Diversity Within Diversity:

The Experience of LGBTIQ+ Expatriates Residing in Malta

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Abstract

This Masters dissertation gives an insight on intersectional identities of non-Maltese LGBTIQ+ people who choose Malta as their second home. This research puts a spotlight on the expatriate identity and sexual orientation as intersections which create unique individual experiences. Whilst expatriates in Malta hail from different countries and continents, some may seem more foreign than others, leading to possible discrimination based on visible diversity. This discrimination may at times manifest itself based on how an individual is perceived, rather than on how an individual truly identifies. Therefore, this study aims to explore the effects of the visible and invisible diversity of race, gender, and sexuality to understand how they add to one another, focusing on the Maltese context. The methods of data collection consisted of closed-ended surveys and open-ended interviews which were later merged to get a simultaneously broad and specific understanding of this phenomenon. Information on the demographics and the general feelings of the LGBTIQ+ expatriate community in Malta were gathered through an online survey whereas in-depth personal accounts of the lived realities were gathered through Zoom interviews. This mixed-methods approach revealed that some instances of intersectional prejudice do exist in Malta, however, the non-Maltese identity tends to be more problematic than the LGBTIQ+ identity. This study recommends that further in-depth research on LGBTIQ+ expatriates in Malta is carried out to bridge the present gap in local sources.

Keywords: Malta, LGBT, Expatriation, Intersectionality, Minorities

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To all those who truly believed I could do this, especially my girlfriend Nicole; a heartfelt thank you for being a part of my life!

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Nomenclature page

<u>Queer</u> – An umbrella term for people whose gender identity is not cisgender (the same as the gender assigned at birth) and/or whose sexual orientation is not heterosexual.

<u>Cishet norm</u> – Cisgender heterosexual norm; the assumption that everyone identifies with the same gender as assigned as birth and possesses a heterosexual sexual orientation.

<u>Bi/Bisexual</u> – A person who is attracted to people of the same gender as well as other genders.

<u>Pan/Pansexual</u> – A person whose sexual attraction to people is regardless of the biological sex or gender identity of others.

<u>Ace/Asexual</u> – A person who experiences little to no sexual attraction.

<u>NB/Non-binary</u> – A person who identifies as neither female nor male, but their personal identification goes beyond the gender binary.

<u>Trans/Transgender</u> – A person whose assigned sex at birth does not match their gender identity, making them feel like they do not belong in their body.

<u>Demi/Demisexual</u> – a person who only feels sexual attraction after developing an emotional bond with someone.

<u>Gynephilic</u> – a person who is attracted to femininity and/or female characteristics.

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Aims, purposes, and research questions

Studying intersectionality in the Maltese context can take different forms. Being ranked the number 1 country in Europe in terms of LGBTIQ+ rights for seven consecutive years (ILGA-Europe, 2022), Malta might be perceived as a 'gay haven' by non-Maltese audiences who rely on such statistics. This is discussed in more detail in section 3.4 of this dissertation, titled 'The Maltese context'. In order to investigate the expectations and the effects that are linked to such statistics, this study asks; does the fact that LGBTIQ+ expatriates are both non-Maltese and LGBTIQ+ hinder their integration in Maltese society? Besides focusing on the double layering of these intersectional identities, this study will also shed light on the reasons behind LGBTIQ+ expatriates' decision to relocate to Malta. The purpose of this research is to obtain more knowledge on the integration process and feelings of LGBTIQ+ expatriates in Malta in a holistic way, exploring both the prevalent communal perspectives as well as specific individual ones. This is done in an attempt to understand how intersecting minority identities affect or exacerbate each other. It is important to note that there is just one piece of literature that minimally studies both these simultaneous intersectional identities in just one area of the local context, so this dissertation aims to bridge the gap in the existing knowledge.

1.2 Research background

The first Literature Review chapter presents ample theory on intersecting identities and feelings of belonging. Minority identities in relation to this study are explored as well as the different processes of self-identification that may vary depending on the context. Individuals possess several simultaneous identities, but the identity that prevails in specific situations depends on various factors discussed in this chapter (Chikwendu, 2013; Kim and Von Glinow, 2017). Simultaneous identities cannot necessarily be divided into singular identities, as they all influence and interact with a person's reality collectively. Hidden identities such as religion or sexual orientation need to be disclosed to others, therefore people may opt to not reveal such information about themselves when in hostile environments to ensure their own safety. However, visible identities such as race cannot be concealed, so discrimination might occur

based on what outsiders see or perceive about a person (Bowleg, 2013). Both the visible and invisible identities are linked to privileges and disadvantages in everyday life relationships as well as relations with institutions and organisations, whereby the disadvantages may manifest themselves as discriminations. This means that every individual experiences life differently according to the particular combination of identities that they possess, which impacts their perception of belonging to different spaces.

Participating in spaces which are welcoming benefits the individuals as they find mutual support and feel they belong. A place which embraces various intersectional identities makes people comfortable with being themselves, whereas a place that only accepts one identity limits individuals to focus on one intersectional identity over another. For this reason, the more intersectional identities people have in common, the more they bond and understand each other (Formby, 2017, p. 163). In the case of individuals who are outside their native countries, this need to find others who share similar characteristics is essential in the process of integrating in the new country.

Various push and pull factors influence why an LGBTIQ+ person decides to migrate or relocate to another country. The integration process in the new country may or may not involve participation in local LGBTIQ+ activism, and may consequentially result in dialogue on LGBTIQ+ issues between the host country and the native country (Ayoub, 2013; McPhail, McNulty and Hutchings, 2016). Integration also involves the mediating of cultural norms from the native culture to the host culture as the relocation process proceeds further. LGBTIQ+ migrants possess a broader cultural consciousness as they form part of and are able to adapt to more than one culture. This means that they understand notions like sexuality more holistically as they are able to bridge different definitions (Ayoub and Bauman, 2018). Although migration is often portrayed as a movement from repression to liberation, this is not always the case as individuals might face new inequalities after settling in the host country (Luibhéid, 2008). Discriminations such as homophobia, racism, and sexism may present themselves even in countries which are considered as the best for LGBTIQ+ individuals to relocate to, and might result in a different lived experience than that which was expected. Therefore, the process of choosing a suitable country to move to as a member of the LGBTIQ+ community is thorough.

The reasons why LGBTIQ+ individuals are attracted to some places over others are explored in the second Literature Review chapter, as well as in-depth insight into what expatriation means for this community. Some countries or cities are specifically marketed as LGBTIQ+ friendly to attract LGBTIQ+ tourists and expatriates, as these people are seen as wealthy individuals with the potential to boost the economy all-year round (Austin and Wojcik, 2018). Such 'gay' destinations may have historical relevance to the LGBTIQ+ movement or may be internationally portrayed as liberal and progressive. However, LGBTIQ+ friendly destinations may not necessarily support LGBTIQ+ individuals as their liberal attitudes might be fuelled by consumerism rather than social change discourse, resulting in a discrepancy between the marketed destination and the situation of the local LGBTIQ+ community (Hartal, 2019). Products such as LGBTIQ+ vacation packages, gay weddings, and LGBTIQ+ honeymoon destinations have also emerged to cater for this niche market (Alonso, 2013; Luibhéid, 2018). These products might be considered as part of a 'pinkwashing' culture in countries or areas which promote themselves as very liberal but still employ other kinds of discriminations. For this reason, it is essential that destinations are researched carefully and visited prior to relocation to avoid any negative surprises.

Several considerations need to be addressed before choosing a new host country, and these considerations increase if an individual is part of the LGBTIQ+ community. There may be differences in the recognition of LGBTIQ+ individuals between the native country and the host country, therefore some rights might not be fully transferrable from one culture to another. This might be the case if expatriation is not a voluntary choice such as when LGBTIQ+ employees are sent on international work assignments and have to expatriate in countries where they and their possible same-sex spouse are not legally protected (Gedro *et al.*, 2013). However, legal protection might not be enough to make LGBTIQ+ expatriates feel safe, as they might encounter harassment from the local population. This also varies between different areas of a country, where the levels of acceptance may differ (Formby, 2017).

As a destination, Malta is promoted for all kinds of tourists, however, it has also been promoted specifically for LGBTIQ+ travel and weddings. Malta has held the number 1 spot in the ILGA-Europe Rainbow Map index as the most LGBTIQ+ friendly country in Europe for seven consecutive years (ILGA-Europe, 2022); a ranking which provides a positive picture of the country to the rest of Europe and the world. For this reason, LGBTIQ+ individuals from

around the world who check reliable travel guides and websites about Malta might opt to relocate to benefit from the excellent laws of the country, especially if they originate from countries where LGBTIQ+ individuals are not legally recognised. However, other factors relating to the quality of life in Malta, which has decreased according to recent rankings carried out by expatriates themselves (Von Plato and Zeeck, 2021), might influence the expatriates' decisions and decrease the attractiveness of the islands despite the exceptional laws present.

The experiences of LGBTIQ+ expatriates living in Malta were recorded and analysed later on in this publication. Responses were collected through a mixed methods study to gain both broad and specific data on how this intersectional phenomenon affected and still affects the participants of this study. This two-phased collection of data was carried out simultaneously through quantitative online surveys and qualitative in-depth online interviews with expatriates who had been living in Malta for at least 2 years or more before the start of the fieldwork phase. Both databases were then merged to offer a holistic analysis and to reinforce each other in the extraction of themes.

The findings of this study prove useful in understanding the processes LGBTIQ+ expatriates go through both prior to their expatriation as well as during their first-hand experiences of Malta. These findings shed light on the factors that influence how much an individual feels welcomed and integrated in Malta and how these factors change over time. Aspects such as preferred friend circles, perceived prejudice, and engagement in LGBTIQ+ events and organisations are analysed as they are crucial in understanding the extent of belonging. The expatriates' own narratives of culture shocks also provide insight on how successful their expatriation in Malta is, as this feeling is evident from the way they speak and the kind of language they choose in describing what they went through. Such fieldwork is necessary to understand how LGBTIQ+ expatriates prefer identifying themselves and which intersectional identity they feel brings the most issues for them.

1.3 Rationale, positionality, and preliminary limitations

This study is being undertaken to better understand the often ignored experiences of LGBTIQ+ expatriates, especially in the local context. Personally, I have always found diversity and

intersecting identities fascinating as they make me aware of the different combinations of identities and realities that exist in this world. Logically, the combinations of minority identities, being less prevalent than majority intersections, are universally less explored and less understood. Through this exciting study, I want to take on the investigation of intersectional identities and analyse the first-hand experiences of LGBTIQ+ expatriates. There is a significant number of expatriates in Malta, but they are not always given a voice. The choice to orient this study towards LGBTIQ+ expatriates comes from the fact that I myself am part of the LGBTIQ+ community, so although I do not share meanings of expatriation since I have always lived in Malta, I do understand what it means to be LGBTIQ+ combined with other intersections such as being a woman. Therefore, I am choosing to grab the intersectional concept of being non-Maltese and LGBTIQ+ and explore it further through other people's previous research as well as my own. Since the subject deals with sensitive personal information, ethical clearance from the University of Malta was obtained before the fieldwork phase of this study began. The information sheet and consent form were sent by email to the participants, and they were encouraged to get in touch if they had any questions.

It is worth noting that previous literature relating to this subject is quite limited in the local context, as relevant sources only tackled one minority identity at a time; either the LGBTIQ+ identity in Malta or the expatriate identity. There is only one minor study that was carried out among LGBTIQ+ expatriates, which only focused on expatriates residing in Gozo. An intersectional research studying both identities simultaneously for the whole of the Maltese islands was never done before, and therefore the literature used in this case is evaluated carefully keeping this gap in mind. This is further coupled by a lack of research concerning expatriates in Malta, especially recent research, which is also reflected in the Literature Review section dealing with the Maltese context. For this reason, ideas may be taken from the presented local literature but they should not be merged in an attempt to understand how both identities work together. The lived experiences of combined identities often result in new experiences that are different from the sum of their component identity experiences.

1.4 Concluding remarks

In this dissertation, the acronym 'LGBTIQ+' and the word 'queer' are used interchangeably to signify gender identities and sexual orientations that fall outside the traditional definitions. In the interviews, most participants also used the word 'gay' as an umbrella term instead of saying 'LGBTIQ+', particularly since in spoken interaction it is faster and easier to say 'gay' than to spell the acronym every time. For more specialised definitions of individual genders and sexualities, the Nomenclature List provides detail on some of the gender and sexual identities mentioned in this study. The identities mentioned in the Nomenclature List and in the description of the participants such as when quoting their interviews are taken from their own description of their identities. This means that when the survey asked for the gender identity and sexual orientation of the participants, they were free to describe their gender and sexual orientation the way they wanted to, and the same description given by them was then used to refer to them in the study.

It is important to note that the qualitative data collection for this study has been shifted to an online platform since this attempt to get a holistic understanding of the LGBTIQ+ expatriate community in Malta was undertaken at the end of the last phase of the COVID-19 pandemic. For this reason, the data presented in this study was all collected virtually.

Finally, the answers collected in this study are not generalisable for all LGBTIQ+ expatriates in Malta, particularly since the extent of different participant representation was limited. Furthermore, there were other intersectional identities and individual characteristics which were not recorded, such as the effects of class or the level of education. Such factors, if explored, could have also given a more detailed insight on why individuals experienced what they experienced.

Chapter 2: Literature Review: Understanding Identities

2.1 Introduction

Understanding the lived realities of LGBTIQ+ expatriates and the challenges they might face entails engaging with previous research on the subject. This literature review provides an understanding of intersecting identities and how they collectively affect individual experiences, with a focus on LGBTIQ+ migrant and expatriate realities. Theory on intersectionality, migration, and expatriation, which is discussed in the next chapter, was mainly sourced from the journal article 'Contextual Determinants in Disclosing One's Stigmatized Identity During Expatriation: The Case of Lesbian and Gay Self-initiated Expatriates' by Kowoon Kim and Mary Ann Von Glinow (2017) and from the book *Exploring LGBT Spaces and Communities: Contrasting Identities, Belongings and Wellbeing* by Eleanor Formby (2017). The journal article that was largely sourced for its case study in this chapter was '"Once You've Blended the Cake, You Can't Take the Parts Back to the Main Ingredients": Black Gay and Bisexual Men's Descriptions and Experiences of Intersectionality' by Lisa Bowleg (2013). These main sources prove exceptionally helpful in acquiring a picture of the identification and assimilation processes of individuals living outside their native countries and how their various identities interact.

2.2 Intersectionality

Before investigating how shared identities help or hinder the integration of LGBTIQ+ expatriates outside their native countries, the concepts of identity and intersectionality need to be deeply understood. Individuals constantly identify themselves as members of particular social groups according to their personal characteristics or interests. This results in a sense of collective identity that an individual feels and that is shared by others who form part of the same group. People who identify with each other as part of the same group are also referred to as the ingroup, whereas outsiders are referred to as the outgroup (Kim and Von Glinow, 2017, p. 319-320). The collective identity that is felt among ingroup members is characterised by feelings of unity, shared goals, and shared interests that very often emphasise the difference between them and the outgroup. Personal identity, however, emphasises the

difference between individual members of the ingroup, and may at times overlap with the collective identity (Kim and Von Glinow, 2017, p. 319-320). There is a multitude of personal and collective identities that an individual may possess simultaneously as everyone has different roles, responsibilities, and group memberships in life. For example, an individual might simultaneously be a son, a husband, a father, an American, and a Muslim to the same degree at all times. However, one of the identities may be more important than others at certain points in time depending on the context, such that the father identity prevails when the individual is around their children and the Muslim identity prevails when in a mosque. This interchange of identities is referred to as the self-categorization theory, and it represents a constant but fluid process of intersecting identities (Kim and Von Glinow, 2017, p. 320). Therefore, different scenarios affect which identities should prevail and be identified with in different contexts.

Intersectionality theory appeared first in the United States when women scholars of colour exhibited the challenges placed on black women in a legal perspective whereby the legislation would only recognise one identity status when recording incidences of discrimination; either race or gender (Lee and Brotman, 2013, p. 164). According to Parent, DeBlaere and Moradi (2013), intersectionality refers to the various minority statuses that an individual possesses and how they mould people's experiences. To study intersectionality, one has to deal with different areas of inquiry as each status may influence a person independently and also when combined to other statuses. The multiplicative or interactionist perspective deals precisely with the combination of different identities, with the main implication being that one minority status may amplify the effect of another status (Parent, DeBlaere and Moradi, 2013, p. 640-641). This combination of statuses may result in experiences which are unique and not necessarily divisible into their component statuses, meaning that the resulting experience is one which cannot be simplified or merely attributed to a number of statuses acting together.

2.2.1 The fluid nature of intersecting identities

When studying minority intersectional identities, such as in the case of this dissertation focusing on a minority ethnicity combined with a minority sexuality, it becomes difficult to split the various identities individuals possess as they all collectively make up the individual

(Bowleg, 2013). Attempts to understand component statuses and identities require an understanding of what constitutes each identity, and knowledge on how the identities work together. Simply focusing on one identity hinders the depth of understanding that focusing on its intersection with another identity or identities offers. For this reason, studies on identities need to be broad to encompass the various identifications individuals possess. The understanding that multiple identities are constantly influencing and redefining each other is also referred to as circular consciousness (Chikwendu, 2013). This notion states that different identities leave traces on each other leading to individual experiences based on overlapping. It is called circular because the movement of the various identities is circular but not repetitious (Chikwendu, 2013, p. 36). This means that there is no fixed beginning or end of the identities, but rather they are in constant motion around one another.

Possessing several simultaneous identities means that individual realities are much more complex than they look, even if people sharing one identity in common might not seem so diverse in relation to one another, as there are also other identities making up the individuals. To understand how these identities interact to result in different experiences for seemingly similar people, Lee and Brotman (2013) have also studied intersectionality and concord with Chikwendu (2013) that different identities should not be thought of as additives, but rather as intersections which result in new and complex relations of power. Statuses such as gender, class, race, and ability reinforce and complicate each other in unique ways depending on the context, which can lead to complex types of isolation and marginalisation.

2.2.2 Privileges, disadvantages, and acceptance

An attempt to identify both the positive and negative effects of simultaneous minority identities requires a deep insight into how these identities work together. People experiencing multiple oppressions endure them all at the same time, and this notion is referred to as structural intersectionality (Lee and Brotman, 2013, p. 164). Therefore, individuals may be victims of several interlocking social inequalities at the macro social-structural level due to racism, sexism, or classism to name a few, and one identity on its own will not explain all the inequality experienced by an individual as the other identities also need to be taken into consideration (Bowleg, 2013). Bowleg (2013) gives a remarkable example

with black gay and bisexual men in the United States. Whilst being a man brings with it financial and social privileges, being black and of a low socioeconomic status takes away that privilege resulting in higher unemployment among black males when compared to white males (Bowleg, 2013, p. 755). These privileges reduce even further if the black males are part of the LGBTIQ+ community. Essentially, the fact that a black gay man is a man does not add much privilege, as the fact that he is black and gay puts him at a bigger disadvantage. This exemplifies the concept of circular consciousness described by Chikwendu (2013) whereby identities constantly influence and redefine each other to create unique combinations of privileges or disadvantages. Bowleg (2013) also states that privileged identities are relatively invisible identities as few white people in the US consider themselves as having a race, and similarly, few heterosexuals consider themselves as having a sexual orientation. This shows how privileged majority identities are considered the norm and never challenged, whereas other identities exist alongside the privileged ones.

Interlocking social inequalities are present among LGBTIQ+ expatriates as they possess at least two intersecting identities; being non-Maltese and being LGBTIQ+. In this case individuals form part of more than one minority, and this may lead to double discrimination. This means that some LGBTIQ+ expatriates may suffer from different kinds of discrimination at the same time through racism, homophobia, or even sexism (Kim and Von Glinow, 2017, p. 331). Therefore, LGBTIQ+ individuals are not all subject to the same level of discrimination due to their individual identities, and they do not react to situations in the same way either. LGBTIQ+ individuals may be unrecognised or marginalised because of their sexual identity, and so coping strategies and resilience depend on individual personalities. If unrecognised or marginalised, LGBTIQ+ people miss out on the full set of rights they can exercise and may be hindered from participating in some aspects of life, rendering them invisible in some contexts (Takács, 2006, p. 26-28).

With regards to the LGBTIQ+ identity, one should not forget that there is diversity between LGBTIQ+ people as well especially since the acronym represents various identities, so experiences differ from one member of the community to the other. According to Kim and Von Glinow (2017), bisexuals tend to consider their sexual identity as a less important part of their general identity when compared to lesbians and gays, and so bisexuals do not tend to disclose their orientation as much as lesbians and gays do. Furthermore, bisexual women and

lesbians tend to get accepted by society more than bisexual or gay men, whilst transgender individuals are among the least accepted by society (Kim and Von Glinow, 2017, p. 319). There is also a difference between two men seen together and two women seen together. Two women travelling together or doing other activities together do not stir up the same assumptions as two men together, as it is generally more accepted for women to be closer to each other than men (Alonso, 2013, p. 177). Although this shows the difference in acceptance of members of the LGBTIQ+ community by the wider society, one should keep in mind that besides sexuality, personality plays an important role in whether individuals choose to disclose such sensitive information about themselves, as everyone thinks differently and not all LGBTIQ+ people feel comfortable sharing sensitive information to the same extent, if at all.

When it comes to people possessing the 'foreigner' status, they might be victims of racialisation (Lee and Brotman, 2013, p. 163) through stigma or exclusion that may affect people who are visually perceived as non-natives such as through their race. Regardless of whether people truly identify as non-natives, they will be perceived as such by society and may be discriminated against based on what is visible (Bowleg, 2013). The same notion could also be applied to LGBTIQ+ individuals. Regardless of whether people fully identify as part of the LGBTIQ+ community and regardless of how much importance they give to their own sexual and gender identity in comparison to their other identities, if they are perceived as or known to be a part of the LGBTIQ+ community they may be discriminated against, making them feel self-conscious about their intersections. Another similar point is the gender expression of a person, which in itself has nothing to do with gender identity or sexual orientation as individuals are free to present themselves in whichever way they prefer (UNHCR and IE SOGI, 2021, p. 6). A gender expression that deviates from the social norm may result in the individual being perceived as LGBTIQ+ even though they might not necessarily be so. This shows how personal identification may at times be irrelevant as people will judge and treat others based on what they see or which identity they choose to focus on.

