cousin, nobody knows what type of relationship it is, but I just cannot have the same kind of behaviours with my girlfriend, no matter how simple and asexual they might be, I just cannot, I always think that people will see and understand that we are girlfriends.* Semi-structured interview: Lesbian, 45 years, Lisbon

Although personal disclosure of sexual orientation (coming out) was not a variable included in this research, it is worth mentioning that some of the interviewees who "came out" to their families, friends or co-workers, also reveal difficulties on having same-sex public displays of affection.

5. Personal maps of lesbian and gay visibilities

One of the survey's objectives was to draw a map of friendly spaces to same-sex public displays of affection. The survey had a specific question inquiring about public spaces where respondents perform same-sex displays of affection. This question presents a matrix of possible answers crossing geographical areas ["*Away from your locality*", "*In your locality away from your area of residence and work*", "*In your area of residence and work*"] with types of spaces ["*Street*", "*Gardens/Parks*", "*Beaches*", "*Malls*", "*Public institutions (schools, hospitals, government offices, …)*", "*Commercial spaces (restaurants, bars, cafes, …)*"].

Graph 3 – Answers to the survey question "In what geographical areas/types of spaces do you have same-sex public displays of affection?" (multiple choice question)

This question's results (Graph 3) illustrate that respondents perform same-sex public displays of affection predominantly in geographical areas away from their locality, and in their locality preferably away from their area of residence or work. Public institutions are the type of spaces with the lower frequency of same-sex public displays of affection, regardless of their geographical location.

To extend the understanding of lesbian and gay visibilities' mapping, the survey inquires about respondents' perception of open air public spaces as safe to perform same-sex displays of affection. This question has multiple and diverse answers, but some trends emerge from its analysis:

▪ The importance of space - geographical areas away from residence and work

As long that it is not near my home or work, I think that it is possible to have same-sex affective behaviours everywhere. Gay, 24 years, Lisbon

Away from my home area; all over the country. Bisexual, 29 years, Aveiro

▪ Spaces identified as LGBT friendly - like some beaches or bar areas in large cities

Beaches whose frequency is people with no problems or taboos; on the streets at night in Lisbon, in some places like Bairro Alto[7]; or other European cities. Gay, 31 years, Lisbon

Honestly? I don´t think that any public space is safe, outside LGBT friendly identified spaces. Lesbian, 41 years, Faro

▪ Not just space is important, some specific space/time events are considered safer – like pride events

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[7] A Lisbon's area of concentration of LGBT friendly bars

Open air parties away from my locality, that are LGBT identified and that are at night, for instance Pride in Lisbon. Lesbian, 29 years, Lisbon

- Away from "others' eyes" - isolated spaces

The more hidden spaces in the street, or in parks. Gay, 43 years, Setúbal

Gardens and beaches with few people, preferably with no one around. Gay, 23 years, Coimbra

Away from cities, with almost nobody around, like valleys, mountains or beaches' dunes. Gay, 34 years, Santarém

Public gardens and parks, but only when there is almost nobody around. Gay, 25 years, Porto

Places where I feel that I am not being watched. Lesbian, 26 years, Lisbon

- "Restrained and not provocative or ostensive" behaviour makes it safer; it is interesting to stress out that only women presented this type of answer

Any space can be safe as long as behaviours are natural and not provoking. Lesbian, 45 years, Braga

As long as I don´t do these behaviours in an ostensive way, I can do it anywhere I feel like it, without worrying with others. Lesbian, 34 years, Leiria

Noteworthy is the unsafe feeling associated with same-sex public displays of affection. Some respondents stress out that:

The fact that I have had these behaviours in open air spaces does not mean that I feel safe, I always felt insecure while doing it; in spite of this I did not restraining myself and did it anyway. Lesbian, 32 years, Lisbon

It never is completely safe, so when I do it I always take the risk of listening to nasty comments or feel that I am being stared at by others. Lesbian, 27 years, Porto

A clear idea stands out from survey and semi-structured interviews: to be near spaces of residence or work is a constraint to have same-sex public displays of affection.

I think that it is because I think it is possible to run into someone that I know but that I am not really close, and later I will have to deal with their reactions, a kind of "white elephant" that stays. For instance I don´t want to meet my landlord in Aveiro, or a colleague from high school in Maia (note: he used to live in Maia and now he is studying in the University of Aveiro). Gay, 20 years, Aveiro

The importance of residence and work spaces dictates the need for personal maps of lesbian and gay visibility. If we were to draw a map of friendly spaces to same-sex public displays of affection, we would have to draw as many maps as individuals. There would be no single map that would meet the specificities of each individual. Probably only some bars zones in large urban areas would be common spaces to all personal maps.

6. LGBT friendly spaces: a deserted landscape with an urban touch

The "LGBT friendly" expression is used to refer to an environment that is friendly towards LGBT people. LGBT friendly commercial spaces are listed in lesbian and gay's websites and publications in order to inform about specific spaces where LGBT are welcome and may feel comfortable.

The participative website initial list of LGBT friendly commercial spaces had 57 spaces in 4 cities. Only spaces referred in at least two online guides were included. Based on the participative website comments' 27 new spaces and 5 new cities were added to the initial list. One space left the list because it was no longer active. The same rule of at least two references was applied to comments' information. The final LGBT friendly commercial spaces list has 83 spaces and 9 cities.

Although Portugal is a small country, to have only 83 identified LGBT friendly commercial spaces is a revealing number. It is indeed a deserted landscape. Most of the districts and the islands of Azores and Madeira don´t have any identified LGBT friendly commercial space.

Their geographical distribution (Figure 2) is enlightening, 59% of these commercial spaces are in Lisbon area (the Portuguese main city) and 18% are in Porto (the second larger Portuguese city). This distribution draws a clear picture of an urban reality. The numbers on the map correspond to each district. The LGBT friendly commercial spaces are not evenly distributed on the district. They are located on urban areas. These spaces are completely inexistent on small cities and rural areas.
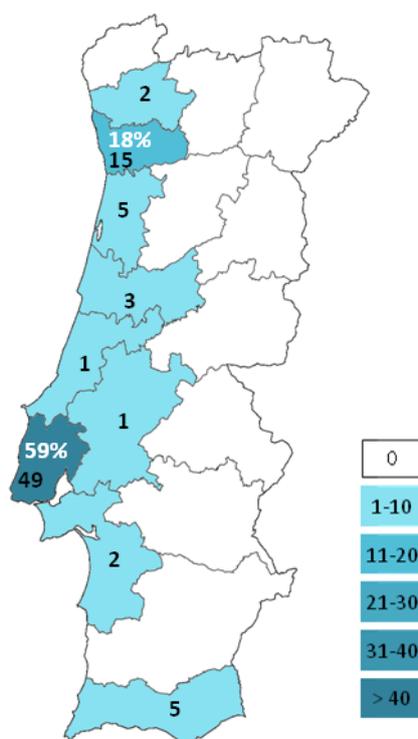

Figure 2 - Geographical distribution of LGBT friendly commercial spaces (N=83)

Using Google Maps to georeferentiate all listed spaces[8] allows a better understanding of their geographical distribution. In large urban areas, such as Lisbon and Porto, there are specific concentration areas of LGBT friendly commercial spaces, as figure 3 and 4 illustrate.
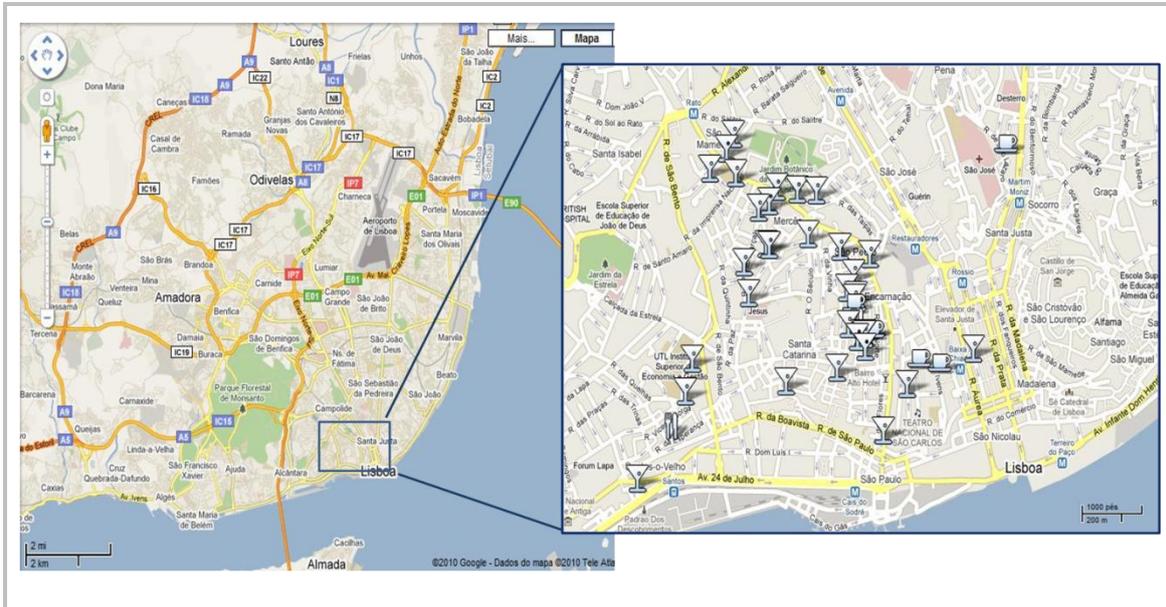