2.2.3 Which minority identity prevails?

Having shed some light on the intersections between the sexual and the racial identities, questions might arise on which of these identities is considered as the most important. In the

study by Bowleg (2013), the visible characteristic of race was the primary reason why interviewees' ranking of their identities placed being black before being gay or bisexual. Race is visible, unlike sexual orientation, and so people tend to identify with their race more than with their sexuality since it is open for everyone to see and cannot be hidden. Sexual orientation, on the other hand, is a hidden characteristic which may or may not be disclosed to others, and as an identity it is discovered later than race (Bowleg, 2013, p. 759). This means that whilst being black is easily visible from the moment a person is born, being gay or bisexual emerges later in life, therefore it is an identity people identify with at a much later stage than race. The fact that sexual orientation is a hidden identity means that individuals can give it less importance or even engage in straight settings without too many problems in cases where they cannot disclose their sexual orientation. In the case of race, one cannot hide it or pass as a member of another race (Bowleg, 2013).

The intersection between sexual orientation and ethnicity might not be bridged successfully as there are instances where racism exists within the LGBTIQ+ community itself, with black members expected to assimilate with white members to be accepted more (Bowleg, 2013). This shows how at times, the LGBTIQ+ identity is not as unifying as commonly thought, as internal discriminations such as racism may still be present between LGBTIQ+ individuals themselves. LGBTIQ+ people, therefore, may not necessarily be less discriminatory than heterosexuals as they might still oppress other minorities (Formby, 2017). The most visible and accepted identity within the LGBTIQ+ community is the gay identity, whereas the transgender identity tends to be considered at the bottom of the hierarchy, often making transgender people feel less valid. Double discrimination may also be faced by bisexual individuals who experience discrimination from both heterosexuals and homosexuals, making them feel like they do not belong to either group (Formby, 2017). Linking to the previous case, some black gay and bisexual men in the study by Bowleg (2013) reported not wanting to mingle with the black community as they do not feel safe being LGBTIQ+ in that community. Not being accepted as black in the LGBTIQ+ community and not being accepted as LGBTIQ+ in the black community leaves black LGBTIQ+ individuals in the US with few places where they feel entirely comfortable being who they are (Bowleg, 2013).

2.3 Belonging and discrimination

The sense of belonging that individuals feel results from a desire to be included and connected to others as part of a community (Gedro *et al.*, 2013, p. 290), whereas not belonging means that an individual experiences rejection and fear. If individuals feel unwanted in a group, they will create a space where they can feel they belong (Formby, 2017). Formby (2017) gives three aspects of belonging; relational, cultural, and material. Relational belonging occurs between people, cultural belonging refers to the feeling transmitted by institutions and governments, whereas material belonging refers to the feeling transmitted by spaces and objects (Formby, 2017, p. 156). These aspects of belonging apply to feelings of nationalism, which can also be extended to imagined LGBTIQ+ communities. LGBTIQ+ individuals' shared history, symbols, Pride, and rainbow flag fit into this description and highlight the shared collective LGBTIQ+ identity, turning this 'imagined community' into a 'quasi-nation' and instilling feelings of similarity and empathy (Formby, 2017, p. 156). An 'imagined community' is one whereby members do not necessarily know or meet each other, but they know that there are more people out there who are similar to them (Formby, 2017, p. 6). It is important to remember that not all LGBTIQ+ people feel that they belong with other LGBTIQ+ people, as this sense of belonging is not shared by everyone in the same way.

Sharing common characteristics with other LGBTIQ+ individuals makes it easier to feel part of a community together, as there tends to be mutual understanding. Shared experiences may be both positive or negative, as people can also share the different prejudices they face. Besides bonding over the shared LGBTIQ+ identity, LGBTIQ+ individuals also bond over shared struggles and discriminations that they have faced or still face (Ward, 2008, p. 35-36, 39). In the case of intersecting identities, the marginalisation experienced may be a common factor between different minorities (Formby, 2017, p. 166).

Integrating into a new country as an LGBTIQ+ expatriate requires participation. Participation in activities within the gay community results in the formation of a gay identity which may fuel an 'imagined community' (Formby, 2017). This need to participate and integrate into the LGBTIQ+ scene also arises independently of expatriation, especially in cases where families are unsupportive so LGBTIQ+ individuals turn to friends for support and have an increased wish to interact with other LGBTIQ+ individuals, expanding their circle of like-minded people and feeling less alone. This interaction can be face-to-face or virtual, however, virtual

interactions have risen sharply over the last couple of years due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Virtual interactions are particularly predominant when LGBTIQ+ individuals such as youths may not be permitted by their families to engage with other LGBTIQ+ individuals, so they turn to safe online spaces.

Whilst online spaces can provide safety for queer individuals, they may also be used by homophobes and transphobes to target and harass members of the LGBTIQ+ community, so a person needs to be careful about where they post and how much information they give (UNHCR and IE SOGI, 2021, p. 18). For this reason, care needs to be taken not to put oneself in danger when seeking online support or sharing ideas and resources virtually (UNHCR and IE SOGI, 2021, p. 18). Online spaces may be observed by people intending to carry out hate crimes, so although it facilitates like-minded networking, it also facilitates targeting. Genuine friendships are vital for LGBTIQ+ individuals and expatriates as they can relate to others with similar experiences and support each other, even though people belonging to different age groups do not tend to socialise together (Formby, 2017). When it comes to people with shared experiences and shared struggles, age does not tend to be an important factor, especially if the pool of possible friends is very limited and individuals are trying to establish themselves. The desire to socialise with similar people often overcomes the other differences that may be present.

Engagements in LGBTIQ+ organisations and groups are considered essential to socialise and integrate with other LGBTIQ+ individuals, as this association makes members feel comfortable in each other's presence. If experiencing oppression in their daily lives, such settings provide a safe space for LGBTIQ+ individuals to relax in each other's company. The more a community feels connected, the more it contributes to the psychological and social wellbeing of its members. Limited access to the LGBTIQ+ community and events contributes negatively to the members' health (Formby, 2017). Face-to-face interactions are considered crucial for some individuals as they may offer more support, understanding, and validation when compared to virtual interactions. Interactions of the sort can happen in safe LGBTIQ+ community spaces such as bars, cafes, and clubs (Ayoub, 2013, p. 290). This is especially true for minorities such as non-natives who depend on such networks to make friends within the LGBTIQ+ community of the host country. Mutual support is established through such settings, which is vital in times of discrimination or oppression.

Discrimination is generally a prejudice against identities which tend to be in the minority, mostly manifested through behaviour such as hate speech and/or hate crimes (Assimakopoulos and Vella Muskat, 2018, p. 25). This behaviour can include insults or threats towards members of a group who get singled out because of their group membership, such as due to their race, religion, or sexual orientation amongst other identities. Minority group memberships are often beyond one's control, and the experience of unequal treatment may lead to feelings of stress in the victim (Stevens and Thijs, 2018, p. 560). There is a difference between personal discrimination and group discrimination. Group discrimination is more extensive than personal discrimination as a whole group gets targeted rather than an individual alone. When whole groups are perceived negatively and/or disregarded by society, individual members might experience little discrimination at a point in time, but it might not always remain as such depending on several factors such as the surrounding people and the surrounding environment, which can contribute to fluctuating levels of context-depending discrimination (Stevens and Thijs, 2018, p. 560). Perceived group discrimination can harm the in-group, however, if individuals do not experience high levels of discrimination in their personal daily lives, the effective management of existing obstacles can increase the individuals' self-esteem (Stevens and Thijs, 2018, p. 560). The strength of the in-group also increases when the members are collectively faced with adversity, as they find support in one another and work collectively to improve their lives.

Individual reactions to group discriminations depend heavily on the individual's association and identification with the in-group. If a person is very attached to the in-group and feels that they belong, there is a higher chance that they will take group discrimination personally as it discriminates directly against themselves and the people they care about (Stevens and Thijs, 2018, p. 560-561). However, if a person does not give as much importance to a particular minority identity they possess, they would be less affected by group discrimination since they distance themselves and do not share feelings of belonging with the group. Protection against group discrimination in the case of attached in-group members arises from the close-knit system of support between the group members themselves, whereas for distanced members of a minority, the lack of association with the group in itself protects them from interpreting group discrimination as a personal attack (Stevens and Thijs, 2018, p. 561).

2.3.1 Self-categorization and depersonalization

As a result of past discriminations or oppressions, LGBTIQ+ individuals' self-categorization may be a tricky process as it relies on past and present hostilities that may or may not hinder a person to 'come out' in different contexts (Kim and Von Glinow, 2017, p. 322). Self-categorization in this sense refers to people's need or willingness to identify with one of their identity statuses in different contexts, leading either to openness or repression. Therefore LGBTIQ+ individuals may either assimilate and disappear in mainstream society or be out in public settings (Doan and Higgins, 2011, p. 9). If an individual fears rejection or discrimination based on their sexual orientation, then they might not be willing to identify as such, as it would be easier to repress their sexuality and assimilate to the majority. When this happens, the sameness with the group is emphasised to compensate for the hidden difference in a process called depersonalization (Kim and Von Glinow, 2017, p. 320-321).

Depersonalization pressure is especially felt within minority groups as they are more subject to stereotypes and stigma, therefore assimilation is seen as a way to be more socially acceptable or to remain alive in hostile environments (Ward, 2008, p. 2). When applied to the work by Bowleg (2013), depersonalisation pressure is easily visible. Black LGBTIQ+ participants in the study clearly underwent pressure to 'act less black' in order to be accepted by the white LGBTIQ+ community. LGBTIQ+ individuals may also employ self-regulatory practices such as avoiding same-sex hand holding or kissing to reduce the chance of outing themselves in public. This behaviour may be modified accordingly when transitioning from straight spaces to gay places (Formby, 2017, p. 131-132). Intersectionality, therefore, exists even in terms of places, with a distinction between places where one can be out as LGBTIQ+ and places where one has to remain closeted. Environments such as specific houses, streets, cities, or countries, as well as the people that can be found there, determine whether an individual chooses to disclose their sexual orientation and determine which intersecting identity should prevail (Chikwendu, 2013, p. 40-43).

2.4 Belonging as an immigrant

As discussed earlier, feelings of relating to one another and belonging are the basis for forming interpersonal relationships with similar individuals. However, when it comes to

LGBTIQ+ migrants, the sexual identity alone might not be enough to induce a connection. The more intersecting identities people have in common, the more they tend to bond together and share experiences (Formby, 2017, p. 163). Commonalities may arise from aspects such as the reasons behind one's migration out of the native country, referred to as push factors, as well as the reasons for choosing a specific host country, referred to as pull factors.

There are push and pull factors which influence migration, and LGBTIQ+ people also migrate for the same reasons other migrants do, but some may migrate specifically because of their sexual or gender identity, referred to as sexual migration (Bhugra *et al.*, 2010; McPhail, McNulty and Hutchings, 2016). For LGBTIQ+ individuals, push factors may be the negative sentiments of their family or native country, isolation, and discrimination. Pull factors, therefore, are notions that pull LGBTIQ+ people towards another country which might be safer, more accepting, and offer the freedom to be oneself amongst other things. For transgender individuals, pull factors may include the availability of medical and surgical intervention (Bhugra *et al.*, 2010).

2.4.1 Reshaped inequalities and the state of in-between

On the topic of queer migrants, Martin Manalansan wrote how they often arrive in countries not to assimilate but to engage with countries and their regimes of power (Luibhéid, 2008, p. 170). This clashes with the popular model that describes migration as a movement from repression to liberation, as Manalansan believes migrants face reshaped opportunities and inequalities. Essentially, this means that instead of moving from repression to liberation, migrants may face good opportunities but they often end up facing inequality nonetheless, albeit in a different form (Luibhéid, 2008, p. 170). Adopting a neoliberal tone, unwanted migrants are either labelled as engaging in uncontrolled childbearing resulting in 'undesirable' children, and/or they may also be viewed as having debateable sexual morals and as carriers of sexually transmitted diseases like AIDS, that are seen as a threat that may 'contaminate' the host country (Luibhéid, 2008, p. 174-175). While there exist both pro- and anti-immigration sentiments, those migrants who hold official citizenship are often treated as suspects and/or second-class citizens of the country, and may continue to suffer discrimination nonetheless (Luibhéid, 2008, p. 175).

2.4.2 Integrating and advocating

McPhail, McNulty and Hutchings (2016) found that to integrate into the host country, LGBTIQ+ immigrants often adjust their behaviour to fit in better, such as by not engaging in local activism since they are not locals. In reality, the denial of social participation due to an individual's immigrant status is a human rights violation, as all humans are equal and all humans may wish to contribute to society and be visible (McPhail, McNulty and Hutchings, 2016). Whilst natives and non-natives all have the same freedoms, it is often trickier for non-natives to participate in public demonstrations particularly those involving police interaction as they could lead to a stain in their records (National Immigration Law Centre, 2020). As seen in the US, the law acknowledges the right to free speech for both documented and undocumented foreign residents, however, the court does not always move accordingly and some individuals might even face deportation in exceptional cases. This shows a discrepancy between the laws and their enforcement (National Immigration Law Centre, 2020). Shifting our focus back to expatriate residents, whilst it is a personal decision for expatriates to be socially active or not, they often present great ideas and introduce a sense of transnational activism between the host country and the native country.

Transnational LGBTIQ+ activism in Europe allows for mobilization in a vertical manner and a horizontal manner, with the vertical manner referring to interaction between countries and Brussels and the horizontal manner referring to interaction between the member countries of the EU itself (Ayoub, 2013, p. 280). This interaction between countries has made it easier for transnational networks of European LGBTIQ+ activists to emerge, whereby activists from different countries share resources and work together for a more inclusive Europe. Such networks are essential in bridging countries together and make it possible for activists to speak up about European LGBTIQ+ issues besides national LGBTIQ+ issues (Ayoub, 2013, p. 284-285), inducing change in European countries where LGBTIQ+ activists had to relocate and advocate for their native country from a safer EU country. This process referred to as Europeanization is facilitated by the free movement of people and services that helps in the establishment of 'gay' communities which are more accessible to EU non-nationals (Ayoub, 2013, p. 290).

A case in point is Berlin, whose 'gay' community boasts visible social spaces and the freedom of being openly LGBTIQ+. Ayoub (2013) looked into the LGBTIQ+ activism of expatriate Poles

in Germany, whereby the expatriates stated that their need to be politically active was fuelled after leaving Poland. LGBTIQ+ visibility in Berlin often resulted in Polish expatriates' engagement, which was also undertaken to learn tactics that could potentially be transferred to Poland later. This proves to be a clear example of how transnational activism aids in project development and information exchange that are the predecessors of dialogue and cooperation between countries (Ayoub, 2013, p. 295). Transnational activism between Germany and Poland has helped increase awareness and introduce LGBTIQ+ issues to the national discourse through the work of transnational actors as well as local actors. Besides expatriating in Berlin, LGBTIQ+ Poles also expressed the safety that the city offers to them as a refuge when they feel like escaping Poland for a limited time as tourists (Ayoub, 2013). In a study by Gedro at al. (2013), a Canadian LGBTIQ+ expatriate in Japan had to go back in the closet to ensure his own safety until he initiated an informal group for sexual minorities. This initiative spread across southern Japan to offer Japanese and non-Japanese LGBTIQ+ individuals a safe space and reciprocal support (Gedro *et al.*, 2013, p. 289). This shows how expatriates bring new ideas and concepts with them, which may be needed in the host country or in the native country, meaning that the transfer of advocacy skills can happen in both directions.

Transnational queer activism is also seen in the study by Yu (2020), whereby LGBTIQ+ Chinese Malaysians chose to further their studies in Taiwan due to its progressive human rights and positive attitudes towards LGBTIQ+ people. Although most participants did not consider themselves part of the LGBTIQ+ community before going to Taiwan, their experience of the queer communities and their involvement in LGBTIQ+ rights movements in Taiwan helped them mingle with individuals who shared their sexual orientation (Yu, 2020, p. 8). This helped them broaden their circle of like-minded people and gain activism skills that were transported back home with them. Similar to the expatriate Poles in Ayoub's study, these queer Chinese Malaysian students also felt the desire to contribute more to LGBTIQ+ activism in their home country upon returning from their studies. After contributing to LGBTIQ+ activism outside of Malaysia, these students realised that there were various people back home that they could engage in such activism with, an idea that never occurred to them before (Yu, 2020, p. 9). This newfound motivation also arose from their membership in their diasporic community in Taiwan, as it helped them see that there were more people like them who could advocate

together back home. Between them, these migrants already shared a national or ethnic link, so the fact that they were also part of the LGBTIQ+ community meant they had more commonalities and formed a stronger and more complex 'imagined community' with people they did not know (Formby, 2017).

2.4.3 Norm brokerage and transnational mobilisation

Munro *et al*. (2013) in their study focusing on Canada found that most queer immigrant youths avoided members of their diasporic communities to avoid homophobia from their end. This shows how even though individuals move away from their native countries, parts of their local communities will still be present in the host country, which might impact the sense of anonymity individuals long for in a new country, increasing their anxiety (Munro *et al.*, 2013). However, one should note that queer immigrants may arrive in the host country alone, and so attachments and relationships with their diasporic communities might be an unavoidable first point of contact until they establish themselves in the new place and start broadening their circle (UNHCR and IE SOGI, 2021, p. 25). Coinciding with Manalansan's notion of reshaped inequalities, a migratory attempt towards liberation does not necessarily guarantee an easier life where one can be open everywhere (Luibhéid, 2008, p. 170). This proves similar to the work by Bowleg (2013), where black gay and bisexual men in the US expressed their discomfort with going out in the black community as part of the LGBTIQ+ community.

Although the black men in Bowleg's study were not immigrants, they still shared the same feeling of identifying as black just like the immigrants in the study by Munro *et al*. (2013) identified with their diasporic communities. This collective racial identity made the subjects uneasy with being out as LGBTIQ+ within their communities, leaving them in a state of in-between whereby they either identify according to their race or their sexuality. Identifying with both identities at the same time proved cumbersome, as they felt that very few places would make them feel entirely accepted (Bowleg, 2013; Munro *et al.*, 2013). At first glance, this seems to contrast with the research by Yu (2020) whereby the Chinese Malaysian diaspora taking part in LGBTIQ+ activism in Taiwan actually helped the students realise that they were not alone. However, this study did not mention the Chinese Malaysian diaspora outside of the student activism context, so the reader should not assume that what applies

for like-minded LGBTIQ+ students applies also to the diaspora in general. Whilst they may or may not have felt like they belonged to the broader diaspora, the student LGBTIQ+ activism scene can be taken as one of the few spaces where queer Chinese Malaysians could comfortably identify with both their race and their sexuality.

The feeling of nationalism previously presented by Formby (2017) may be extended as a political strategy called homonationalism, whereby LGBTIQ+ issues are merged with nationalist sentiments, and LGBTIQ+ individuals may be pictured as being part of a threatened nation under fire by homophobes (Ayoub and Bauman, 2018, p. 2). To exemplify, during the Brexit campaign, the group Out and Proud claimed that the European Union's free movement treaty directly threatened the UK's top ranking in the global LGBTIQ+ rights index (Ayoub and Bauman, 2018, p. 2). In itself, this claim is contradictory since the expansion of LGBTIQ+ rights is due to the globalisation of countries. According to Ayoub and Bauman (2018), migration actually magnifies the tendency for LGBTIQ+ organisations to shift their focus beyond the state, resulting in the promotion of LGBTIQ+ rights in the non-native activists' home countries. Migrant activists also bring about a 'norm brokerage' whereby cultural differences in the understandings of sexuality and gender are accepted and harmonised (Ayoub and Bauman, 2018, p. 2). This multicultural aspect of activism ensures solidarity between countries and strengthens the relations migrants keep with the LGBTIQ+ situation in their home countries, since migrants very often keep ties with their native countries. Ties are most often kept through the internet considering that migrants would be physically away from the people they love.

Migration, therefore, enables horizontal political interactions that result in transnational mobilisation, as migrant identities belong to multiple spaces which help them convert their knowledge of norms into domestic contexts, leading to a possible change in the situation of LGBTIQ+ individuals in their home countries (Ayoub and Bauman, 2018, p. 2). Queer migrants often understand sexual diversity in a more holistic manner than queer people belonging to one national group only, as cultural difference implies difference in the definition and understanding of sexuality. Migration from repressive countries to more liberal countries increases the chances for mobilisation, as being in a different country with no relations to friends, family, or acquaintances may bring with it a new freedom that allows migrants to be more open about their sexuality and to engage themselves politically (Ayoub and Bauman,

2018). The openness of the host country can show migrants that their sexuality is welcomed, whereas in the case of heterosexual migrants it can help in changing their attitudes and the attitudes of their families back home, resulting in an increase of transnational allies.

2.5 Concluding remarks

The literature in this chapter has provided a very deep understanding of how intersectional identities affect individual experiences in places where they do not primarily belong. Gathering examples from LGBTIQ+ migrant experiences, one must keep in mind that they are not enough for the purposes of this dissertation, as another step needs to be taken to understand expatriation. Although migration and expatriation are related, and literature on migration provides the basis for delving into expatriation, expatriation is more specific and so literature which is specific to LGBTIQ+ expatriation must be consulted.

Chapter 3: Realities of LGBTIQ+ Expatriates

3.1 Introduction

Strategies used to attract LGBTIQ+ individuals to specific countries or areas are discussed in the beginning of this chapter, including literature on pinkwashing and homonationalism. The decisions relating to expatriation are later discussed in detail, highlighting what makes this process different for LGBTIQ+ individuals. This chapter concludes with an insight into migrant acceptance and LGBTIQ+ acceptance in Malta and an application of the points discussed earlier to the Maltese context. The book which was mainly used to highlight pull factors that appeal to the LGBTIQ+ community was *Best Inclusion Practices: LGBT Diversity* by Margarita Alonso (2013). Insights on LGBTIQ+ expatriation was gathered through the journal articles 'Lesbian and gay expatriation: opportunities, barriers and challenges for global mobility' by Ruth McPhail, Yvonne McNulty, and Kate Hutchings (2016) and 'Freedom's Frontiers: The Travails of LGBT Travelers' by David Austin and Mark E. Wojcik (2018). Another journal article that was sourced for the understanding of expatriation coupled with information on the Maltese context was 'Experience Language, Understanding Culture: Expatriate Adjustment on Mainland Malta' by Anita Vukovic (2013).

3.2 What attracts LGBTIQ+ people to a place?

To understand what influences LGBTIQ+ individuals to expatriate to one country over another, we must look at how countries present themselves. The promotion of a destination as LGBTIQ+ friendly brings with it various financial advantages, as this niche market tends to bring a better quality of tourists (Austin and Wojcik, 2018, p. 277). The LGBTIQ+ market is considered as wealthy, fashion forward, and brand-conscious. Logically, older LGBTIQ+ travellers tend to afford more luxurious services than their younger counterparts, so they are considered as an even wealthier part of this niche market (Wong and Tolkach, 2017, p. 580). Some governments are actively advertising their countries as 'gay' destinations to attract more people and increase the income for local goods and services. Pride events are also heavily invested in by governments and private companies for the same reasons. International LGBTIQ+ events such as the Gay Games bring LGBTIQ+ athletes and supporters

from around the world, attracting a huge number of people and profiting the host country (Austin and Wojcik, 2018, p. 278). Events of the sort show how fruitful LGBTIQ+ tourism can be and how countries can benefit from it.

The availability of vacation packages for LGBTIQ+ individuals ensures the presence of other LGBTIQ+ people at the destination of choice, whereas packages for LGBTIQ+ families ensures the presence of other same-sex couples with children (Austin and Wojcik, 2018, p. 283). This offers reassurance to LGBTIQ+ individuals and families as it means they will be accepted in the destination, not harassed or attacked. The definition of 'gay space' that Wong and Tolkach (2017) give is that of a place which may have a high proportion of LGBTIQ+ residents, and may be a historical location in relation to the LGBTIQ+ rights movement or comprise of various LGBTIQ+ businesses. Such a space also instils feelings of security, shelter, and provide a network of support. Gay spaces may be tourist attractions in themselves, incorporating places considered as heritage attractions, commercial attractions, and even live event attractions like Pride events (Wong and Tolkach, 2017, p. 586). When travelling in large groups which may have a mix of straight and LGBTIQ+ people, specific places considered as LGBTIQ+ only are generally not visited. However, such places may be chosen when travelling individually or as couples (Wong and Tolkach, 2017, p. 586). Gay spaces undergo gentrification not only towards LGBTIQ+ individuals but also towards heterosexuals, as places considered liberal and accepting do not attract LGBTIQ+ people only but cater for everyone. These areas get integrated into the mainstream urban economy and generate revenue which is enjoyed by the whole country, not just the gay space itself (Doan and Higgins, 2011, p. 9). Therefore, gay spaces are financially advantageous for everyone.

Besides being a step forward towards equality, same-sex marriage also creates a product in itself; same-sex weddings (Alonso, 2013, p. 171). Same-sex weddings bring three new services to the tourist industry. The first is civil ceremonies, which may be either simple or flamboyant, with the latter generating a lot of revenue. The second is celebrations with families and friends, and the third is honeymoons (Alonso, 2013, p. 171). LGBTIQ+ destinations for honeymoons offer safety and anonymity, and the individuals who have a positive experience will recommend the place to other LGBTIQ+ individuals who are looking for accepting honeymoon destinations. The LGBTIQ+ community as a target for the advancement of the economy is rooted in the fact that most LGBTIQ+ individuals do not have children, and so they

are seen as having more time and money to spend on travel and entertainment (Alonso, 2013, p. 178). In terms of childless LGBTIQ+ individuals, they do not have to plan their vacations according to school holidays, making them an attractive tourist niche that can help boost tourism throughout the whole year, not just seasonally.

There are specific travel agencies and guides for the LGBTIQ+ community, even online, with websites such as the International Gay and Lesbian Travel Association providing many helpful resources (Alonso, 2013, p. 183). If LGBTIQ+ clients are not satisfied, they can easily leave bad reviews online which may even lead to boycotting. For obvious reasons, countries which suffer from notorious homophobia are not considered as honeymoon destinations, and similarly if LGBTIQ+ accepting honeymoon destinations prove to have a safe climate, they might even lead the tourists to relocate there (Alonso, 2013, p. 183-184). However, it is important to add that not all LGBTIQ+ individuals choose to consume LGBTIQ+ products and services, as some might opt for inclusive products that do not differentiate or cater specifically for LGBTIQ+ people but are aimed at everyone. Inclusive advertising refers to the advertising of products or services whereby the portrayals include non-heteronormative aspects, such as showing different couples and including a same-sex couple among them (Alonso, 2013, p. 164). Such a scenario does not make the product or service exclusive to LGBTIQ+ individuals only, but it is seen as targeted for everyone.

As Alonso (2013) states, the choice to orient a product or service specifically towards the LGBTIQ+ community is a strategic decision that should be rooted in business data. In progressive countries which legally protect LGBTIQ+ individuals, all products and services are de facto inclusive as it is unacceptable to discriminate against different customers (Alonso, 2013, p. 164). This means that advertising in progressive countries does not necessarily have to be inclusive as the law already protects the LGBTIQ+ community as well as other minorities from being denied access to services, therefore automatically making all services LGBTIQ+ inclusive. However, this does not hold true in all areas of countries considered progressive. A case in point is the state of Ohio in the US, which recently introduced a provision in the budget allowing medical providers to choose to refuse giving treatment to LGBTIQ+ individuals on the basis of their personal moral or religious beliefs/principles (Schultz, 2021). Even though the United States is a progressive country, not all states are progressive to the same extent and not all states have visibly gay spaces. There is usually a difference in LGBTIQ+ acceptance

between different parts of the country such as the rural and the urban areas (Formby, 2017). The LGBTIQ+ community could be celebrated and very visible in one area, but invisible and frowned upon in another. Similarly, the duality of the projected version of a place against the real experience of it may result in opposing scenarios, particularly for those people who relocate and experience the place for longer periods of time. According to Formby (2017), Brighton is an imagined place where a sense of community may be felt by outsiders but not necessarily by locals. Migration towards Brighton may be fuelled by an idealistic picture of the place, which may lead to disappointment when migrants integrate and start experiencing the place better (Formby, 2017, p. 85).

LGBTIQ+ friendly places are generally given more importance during travel rather than in native countries, as since travellers do not know people in the destination, such places prove to be useful in feeling comfortable and establishing contacts with like-minded people. However, most LGBTIQ+ Asian tourists actually reported a preference for places and activities related to local traditions and lifestyle as opposed to those oriented towards LGBTIQ+ individuals (Wong and Tolkach, 2017, p. 585). Wong and Tolkach (2017) also found that individuals who are openly gay and consider their sexuality as an important part of their identity were more inclined to visit gay spaces than those individuals who were closeted or who did not give as much importance to their sexual orientation. Preferred destinations, therefore, must not be generalised for all LGBTIQ+ people as they might have differing interests. Similarly, the study by Wong and Tolkach (2017) revealed that openly gay individuals were less likely to travel to countries considered homophobic and discriminatory, whereas other LGBTIQ+ individuals expressed no problem in visiting such countries and altering their behaviour to avoid harassment. This coincides with the depersonalization process put forward by Kim and Von Glinow (2017), whereby those who do not consider their sexuality central to their overall identity do not object to temporarily suppressing that identity to ensure survival in a hostile environment.

3.2.1 The blurred line between liberal progress and economic advantage

Different destinations cater for the LGBTIQ+ population in different ways when it comes to holistic acceptance and mental wellbeing. In some countries, LGBTIQ+ individuals are

tolerated because of the economic advantages this niche brings with it, rather than being truly accepted for who they are. It is suggested that in Thailand and Israel, both considered as very LGBTIQ+ friendly countries, the LGBTIQ+ community is only catered for to increase revenue (Wong and Tolkach, 2017; Hartal, 2019). The term 'pinkwashing' refers to a limited inclusion of LGBTIQ+ individuals into a country which depicts itself as very liberal and accepting whilst still employing subtle forms of discrimination (Hartal, 2019, p. 1149). This might also be adopted to cover or distract the people from other national issues by putting the limited liberal progress in the spotlight and overemphasising it. In this case, countries actively promote sexual difference and inclusion as a sign of progress and modernity to be more competitive in these regards (Hartal, 2019, p. 1150). In Thailand, for example, same-sex marriage is still illegal and LGBTIQ+ individuals are not equally protected by the laws, despite the activism present and the exceptional reputation of the country (Wong and Tolkach, 2017, p. 582). Therefore, support of LGBTIQ+ tourism does not necessarily mean support of LGBTIQ+ rights and individuals.

Homonationalism from an economic perspective consists of a sense of belonging to the nation, but also an assimilation of LGBTIQ+ individuals and practices fuelled by consumerism. Israel gives a good example of pinkwashing, whereby in 2016 there was the first LGBTIQ+ rights day at the parliament followed by a rejection of the civil marriage bill the day after (Hartal, 2019, p. 1155). This shows how at times, countries and institutions which claim to support LGBTIQ+ rights and have a reputation of being very accepting might not really be so. The LGBTIQ+ community is used in such cases solely for the economic benefits that a good reputation and good marketing bring with it, ignoring the real struggles of LGBTIQ+ individuals and giving a false picture of the country's attitudes. Events like Pride in Israel have highlighted the inequality present, whereby huge amounts of money were spent on advertising the country as a gay haven instead of financially supporting Israeli LGBTIQ+ activist and community organisations, resulting in a massive discrepancy between the revenue generated by the country during Pride and the money given to the LGBTIQ+ community itself (Hartal, 2019, p. 1158-1159). The presence of the LGBTIQ+ community is exploited for economic gain even with simple gestures like hanging a rainbow flag, as the intention is to make money and look liberal, irrespective of whether the people who hang the flag accept LGBTIQ+ individuals or not. In itself, this behaviour also shows the evolution of the perception of LGBTIQ+ people

over the years, as they have shifted from 'sick' beings to a beneficial investment niche, due to the possibility of financial potential rather than motivated by liberal social change discourse (Hartal, 2019, p. 1161).

Luibhéid (2018) suggests that economic homonationalism and pinkwashing were also present in Ireland during and after the May 2015 same-sex marriage referendum. It is implied that the Irish diaspora was homonationalised leading up to the referendum and its migration was aided (Luibhéid, 2018, p. 408-411). However, during and after the referendum, other aspects of migration were not affected except for the tourism industry that was essential for generating revenue. Issues such as the family reunification of migrant workers were overshadowed by this new type of migration, even though the referendum itself was founded on the guarding of the institution of marriage as the basis for a family (Luibhéid, 2018, p. 413). This contradiction meant that family rights of non-citizens were not prioritised, especially if the individuals in question did not provide proof that they could financially support family members. Besides all this, further discriminations such as racism and sexism also existed for non-EEA/Swiss migrant workers (Luibhéid, 2018).

Pinkwashing was also visible when during the referendum, LGBTIQ+ people who did not conform to the majority group were erased. This manifested itself in the erasure of migrant and racially diverse LGBTIQ+ individuals in Ireland, who were thrown together with other migrants and collectively seen as a religious conservative group bound to vote No (Luibhéid, 2018, p. 419). Such an approach strips non-dominant individuals from their various intersectional identities, whereby being LGBTIQ+ becomes synonymous with whiteness and therefore the native LGBTIQ+ are seen as 'victims' of culturally different 'others' (Luibhéid, 2018, p. 419). This is similar to the previous example brought forward by Ayoub and Bauman (2018), whereby the pro-Brexit group Out and Proud equated migrants and migration with threats to LGBTIQ+ rights and individuals.

Furthermore, even though the Irish public wanted same-sex marriage, and voted in favour, the state turned the result into a marketing campaign and used it to pinkwash its migration systems. Consequentially, Ireland started being marketed for LGBTIQ+ weddings and honeymoons, featuring also the introduction of a matchmaking festival specifically for LGBTIQ+ individuals (Luibhéid, 2018, p. 412). This strategy based on consumption was rooted in the stereotype regarding LGBTIQ+ people having more disposable income than other

groups of people, linking to the previous literature by Austin and Wojcik (2018) which considers this niche market a financially advantageous one. This type of migration provides economic benefits, unlike the settlement of Non-EEA/Swiss migrant families who are not financially stable and who have to face numerous barriers (Luibhéid, 2018). Therefore, visiting or expatriating in a place could be aided or hindered according to the attitudes and politics of the place, whereby intersectional identities work as privileges or disadvantages (Bowleg, 2013) that manifest themselves differently when trying to integrate outside the native country.

3.3 Defining expatriation

To be able to understand the process of integration of LGBTIQ+ expatriates, it is essential to understand exactly what is meant by the word expatriate and what the process of expatriation entails. The definition of expatriate that Vukovic (2013) gives is that of an individual who lives outside their native country, although this definition in itself is quite vague. There is an important difference between individuals expatriating voluntarily and others expatriating for work reasons. Self-initiated expatriates are also sometimes referred to as SIEs and such individuals decide to relocate to another country solely out of their own will, unlike those who are sent on work assignments. SIEs move voluntarily due to personal interests and so represent more diverse demographics than those sent on work assignments (Kim and Von Glinow, 2017, p. 318). Demographics do not only include nations or age groups as they could represent individual and social identities as well, which could be both visible or invisible. When it comes to invisible diversity, as discussed before, individuals generally have to disclose that personal information themselves since this kind of diversity is not as obvious as others (Kim and Von Glinow, 2017, p. 320-321). Social identification may be influenced by outside factors such as cultural meanings and social behaviours that people are surrounded by, leading to different social identifications in different contexts as explored earlier (Kim and Von Glinow, 2017).

3.3.1 What LGBTIQ+ expatriates consider before expatriating

Before expatriation, LGBTIQ+ individuals' considerations include the legal protections and lack of legal protections in the country of choice, the benefits and the recognition of a same-sex spouse, and other cultural issues (Gedro *et al.*, 2013, p. 284). Many countries define family from a heteronormative perspective, therefore same-sex families might not be fully recognised and the benefits and rights might not be transferred entirely from the native country to the host country. A situation of the sort includes, for example, the host country not granting a spousal visa to a same-sex spouse because they are not legally recognised as spouses (Gedro *et al.*, 2013, p. 291). This is an issue which opposite-sex spouses take for granted when expatriating, as they are typically never asked to produce proof of marriage to have their rights recognised in the host country (Austin and Wojcik, 2018, p. 280). The status of heterosexual married couples is always accepted by governments and individuals one may meet during expatriation. In the case of a serious medical emergency, doctors almost never question the right of a heterosexual spouse to take medical decisions for the sick spouse, unlike for same-sex spouses (Austin and Wojcik, 2018, p. 280). This highlights the challenges LGBTIQ+ couples and families face when in a country which does not recognise these legal ties, which may result in discrepancies between the services provided in the native country and in the host country.

Another important factor to consider before expatriating is the distance between the native country and the host country, which can be calculated both geographically and culturally. Generally, the closer the countries are, the closer the culture and lifestyle tend to be, so if a person wishes to leave their native country due to negative attitudes towards queer people they often avoid neighbouring countries as they tend to exhibit similar cultural attitudes (UNHCR and IE SOGI, 2021, p. 9-10). This means that if someone wishes to move to a different culture, it is more likely that the country of choice will be geographically far (Gedro *et al.*, 2013, p. 286). The freedom of movement within the EU and the nature of the interconnected European economies result in various professional movements between member states. For this reason, movement within the EU is ideal for expatriates who prefer remaining close to their native countries whilst experiencing a different culture (Gedro *et al.*, 2013, p. 286). Therefore, it is essential for LGBTIQ+ expatriates to gain more information about the country they wish to move to before the expatriation process. Such knowledge can be obtained from

the internet from trustworthy sources such as the International Lesbian and Gay Association (ILGA), or even personally by visiting the location a number of times and establishing local contacts before moving (McPhail, McNulty and Hutchings, 2016, p. 402). However, as discussed before, different regions of a country have different climates, which means that countries have various degrees of LGBTIQ+ acceptance depending on the area in question, so care needs to be taken not to generalise among all areas (Formby, 2017). The feeling of acceptance transmitted by institutions and spaces relates to the concept of cultural and material belonging previously presented by Formby (2017). In countries where LGBTIQ+ individuals are legally recognised, it is the population that may potentially harass LGBTIQ+ tourists and expatriates rather than the government itself (Austin and Wojcik, 2018, p. 287). Acceptance, therefore, does not depend solely on legal recognition, and does not manifest itself equally towards all LGBTIQ+ individuals.

Essentially, this means that although LGBTIQ+ individuals may expatriate to escape judgement and negative attitudes, they might still face some judgements in the host country. At times, countries which are perceived as LGBTIQ+ friendly might still present hidden homophobia in private settings such as workplaces, and this subtle discrimination is very often the most common kind (Munro *et al.*, 2013). This coincides with Manalansan's claim about reshaped opportunities and inequalities, whereby great opportunities in the host country may be clouded by subtle inequalities (Luibhéid, 2008). Other problems might surface for LGBTIQ+ partners who wish to expatriate together in the same location, whereby the ideal scenario would be for both individuals to find a suitable workplace independently. This brings an added challenge when compared to expatriating alone, as people who are single are more independent and have less constraints. Individuals who expatriate with their partner find it more stressful as this might also entail a career change for the partner to allow them to find work in the host country, and the partner might also experience subtle discrimination at the new workplace (McPhail, McNulty and Hutchings, 2016). McPhail and McNulty (2015) also refer to a 'comfort factor' which describes the locals' acceptance of LGBTIQ+ people, which is given more significance than the legal situation of LGBTIQ+ people in the host country. This 'comfort factor' is similar to the earlier concept of relational belonging by Formby (2017) as it depicts the belonging that is felt through relationships with the local population. In countries where the laws recognise LGBTIQ+ individuals and families, expatriates may enjoy a bigger

freedom than that of their native country. In the case of transgender expatriates, they might face difficulties prior to expatriation such as a passport that does not match their gender identity, or experience transphobia during expatriation such as when entering a bathroom (Paisley and Tayar, 2016, p. 4).

Paisley and Tayar (2016) argue that for LGBTIQ+ expatriates the process of coming out is never over as it has to be repeated again in the host country in different contexts. The culture of the host country plays an important part in the perception of gender, as cultural gender norms might be strict or loose, meaning that gender diversity may or may not be frowned upon. This is true for homogeneous cultures such as Japan whereby differences are not as socially accepted as in heterogeneous cultures with diverse populations and backgrounds like the United States (Paisley and Tayar, 2016, p. 8-9). Any different behaviour exhibited in strict cultures is often attributed as an outsider behaviour. In loose diverse cultures, expatriates tend to form sub-cultures in the host country especially if there are many of them originating from the same country or culture, so non-conforming behaviour is not so frowned upon by society in such multicultural settings.

3.3.2 When and which behaviour is accepted rather than permitted?

As stated by Paisley and Tayar (2016), some countries that attract a lot of expatriates tend to accept the fact that they behave differently from locals. Similarly, McPhail, McNulty and Hutchings (2016) found that expatriates are often excused for displaying non-conforming behaviour which may not be accepted among locals. In such cases, different behaviour exhibited by non-locals is not given importance because it is not local people who are engaging in that behaviour. In the case of non-conforming behaviour that may be interpreted as LGBTIQ+, local people generally suppress their identity and undergo depersonalization to assimilate to the majority for survival. Essentially, this coincides with the prevalent mindset of leaders of countries which do not accept homosexuality or even persecute LGBTIQ+ people, as due to the strict gender norms it is thought that LGBTIQ+ individuals and issues do not exist in their countries, therefore they are a foreign formulation brought in the country by non-natives (Austin and Wojcik, 2018, p. 293). In such countries, LGBTIQ+ activism by non-natives might result in a backlash against the local LGBTIQ+ community as it reinforces negative

stereotypes (Austin and Wojcik, 2018, p. 293). LGBTIQ+ tourists or expatriates in such countries who wish to support the local LGBTIQ+ community financially may opt to do so by choosing the services of LGBT-supportive or LGBT-owned businesses. Supporting the local LGBTIQ+ community may also prove useful in providing non-locals with guidance on how to ensure one's safety in the country whilst still raising awareness on LGBTIQ+ identities (Austin and Wojcik, 2018, p. 295).

3.3.3 The phases of expatriation

When an individual tackles every consideration and decides on a place to expatriate to, it does not mean that the difficult part is over. The process of expatriation may lead to confusion as an expatriate's self-identification might become distorted, especially if the 'culture shock' is one where there are no shared meanings or notions with the host nationals (Vukovic, 2013, p. 597). Vukovic (2013) refers to the earliest expatriation period as the honeymoon phase whereby expatriates are captivated by their new host country, culture, and people, and are interested to get to know more about them. The honeymoon phase is followed by a 'crisis' period where expatriates' attitudes become aggressive towards the host country and feelings of anxiety and isolation start to develop. Vukovic (2013) notes that the isolation felt at this stage is a perceived one that stems from a disappointment related to social needs, which results from a strict boundary felt between the expatriates and the host country/nationals. This boundary makes it difficult for the expatriates to understand the host nationals and ultimately also hinders the expatriates' own self-identification (Vukovic, 2013, p. 591). For this reason, cultural flexibility ensures emotional survival in a new environment by having the ability to incorporate one's culture into the culture of the host country and mediate different cultural norms at the same time. This broadening of cultural consciousness is at times referred to as forming part of a bicultural identity whereby individuals learn how to accept and be accepted in different cultural settings (Vukovic, 2013, p. 592) and is similar to the previously mentioned 'norm brokerage' concept by Ayoub and Bauman (2018) in which different cultural norms are mediated to adapt to the cultural norms of the host country. Vukovic (2013) also noted that expatriates who had previously travelled more or lived outside their native country prior to expatriation find it easier to mediate cultural norms during expatriation than those with limited experiences outside their countries. A successful expatriate, therefore, is one

who adopts a cultural identity and shares the same meanings and histories as those possessed by other members of the culture, whilst being non-judgemental towards host country nationals (Vukovic, 2013, p. 592). This level of effective communication is the basis for forming interpersonal relationships and social networks in the host country.

3.3.4 Self-initiated expatriates (SIEs)

When it comes to self-initiated expatriation, one of the major drivers is the desire for adventure and travel, and in the case of LGBTIQ+ expatriates, the choice of the country is a very important process. As discussed before, factors such as lifestyle, stability, and security of a country are crucial in determining whether a country is good to expatriate to and will determine the final choice of this voluntary move. Self-initiated expatriation may also arise among individuals who are in a relationship with a non-native partner and wish to relocate to their partner's country. The disapproval or discrimination that LGBTIQ+ individuals may face in their home countries may lead them to expatriate to flee homophobia, although there may still be homophobia present in the host country (Formby, 2017). Expatriation may also take place among older adults who wish to retire in LGBTIQ+ accepting countries. If a country possesses equal rights for LGBTIQ+ people, it has better chances of attracting LGBTIQ+ expatriates, especially if they would like to expatriate with their spouse and/or children since these family members would be legally recognised by the host country. However, according to Gedro *et al*. (2013) there is a lesser chance of LGBTIQ+ expatriates disclosing their sexual orientation if they are married and have children, as this could lead to discrimination against their family members. If expatriating with family members, these can also experience stress and challenges such as when adapting to a new work or a new school, and being away from other family members and friends in the native country (Gedro *et al.*, 2013, p. 291-293).