Figure 3 – Geographical concentration of LGBT friendly commercial spaces in Lisbon

Figure 4 – Geographical concentration of LGBT friendly commercial spaces in Porto

The importance of urban areas to LGBT friendly commercial spaces is reinforced in semi-structured interviews.

> *Here, where I live it is very difficult to go out at night, but I know lots of LGBT friendly bars in Lisbon and Porto, but Portugal is not only Lisbon and Porto, and that is a problem. When I want to have some fun without having to worry about people I go to Porto. The proximity of Porto (note: about 75*

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[8] LGBT friendly spaces Google map

km) makes that LGBT people from Viana do Castelo prefer to go away from their city and go to Porto bars. Gay, 28 years, Viana do Castelo

LGBT friendly spaces are considered to be safe and comfortable to LGBT sexualities. This is the definition of the expression. **But do lesbians and gays feel safe and comfortable in these spaces?**

Survey's respondents were inquired on what type of commercial spaces ("*Non-LGBT friendly*" or "*LGBT friendly*") do they usually have same-sex public displays of affection. The results indicate a major number of respondents that perform these behaviours in LGBT friendly spaces.
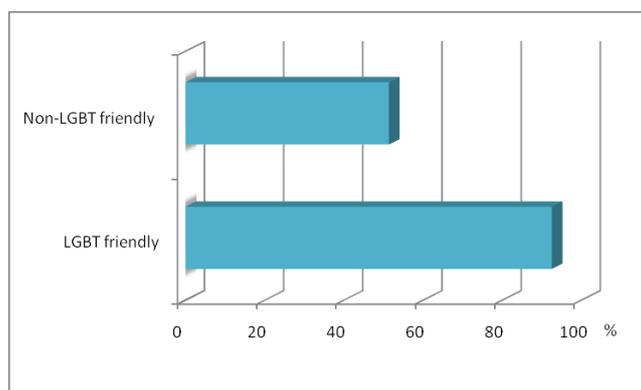
Graph 4 – Answers to the survey question "In what type of commercial spaces do you have same-sex public displays of affection?" (multiple choice question)

On LGBT friendly spaces it is easier; it is quite rare to have these behaviours in non-LGBT spaces, it may depend on the people that are present. But if it is a LGBT friendly space I don´t have any problems. Gay, 39 years, Porto