3.3.5 LGBTIQ+ expatriates on work assignments

A slightly different scenario exists for LGBTIQ+ expatriates who relocate as part of their work, as this often represents the involuntary assignment to a destination which may or may not be accepting (Kim and Von Glinow, 2017). The risks of international work opportunities for

LGBTIQ+ individuals depend on individual risk-taking behaviour as well as the knowledge of the perceived and real threats of the host country towards LGBTIQ+ people (McPhail and McNulty, 2015, p. 745-746). A work environment that embraces diversity and inclusion is more likely to be accepting of LGBTIQ+ employees. In such a case, the expatriation process may take into consideration the sexual orientation of the employee to avoid sending them to countries which severely punish homosexuality. The openness of work organisations in the host countries, for example, affects whether LGBTIQ+ expatriates 'come out' or undergo depersonalization pressure in their workplaces. Some expatriates expressed a difference between disclosing their sexual orientation at work and outside of work, highlighting the dichotomy between personal life and business even though the law in the EU, for example, does not allow discrimination against LGBTIQ+ individuals in the work setting (Gedro *et al.*, 2013, p. 283). As a result of the increasing equality and globalization of companies, workplaces have been actively accepting diversity (Kim and Von Glinow, 2017, p. 328).

However, at times LGBTIQ+ employees have to carry out work assignments in risky homophobic countries, where they might choose not to disclose their sexuality to protect themselves. This means that they would have to change the self-categorization of their identity to minimise their identification as LGBTIQ+ and start identifying themselves according to their nationality or profession (Kim and Von Glinow, 2017, p. 322). During expatriation in such countries, LGBTIQ+ individuals are pressured to undergo depersonalization to ensure their own safety. For obvious reasons, depersonalization inhibits people from reaching their full potential in work and in life as it involves the suppressing of their true identities. According to McPhail and McNulty (2015), some LGBTIQ+ employees opt out of international work opportunities to safeguard their wellbeing. In this case, homophobic countries miss out on benefitting from the talent that LGBTIQ+ workers bring with them, which may hinder the country's competitiveness for talent (Kim and Von Glinow, 2017, p. 325). However, during expatriation, the foreigner identity tends to prevail over the sexual orientation of an individual as it might be a visible difference (McPhail and McNulty, 2015, p. 739).

At times, work organisations segregate their expatriates by grouping them together without much interaction with the local people and culture. This means that expatriates would still be living their own culture between them in the host country as they are not exposed to the true local culture around them (Paisley and Tayar, 2016, p. 9-10). In such cases, expatriates are not

allowed to integrate properly in the host country, consequentially missing out on getting the full experience of the place.

3.3.6 Case studies of LGBTIQ+ expatriates

LGBTIQ+ expatriates may choose an LGBTIQ+ friendly city or place for a multitude of reasons, however, the most crucial reason remains the fact that such places are open and accepting. In the study by Doan and Higgins (2011), individuals who relocated to Atlanta, Georgia, identified the city's rich LGBTIQ+ culture and openness as one of the reasons for moving there, especially those individuals who originated from more closeted backgrounds. This shows how important the LGBTIQ+ scene is in taking such decisions, as LGBTIQ+ individuals will want to make sure they can safely be themselves in the place of choice. Safety is also calculated by how easily accessible LGBTIQ+ organisations are, and by the absence of issues in everyday life activities for LGBTIQ+ people when compared to heterosexual individuals (Doan and Higgins, 2011, p. 18). Various aspects to keep in mind are the ability of same-sex couples to do activities together in public such as shopping without being looked at weirdly, as well as same-sex parents with children who may have trouble finding accepting childcare providers. Immigrants in LGBTIQ+ identified communities such as Atlanta expressed their appreciation for being able to publicly display their affection for their partners without discrimination (Doan and Higgins, 2011).

In the later 2018 study by Adur, sexual orientation was the determining factor behind relocating to the United States, as the country was always portrayed in the media as accepting of LGBTIQ+ individuals. Homophobic violence in the US was rarely advertised internationally, and so outsiders were under the impression that the country was a safe haven for such individuals and that they could be open about their sexuality. However, the immigrants in this study reported how they encountered homophobia and violence after expatriating, at times to a greater extent than the violence they suffered back in their home countries which are not considered progressive at all, showing the contrast between the idea they had of the US before moving and the true situation in the country after moving (Adur, 2018). Furthermore, the immigration and naturalisation policies themselves proved to have a bias towards heterosexual couples, white individuals, and/or the rich. If a permanent citizen petitioned

residency for their non-citizen same-sex partner, there was a bias towards those couples who could form financially stable families (Adur, 2018, p. 326). This shows how these expatriates were victims of racism, homophobia, and even classism from the people and from the state, in a country where they were expecting to encounter the opposite attitudes. The image of the US projected outside the US had not prepared them for the harsh reality which at times proved harsher than that of their native countries. In reality, LGBTIQ+ expatriates in the US could only exercise a few of the rights associated with a 'gay haven'.

This 2018 study clashes with the previously mentioned case of Atlanta whereby there was almost no difference between their expected environment and the true environment. However, it highlights Manalansan's concept of reshaped inequalities (Luibhéid, 2008) and, even though the study is 7 years apart from the Atlanta study by Doan and Higgins (2011), it also proves how different areas of a country may have different levels of acceptance (Formby, 2017). The research by Adur (2018) focused on the US in general, whereas the research by Doan and Higgins (2011) focused specifically on one city in one particular state; Atlanta in Georgia, and therefore highlights the importance of not generalising local realities to the wider country context. Although naturalisation policies were not mentioned by Doan and Higgins (2011), the portrayal of life in Atlanta as an LGBTIQ+ person matched that of a gay haven, with a lack of violence and a lack of issues. The study by Adur (2018) presents similarities with Formby (2017) and Kim and Von Glinow (2017) whereby there was often a discrepancy between the accepting environment one expected to find and the true environment of a place. The discrimination of the naturalization process matches that of the non-EEA/Swiss migrants in Ireland previously described by Luibhéid (2018).

In a study by McPhail, McNulty and Hutchings (2016), some LGBTIQ+ expatriates expressed how the fact that they form part of the LGBTIQ+ community actually helped them integrate better in the host countries, since the small size of the local LGBTIQ+ community meant that members were closer and it was easier to make friends. Expatriates are already considered different from the local population due to the fact that they are non-natives, therefore being part of the LGBTIQ+ community as well is not so significant when the foreigner status prevails (McPhail, McNulty and Hutchings, 2016, p. 402). This echoes the work by Bowleg (2013) and the notion of privileges and disadvantages. Expatriates already possess the foreigner status which puts them at a disadvantage, therefore the added disadvantage of being LGBTIQ+ does

not add much more disadvantage, especially since the foreigner identity may be a visible one and not hidden like sexual orientation, making it the most prevalent identity of the individual. Contrastingly, in this research, their disadvantaged LGBTIQ+ identification also worked as a privilege since it offered expatriates the possibility to bond with a small amount of locals through limited channels of socialisation (McPhail, McNulty and Hutchings, 2016). This meant that whilst other heterosexual expatriates might have felt dispersed in a new country not knowing where to find friends, their LGBTIQ+ counterparts could rely on the presence of specific groups and organisations that bring the community together, and use them as vehicles for integrating.

A country may appear to outsiders as LGBTIQ+ friendly but the lived experiences might vary from what is apparent, and that is why the 'comfort factor' is important to take into consideration before relocating (McPhail and McNulty, 2015, p. 759-760). Such scenarios show the importance of the collective LGBTIQ+ shared identity as queer expatriates feel safer having a group of LGBTIQ+ friends in the host country.

3.4 The Maltese context

Malta as a destination is marketed towards every type of tourist. Following the notion by Alonso (2013), the Maltese tourism advertising is done inclusively, as the country is promoted to LGBTIQ+ individuals and to heterosexuals as well. Meeting other LGBTIQ+ individuals in Malta might be a tricky task if one does not know where to start looking. There are specific pages on social media like Facebook which offer a variety of LGBTIQ+ groups where people can join, make friends of all ages, and be informed about LGBTIQ+ events. These groups may be useful for expatriates who want to integrate and find like-minded friends, especially if they might be feeling lost (McPhail, McNulty and Hutchings, 2016), and also links to what Doan and Higgins (2011) stated regarding the accessibility of LGBTIQ+ organisations and events in the host country, whereby such spaces and networking events are organised by LGBTIQ+ organisations themselves.

To know more about the local LGBTIQ+ scene, there are information websites targeted at tourists and locals alike. In accordance with Alonso (2013), information can be gathered online before travelling through specific LGBTIQ+ travel guides available for the Maltese

context such as gaymalta.com and gayguidemalta.com (ARC Malta, 2018a). It comes to no surprise, then, that Malta actively promotes itself as an LGBTIQ+ friendly destination and assists travel agents who plan vacations for LGBTIQ+ customers by informing them about LGBTIQ+ friendly places, hotels, and activities (ARC Malta, 2018b). Similar to Austin and Wojcik (2018), the Maltese government actively advertises the country to attract LGBTIQ+ travellers and invests in Pride events to consequentially increase the income for local goods and services. The Malta Tourism Authority (MTA) has promoted Malta as a year-round destination for LGBTIQ+ individuals in European countries as well as in the United States and Canada (Leone-Ganado, 2016). Same-sex weddings in Malta have also been turned into products as the country is promoted for marriage ceremonies besides regular tourism. The reasoning behind such promotion matches Alonso (2013) as LGBTIQ+ tourists have more money to spend and are considered a financially beneficial niche to invest in for year-round revenue. Such individuals are seen as frequent, well-educated travellers who tend to have a higher income, but this niche market is also diverse in itself as LGBTIQ+ individuals do not all enjoy the same services (Leone-Ganado, 2016). Therefore, whilst a variety of services may be targeted at LGBTIQ+ tourists, they also need to be diverse in nature to cater for the different tastes the customers might have. This coincides with the claim by Wong and Tolkach (2017) which states that individual preferences should not be generalised for the whole LGBTIQ+ community.

Going back to the work by McPhail, McNulty and Hutchings (2016) regarding the fact that different areas of a country have different social climates, this statement holds true even for a small country like Malta. There is an evident difference in mentality and LGBTIQ+ acceptance between areas such as the north and south, especially when comparing the two main islands. Malta is more accepting than its sister island Gozo, therefore, care needs to be taken not to assume that what applies in Malta also applies to the same extent in Gozo (McPhail, McNulty and Hutchings, 2016, p. 398). What is projected about Malta to the international audiences such as through the ILGA-Europe ranking placing Malta first in Europe with regards to LGBTIQ+ rights for seven consecutive years should be personally assessed depending on where one decides to relocate (ILGA-Europe, 2022). Furthermore, acceptable behaviour in Malta does not generally restrict LGBTIQ+ people from being themselves. Contrary to McPhail, McNulty and Hutchings (2016), 'non-conforming' behaviour among

expatriates is not labelled as outsider behaviour as even locals are permitted to display such behaviour. Maltese authorities do not consider homosexuality as a foreign construct, therefore they do not impose restrictions on locals to avoid acting that way (McPhail, McNulty and Hutchings, 2016, p. 398, 402). The locals' acceptance and engagement in 'non-conforming' behaviour in itself reassures LGBTIQ+ expatriates that they can fit in better and that there are less chances of being harassed. This reduces the degrees of difference between the expatriates and the locals.

3.4.1 The acceptance of LGBTIQ+ individuals in Malta

To gain insight on the acceptance of LGBTIQ+ non-Maltese residents in Malta, we must first go over the steps Malta has taken towards legally recognising and protecting the queer community. Major steps in Malta's journey towards LGBTIQ+ equality include the revocation of the sodomy law in 1973, the founding of the main Maltese LGBTIQ+ Rights Movement MGRM in 2001, and the first Malta Pride in 2004 (The Malta LGBTIQ Rights Movement, 2021). These steps have paved the way for further advocacy that resulted in better services for the Maltese queer community and more progressive laws. In 2013, there was the setting up of the LGBTIQ+ Consultative Council to aid the Government as well as the launch of the Rainbow Support Service to support the community, whereas 2014 saw the passing of the Civil Union Act (The Malta LGBTIQ Rights Movement, 2021). Other later services that benefit the LGBTIQ+ community include the creation of the Gender Wellbeing Clinic, along with the SOGIGESC (Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, Gender Expression, and Sex Characteristics) Unit within the Human Rights Directorate in 2018, whilst gender expression and sex characteristics were included as grounds of protection of asylum seekers in Malta in 2020, which shows an extension of services to non-Maltese individuals (The Malta LGBTIQ Rights Movement, 2021).

Whilst it is true that Malta is not simply depicted as LGBTIQ+ friendly for marketing purposes but LGBTIQ+ rights are truly legally recognised, as stated by Austin and Wojcik (2018) and McPhail and McNulty (2015), such a scenario might present harassment from the local population rather than the government itself. There are still some instances of hate crimes in Malta, which LGBTIQ+ organisations claim are not tackled seriously by the police as no subsequent action is taken after reporting (Vassallo, 2021). This shows how even though

there are laws in Malta which protect against discrimination or hate of the sort, they might not be appropriately enforced, making the local LGBTIQ+ population feel disregarded in such scenarios. In itself, this discrepancy between the exceptional laws enacted to protect the LGBTIQ+ community and the lack of enforcement and action echoes the notion of pinkwashing behaviour brought forward by Hartal (2019), whereby LGBTIQ+ individuals might feel like the country adopted such laws to look liberal to other countries rather than to really battle discrimination. A case in point is the double discrimination faced by British singer Lucy Spraggan during her holiday in Malta with her girlfriend. Although Malta's laws protected them, they did not reflect the attitudes of the people around them as they were subjected to harassment on the basis of being simultaneously a same-sex couple and women (Spraggan, 2021). This further amplifies the previously mentioned notion of various disadvantaged identities collectively resulting in a greater discrimination (Bowleg, 2013).

3.4.2 The acceptance of non-Maltese residents in Malta

Along with the previously mentioned laws protecting the LGBTIQ+ community, the Constitution of Malta and the Criminal Code explicitly prohibit any form of discrimination in Malta, which also includes legal protection against racism (Assimakopoulos and Vella Muskat, 2018, p. 25). A 2017 study by Assimakopoulos and Vella Muskat showed that in Malta, despite having the presence of xenophobia, racism, and homophobia, xenophobia and racism are bigger problems when compared to homophobia.

The local population tends to discriminate against the Muslim 'others' and/or those whose ethnicity is Arab or African, whereas queer individuals are not considered 'others' as much as Muslims and Arabs/Africans (Assimakopoulos and Vella Muskat, 2018, pp. 183–184). Muslims are thought of as more different when compared to LGBTIQ+ individuals, since LGBTIQ+ individuals are thought of as part of Maltese society, unlike Muslims who are perceived as non-Maltese since they do not share cultural and religious connections with the Maltese through Christianity. Furthermore, immigrants hailing from Europe and who are Caucasian do not get discriminated against as much due to their whiteness and their ability of blending in better with the Maltese population (Assimakopoulos and Vella Muskat, 2017, p. 184-185). This means that immigrants who stand out the most get discriminated against the most based

on their visible physical qualities. However, the Maltese population tends to wrongly associate skin colour with religion, leading to the assumption that black immigrants are de facto of Muslim faith, which may not necessarily be the case (Assimakopoulos and Vella Muskat, 2017, p. 184).

To put this into perspective, therefore, black Christian immigrants might still suffer from xenophobia in Malta due to the fact that they are automatically perceived as Muslims. Similarly, black LGBTIQ+ immigrants will not be perceived as LGBTIQ+ due to the general association between queerness and whiteness. This mindset is identical to the earlier Irish referendum case as all migrants were automatically assumed to not be LGBTIQ+ since they were not white (Luibhéid, 2018). Such perceptions strip individuals from their various intersecting identities, automatically classifying them as 'others' without considering the possibility of common identities. This links to the previously mentioned work by Bowleg (2013) whereby people may get discriminated against not on the basis of what they truly identify with, but on the basis of what society believes the person identifies with. Connecting this notion to this research, LGBTIQ+ individuals might stop at the fact that expatriates are non-natives, either visibly or invisibly, resulting in a possible overshadowing of common identities like sexual orientation and hindering the queer expatriates' full integration in the local LGBTIQ+ community.

3.4.3 Expatriate experiences in Malta

At the end of the year 2021, the Maltese population stood at 519,562 inhabitants, 115,449 of which were non-Maltese, amounting to 22.2% of the population (National Statistics Office, 2022, p. 30). Shifting our focus to expatriates, the main reasons, or pull factors, behind relocating to Malta include the warm climate, the broad use of the English language, the short distance from mainland Europe (especially for EU nationals), and the low levels of criminal activity (Vukovic, 2013, p. 594). This coincides with the claim by Gedro *et al*. (2013), whereby the freedom of movement within the EU makes it possible for EU citizens to relocate to another culture whilst remaining close to their native countries and availing of EU benefits.

A 2008 study by Innes specifically among British retiree expatriates in Malta showed how the fact that a British expatriate community was already in place in Malta made the retirees more

prone to choose the country over other southern European retirement destinations. The close-knit friendships between members of the same expatriate community through the formal association British Residents Association (BRA) were described as essential especially immediately after relocation to Malta (Innes, 2008, p. 28). Participation in BRA activities strengthened the link between members as well as helped in the exchange of essential information related to living in Malta. Contrary to Munro *et al*. (2013), although these British expatriates were not part of the LGBTIQ+ community, having parts of the local community in the host country was considered as an advantage as it meant that they had a structure which they could rely on when requiring help. The decision to expatriate to Malta was further facilitated by previous holiday visits to the island before relocation as well as a connection with the host natives, either through repeat leisure visits or through long periods of working in Malta (Innes, 2008, p. 20). Furthermore, another pull factor for British nationals in this study was a detail regarding driving on the same side of the road (Innes, 2008, p. 23).

English as a widely used second language in Malta means that expatriates do not necessarily need to learn Maltese to integrate in the country. In fact, the British retirees in the research by Innes (2008) did not mention a language barrier and reported having a good number of local friends. However, some expatriates in the research by Vukovic (2013) noted that their lack of Maltese meant that they could not integrate fully with the locals, which led them to group more with other non-Maltese individuals. This also resulted in them feeling a sense of boundary between themselves and the locals due to the language barrier. Some of the expatriates interviewed by Vukovic (2013) were judgemental towards Maltese people and their culture, however, some were non-judgemental which is a sign of successful expatriation. The interviewees in both studies did not mention a divide between the expected environment before and the true environment after expatriation (Formby, 2017; Kim and Von Glinow, 2017). However, it is important to note that the participants in these studies were not LGBTIQ+ individuals, and so one should be careful not to generalise these findings for LGBTIQ+ expatriates in Malta. Furthermore, the participants of the aforementioned studies hailed from Western Europe and North America, and the issue of visible difference was not explored at all.

A more recent report issued by the InterNations community of Expat Insider ranked Malta in the bottom 10 places for global expatriates (Von Plato and Zeeck, 2021). This evaluation done

by expatriates themselves represents a drastic decrease when compared to previous years, as Malta had previously boasted excellent rankings in attracting expatriates. Overall, in the 2021 report Malta was ranked in the 50th place out of 59 expat destinations, gaining average rankings for categories like leisure, health, feeling at home, and friendliness whilst performing poorly in aspects like quality of life, travel and transportation, and quality of environment (Von Plato and Zeeck, 2021, pp. 21–30). This shows that Malta as a destination for expatriates is no longer as attractive as it used to be, and so this might also influence expatriates who might want to relocate to Malta solely for its progressive laws. When the whole picture is taken into account, this might affect the perception that non-Maltese LGBTIQ+ people have of what living in Malta entails. Since the expatriation of LGBTIQ+ individuals is also generally fuelled by the same motivations other expatriating individuals possess (Bhugra *et al.*, 2010), these rankings relating to quality of life might outshine the country's exceptional reputation of being LGBTIQ+ friendly.

A 2022 survey report giving insight on LGBTIQ+ expatriates in Gozo has highlighted the fact that half of them found it more difficult to be open about their sexuality in Gozo compared to their native countries, even though the majority were already openly LGBTIQ+ before their relocation to Gozo (LGBTI+ Gozo and Jakob, 2022, pp. 7-8). This reveals that half the participants did not experience the 'comfort factor' previously presented by McPhail and McNulty (2015). However, the report does not state where these expatriates come from, so there is no indication about the native countries in question. The reasons behind this struggle in their disclosure of their sexuality are linked to the Gozitan mentality, which is primarily dominated by religion (LGBTI+ Gozo and Jakob, 2022, p. 8), and is similar to the point by Austin and Wojcik (2018) regarding the fact that when a country protects LGBTIQ+ people through inclusive laws, it might be the population that presents harassment, leading to feelings of hidden homophobia (Munro *et al.,* 2013). Whilst this portrays a difference in the native attitudes between Malta and Gozo and coincides with the claim by Formby (2017) regarding the acceptance of the rural and urban areas of the same country, another difference that was accentuated relates to the non-Maltese identity. The LGBTIQ+ expatriates in this research mentioned how Gozitans feel superior to expatriates, make them feel like they do not belong, and tell them the notorious phrase 'go back to your country' (LGBTI+ Gozo and Jakob, 2022, p. 10). Such a discrimination was pointed out in scenarios relating to healthcare, employment,

and everyday life with issues like having to pay more than other individuals for the same products and services.

The study by LGBTI+ Gozo and Jakob (2022) also explored the impact of COVID-19 on these LGBTIQ+ expatriates. Almost all of them were affected negatively by the pandemic, with the majority experiencing adverse effects on their mental health. This manifested in feelings of loneliness and lack of support, although some were able to turn this negative period into an interesting one by exploring their surrounding environment more and learning new things (LGBTI+ Gozo and Jakob, 2022, p. 13). The expatriates in this study expressed how they would have used services oriented towards queer people such as the services of a counsellor or more online activities if they were available in the Gozitan context, with half of them wanting to engage with the organisation LGBTI+ Gozo. This adds up to a lack of relational and cultural belonging (Formby, 2017) as a result of poor interactions between the queer people in Gozo themselves, the Gozitans who disregard the expatriates because they are non-Maltese, and the lack of LGBTIQ+ organised events. Echoing Doan and Higgins (2011) and Formby (2017), the weak presence of the LGBTIQ+ NGO during the pandemic period contributed negatively to the mental health of queer expatriates in Gozo as there was a very limited sense of community present.

From the LGBTIQ+ oriented events in Gozo that have been organised, almost half the participants reported attending at least once, with only a few expatriates not having attended any event whatsoever (LGBTI+ Gozo and Jakob, 2022, p. 15). Lack of engagement in queer oriented events and activities in Gozo was attributed to shyness. On the other hand, those participants interested in attending online events indicated that their event preferences were those focusing on community engagement, socialisation, and self-care (LGBTI+ Gozo and Jakob, 2022, p. 15). This data, although specific to Gozo, can shine a light on how LGBTIQ+ expatriates in the Maltese islands have adapted to the effects of the pandemic over the last two years.