To explore the perception of LGBT friendly commercial spaces as friendly to different groups of people ("*Women and Men*", "L*esbians, Gays, Bisexuals and Heterosexuals*") and to same-sex public displays of affection, the survey presented questions with a rating scale (from 1=not friendly at all to 4=very friendly) (Graph 5).
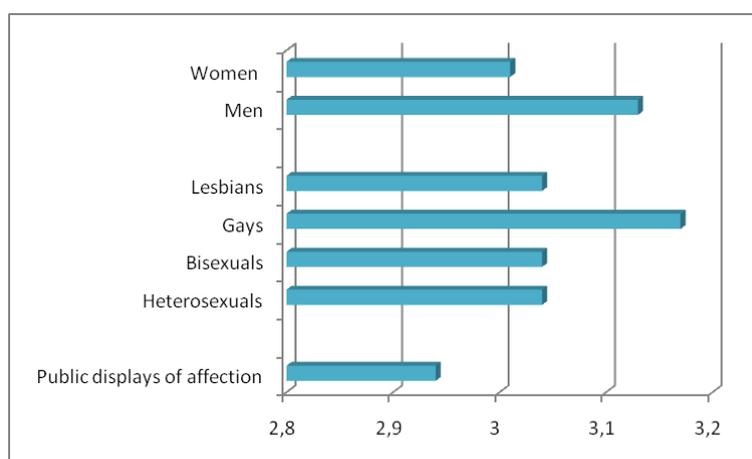
Graph 5 – Answers to the survey question "How do you rate commercial spaces identified as LGBT friendly, in terms of being friendly to: women, men | lesbians, gays, bisexuals, heterosexuals | public displays of affection?"

The category "Men" has a higher rating average than the category "Women", and the category "Gays" score higher than the categories "Lesbians", "Bisexuals" and "Heterosexuals". These results indicate a friendlier environment towards men and gay. We can say that according to respondents' perceptions, the Portuguese LGBT friendly commercial spaces are more "gay friendly".

In what concerns public displays of affection the rating average is 2,94. Analysing the results to each of the scale points, 21,6% of the respondents consider LGBT friendly commercial spaces to be not friendly at all (1) or not friendly (2) towards same-sex public displays of affection. And if we consider that most lesbian and gays do not perform same-sex displays of affection in public spaces (see "Is public space LGBT friendly?") and that LGBT commercial spaces are almost the unique public spaces where people feel comfortable to perform such behaviours, this result is even more significant.

> *To perform same-sex public displays of affection it depends on what city I am, or if I am in an area where I might meet someone that I know and that I don't want to know that I am bisexual. If I am in a place where I don't know anyone, then I don't have any problems, but if I am in a place where I know many persons than I seldom have these behaviours. This is also because my girlfriend does not like to expose herself.* Bisexual, 22 years, Loulé

This survey's results are in line with the information on LGBT friendly commercial spaces of PortugalGay.com[9], a Portuguese LGBT portal with the most comprehensive directory of LGBT friendly spaces in Portugal. The directory has an interesting aspect: a classification of frequency. Each listed space has graphic symbols (Figure 5) that inform about their frequency. The analysis of the classification of frequency in this directory (Graph 6) shows us that gay frequency is the most common. It is interesting

| Gay Men |
| Lesbians |
| Bisexuals |
| Transexuals |
| Heterosexuals |
| Public Display* Welcome |
| Public Display* Not Tolerated |
| *-between persons of the same sex |

Figure 5 – Symbols used on PortugalGay.com directory

to consider the higher frequency of heterosexuals when compared to bisexuals and transsexuals. A relevant issue to highlight is the existence of 10% of LGBT friendly spaces identified with "Public display not tolerated" and only 26% identified with "Public display welcome"; the remaining spaces have no indication regarding "Public display". In the interview with PortugalGay.com's responsible it was clear that the classification of frequency is based on users' comments and commercial spaces owners' information, and not on a well established and reliable methodology; nevertheless it is noteworthy that its information is similar to this research's survey and interviews.

> *On spaces that are clearly LGBT friendly it is easy to have affective behaviours towards same-sex persons. On spaces clearly LGBT friendly, although there might be a majority of LGBT people inside, the managers may not want to drive off heterosexuals and assume a discretion policy towards same-sex public displays of affection.* Lesbian, 24 years, Tavira

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[9] www.portugalgay.com
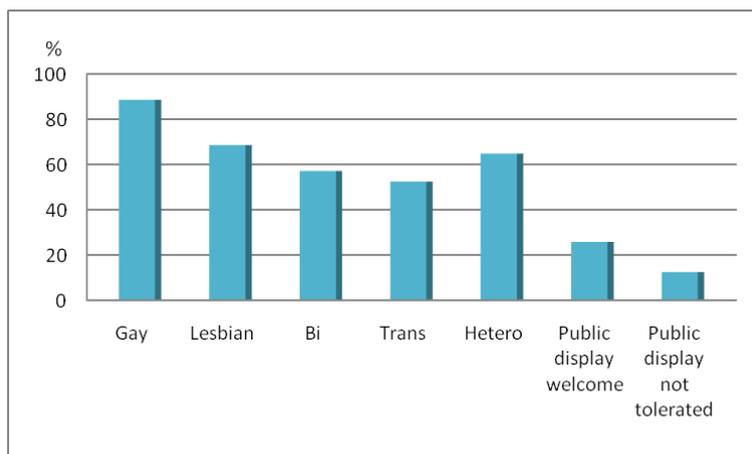
Graph 6 – Classification of frequency of LGBT friendly spaces in PortugalGay.com directory

To summarize we can say that, according to respondents' perceptions, LGBT friendly commercial spaces are not so friendly after all, in particular to same-sex public displays of affection; and that there are more gay friendly spaces, than lesbian or bisexual friendly spaces.

7. LGBT online: a space of visibility?

The websites analysis of Portuguese LGBT websites and blogs aimed to map online spaces of lesbian and gay visibility. After applying the selection methodology the websites sample had 49 websites and blogs (Figure 6). **"Association websites"** refers to LGBT associations' websites and blogs; "**Group websites"** refers to non-formal

Figure 6 - Websites sample composition

LGBT groups' websites and blogs; and "**Personal blogs"** refers to blogs of a single individual or group of individuals.

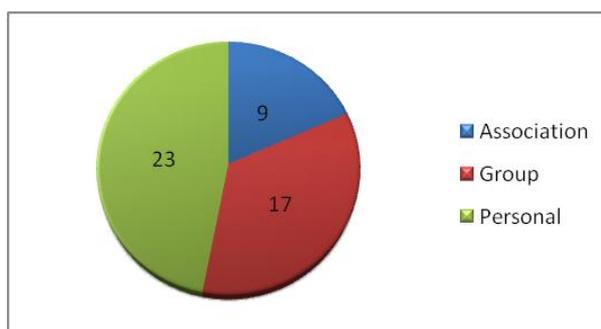Based on the data of the websites analysis there are some major trends to report.

The first noteworthy result is the dominant invisibility of **personal identification**. Only 46,9% (23) of the 49 websites have personal identification of their authors. Associations have 100% (9) and Groups have 58,8% (10) websites with personal identification, but only 17,4% (4) of Personal blogs have personal identification. Associations and Groups' leaders perform public activities and speak out for LGBT rights, but away from activism there is a dominant landscape of invisibility. Because this is the dominant attitude, it is not possible to map separately lesbians, gays and bisexuals presence online.

Websites' objectives are clearly stated in Associations and Groups, but 69,6% (16) out of 23 Personal blogs don´t mention their purpose or description of blog's content.

Personal identification and websites' objectives are major differences between Associations and Groups' websites and Personal blogs.

The presence of **LGBT symbols**[10] is not significant. As much as 57,1% (28) of the 49 websites don´t have any LGBT symbols, and when present almost all are limited to rainbow colours and often in a very subtle way.

Homepages' highlights are the most viewed information on websites and blogs. After copying all homepages' highlights (and all the posts from first page in blogs) to a word document, a Vocabulary Grabber software[11] was applied (Table 3).

Websites' types					
Associations		**Groups**		**Personal**	
Gay	5	Gay	4	Festival	5
Court	4	Sexual	4	Com' Out	4
Network	3	Debate	3	Portugal	4
Sexual	3	Online	3	Gay	3
Debate	2	Cinema	2	Lisbon	3
Pope	2	Civil	2	Time	3
		Moral	2	Love	2
		Pope	2	Cinema	2
		Portugal	2	Debate	2
				Queer	2

Table 3 – List of words with more than 2 occurrences in homepages' highlights

"Gay" is the only word that is present in the list of all types of websites (Associations, Groups and Personal). Although the "Gay" word is sometimes used as synonymous of LGBT it is interesting to stress out that the words "Lesbian", "Bisexual" or "Transgender" are not listed.

"Sexual", "Debate", "Pope", "Cinema" and "Portugal" are the words that appear in the list of at least two types of websites. The Pope's visit (May 11th to May 14th 2010) was close to the time spam of websites analysis (April 24th to April 30th). This temporal proximity may explain the presence of the "Pope" word in Associations and Groups' websites.