3.5 Concluding remarks

With a lack of prior research concerning LGBTIQ+ expatriates in Malta, only assumptions had to be made up to this point. The survey by LGBTI+ Gozo and Jakob (2022), although very

insightful, only gives information about queer expatriates living in Gozo. This means that the findings are partial and only relevant to one area of Malta, not to be extended to the whole country. The intersection of sexual orientation and the non-Maltese identity were never simultaneously explored in the local context over the whole country, therefore existing literature needs to be reviewed carefully as one would not get the full picture just by looking at LGBTIQ+ individuals only or expatriates only and merging both existing data. As explored in the previous literature, identities are constantly influencing each other and so the combination of several minority identities affects individuals differently without necessarily being able to trace the effects back to one minority identity source (Chikwendu, 2013; Lee and Brotman, 2013; Parent, DeBlaere and Moradi, 2013). Since minority identities may amplify each other in cases of oppression, the resulting experiences are new and unique and may be unrelated to those possessing one minority status only. For this reason, this study proves to be essential to shed light on this intersectionality in the Maltese context whereby intersecting identities and their collective effects were taken into account. The next chapter provides a description of the research processes and methods adopted to document and understand this interesting phenomenon.

Chapter 4: Methodology

4.1 Introduction

To understand the difference between the expectation and the reality of living in Malta as well as the integration process of LGBTIQ+ expatriates and the effects of their intersectional identities in Malta, a mixed methods study was carried out. This two-phased research consisted of merging the responses gathered from an online survey and online interviews. The merging of quantitative and qualitative data helped in obtaining a picture of what it means to be simultaneously non-Maltese and LGBTIQ+, and why both identities needed to be taken into consideration for this study to be as accurate as possible. In an attempt to replicate the diversity of identities within the LGBTIQ+ expatriate community in Malta, various identities were represented in both databases.

4.2 Research approach

Surveys are an excellent way to provide quantitative data on the general opinions and attitudes of a group of people, referred to as a sample, whilst establishing a clear study purpose. Quantitative surveys are typically closed-ended, focusing on numbers and leaving little to no room for elaborate or detailed answers. Such data could be collected at one point in time only through cross-sectional surveys, or over a longer period of time through longitudinal surveys (Creswell and Creswell, 2018, p. 49-50). The process of stratification in surveys means that specific individual characteristics (such as gender) are represented in the study sample in a way that reflects the true nature of the population whilst still abiding by the inclusion and exclusion criteria of the study. This method ensures that the sample of participants is equally balanced between characteristics to get broader and more extensive results, rather than giving unequal priority to one characteristic over others (Creswell and Creswell, 2018, p. 212).

Interviews are remarkable to collect qualitative accounts since they provide the possibility of exploring subjects in more depth and understanding individual experiences through open-ended questions. The process of generating meaning according to the data collected is referred to as constructivism (Creswell and Creswell, 2018, p. 45-46). In research addressing

social issues, the researcher should proceed carefully by giving a voice to the participants and not marginalising them further. Through narrative research, participants are asked to share personal experiences which may be quoted directly or retold by the researcher in a chronological manner. Phenomenological research deals with participants' stories about a particular phenomenon they have all experienced, and comparing and contrasting different accounts (Creswell and Creswell, 2018, p. 50).

As seen so far, quantitative analysis is used to measure numbered data in a statistical manner, whereas a qualitative analysis explores social or human problems to obtain an understanding of what they mean to individuals or groups (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). Combining these two methods together, also known as a mixed methods approach, results in an integration of data that allows for additional insight into the research question. A study adopting both quantitative and qualitative research methods should be accompanied by a plausible reason for the mixing of the two research methods. The final report should have a flexible structure and incorporate the two data collection methods seamlessly, by analysing the individual meanings of a situation whilst giving a broader view of its complexity (Creswell and Creswell, 2018).

4.2.1 Adopting a mixed methods approach

Merging survey data and interview data to answer a research question offers a more detailed insight which cannot be achieved when adopting one data collection method on its own. Adopting both data collection methods means that combining the strengths of both methods provides the researcher with a better understanding of the research question (Creswell and Creswell, 2018, p. 57). This method is essential for a researcher who wants to explore the general effects of a phenomenon on a group of people whilst exploring how it effects individuals on a personal level, resulting in an initial survey of a large number of people followed by interviews with a few of them to get specific accounts. In such a case, the researcher gathers both types of data at around the same time, then converges the information when interpreting the results (Creswell and Creswell, 2018, p. 52). This method also allows the researcher to pinpoint any contradictions or inconsistent findings and elaborate on them further. The comparing of databases to prove or disprove each other is

also known as a convergent mixed methods design (Creswell and Creswell, 2018, p. 300). Besides expanding the amount of research data, this method improves the quality and validity of the study as apart from combining the strengths of both quantitative and qualitative research methods, such an approach consequentially also minimises the weaknesses of each method.

Explanatory sequential mixed methods is a data collection process whereby the quantitative data is gathered first, analysed, and the results influence the course of the qualitative in-depth research gathered later (Creswell and Creswell, 2018, p. 304-305). This is called an explanatory research since the initial quantitative information is backed up and explained in more detail through the qualitative information. Such an approach means that the second phase research can only start once the first phase research is finished and evaluated, since its outcome will determine the trajectory of the second phase research (Creswell and Creswell, 2018, p. 304-305). For this reason, the sample size for the qualitative method is smaller than the quantitative as it strives to obtain more extensive information from fewer people.

This study adopted cross-sectional surveys and interviews to collect narratives about LGBTIQ+ expatriates' experience. Although the samples of both databases represent a variety of identities, the demographics are not equally represented from one database to another as it depended on the participants' will to progress from one research method to another. This research was phenomenological as the aim was to understand emotions and experiences in a holistic manner, but also to adopt a constructivist perspective, due to the fact that meaning and interpretation were given to data from two different databases. This aim justifies the use of a mixed methods approach as such an approach provides data that is generalisable through closed-ended questionnaires but also individual and unique through open-ended interviews that help in looking at the phenomenon in question from various angles. Besides understanding the feelings of the participants through rating statements on a 5-point Likert scale, the online surveys were also undertaken to understand the demographics of the LGBTIQ+ expatriate community in Malta. This was particularly crucial to make up for the lack of previous studies on the subject in the local context. An explanatory sequential mixed methods approach was not used as both sources of data were gathered at the same time with the intention of strengthening each other, and so the results from one source did not influence the other. Furthermore, the questions that were asked during the structured

interviews were already finalised before the survey data collection process began, meaning that the interview questions were not affected by the survey outcome. However, the sample for the quantitative study was bigger than that of the qualitative study as the surveys required more participants to generate an accurate picture of the general LGBTIQ+ expatriate experience. The participant aim for the questionnaire was 50 or more respondents and the participant aim for the interviews was between 8-10 interviewees. The sample outcome was that of 57 survey respondents and 9 interviewees. This proved useful as the bigger the quantitative sample, the broader the communal perspective.

The quantitative data collection was carried out online through Google Forms internet surveys, and due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the qualitative interviews also had to be carried out online through audio recorded Zoom video calls. Under normal circumstances they would have been held face-to-face, however, the shift to virtual interviews also provided some advantages particularly during such stressful times. The possibility of being interviewed at the comfort of one's own home could have made the interviewees less stressed and, consequentially, more prone to revealing sensitive information in such a familiar setting to them (Salmons, 2015, p. 62). Furthermore, much of the personal and business communication had shifted to online methods since the start of the pandemic, meaning that interviewees could have not been so willing to meet face-to-face if they had other virtual commitments before or after the interview.

The advantages of these data collection methods over others include the fact that both the platforms for the Google Forms questionnaires and the Zoom interviews can be used for free, and they are both easy to use. Furthermore, they reduce the need to identify and book adequate venues particularly for the interview phase, which would normally require a quiet environment to ensure a clear audio recording with no background distractions (Salmons, 2015, p. 194).

4.3 Sampling method

Data collection for the closed-ended questionnaires was carried out through purposive snowball sampling, whereby local LGBTIQ+ NGOs acted as gatekeepers to disseminating the survey invitations to individuals fitting the study criteria both among their members as well

as on their social media. This type of sampling was adopted as the participants for my study had to all be LGBTIQ+ expatriates, so a purposive approach ensured that only people who fit the criteria accepted the invitation. A snowball sampling was adopted as the best way to reach LGBTIQ+ expatriates in Malta was through local LGBTIQ+ organisations which distributed my invite to their members and followers, who were also asked to share the invitation with others they know who fit the criteria.

After obtaining ethical clearance from the University of Malta, the gatekeeper NGOs which helped promote my research were Malta LGBTIQ Rights Movement (MGRM), Allied Rainbow Communities (ARC), and Drachma LGBTI. The survey link was also shared on the Facebook group Expats Malta and similar expatriate Facebook groups to reach LGBTIQ+ expatriates who might not be part of any local LGBTIQ+ organisations. To reach other LGBTIQ+ expatriates who might not be on Facebook groups, the survey link was also sent online to international students by the University of Malta registrar. Participants for the open-ended structured interviews were recruited through the questionnaire itself, with the last question offering respondents the possibility to show interest to be contacted personally to be interviewed in more detail about their experiences. Interested participants wrote their emails in this last optional question, whereby they were later contacted with a formal invitation for the Zoom interview. Respondents were fully aware that participation in this study was voluntary and that they could stop their participation at any time. The survey data was collected anonymously through Google Forms since it does not collect IP addresses, whereas the interview data was audio recorded and collected anonymously using code assignment. All the data was then stored securely on a password-protected encrypted drive to ensure the participants' identities remained anonymous.

The participation criteria for this study were LGBTIQ+ expatriates who had been residing in Malta for not less than two years prior to February 2022. The quantitative survey, consisting of 25 questions, was carried out between the months of February and April 2022. Its sample consisted of 57 individuals, comprising of 26 cisgender females, 26 cisgender males, 2 non-binary individuals, 2 transgender males, and 1 transgender non-binary person. The survey respondents hailed from all continents except from Oceania, with the majority coming from Western or Central Europe. All age groups from 18 upwards were represented in this study, with the largest age bracket being 25-34, and the time of residence in Malta ranged from 2

years to 10+ years, with the majority having lived in Malta for between 2-4 years. A more detailed look at the demographics of the survey sample can be seen in the following graphs.

Nationality

How many years have you lived in Malta
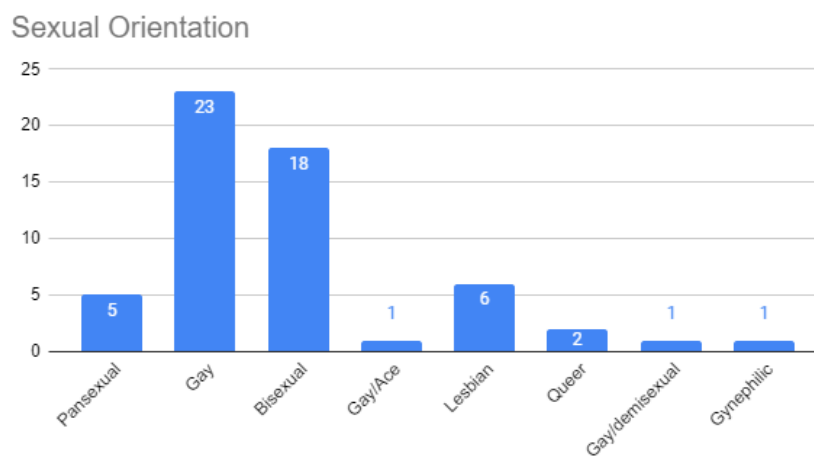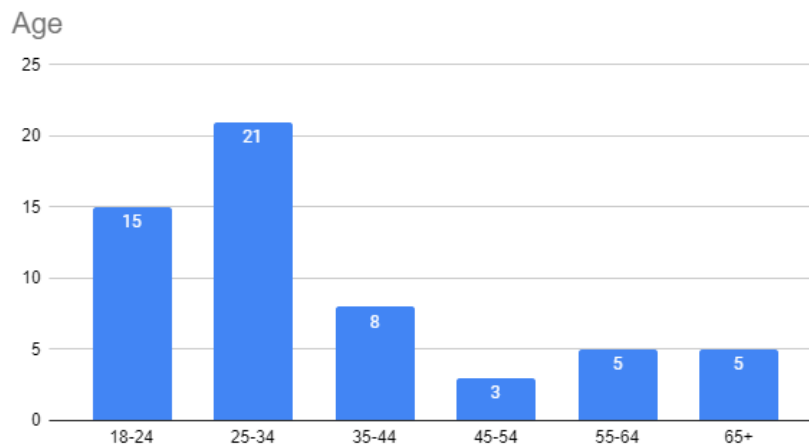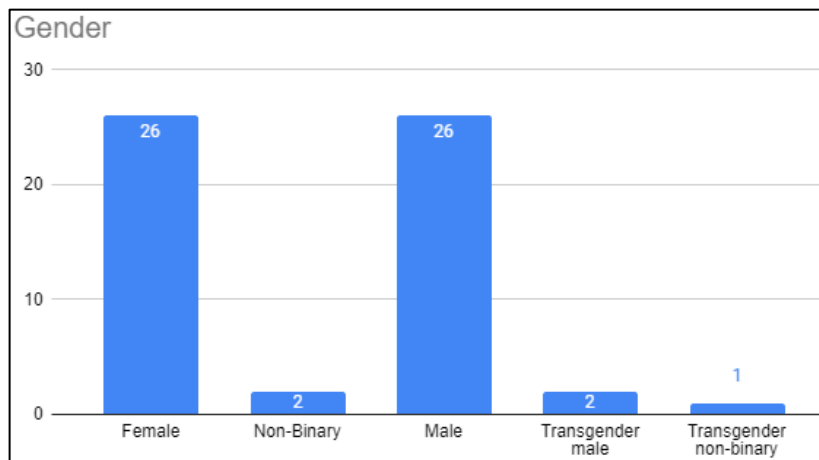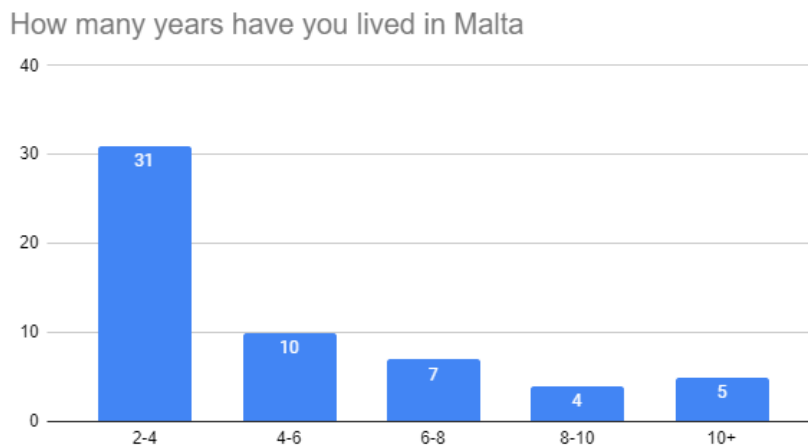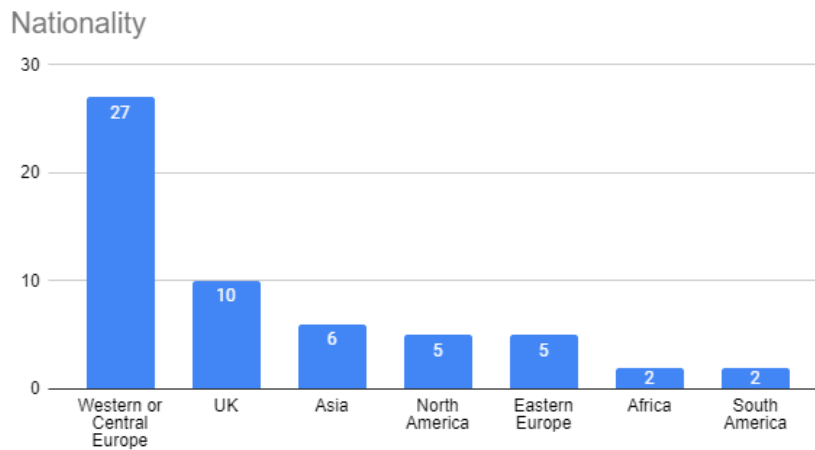
Demographics of the survey sample

The qualitative interviews, which consisted of 6 questions and ranged between 20 to 40 minutes, were carried out between the months of February and May 2022. The sample consisted of 9 individuals, comprising of 5 cisgender males, 3 cisgender females, and 1 non-binary person, meaning that there was no transgender representation in the qualitative part of this study. The survey respondents hailed from Asia, Western or Central Europe, North America, Africa, and the UK, with the majority coming from Western or Central Europe and North America. All age groups were represented in this sample except for the 45-54 age bracket, with the 25-34 age bracket being the most dominant. The time of residence in Malta ranged from 2 to 8 years, with the majority having lived in Malta for between 2-4 years and 6-8 years. A more detailed look at the demographics of the anonymised interview sample can be seen in the table below.

	Age	Gender	Sexual Orientation	Nationality	How many years have you lived in Malta
Participant 4	35-44	Male	Gay	Asia	6-8
Participant 11	25-34	Female	Bisexual	Western or Central Europe	2-4
Participant 13	18-24	Male	Gay/Ace	North America	2-4
Participant 23	55-64	Male	Gay	North America	6-8
Participant 24	55-64	Male	Gay	Africa	4-6
Participant 25	25-34	Male	Queer	Western or Central Europe	6-8
Participant 26	65+	Female	Bisexual	Western or Central Europe	6-8
Participant 28	25-34	Non-Binary	Queer	UK	2-4
Participant 46	25-34	Female	Lesbian	North America	2-4

Demographics of the interview sample

4.4 Limitations and restrictions

The sample size for the quantitative surveys and especially the qualitative interviews was relatively small, therefore, accounts should not be generalised for all LGBTIQ+ expatriates in Malta as opinions and experiences may differ from one person to another (Creswell and Creswell, 2018, p. 45-46). Similarly, not everyone reacts to the same situation in the same way, so experiences presented in this study are highly subjective.

The fact that this research was conducted among LGBTIQ+ expatriates residing in Malta means that English may not have been the first language of most participants, therefore it might not have been the usual language participants use to comfortably express their feelings with. Whilst LGBTIQ+ expatriates essentially need good English to navigate daily life in Malta, this might have created a language barrier for any participants who have limited vocabulary and do not feel so confident expressing emotions in English. This could have resulted in inaccurate translations of experiences. Furthermore, this also meant that LGBTIQ+ expatriates in Malta who do not speak English were purposely excluded from this study due to the language barrier.

The collection of data for this research was two-phased whereby quantitative survey data was gathered in the first phase and qualitative interview data was simultaneously gathered in the second phase. Since the questions asked in the second phase were an extension of the responses collected in the first phase, and due to the fact that the second phase was more in-

depth, the sample size in the first phase was larger than that of the second. This could have provided an imbalance between the data sources since not all survey participants got the opportunity to elaborate further on their experiences (Creswell and Creswell, 2018, p. 52).

Another uncontrollable limitation relating to imbalance was linked to the first phase of the study, whereby there was no way to ensure equal demographic representation in the questionnaire as it depended solely on public will. The sample for the interviews, on the other hand, could have been controlled after checking the demographics of those survey participants who expressed an interest in being interviewed, then contacted accordingly to avoid over-representation of some demographics over others. Ideally, this would have been the case, however, the amount of survey participants who wanted to be interviewed was the same as the amount of participants required, therefore there was no possibility to choose some participants over others to get different insights and equal representation. Similarly, the diversity of demographics present in the first phase of this study was not necessarily reflected in the second phase. This meant that some identities were present in the survey but absent in the interviews, leading to a lack of valuable insight. Such an example is the transgender identity, which was minimally represented in the surveys but not at all in the interviews. Another factor relevant to this study concerns race, where the majority of the interviewees were Caucasian, which particularly limits the validity of the generalizability of the feelings portrayed in this study.

Since this was a mixed methods study with two sources of data, care was taken to give equal weight to both databases as they were both essential to help answer the research question (Creswell and Creswell, 2018, p. 318). An unequal priority would have led to a data imbalance, represented by a lack of equal consultation between data sources.

As an effect of the data collection method employed in the second phase of the study, there could have been lags in the Zoom interviews due to bad internet connections, which would have affected the quality and clarity of the participant narratives as well as the audio recordings. During the fieldwork, there was only one minor lag in one interview, which was very short and did not affect the narrative of the interviewee as the interview still kept flowing normally. As for the other interviews, there were no connection issues, and so they were all carried out as planned.

An issue that could have been present in the virtual interviews is the observation of non-verbal communication such as body language (Salmons, 2015, p. 63). Video calls only enable the interviewees to see the body language from the shoulders up, which might have meant that any other body language exhibited by interviewees during the interviews was unable to be seen and therefore was lost. Additionally, the concept of eye contact differed in virtual interviews as the participants could not establish the same eye contact as one would achieve face-to-face. Salmons (2015) refers to this phenomenon as virtual eye contact, whereby looking at each other's video was the closest action to eye contact. This is due to the fact that if participants looked directly at the camera, they would have not looked at the other participant's video, which translates to a lack of mutual connection and understanding (Salmons, 2015, p. 216-217).

Another issue that could have presented itself with those participants who had been residing in Malta the least could have been the fact that the COVID-19 pandemic has been ongoing for 2 years, which coincides with the minimum number of years for participating in this study. This means that expatriates who have been in Malta for 2 years or slightly more may have not been able to physically interact and socialise as much due to the lockdowns and restrictions present, reducing the richness of their experiences. However, their experiences could have provided more insight on virtual integration instead of physical integration, highlighting another side of socialisation.

Participation in this research was restricted to LGBTIQ+ expatriates who chose to move to Malta out of their own will and who had been residing in the island for not less than two years by the end of the fieldwork phase of this study. Because of the limitations of this research, these criteria excluded non-Maltese LGBTIQ+ individuals who were forced to seek asylum since their relocation to Malta did not involve a voluntary choice of countries. This study also excluded non-Maltese LGBTIQ+ individuals who were born and raised in Malta, due to the fact that they have always lived in Malta and did not undergo an integration process as expatriates.

4.5 Validity and reliability

As highlighted by Creswell and Creswell (2018), both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods have strengths and weaknesses. However, the combination of both methods provides a holistic research approach whilst neutralising the weaknesses of each research method. This combination of methods proves helpful in the triangulation of data sources, as the findings from one method could back up and help explain the findings from the other method. Additionally, one method could provide more detailed information than the other, and prove itself useful in building information and directing the readers to better understand the research question and its answers. However, a mixed methods approach may also present contradictory data, and an acknowledgement of such findings makes the research more valid (Creswell and Creswell, 2018, p. 275).