The absence of the word "Marriage" is interesting since Portugal was in the midst of the process of approval of same-sex marriage. The law was approved by the Assembly of the Republic in February 2010 and in May 17th 2010 the President of the Republic ratified it. The most active time of discussion was before February, nevertheless it would be expected more highlights on this subject. The **type of content** of websites (Table 4) is reported in Graph 7.

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[10] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/LGBT_symbols
[11] http://www.visualthesaurus.com/vocabgrabber/

Type of content	Description
Personal	Content about personal aspects of private life / moods, feelings, personal stories …
Sexual	Explicit sexual content, register if it is text, photos, …
Social and political	Information on social and political issues, opinions and discussions on civil rights issues
Academic / scientific	Academic or scientific issues related with sexual orientation issues
Entertainment	Leisure information (shows, movies, famous people gossips, ...)
Commercial / business	Information on commercial services, publicity or direct access to services
Dating services	Explicit dating services, with access to databases information
Activities	Information on activities organized by the website's responsible, or divulgation of others activities
Resources	Resources related with sexual orientation issues and directly accessed through the website (documents, multimedia, ...)
Not related to sexual orientation issues	Every content not related to sexual orientation

Table 4 – Type of content description

The most striking result is the high incidence of "Social and political" content in Associations and Groups' websites and Personal blogs. It is particularly relevant the high frequency on Personal blogs, pointing to a rather political lesbian and gay online landscape.
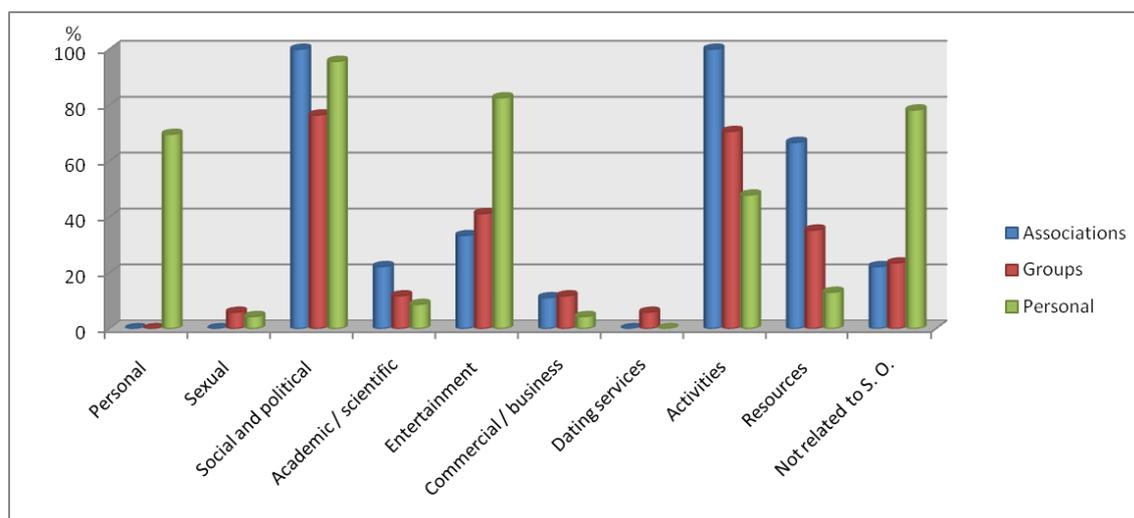
Graph 7 – Type of content frequency

Association's websites have more "Activities" and "Resources" content than other type of websites, which is consistent with their purposes and activist work.

"Personal", "Entertainment" and "Not-related to sexual orientation" contents are more frequent in Personal blogs. Personal blogs have a more diverse type of content which is consistent with their specific nature; they are the product of a wide diversity of individuals.

"Commercial/Business" content is almost inexistent on all websites and blogs analysed. This result is in line with the fact that the LGBT reality in Portugal does not have a significant commercial expression (Santos, 2005).

"Academic/scientific" content does not have a significant presence on the websites and blogs analysed. Nevertheless there is a worth mentioning website, LES Online - Digital Journal on Lesbian Issues[12], once it is the only one that specifically aims to promote studies and scientific research.

Noteworthy is the low incidence of "Sexual" content and "Dating services" on all websites and blogs, since this type of contents are frequently associated with LGBT online (Wakeford, 2002).

In what concerns **communication features** there are few options. The large majority of websites only use email to communicate with visitors, and blogs have the feature "comments to posts". There are some isolated exceptions in Associations and Groups' websites that are summarized in table 5. Some Associations and Groups may have an account in social networks, but that information is not disclosed in their websites.

	Forums	Guestbook	Chat	Social networks	Mailing lists
Associations	3	1		1	4
Groups			1	3	2

Table 5 – Communication features in websites and blogs

The average number of posts per day gives us an idea of **blogs activity**. Most blogs (Groups and Personal) have an average of 1 post every two days, which indicates a regular online activity. There is a personal blog that emerges as a particularly active one: "Os tempos que correm"[13], with an average of 5 posts per day. This is the personal blog of a gay activist, Miguel Vale de Almeida that was a member of the Assembly of Republic from October 2009 to January 2011.

Analysing the **comments to posts** in the first page of blogs it is interesting to note that there is a large number of blogs with an average of more than one comment to post: 5,9% (1) Group and 56,5% (13) Personal blogs. There are two Personal blogs that must be mentioned, Tangas Lésbicas[14] and Estrela Minha[15] with an average of more than 10 comments to posts.

The average number of **Links** is significantly different according to the type of websites. Associations have an average of 30 links, Groups have an average of 50 links and Personal blogs have an average of 100 links.

There are some websites not included in this research sample but that must be mentioned due to theirs specificity:

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[12] http://www.lespt.org/lesonline
[13] http://blog.miguelvaledealmeida.net/
[14] http://tangaslesbicas.wordpress.com/
[15] http://estrelaminha.wordpress.com/

- Two commercial websites, which constitutes a novelty in the Portuguese reality: Loja Chegay[16], an online store with clothes with LGBT symbols, and Happy Sensations[17] a company that organizes events to LGBT people, including same-sex marriages.

- A very active forum[18] of a LGBT youth association, Rede ex-aequo, that has 9542 members, 8355 topics, 731431 messages, and has an average of 481 messages per day (numbers retrieved on 30th April 2010).

Summarizing these results it is possible to draw a draft map of the Portuguese landscape of lesbian and gay online visibility. It is an active landscape with a dominant trait of social and political issues, but it is not a space of personal visibility.

Online identities allow reflexivity and choice in terms of self-presentations (Bell, 2001a) and it is common to have online made-up identities. But in this case it is particularly relevant the prevalence of personal invisibility in Personal blogs, since invisibility is such an important issue to lesbians and gays. The possibility of made-up identities allows lesbians and gays to share their personal experience as homosexuals, but at the same time safeguard their personal visibility. Online space is a space of liberty but not of personal visibility.

The subtle presence of LGBT symbols in websites and blogs reveals a not very colourful landscape. Words have prominence over graphic symbols on lesbian and gay Portuguese online landscape.

8. Conclusions

The Portuguese reality of lesbians and gays has rapidly changed in recent years. A consistent and significant set of legal measures were adopted: from the decriminalization of homosexuality in 1982 to same-sex marriage law in 2010. It is a remarkable change, framed by the revolution of 1974 that ended a long period of dictatorship and brought noteworthy social changes to Portugal in extensive and diverse areas of life, including sexuality.

Portugal's accession to the EU in 1986 was a significant stimulus to national equality legislation. However, there still is widespread social discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation, as it is clear from the results of the Eurobarometer on "Discrimination in the EU in 2009" (European Commission, 2009). One of the most pervasive forms of social discrimination is strong societal pressures to confine and hide lesbian and gay sexualities within private spaces (Valentine, 1993). Public spaces are the last stronghold of diverse sexual orientation's equal rights.

This research focuses on same-sex public displays of affection and not on identities. Sexual identities are heterogeneous. Identities are not stable or given understandings of social

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[16] http://www.chegay.pt/
[17] http://atuaempresa.blogspot.com/
[18] http://www.rea.pt/forum/

differences, and it is not possible to explain inequalities through a single framework. Individuals maintain multiple identities in different spaces and in one space but at different times. Particular identities become salient or foregrounded at particular moments, and this process is highly contingent on the power-laden spaces in and through which experiences are lived (Valentine, 2007:19). Same-sex public displays of affection are observable behaviours that disclose the perception by lesbians and gays of public space as discriminatory/non-discriminatory to homosexuality.