This research started out with the collection of quantitative data which explored the demographics of the participants and included a ranking of feelings on a 5-point Likert scale whereby 1 meant highly disagree, 3 meant neutral or no preference, and 5 meant highly agree, then proceeded with a simultaneous collection of qualitative data to add personal experiences which backed up and explored further the quantitative data. Data from both databases was later presented together through the discussion of themes. The questions for both data sources were devised at the same time and data was gathered simultaneously in a cross-sectional manner. Such an approach helped in understanding the general reality of LGBTIQ+ expatriates in Malta whilst also providing personal accounts to understand this experience on a deeper level. This ensured that some of the participants were given the opportunity to provide rich, thick descriptions (Creswell and Creswell, 2018, p. 274) to get an in-depth understanding of their feelings.

In terms of my own reflexivity, I am a Maltese national who has always lived in Malta. For this reason, I may not fully comprehend what it means to switch countries and start a new life in a country different than one's own. However, I understood the meaning and experiences that the participants provided me with in order to examine their responses in the most objective way. Whilst not being an expatriate myself, I do form part of the LGBTIQ+ community, therefore there may have been a bias on that regard. Although I possess intersectional identities of a different kind, such as being both LGBTIQ+ and a woman, I proceeded with this study of intersectionality in an objective manner.

4.6 Data analysis methods

In order to answer the research question of this study and investigate intersectionality, the data from the questionnaires and the interviews were interpreted in such a way that they reinforced each other. The analysis of the quantitative statistical surveys included the visualisation of the responses of each question (Creswell and Creswell, 2018, p. 270) automatically portrayed by Google Forms. These were integrated into the evaluation of this study in the Analysis chapter to ease understanding, as each question was isolated to visually explore the extent of the different responses given to be able to provide an interpretation of the data. As for the analytical phase of the surveys, Google Forms was an exceptional platform as it automatically generated the survey data into visual charts and an excel sheet, which aided tremendously in the visualisation of the responses and reduced any possible data entry errors (Creswell and Creswell, 2018, p. 215). Furthermore, the charts automatically included the percentages of the responses, which were later rounded up to whole numbers in the analytic phase to remove decimal points. Consequentially, this made it faster and easier to work with the collected data. Although not visually included in the Analysis chapter, the full individual survey responses were also evaluated to be able to link the answers from different questions together to understand better the individual respondents' experiences. This was done alongside the qualitative interview analysis as part of themes, and ensured that answers were analysed both individually as part of completed surveys but also in relation to other answers from other completed surveys and interviews. The survey questions are presented at the end of this dissertation as part of the Appendix section.

Upon collecting the online interview data, the handling and analysis were carried out along the same lines of face-to-face interviews (Salmons, 2015, p. 254). The analysis of the qualitative interview data entailed identifying themes from the information collected whilst giving importance to the meaning that the participants themselves held about their experiences, as opposed to the meaning found elsewhere such as in the relevant literature presented in the previous chapters (Creswell and Creswell, 2018, p. 46, 258). The one-on-one interviews were consistent throughout, audio recorded and transcribed, and consistent in relation to each other such that responses were coded. The coding of themes is a process that can be done in a chronological manner, or in a way that highlights both prevalent responses and surprising ones (Creswell and Creswell, 2018, p. 270, 272). Coding narrative research

tends to be done by structuring responses into a plot, setting, climax, etc. whereas phenomenological research is coded by analysing important responses. This research was a phenomenological one, and so its data analysis phase consisted of coding important responses and prevailing themes irrespective of their chronological order. A holistic analysis of the perspectives and experiences gathered ensured an interpretation that is very similar to real life, using participants' own words through direct quotes collected from the interviews and inserted in the Analysis chapter to strengthen the argument. The interview consent form and questions are also presented later on in the Appendix section.

Both the quantitative and the qualitative results were analysed and discussed at the same time in relation to one another to aid in the understanding of the participants' lived experiences. Merging the different data collected in a mixed methods research proved to be an excellent analytical method especially since one database provided more depth than the other database. Therefore, the interviews acted as an extension of the important questions asked in the questionnaire. Excerpts of the results from both databases were presented at the same time to fortify each other and strengthen the argument in question as part of themes. The findings from the questionnaire were introduced to get a general idea of the experiences of the LGBTIQ+ expatriate community in Malta coupled by the findings from the interviews to give a voice to some participant experiences and bridge the general survey feelings with the specific individual realities. The themes that prevailed in this study are explored in the following chapter, where both databases were examined and compared.

Chapter 5: Analysis

5.1 Introduction

For this study, the analysis of the lived experiences of LGBTIQ+ expatriates in Malta entailed presenting the data from two separate databases at the same time. The converging of the two databases, as described in the previous chapter, took place as part of themes. Therefore, care was taken to represent both databases equally. When the results of the survey answers are graphically portrayed in this chapter as part of a 5-point Likert scale, it is important to keep in mind that 1 means highly disagree, 3 means neutral or no preference, and 5 means highly agree to the statement in question. Furthermore, the percentages given in this chapter to aid in the interpretation of data are rounded up figures to exclude decimal points and make comparisons easier between different responses. As for the interview answers, key quotes are inserted faithfully in this chapter to strengthen the argument in question.

5.2 What motivates LGBTIQ+ expatriates to choose Malta?

Survey demographics: Nationality
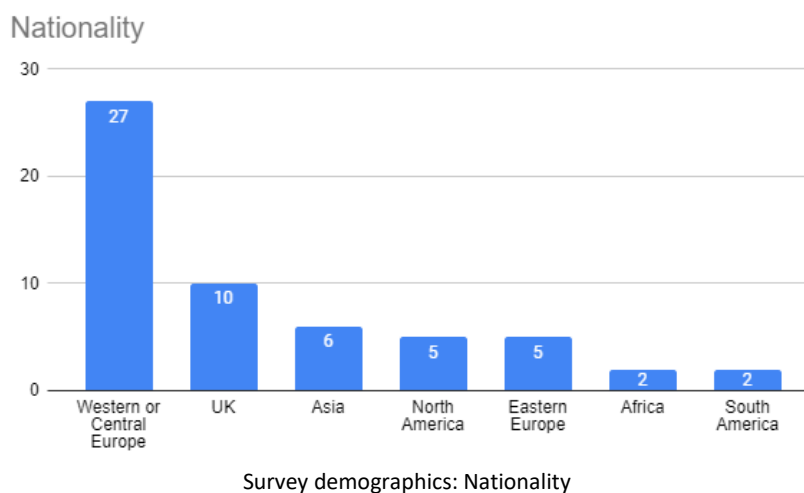
Analysing the top demographics of the survey sample, almost half the respondents hail from Western or Central Europe and almost one fifth hail from the UK. This comes to no surprise considering the proximity of the Maltese islands to continental Europe and the UK, coupled with the fact that most of these countries are part of the EU which facilitates internal movement between member countries. Although the UK is no longer an EU member, there is still a strong historical link between the two countries. Some interesting patterns that can be

noted from the survey answers in relation to particular nationalities include the fact that North American respondents were the sub-group which reported having the most Maltese friends, Eastern Europeans all reported themselves proud to be LGBTIQ+ in Malta even though none are members of local LGBTIQ+ NGOs, and Asians and South Americans all had high expectations of Malta before relocating, with 67% finding reality in Malta satisfying even after relocation. These statistics can shed light on notions such as the portrayal of Malta in different parts of the world, whereby Malta may have different reputations in different countries, leading to individuals from different countries having differing images and expectations of the islands. This could be as a result of marketing for tourism purposes or due to other international rankings linked to Malta's progressive rights, which could induce LGBTIQ+ individuals from geographically far to relocate to Malta over other possible countries. Although one survey respondent from Asia opted to be interviewed, none of the Eastern European or South American survey respondents wished to be interviewed. Such qualitative input could have provided more insight into how the expectation of Malta varies between people from different continents.

Around half the interviewees are not from the EU, with one participant hailing from the UK. The British participant mentioned how Brexit has affected their expatriation procedure such that nowadays they require more paperwork since the process has become more complicated. This detail compares to the point by Gedro *et al.* (2013) whereby movement is facilitated within the EU and the transfer of benefits from one EU country to another is ensured. Now that the UK is not part of the EU anymore, there are less benefits for British expatriates as they have shifted to third country nationals, meaning that their relocation within the EU is no longer aided. This point was also mentioned by one of the American interviewees, whereby since the US is also a third country like several other countries outside the EU, there are various bureaucratic issues that cloud the expatriation process of such individuals.

> "We did quite a lot of travelling around looking at different jurisdictions and different countries and thinking 'do we feel comfortable here or not? Do we like it or not?' […] because Malta being so small it was one of the last countries we got to look at. […] In South Africa we were perfectly able to be a gay couple, there was no issue with it there. So we would never have left an environment where we could be, you know, out and proud, to come to a country where we couldn't be."

Participant 24 recounted that his expatriation to Malta followed a very thorough process of comparing different locations and taking several things into account. Together with his partner, this participant visited several potential host countries to get a better idea of what life is like and to see if they satisfy their requirements to live in them authentically. As Participant 24 said, he and his partner did not have any problems being a gay couple in their country of origin, therefore it was imperative that their expatriation decision was thought out well to ensure that they did not lose any rights in their host country. In their case, they created and went through a list of appealing countries and made a checklist with the most important considerations that needed to be confirmed about the country of choice to ensure a smooth relocation and integration where they could keep on going normally with their lives, having no legal discrepancies between the countries (Austin and Wojcik, 2018). This coincides with Doan and Higgins (2011) and Gedro *et al.* (2013) as the benefits and legal protections were always kept in mind to ensure a full transfer of rights from the native country to the host country to avoid issues in their everyday life activities.

Apart from the legal rights, the extent of the cultural belonging (Formby, 2017) and the feelings transmitted by the locations were also considered through personal visits of these appealing countries as, coinciding with Austin and Wojcik (2018), acceptance does not depend only on the presence of rights but also on the attitudes of the population. Participant 24's expatriation process in Malta can also be compared to the point by Wong and Tolkach (2017) concerning the country choice of openly gay individuals as, being openly gay, he and his partner only considered liberal countries for expatriation to avoid having to undergo depersonalization in different contexts in the host country (Kim and Von Glinow, 2017).

5.2.1 Adventure as a motivation for expatriation

The decision to expatriate to Malta may not necessarily be fuelled by other people's positive experiences or exceptional online reviews. Although these may influence the decision, some individuals relocate purely to try out a place first-hand without knowing much about what to expect. As mentioned in the literature, adventure is a major driver of expatriation, and some

people prefer getting to know a new country and culture in this way. Participant 23 is one of these people; he relocated to Malta with his husband after a trip to the island and without knowing much about the LGBTIQ+ situation of the country. The decision did not involve any previous research but was undertaken as a trial to test out life in Malta, which contrasts with Participant 24's list of potential countries and meticulous checklist of essentials. Participant 23's history of moving around several countries made it easier for him to adapt to a different culture and settle in a new place because he had already been through the process several times beforehand, therefore, relocation was not such a big procedure for him. This meant that Participant 23 had a better cultural flexibility and was able to mediate different cultural norms better as he had been exposed to other cultures before expatriating to Malta. These skills gained from previous experiences aided him in becoming a successful expatriate (Vukovic, 2013).

> "In general it was, I think much easier for me than it would be for the average person because my expectations were different, I wasn't planning on living here forever and so it wasn't like I was assessing everything based on long-term lifestyle. So I came here kind of like 'oh you know, who cares? Whatever. Like I like this part, I don't like this part', you know? It wasn't kind of a serious thing for me, at least at the beginning."
>
> Participant 46
>
> 25-34, Female, Lesbian, 2-4 years in Malta

Participant 46, like Participant 23, also did not plan out the relocation carefully like Participant 24 did. As she herself stated, Participant 46 originally did not intend to stay for a long period in Malta, so her considerations were not as serious and were not intended for a distant future. This made her expatriation easy as her main concerns were focused on short-term adventure and enjoying the host country until her scholarship ended. The decision to remain in the country for longer than originally intended was only taken after having experienced life in Malta first-hand. For obvious reasons, this contrasts heavily with Participant 24 who, due to the wish to expatriate and make another country his long-term home, did not take the relocation process lightly and was not motivated by adventure but by life stability. On the other hand, Participant 23's attitude and motivation are somewhat in the middle between Participant 24 and Participant 46 as although he was looking for a long-term country of residence, his main motivation was still adventure, and so he was willing to take risks in trying out the countries personally without any prior research before committing to expatriation.

5.2.2 Other minor reasons for expatriating to Malta

What made you move to Malta?

Count of What made you move to Malta?
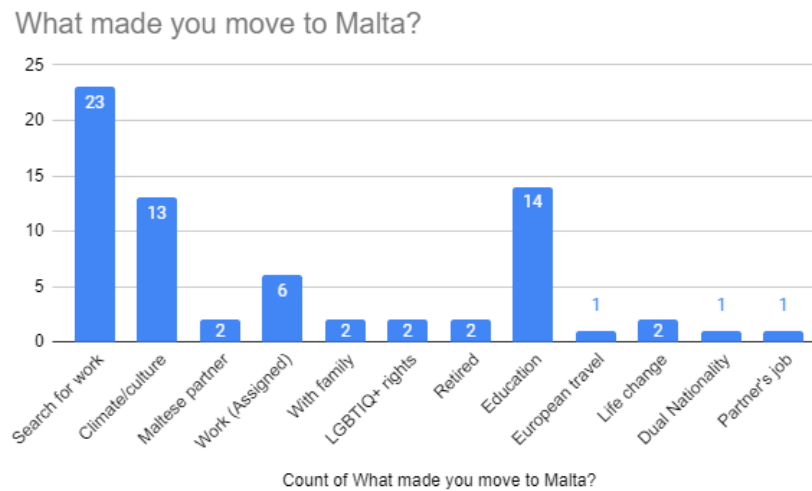
Survey answers: Reasons for moving

Analysing the survey responses to the question about the reasons for expatriation, it might come as a surprise to note that only 2 people out of 57 relocated to Malta specifically because of its progressive LGBTIQ+ rights. The 2 individuals who moved to Malta specifically because of its LGBTIQ+ rights are both proud of their queer identity, however, they do not attend LGBTIQ+ events often. Unlike Formby (2017), both these individuals expatriated alone, so there was no need to have the status of a same-sex spouse or partner legally recognised by the host country. With that being said, there is a division between the rights that the LGBTIQ+ expatriates were able to enjoy in Malta during their initial expatriation phase depending on how long they have been staying on the islands. The longest expatriation timeframe represented in the survey is 10+ years in Malta, which corresponds to before the wave of LGBTIQ+ inclusive laws was passed. This means that the LGBTIQ+ expatriates who have been living in Malta the longest relocated here with little legal protections of their gender and sexual identities but have seen the country's progress first-hand. Out of those who have been living in Malta for 10+ years, the majority do not go to queer events often although they are mostly proud of being LGBTIQ+. They are out in all or in some settings, with 60% of them being members of LGBTIQ+ NGOs.

As can be seen particularly from the interviews, those who are geographically far from their native countries did not necessarily want to escape their native culture through their decision to expatriate, which contrasts with the literature by Gedro *et al.* (2013). The main motivations were personal gain and adventure, so much so that some participants like Participant 24

actually wanted to continue the same life as before, ensuring that the host country had the same accepting culture as the native country to have a smooth relocation. From the 2 survey respondents whose reason to expatriate to Malta was because they wanted a change in their lives, one hailed from geographically far and one from geographically near. For the geographically near individual, who is Participant 25, this need for adventure also links to Gedro *et al.* (2013) as due to him originating from an EU country, relocating to another EU country which is not a near/neighbouring country resulted in a change of culture that still ensured the possibility of availing of EU benefits. This ensured that although the cultures of the native country and the host country were different, the countries were neither too far away from each other nor too close to one another, giving Participant 25 the sense of change and freedom that he desired. The other participant, Participant 23, hails from geographically far but wanted a life change based on adventure, not on escaping his native culture. Both these individuals who relocated to Malta as part of a life change expected Malta to be very safe for LGBTIQ+ individuals.

Taking a closer look at some of the other minor reasons behind the survey respondents' expatriation to Malta, 2 LGBTIQ+ expatriates reported moving to Malta to retire. Although this coincides with Formby (2017) stating that LGBTIQ+ individuals may choose to retire in accepting destinations where they can freely be themselves, it is surprising to note that none of these retirees are out to anyone in Malta regarding their sexuality. This observation underlines the importance of the fact that although gender and sexuality may be the reasons for some LGBTIQ+ people's expatriation, they are not the motivation behind all expatriations of LGBTIQ+ individuals. The retired LGBTIQ+ expatriates in this study are a perfect example, as they show how individuals may not necessarily choose an accepting host country because they are out in all settings, and they may not choose such a host country for its exceptional LGBTIQ+ rights either. Other pull factors (Bhugra *et al.,* 2010) that were mentioned in the survey answers are similar to other pull factors mentioned in the literature. 2 LGBTIQ+ expatriates reported relocating to Malta due to having a Maltese partner, which coincides with the claim by Formby (2017) whereby individuals may expatriate to their foreign partner's country. Various expatriates moved to Malta because of the climate, which matches the pull factors mentioned by Vukovic (2013), and other expatriates were sent to Malta on work assignments (Kim and Von Glinow, 2017).

5.2.3 The expectation and reality of living in Malta

The major reasons behind expatriating to Malta include the search for work, education, and the climate and culture. This shows how Participants 23 and 46 were not the only LGBTIQ+ expatriates who relocated to Malta without giving much consideration to the situation of the LGBTIQ+ community in the country as expatriation for the survey respondents was mostly fuelled by the same reasons as those held by heterosexual expatriates. This does not necessarily mean that these expatriates were not aware at all about the positive reputation and situation of LGBTIQ+ individuals in Malta, but rather that this was not the determining factor behind their relocation, such as in the case of sexual migration (Bhugra *et al.*, 2010). In fact, the majority of the survey respondents had high expectations of Malta's safety for LGBTIQ+ people before their expatriation, which collectively remained almost identical soon after relocation:

Survey answers: Expectation and reality of Malta
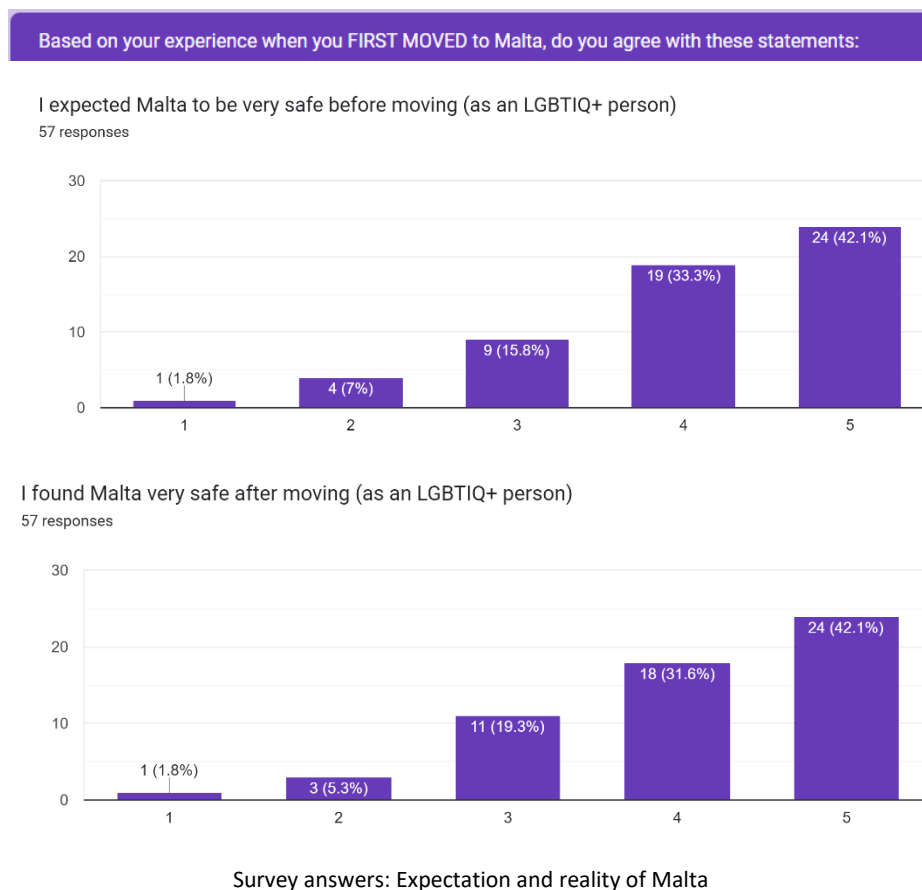
These responses can be broken down and analysed further. Those LGBTIQ+ expatriates who ranked both the expectation and reality of living in Malta as positive are all proud or of a neutral opinion about their LGBTIQ+ identity, with 6% of them not out to anyone. 28%

reported being members of an LGBTIQ+ NGO and 25% attend events often. This contrasts with the fact that none of the LGBTIQ+ expatriates who ranked both their expectation and reality of Malta as neutral or negative attend events often, however, all of them are proud or of a neutral opinion about their LGBTIQ+ identity with 25% of them being members of an LGBTIQ+ NGO and 25% not out to anyone. It comes to no surprise, therefore, that those whose high expectations of Malta matched their lived reality are more open about their sexuality and are more inclined to attend targeted events often.

Similarly, those individuals who had low expectations of Malta but improved their ranking based on their personal lived experiences did not report suffering from any prejudice based on their intersectional identities neither in their initial expatriation period nor nowadays. This could explain why the rankings improved, as the absence of expected prejudice based on their differences from the host natives resulted in a satisfying expatriation whereby they felt more integrated in the host country. In fact, although only 20% reported attending LGBTIQ+ events often, almost half of this sub-group are members of an LGBTIQ+ NGO with one of them having held an executive position. The higher number of NGO members in this sub-group compared to the sub-group of individuals who expressed an equally positive expectation and reality of Malta may reflect the bigger sense of satisfaction after relocating to a place having low expectations of it but then being positively surprised by the experience.

On the contrary, those who had high expectations of Malta which worsened upon experiencing the true situation could have been initially influenced by depictions of the country as a 'gay haven' but then ended up being disappointed by the real attitudes of the host locals. This could have manifested itself in a similar way to the concept of reshaped opportunities and inequalities put forward by Martin Manalansan (Luibhéid, 2008) whereby the idea of an accepting host country might have been clouded by other issues such as discrimination and prejudice. Indeed, 58% of those whose rankings of Malta worsened reported facing intersectional prejudice in their initial expatriation period, with 42% still facing it nowadays. Such attitudes obviously affect the feelings of belonging and integration an individual feels, which ultimately influence the overall expatriation experience in a negative way.

Out of those who highly agreed to expecting Malta to be very safe for LGBTIQ+ individuals, 50% hailed from Western or Central Europe. This particularly highlights the expectations

67

linked to the ILGA-Europe ranking (ILGA-Europe, 2022), which besides placing Malta first in Europe in terms of LGBTIQ+ rights for the past 7 years, also affects the perception of Malta throughout the rest of Europe which might create pressure on Malta to keep up with its progressive reputation, ensure a truly accepting environment, and to safeguard its number 1 spot. Any behaviour or experiences in the number 1 country which go against what is expected of the most LGBTIQ+ inclusive place in Europe will make people doubt whether that ranking is well-deserved and is taken much more seriously than if it were experienced in other countries. Therefore, although very advantageous for Malta, this top spot represents more than just a ranking as it might romanticise a country and induce particular expectations.

63% of those who had very high expectations of Malta before moving remained with a very high ranking of its real experience after moving. The rest of this sub-group either gave a slightly lower but high ranking of the reality of Malta (25%) or found it neutral (13%). However, it is interesting to note that those survey respondents who reported expecting Malta to be unsafe for LGBTIQ+ individuals all hailed from continental Europe or the UK. This suggests that individuals may not necessarily be influenced by or be aware at all of international rankings of a country but might build their expectations based on other sources such as their friends' narratives of a place. Experiencing the location first-hand might change the individuals' ideas of the place either positively or negatively, in fact, 60% of the survey sample who expected Malta to be unsafe for LGBTIQ+ individuals improved their ranking of Malta's reality drastically, giving it a high ranking after relocation.

5.3   Repression and liberation in rural and urban spaces

"I moved to Gozo first, and stayed in Gozo for about 3 months, but […] the gay scene there was almost non-existent."

Participant 28

25-34, Non-Binary, Queer, 2-4 years in Malta

"It also depends on where you live, because [in my native country] I live in a rural area, so there's definitely a more backwards mentality. So you can have more or less a perspective it's kinda like a town in Gozo, so there you go."

Participant 11
25-34, Female, Bisexual, 2-4 years in Malta

As stated in the literature, different areas of a country have different levels of acceptance and visibility, therefore, the prevalence of services and events for the LGBTIQ+ community are not evenly distributed in a country (Formby, 2017). Participant 28 has experienced life as an LGBTIQ+ person in the two main islands of Malta; Malta and Gozo. They noted how there was a lack of events in Gozo, calling its queer scene "almost non-existent". This participant's move from Gozo to Malta portrays a small shift from repression to liberation (Luibhéid, 2008), as their relocation within the same host country exposed them to more queer events and opportunities to engage with the LGBTIQ+ community whilst highlighting the difference in the attitudes between the islands (LGBTI+ Gozo and Jakob, 2022). This gives justice to Participant 11's comparison of her native hometown to a town in Gozo, whereby she noted that people are not so open there due to a backwards mentality particularly among the older generation. This also highlights the point by LGBTI+ Gozo and Jakob (2022) where the LGBTIQ+ expatriates reported finding it more difficult to be open about their sexuality in Gozo than in their native countries.

In this sense, Participant 11's relocation from her native country to Malta can be seen as a move from repression to liberation (Luibhéid, 2008), as leaving her hometown gave her the freedom to be herself. Even though she originates from a progressive country in which the cities are very open and LGBTIQ+ friendly, expatriation provided this participant with more freedom and adventure than remaining in her native country, so she opted to start afresh somewhere else instead of moving from the rural area to the urban area of the same country. A similar backstory was recounted by Participant 25, who could not freely discuss his sexuality in his native hometown. Participant 25 also revealed how the openness of Maltese people came as a surprise to him, as he was not expecting such a liberal environment compared to what he was used to at home:

> "I was surprised how many people were so open about it [in Malta], so supportive, not really difficult when they knew, but also it was always a bit of a struggle because I didn't really want to let everyone know about my private life, I didn't feel that it's necessary to tell everybody. But over years, […] I don't think twice of mentioning my partner, or anything, it just happens, so, yeah, it was a bit of a journey I guess."

> Participant 25
>
> 25-34, Male, Queer, 6-8 years in Malta

Originating from a rural area where sexuality is not revealed so openly, the move from repression to liberation is also present in terms of disclosure of personal information. Moving to a place where different sexualities are welcomed shifts the reason of the disclosure or lack of disclosure of personal information from an involuntary process to a voluntary one. This means that whilst Participant 25 did not have much choice on whether to disclose his sexuality in his place of origin because sexuality is not discussed so openly, in Malta, this turned into a choice as it depended entirely on personal will.

In fact, the availability of this choice accentuates the division between private life and public life (Doan and Higgins, 2011) as the revelation of sensitive information now concerns how much an individual is willing to mix the two spheres. This participant has expressed that now he feels so comfortable mixing the two spheres that when asked if he is proud to be LGBTIQ+ in Malta, he was not sure whether he could differentiate between being proud as LGBTIQ+ in Malta and being proud in Malta in general. Essentially, this shows how this participant has mixed both the private life and the public life in his expatriation process such that he has become a successful expatriate who is proud of being his authentic self in his host country. His sexuality and his overall identity have become interchangeable in a way that he cannot take away one component identity as his identities are indivisible (Parent, DeBlaere and Moradi, 2013). This contrasts with the degree of depersonalization that this participant went through in his home country, where he could reveal his other identities but not his sexual identity. This experience presents similarities with the Chinese Malaysians in the study by Yu (2020) whereby they did not consider themselves a part of the LGBTIQ+ community before experiencing the queer communities in their host country. Participant 25 also expressed how, due to him not being able to be openly himself in his area of origin, he did not really consider himself as an LGBTIQ+ person as a result of depersonalization pressure. Upon relocation to Malta, he felt he could mingle with and relate to the LGBTIQ+ community and freely identify as a part of it.

The previous quote perfectly describes the process of self-categorization put forward by Kim and Von Glinow (2017), where Participant 25's self-categorization in Malta was affected by his past experiences in his host country. Therefore, he was not comfortable being open about himself at first in Malta as he needed to adapt to the openness of the host culture. As time went by, this participant found it easier to identify more with his sexual identity and became

willing to come out and to mention his partner in his daily life. Consistent further with Kim and Von Glinow (2017), this represents a shift between places from being subjected to depersonalization in the native environment to the freedom of being openly oneself in the new environment. In this sense, there is also an intersectionality of places between the native country and the host country (Chikwendu, 2013) as there is a division between the countries and places where he can be comfortably 'out' or not. This coincides with the claim by Ayoub and Bauman (2018) that states that being in a new country with no connections to anyone and where different sexualities are welcomed brings a new freedom that allows the individual to be authentic.

5.4   Culture shock

"The thing is I had a challenge to break in through the community, to break through the circles. I found out here in Malta that people are in close circles of friends. They grow up together, they go to school together, they go to university together, or even if they separate from that they remain in that close group and people cannot access as foreigners."

Participant 4

35-44, Male, Gay, 6-8 years in Malta

Although being a foreigner in a new country without any connections to anyone brings with it a new freedom (Ayoub and Bauman, 2018), this scenario may present disadvantages. As a newly relocated foreigner, it takes time to be able to break into the local community, feel a sense of belonging, and make meaningful friendships. Participant 4 recounted his personal struggle at making a group of friends. As an outsider with no connections to locals, he suffered from loneliness during his first months in Malta, although there was a reason for this. Being a small island, Malta has an insular culture where people form strong bonds and everyone knows each other. An outsider who tries to enter a strong group of friends will find it particularly challenging to not feel like the odd one out, due to the fact that every other group member knows each other well. Furthermore, this participant originates from a big city, therefore this specific structure of friend groups was quite alien to him, and it took him a long while to try to understand and accept how Maltese culture works. In his native city, this participant was used to multiple open friend groups which were easily accessible to outsiders

so the insular culture of the host natives was a problematic culture shock (Vukovic, 2013) for this participant as it clashed with his personal socialising pattern and hindered him from being a social butterfly like he would usually be in his home country. As a result, this participant endured a difficult 'crisis' period (Vukovic, 2013) in Malta whereby the feelings of anxiety and isolation persevered for around one year.

Several experiences of culture shock are normal and expected during the expatriation process. The cultural shock experienced by some of the interviewees manifested itself in various ways. Culture shocks might also be related to other intersections present in Malta which are not so shocking for locals but which may seem unlikely to outsiders (Vukovic, 2013):

> "And I think the first summer we were here we were invited to a barbecue on the church roof, and neither one of us are religious, and it was like a big surprise, half the people there are gay, it was like 'oh my gosh what a great welcoming place it is'."
>
> Participant 23
>
> 55-64, Male, Gay, 6-8 years in Malta

A case in point is the bridging between sexuality and religion. Roman Catholicism is the biggest religion in Malta, so it comes to no surprise that some members of the local LGBTIQ+ community are Roman Catholics themselves. Non-Maltese individuals, particularly those coming from more secular backgrounds, might find the way how these identities work together and are harmonised as interesting, especially since the local Church itself is quite accepting of its diverse members. Participant 46 recounted how, particularly with individuals under 40 years, native Catholics have a more open attitude than some of the non-Maltese individuals she met, who proved to be judgemental. A major cultural trait that is taken for granted by locals but which came as a surprise to one interviewee was the fact that politics cannot be discussed openly in Malta, amongst other cultural surprises;

> "We found it surprising that when we looked for a place to live there were no bars, there were no LGBT real estate companies, no LGBT lawyers, and if you've never been to Malta that's strange. Once you're here and you understand maybe why that isn't the case, I mean there's 2 sides to that coin, there's 'oh no we welcome everybody' and there's the side of 'we don't really care about that'."
>
> Participant 23
>
> 55-64, Male, Gay, 6-8 years in Malta

Another kind of culture shock (Vukovic, 2013) was expressed by Participant 23, who is originally from the United States. Whereas in the US there are various services oriented specifically towards the LGBTIQ+ community (Alonso, 2013), businesses in Malta do not differentiate between their clientele as they are generally accepting of all kinds of clients. This is further accentuated by inclusive laws which explicitly prohibit all forms of discrimination, therefore, services do not necessarily have to be LGBTIQ+ oriented as several different communities are catered for. The fact that inclusive access to services is taken so for granted in Malta came as a surprise to this participant, so much so that he revealed a different perspective on issues like businesses having a rainbow sticker on their window to show that they cater for the LGBTIQ+ community.

Some years ago, this proposed initiative had gained various mixed reactions from the Maltese public, primarily because businesses in Malta do not discriminate, hence a rainbow sticker was seen as nonsensical and useless. This reaction stemmed as a result of the point made by Alonso (2013) since Malta's laws prohibit any form of discrimination. Therefore, people thought that there was no need to highlight the fact that LGBTIQ+ individuals do not get harassed in the majority of places in Malta since inclusive behaviour is considered obvious and taken for granted by locals. However, non-Maltese LGBTIQ+ people who visit Malta and who might come from countries with different attitudes towards accepting everyone might not know how the LGBTIQ+ situation in Malta is, so they might not know that, as part of Maltese culture, all businesses and services are inclusive. This might make them think that the LGBTIQ+ community is not catered for in Malta, resulting in a false understanding of Maltese culture.

Other culture shocks relating to the size of Malta were mentioned, particularly among those who had never expatriated before. Participant 4, for example, besides having issues understanding local friend circles, also found it difficult to get used to being in a small country and having everything on a smaller scale. Originating from a big city, this participant had never lived in a small community before, and therefore found it initially difficult living in a concentrated area. Furthermore, concordant with Vukovic (2013), he did not have previous experiences of expatriation, so the differences between the lifestyle of his native country and Malta affected him even more.

Looking back at his initial expatriation period, Participant 4 was aware that he was not discriminated against because he is non-Maltese, but admitted that due to the fact that he was desperate to expand his social circle and integrate, he was forcing his own socialisation habits rather than adapting to Maltese socialisation habits. In turn, similar to the process explained by Vukovic (2013), this resulted in an initially unsuccessful integration attempt as there was a lack of cultural mediation. The culture of the host country was not understood properly which led to dissatisfaction and frustration, particularly concerning the culture shocks which left a negative impact on his perception of Maltese life. No matter how big the effort, this participant could not progress any further in his expatriation process until he adapted to Maltese culture and stopped trying to challenge it. His shift in attitude from being judgemental towards Maltese people and Maltese culture to looking at his experience objectively confirms that nowadays he is a successful expatriate who is able to explain, in terms of local customs, why things happened the way they did.

5.4.1 Successful expatriation

> "I also think part of integration is based on the individual, […] I know several people who don't try to integrate, whether gay or straight, they don't try to understand the history of why people do what they do in Malta."

> Participant 23

> 55-64, Male, Gay, 6-8 years in Malta

> "It's understandable, based on, history of Malta, various takeovers and various things going on so. It's one of those things that you work on accepting everyday rather than challenge it because if you challenge it you just end up exhausted you know."

> Participant 28

> 25-34, Non-Binary, Queer, 2-4 years in Malta

These quotes exemplify the state of successful expatriation put forward by Vukovic (2013) as these interviewees have reached a stage where they accept how the Maltese culture and lifestyle work and they try to make sense and adapt to them rather than distance themselves from them. As these participants stated, the behaviour of locals is a product of Malta's history, so if expatriates want to integrate they need to remove the judgements they have about how Maltese culture works and start to understand life from a Maltese perspective. The extent of

integration depends heavily on personal will, as individuals who keep a barrier between themselves and the host natives and culture do not allow themselves to develop a bicultural identity and 'norm brokerage' (Vukovic, 2013; Ayoub and Bauman, 2018). The inability to reach this stage of integration will hinder the expatriation process as the individual remains stuck in the judgemental phase and cannot move past that point unless they open their perspective and develop an understanding of the host culture.

Successful integration is also heavily dependent on previous experiences. As Participants 13, 23, and 28 revealed in their interviews, they had lived in other countries before relocating to Malta, so these previous experiences of understanding and mediating different cultural norms helped them adapt much quicker to Maltese cultural norms. For this reason, since they were better equipped, they integrated much better than individuals such as Participants 4 and 46 who had never expatriated beforehand and therefore experienced the phases of expatriation (Vukovic, 2013) in a more shocking and overwhelming way. However, the greater shock experienced by new expatriates does not inhibit them from eventually integrating as much as experienced expatriates, as they would all be capable of integrating in the same way after the judgemental phase. Through the way that they have talked about their experiences, various interviewees showed how they have integrated so much into the local culture that they have changed their attitudes and their perspectives accordingly by always keeping the local customs and history in mind when trying to understand Maltese life. This brings them closer to the Maltese psychology as they start thinking and perceiving life like natives.

Expatriates may try to successfully integrate into a new environment in a variety of ways, such as through common preferences with the natives. This is similar to Formby (2017) as the more identities people have in common, the more they can relate to one another and bond. Furthermore, this is also true for preferences like hobbies and shows, such as in the case of Participant 25 who used Eurovision as a vehicle for integrating with the many local LGBTIQ+ individuals who are also fans of the contest. In this regard, this participant cleverly used Maltese culture to his advantage since this contest is widely followed in Malta, helping him belong with the locals and in the host culture. This provided him with further channels of socialisation that aided his sense of feeling welcomed, as he could personally bond with locals over an aspect of Maltese culture. As a result, belonging happened so easily for this participant that he admitted that he has taken up so much of Maltese culture that he does

not consider himself as having his native nationality anymore, consequentially ranking his identification with his race as very low. Therefore, successful integration and successful expatriation for this participant happened naturally, although in general successful integration does not signify the erasure of the native nationality.

5.5 Shared identities and integration

> "So sometimes I feel like the idea of LGBT community, it's a bit misleading, […] in reality LGBT community is a big bunch of people who are very different from each other, but they just have that one thing in common. So it's a bit, I mean it's a kind of collectivity but it's not a collectivity kinda?"
>
> Participant 11
> 25-34, Female, Bisexual, 2-4 years in Malta

The LGBTIQ+ community comprises of people with various identities and experiences who are grouped together as different from the cisgender heterosexual norm. This may or may not hinder feelings of belonging, as LGBTIQ+ individuals may want to relate and belong to others who are different like them, but this community is also broad in itself, so feelings of belonging might not be so easily established when there are other intersections at play. This echoes Kim and Von Glinow (2017) as the collective identity of the LGBTIQ+ ingroup may not be equally shared by the members, due to everyone's personal identity being unique. Additionally, as Participant 23 mentioned in his interview, the LGBTIQ+ community in itself comprises of several smaller communities or groups of people who may share nothing in common between them. For individuals who consider their sexuality as an important part of their identity, sharing a common sexual orientation alone might be enough to create a bond with someone new. Other LGBTIQ+ individuals who do not give as much importance to their sexual orientation will either not be comfortable bonding with someone new over a common sexuality only, as there would need to be a more important identity or identities in common, or they will consider sexuality as an irrelevant factor when making friends. This is the case with Participant 24, who considers sexuality as an equally important individual characteristic like hair colour or any other characteristic one might possess. This contrasts with someone like Participant 4, who despite having several heterosexual friends in his initial expatriation period, the lack of like-minded LGBTIQ+ friends made him lonely and unhappy as he felt he could not belong entirely with them.

"[I do have] LGBT friends but I don't feel like I'm particularly a part of maybe the broader community, I don't really go to gay bars or like gay events, or LGBT events rather."

<div align="right">Participant 13</div>

<div align="right">18-24, Male, Gay/Ace, 2-4 years in Malta</div>

Highlighting further the notion that not all LGBTIQ+ individuals might share the same degree or wish of belonging to the queer community, individuals like Participant 13 do have friends within the community, but they do not necessarily want to participate in LGBTIQ+ targeted events. This means that although such individuals personally identify as LGBTIQ+, they have no desire to identify as part of the broader LGBTIQ+ community, which underlines the division between personal identity and collective identity (Kim and Von Glinow, 2017). This split is not the same as the division between the private life and the public life (Doan and Higgins, 2011) as such individuals, like Participant 13 himself has stated, are open about their sexuality in all settings. Instead, this means that although an individual may be open and proud of an identity, they may not feel the need to find like-minded people and to bond in a community that shares the same experiences. Therefore, they may have friends in the LGBTIQ+ community, but they may not necessarily wish to engage with strangers who share just one thing in common in that community.

On a similar note, individuals may not be willing to use their identity to opt for some specifically targeted services over others. Extending the previously mentioned notion of the business culture shock, it is important to keep in mind that, coinciding with the work by Alonso (2013), not all LGBTIQ+ individuals would want to make use of LGBTIQ+ exclusive products and services, as several queer individuals would want to opt for any inclusive service. The law safeguarding minorities is one of the reasons why Participant 24 decided to choose Malta as his and his partner's host country, as that ensured that any product or service in the island is de facto inclusive (Alonso, 2013). Participant 24 does not consume products and services specifically targeted at LGBTIQ+ individuals since his sexuality is not a big part of his identity, so he prefers opting for inclusive products that cater for everyone. This contrasts with Participant 23 who would have opted for services such as LGBTIQ+ lawyers and LGBTIQ+ real estate agents in Malta, if they existed. This highlights further the fact that identities are not shared by everyone in the same way, and interests are not equally shared by all the LGBTIQ+

community either as, coinciding with the literature by Leone-Ganado (2016) and Wong and Tolkach (2017), everyone in the LGBTIQ+ community has individual tastes.

I feel proud being LGBTIQ+ in Malta
57 responses

Survey answers: How proud they feel
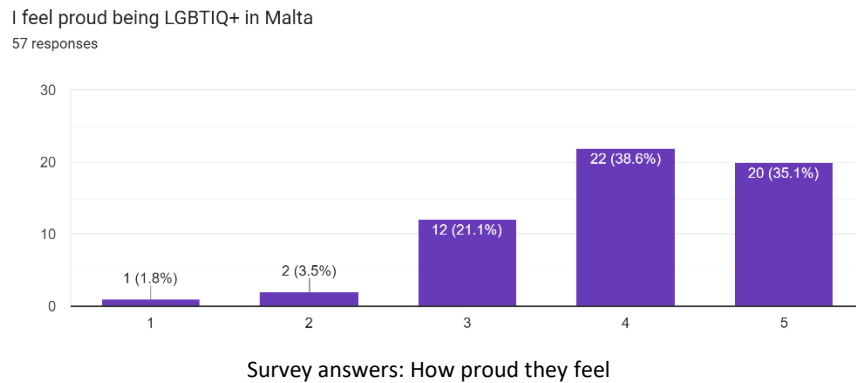
The diversity of the LGBTIQ+ community can be seen with notions such as how proud they feel about their LGBTIQ+ identity. Whilst the absolute majority of the survey sample feel proud that they are a part of this community, 21% answered neutrally, which suggests that their sexual and/or gender identity is considered as important as any other identity they possess. Only 5% of the sample marked themselves as not proud, meaning that they do not consider their LGBTIQ+ identity important at all. It comes to no surprise that 2 out of the 3 individuals who marked themselves as least proud are not out to anyone about their LGBTIQ+ identity, with the remaining individual being out in some settings only.

The answers to this survey question bring an interesting observation to light. Whilst Wong and Tolkach (2017) claimed that those individuals who are openly gay and/or consider their sexuality an important part of their identity are more inclined to visit gay spaces, the survey answers of this study show that although the majority of the sample are out and proud as LGBTIQ+, they are not inclined to attend LGBTIQ+ events often. Therefore, the majority of the LGBTIQ+ expatriates in this sample do not have a preference between 'gay spaces' and 'straight spaces' as they feel proud and comfortable being themselves in either kind of space.