This task's objective was to map physical and online spaces of lesbian and gay visibility in Portugal and to explore same-sex displays of affection in public spaces. The analysis of the results obtained from the participants in this research, point to some interesting conclusions.

According to the participants in this research, **lesbians and gays do not perceive public spaces as friendly**. Most do not perform same-sex displays of affection in public spaces, and it is particularly relevant that there are no significant differences related to age. Younger lesbians and gays report the same frequency of same-sex public displays of affection as the older ones. It is noteworthy that the results of younger and older lesbians and gays are similar, considering the significant legal measures on homosexuality and societal changes in Portugal after the revolution of 1974. Confining same-sex displays of affection to private spaces is one of the most common traits among lesbians and gays.

An analysis of space/time contexts is interesting. Lesbians and gays may feel comfortable in public spaces that usually they don´t consider friendly, but that at specific times become friendly, such as Pride events[19] or films festivals[20]. The presence of visible lesbians and gays can transform a heteronormative space into a homo friendly one.

Based on the answers of the participants in this research, **there is no common map of lesbian and gay visibilities**. The importance of residence and work spaces dictates the need for personal maps of lesbian and gay visibility. Lesbians and gays avoid having same-sex public displays of affection near their home or work areas, because most of them do not want to disclose their sexual orientation to people with whom they interact daily. If we were to draw a map of friendly spaces to same-sex public displays of affection, we would have to draw as many maps as individuals. There would be no single map that would meet the specificities of each individual. Probably only some bars zones in large urban areas would be common spaces to all personal maps.

LGBT friendly spaces in Portugal are a deserted landscape with an urban touch. LGBT friendly commercial spaces are concentrated in Lisbon and Porto, with scattered spaces in some small cities. Most of Portugal's districts don´t have any LGBT friendly commercial space, neither non urban areas. In large urban areas, such as Lisbon and Porto, there are specific areas of concentration of LGBT friendly commercial spaces.

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[19] http://portugalpride.org/

[20] Queer Lisboa - Lisbon Gay & Lesbian Film Festival http://www.lisbonfilmfest.com/

Considering that LGBT friendly spaces are the few public spaces where lesbians and gays perform same-sex displays of affection, it is worrying that these spaces are perceived as (not so) friendly after all. Lesbians and gays that participated in this research perceive **LGBT friendly commercial spaces as not so friendly**, in particular to same-sex public displays of affection. These spaces are considered to be more gay friendly spaces, than lesbian friendly or bisexual friendly.

The Portuguese landscape of lesbian and gay online visibility is a virtual space of liberty and civil rights claim, but not a space of personal visibility. Lesbian and gay online landscape is active and participative but not very "colourful", words have prominence over graphic symbols. It reflects some features of the physical landscape, like the pervasive invisibility of lesbians and gays, the significant social and political LGBT activity, and the almost nonexistent commercial expression of lesbians and gays in Portugal.

There are intimate connections between the production of space and the systematic production of power (Massey, 1999; Mitchell, 2000; Smith, 1991; Valentine, 2001). Research on practices and experiences of being a lesbian and a gay can contribute to a better understanding of sexuality as a process of power relations which mediates our everyday interactions.

Based on this research results I argue that the invisibility of lesbian and gay sexualities in public spaces relates to the hidden, subtle, not verbalised and not explicit codes of behaviour that discriminate same-sex public displays of affection. These hidden and not explicit codes of behaviour are one of the most pervasive and strong expressions of heteronormative power structures inscribed in socio-spatial landscapes.

On a context of a heteronormative socio-spatial landscape people can decide not to disclose their non-normative sexual orientation, leading to a pervasive invisibility of lesbian and gay sexualities in public spaces. Concurrently the pervasive invisibility of lesbian and gay sexualities in public spaces reinforces power inequalities, feeding back the heteronormative socio-spatial landscape.

How to change and transform pubic space in a more friendly space towards lesbian and gay sexualities? The research project *"Reconceptualising Public Spaces of (In)Equality: Sensing and Creating Layers of Visibility"* following tasks: *Sensing the landscape* and *Creating landscapes* are proposals to address this challenge.

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