5.5.1 Making friends

I have many Maltese friends

57 responses
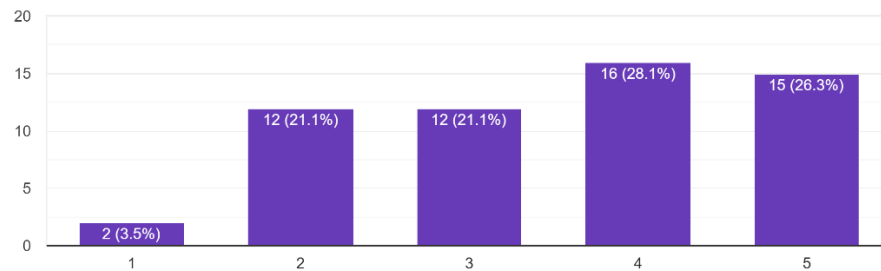
I feel safer with other foreigners than with the Maltese

57 responses
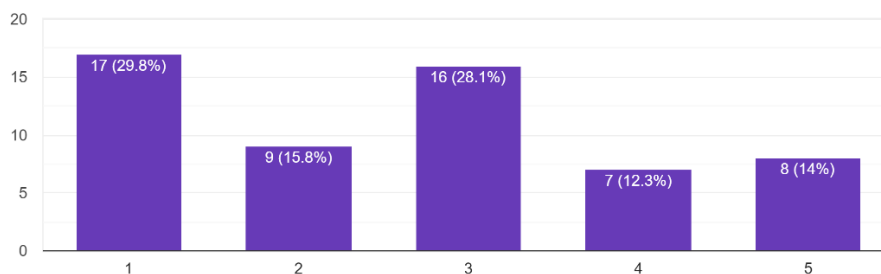
I feel safer with other LGBTIQ+ foreigners than the LGBTIQ+ Maltese

57 responses
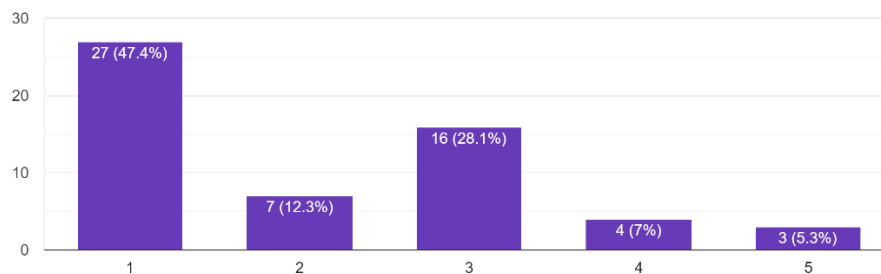
Survey answers: The friend dynamics of LGBTIQ+ expatriates

Looking at the survey answers, more than half the LGBTIQ+ expatriates in this sample reported having many Maltese friends. This is a sign of successful integration whereby they feel comfortable mingling with the host natives such that they have formed meaningful bonds. Almost a quarter of the sample gave a neutral answer, which suggests that they have no friend preferences and equally enjoy the friendships of Maltese individuals as well as non-Maltese. On the other end, almost a quarter of the sample answered negatively, meaning that they do not have many Maltese friends and consequentially are not so integrated with the host natives. Out of those who reported having many Maltese friends, 35% are members of an LGBTIQ+ NGO compared to only 7% of those with few Maltese friends. This shows a

slight correlation between LGBTIQ+ NGO membership and having local friends. Due to the fact that these individuals have few Maltese friends, it comes to no surprise that 71% of this sub-group reported feeling safer with other non-Maltese than with the Maltese.

When all the survey respondents were asked if they feel safer with other foreigners rather than with Maltese people, almost half the sample disagreed with the statement, which shows that in general they do not feel uneasy around the host natives. Around 30% responded neutrally, which suggests that nationality is not an important factor in their friendships as they feel equally comfortable with host natives as well as with other non-Maltese. Slightly more than a quarter of the sample agreed with the statement, whereby they revealed that they prefer the company of other non-Maltese rather than that of the Maltese. This could be a result of possible discriminations faced due to the foreign identity, which could lead LGBTIQ+ expatriates to group more with other non-Maltese to avoid issues such as racism. In fact, a bit more than half the sample who faced and still face prejudice because of their intersectional identities reported not having many Maltese friends. This translates to 67% of them feeling safer with other non-Maltese but not necessarily with LGBTIQ+ non-Maltese.

A similar dynamic is seen in the following question regarding whether they feel safer with LGBTIQ+ foreigners than with LGBTIQ+ locals. Only 12% of the survey sample agreed to feeling safer with the LGBTIQ+ non-Maltese, which could imply internal discrimination within the local LGBTIQ+ community that results in LGBTIQ+ expatriates preferring the company of other LGBTIQ+ expatriates. More than half the sample disagreed with the statement and 28% gave a neutral answer. This means that the absolute majority of LGBTIQ+ expatriates in Malta do not have a preference when it comes to engaging with members of the LGBTIQ+ community as they feel safe with them irrespective of their nationality.

5.5.1.1 The LGBTIQ+ expatriates' sense of 'otherness'

> "I think being gay helped with integration into the gay community in Malta because […] as a member of the LGBT community you already have this sense that you're a little bit other? So it's easier for you to be accepting of people who are another kind of other. […] The LGBT community though, there's already the assumption that you have something in common. When I'm meeting people, for example for work as a foreigner, the first assumption is that we have nothing in common."

<div align="right">Participant 28</div>

Echoing Formby (2017), this quote highlights the importance of having qualities in common to be able to build connections with people. The LGBTIQ+ community, although diverse, is constituted of people with similar identities and experiences. This similarity is not necessarily felt among the non-Maltese themselves as they may have nothing in common besides the state of being an 'outsider'. Looking at the survey answers, although more than half the survey sample reported having many Maltese friends, 15 individuals out of 57 (26%) reported feeling safer with other non-Maltese rather than with Maltese people, with 7 individuals (12%) feeling safer with other LGBTIQ+ non-Maltese individuals rather than the LGBTIQ+ Maltese.

Whilst non-Maltese LGBTIQ+ individuals have a further unifying difference besides being all part of the LGBTIQ+ community; that of not being Maltese, this could increase the interactions between them particularly if they all find issues entering Maltese friend circles such as due to a language barrier. Oftentimes, this feeling of 'otherness' is not enough to instigate a connection unless the non-Maltese share a common nationality or other characteristics, as the differences between them would still be many. Consequentially, the feeling of similarity is further absent between a non-native and a host native in everyday scenarios. For this reason, specific spaces help in establishing this feeling as they attract particular individuals. Non-natives and natives mingling in specific LGBTIQ+ spaces have the ability to build a better connection in these spaces than in everyday scenarios as targeted events highlight commonalities and facilitate interaction.

> "I would love to know more gay Maltese people but I don't know where to find them, I don't know how to find them. So I've been on dating apps and I dated, [...] and the person who is my partner now is Maltese so that is how I have integrated into the LGBTQ community in Malta. [...] The LGBTQ community who are foreign, I knew more of than I did locals for a while. [...] But not for lack of trying, like I was physically in some of these places but I don't look very gay and I'm a little bit shy."

> Participant 46

> 25-34, Female, Lesbian, 2-4 years in Malta

This participant expressed how she would like to be more integrated with Maltese LGBTIQ+ individuals, however, she finds it difficult to find the community and engage with it. Although she has tried putting herself in LGBTIQ+ spaces to expand her circle, she attributes the reasons

for unsuccessful engagement to shyness and a context-depending language barrier. Shyness was also mentioned as one of the reasons why LGBTIQ+ expatriates in Gozo did not attend LGBTIQ+ events (LGBTI+ Gozo and Jakob, 2022), however, in this case this participant attends queer events but is shy to approach strangers and start a conversation. Participant 46 noted that there is a difference between how accessible friend circles in Malta are depending on the language that is spoken, such that a Sliema circle is considered more accessible to try and break into since the predominant language is usually English, unlike other Maltese circles in which generally only Maltese is spoken. This barrier explains why most of her LGBTIQ+ friends are not Maltese, and coincides with the study by Vukovic (2013) whereby the expatriates tended to group more with other non-Maltese due to their lack of Maltese and the prevalence of English as a lingua franca between the non-Maltese of different nationalities.

The bonding with other LGBTIQ+ non-Maltese individulas as opposed to LGBTIQ+ Maltese individuals also highlights the concept of 'otherness' that Participant 28 mentioned in their interview, which can be extended in this case as it is easier for an LGBTIQ+ non-Maltese resident to group with other LGBTIQ+ non-Maltese residents due to them all being 'others' in relation to the Maltese LGBTIQ+ who share the same nationality and language. Therefore, whilst Participant 46 exhibits initiative in trying to make Maltese LGBTIQ+ friends, the nature of closely-knit Maltese friend circles, her shyness, and the language barrier lead her to group with other 'others' and prohibit relational belonging (Formby, 2017) with the Maltese LGBTIQ+.

5.5.1.2 Differences in the kind and extent of integration

> "Maybe from my experience is that foreigners always leave after 1 year or 2 so they [the Maltese] don't want to go through that process always, […] probably the fear of abandonment by foreigners always leaving, but there is always that factor, not on a discrimination basis but in a fear of welcoming in, you know, letting people in."

<div align="right">Participant 4</div>

<div align="right">35-44, Male, Gay, 6-8 years in Malta</div>

The challenge to break into circles might also depend on the status of the expatriate. Concordant with McPhail, McNulty and Hutchings (2016), single individuals have less constraints and so can move between countries relatively easier than couples. This means

that people in the host country might not be sure about for how long the single expatriate will actually stay in the host country, particularly if they have expatriated due to a work assignment. Having the presence of other non-Maltese who relocate to Malta for work purposes but then return to their countries after a couple of years might affect the perception of other expatriates on work assignments, as they might also be considered as having a limited definite period on the islands, therefore, they might end up making friendships which are not as deeply rooted to cater for a sudden disappearance later on. In itself, this acts as a defence mechanism taken up by the locals to avoid getting deeply attached to individuals whom they know they would not be able to meet so frequently in the long run. Comparing this to the survey answers, only 14% of those who reported having few Maltese friends expatriated with their partner. This reveals that the majority expatriated alone, which coincides with the previous point about single expatriates having less constraints and as a result finding it difficult to initiate deep friendships. It comes to no surprise, then, that 71% of those having few Maltese friends feel safer with other non-Maltese residents than with the Maltese.

Looking specifically at the survey respondents who expatriated to Malta alone and as part of a work assignment, their answers show that 75% of them faced intersectional prejudice in their initial expatriation period with only 25% still facing it now. Despite these statistics, this sub-group did not report having unusual friend preferences when compared to the general survey sample. 25% of those who relocated as part of a work assignment on their own marked themselves as having many Maltese friends, 25% as having few friends, and 50% answered neutrally. This shows that although there is a lesser percentage of individuals having many Maltese friends in this sub-group, there is a bigger percentage of individuals with a neutral opinion. Therefore, half this sub-group have equal amounts of Maltese and non-Maltese friends, which is still a characteristic of successful integration. 75% of this sub-group reported attending LGBTIQ+ oriented events often and being members of LGBTIQ+ NGOs, which help in expanding one's friend circles irrelevant of nationality.

> "So when I moved here I went for an internship […] and pretty much all the company was foreigner, like there were a few Maltese but they were mostly foreigners, which makes it everything easier but at the same time it makes it also a bit more, it's like you're not living in Malta so to say."

> Participant 11
> 25-34, Female, Bisexual, 2-4 years in Malta

"It was a teaching related scholarship and so [...] I met Maltese people and kind of they took me under their wing a little bit, and then also I shared an apartment with this girl who was going through the same thing that I was, so if something weird happened to me I could tell her, and it still felt like I, so I had a little bit of familiarity at home and a little bit of feeling like I was connected to the host country culture."

Participant 46

25-34, Female, Lesbian, 2-4 years in Malta

The first quote perfectly depicts the point put forward by Paisley and Tayar (2016) which highlights the situation of some expatriates on work assignments living their own culture between them. Participant 11 recounts how during her initial time in Malta she was not experiencing the true local culture and place as, due to the lack of Maltese input and lack of cultural exchange with the host culture, it was like the work group had a boundary between them and the host country. The lack of association and connection to the host environment when outside one's native country reduces the validity of the expatriation experience, as the expatriates are not given the opportunity to understand and belong to the host culture, making them miss out on proper integration. An expatriate in such a setting who wishes to venture further with their expatriation process will likely opt for other methods to get the true experience of the host country.

These interviewees were both part of an educational program upon relocation to Malta. However, there is a noticeable difference between the integration of Participant 11 and Participant 46, whereby Participant 11's internship with a great amount of non-natives hindered her from getting an authentic experience of the host country. Participant 46, on the other hand, was surrounded by natives in her scholarship, and so managed to integrate into the host culture with host natives as a result of a more immersive experience. However, the success or lack of success in one aspect of integration does not necessarily influence the success achieved in other aspects of integration. Ironically, Participant 11 started her expatriation unsuccessfully with Maltese people due to a major lack of host influence on her experience but was successful in her integration within the Maltese LGBTIQ+ community, whereas Participant 46 started her expatriation successfully with a good integration within the local population but was not so successful in integrating with the Maltese LGBTIQ+ community. This highlights the fact that individuals have unique experiences and unique

coping mechanisms as the extent of belonging and integration often depends on one's personal character.

5.5.2 Integrating as a single person

Did you move to Malta:
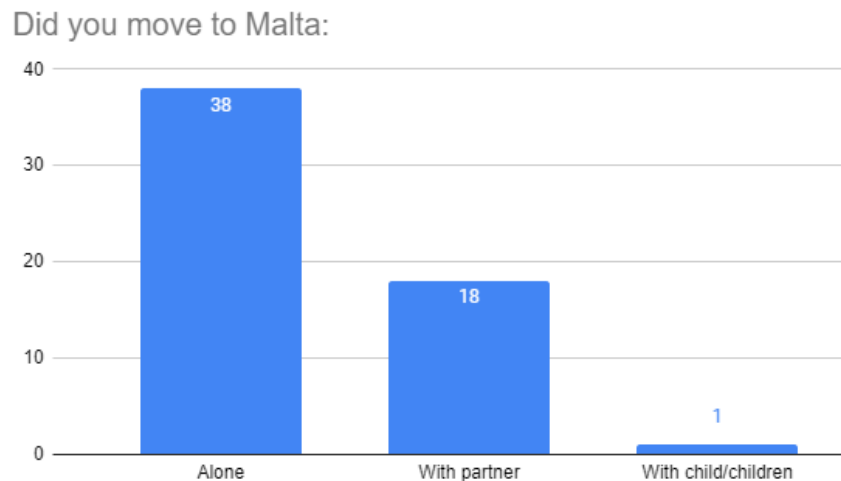
Survey answers: With whom they moved

The absolute majority of the LGBTIQ+ expatriates in the survey sample (67%) expatriated on their own, with 31% having expatriated with their partner and only 2% with their child/children. Out of those individuals who expatriated alone, 21% attend LGBTIQ+ organised events often compared to 17% of those who expatriated with their partner. Furthermore, 21% of those who expatriated alone are members of an LGBTIQ+ NGO compared to 44% of those with partners, and they are out in all settings 63% and 56% respectively. These statistics show fairly similar attitudes between these two groups, except for the LGBTIQ+ NGO memberships. Memberships in LGBTIQ+ organisations are seen as a great way to meet new people, and integrate with like-minded individuals. Those who expatriated with their partners showed more initiative in such memberships, which can be seen as aiding their awareness of the local LGBTIQ+ community and its events. Those who expatriated on their own were half as likely to be members of LGBTIQ+ NGOs, and the reason could be attributed to shyness (LGBTI+ Gozo and Jakob, 2022) amongst other factors which may contribute to a sense of isolation due to feeling distanced from the LGBTIQ+ community. Due to the fact that there is only 1 survey respondent who relocated with their child/children, their survey answers need to be interpreted carefully as they cannot be generalised for all LGBTIQ+ expatriates relocating with their children. This participant reported being out in all settings, being a

member of an LGBTIQ+ NGO, and not feeling welcome at LGBTIQ+ events which she attends at a medium frequency.

> "Maybe it was more difficult for me the integration since I am gay, [...] because no matter how much I spend with my colleagues at work who are heterosexual, I will not have the same satisfaction if I do not actually meet, [...] and develop affection or attachment to people who are the same sexuality or same gender as I am. So that was not easily provided or accessible, or achievable. I suffered for the first months."

> Participant 4

> 35-44, Male, Gay, 6-8 years in Malta

> "I would say that it was a bit lonely at least when I was starting to go on the dating apps because it felt like there were maybe 5 people? Because it's not a lot of, it's a small place and like geographically I put myself in a very small location. [...] I won't say that it was fun, necessarily, to be wanting to be part of the community and not really knowing how/or if it existed, or if I would be welcomed necessarily."

> Participant 46

> 25-34, Female, Lesbian, 2-4 years in Malta

Matching with the concept of relational belonging presented by Formby (2017), these quotes accentuate the wish to find like-minded people to integrate into the local LGBTIQ+ community and highlight the importance of belonging to a group of similar individuals. For people who consider their sexuality as an important part of their overall identity, satisfying this desire to mingle with people who understand them is crucial as they can share experiences and relate to one another. Echoing Formby (2017), limited access to the LGBTIQ+ community contributed negatively to Participant 4's mental health as he felt lonely and unable to relate to others like him. Similarly, Participant 46 also experienced loneliness and uncertainty in the beginning as she was not sure if she would be able to find an LGBTIQ+ community and be accepted in it. Comparing this point to the literature by Wong and Tolkach (2017), Malta's reputation of being an LGBTIQ+ friendly place and the fact that it is marketed as a gay destination could have assured Participant 46 that she would have been able to find an LGBTIQ+ community and targeted events. Therefore, she would have been more prepared to integrate into the local LGBTIQ+ scene and would have belonged better if she knew where to look to avoid feeling lost in her initial period (McPhail, McNulty, and Hutchings, 2016). Furthermore, there is a greater desire to be included (Gedro *et al.*, 2013) and more stress to integrate if an individual is alone in a new country compared to a couple, as the couple can

count on one another for mutual support and understanding whereas the single individual might feel lonely without the presence of friends or an accepting community.

> "First we tried some meetings like gay meetings […] but that didn't feel very well in the beginning, I didn't know people and they didn't know me. They were all in their own different, their own small circles and it was difficult to get acquainted to those people."
>
> Participant 26
>
> 65+, Female, Bisexual, 6-8 years in Malta

Coming to Malta alone as a single person might be more difficult than relocating as a couple due to the individual being on their own in the initial expatriation phase. However, this might not always be the reality as even in the case of Participant 26, who expatriated with her partner, there were difficulties with trying to make local LGBTIQ+ friends. She described local friend circles in a similar way to Participant 4, as she also had issues with breaking into close-knit groups. In this sense, there is a division between Maltese friends and Maltese LGBTIQ+ friends, as some participants have described their integration attempts within the local LGBTIQ+ community as more difficult than in the general Maltese community. This includes participants such as Participant 4 who recounted making friends with heterosexual individuals much quicker than with LGBTIQ+ individuals, and Participant 46 who felt that she has integrated and made friends with various heterosexual locals but struggles with breaking into the local LGBTIQ+ scene and with initiating friendships within that community. This observation could extend the literature by McPhail, McNulty, and Hutchings (2016) further as, being a small community within a small island country, the LGBTIQ+ community in Malta may have an even more insular culture than the culture of the country itself, meaning that the local LGBTIQ+ community knows each other even more and has even stronger links than the Maltese community at large.

5.5.3 Integrating as a couple

Interpreting the survey data to understand the experiences of LGBTIQ+ expatriates who relocated with their partners, from this sub-group of respondents, 56% are out in all settings, 28% in some settings, and 17% not out at all. An interesting observation can be made about the fact that all the gay males who expatriated with their partners are out in all settings

compared to only 20% of bisexual and pansexual expatriates with partners who are out in all settings. This exemplifies the literature by Kim and Von Glinow (2017) which states that bisexuals are among the members of the LGBTIQ+ community who tend to disclose their sexuality the least.

Another point concerns the attendance of LGBTIQ+ events, where 78% of those who expatriated with their partner reported not going to targeted events often. This could be due to the fact that LGBTIQ+ expatriates who relocated as a couple do not feel as alone in the host country as much as single expatriates, therefore, couples benefit from mutual support and may not feel as pressured to find more like-minded people in the new environment. However, even though LGBTIQ+ expatriate couples may not feel the need to socialise as much as single LGBTIQ+ expatriates, it is interesting to note that 67% of those survey respondents who have had an executive position within local LGBTIQ+ NGOs have expatriated with their partner. This sheds lights on the other reasons why LGBTIQ+ expatriates choose to engage with local LGBTIQ+ NGOs as beyond socialisation, such networks help with the strengthening of the community, education, and activism.

> "So I think that just happened kinda naturally, discovered that there were different same-sex couples for example, and you go for lunch or dinner, whatever, and it just sorta happens naturally."
>
> Participant 23
>
> 55-64, Male, Gay, 6-8 years in Malta

> "We met 3 couple friends very quickly within about a period of a month of being here house hunting and whatever. And we thought 'this is amazing we could very easily settle', because we feel we have a support system, we have a social network […] who will open their doors to other Maltese people and other friends."
>
> Participant 24
>
> 55-64, Male, Gay, 4-6 years in Malta

Integration as a same-sex couple was not difficult for these interviewed expatriates as they immediately connected with other couples as well as with same-sex couples. Making Maltese friends was a quick and easy task and their LGBTIQ+ identity was never an issue in this process. Expatriating with another person provides mutual support along with more opportunities of breaking into social circles and making friends, since there are two individuals who might

meet different people during the first expatriation period. This doubles the connection possibilities and provides more security because if one person is not as successful in making meaningful connections, the more successful partner will help the unsuccessful partner broaden their circle and pave the way for both of them to break into further social circles. This was the case with Participant 26, whereby she and her partner had individual friend circles which they both used to integrate individually and together and provided mutual support in expanding their circles:

> "I had many colleagues and so they helped me integrate and with finding my way. And of course my partner, […] he has another circle scene so we both benefitted from both our circles."

> Participant 26

> 65+, Female, Bisexual, 6-8 years in Malta

Contrary to McPhail, McNulty and Hutchings (2016), the couples' adaptations to the Maltese lifestyle and host natives was described as a rather easy process which was mutually beneficial for both individuals. This goes against the claim that couples expatriating together have more constraints and more stress in the integration process. Even in the case of Participant 26, who is one of the two survey respondents who expatriated with their partner as part of a work assignment and not as a result of a voluntary couples' decision like the other interviewees, her partner had no difficulty moving to Malta along with her. Consequentially, despite her partner also being non-Maltese and having to establish himself in the country too, her colleagues and her partner were some of the people who helped her integrate better and break into social circles in Malta.

Concordant with Innes (2008) and McPhail, McNulty and Hutchings (2016), Participant 24's initial friendships were a result of visiting the host location several times before the actual relocation and making local friends. As the participant himself stated, he and his partner were originally not going to expatriate to Malta so soon, but after making local friends so quickly during their pre-expatriation visits and feeling a sense of belonging, they decided to relocate to Malta earlier than intended. In the case of Participant 25, he did not visit the host country and make local friends beforehand but he had internet friends from the host country prior to expatriation, who aided his belonging upon relocation. This proves partially similar to Innes (2008) and McPhail, McNulty and Hutchings (2016) as he still had native connections prior to

expatriating to Malta, although of a virtual kind. Virtual connections with potential host locals are not so unusual in this age, particularly among the younger generation who might have a bigger online presence than other age groups.

5.5.4   Integrating through social media and the impact of COVID-19

"There are a few groups on Facebook, there are a few Instagrams as well, so I would say that that is how I started and I would say that is where most people start nowadays."

Participant 11
25-34, Female, Bisexual, 2-4 years in Malta

"Despite my straight friends who live in Malta who are foreign have not integrated as much as I have, […] on Tinder […] I ended up dating a few people who are Maltese before I was dating my partner."

Participant 28

25-34, Non-Binary, Queer, 2-4 years in Malta

During this era, it is obvious that the internet and social media play an important role in meeting new people and establishing oneself in a new environment. The younger participants who have been interviewed, specifically under the age of 35, revealed that social media was a major helper in their integration process into the local LGBTIQ+ scene. Apps and online groups targeted at the LGBTIQ+ community ensure that the other members involved are also LGBTIQ+ themselves, which facilitates interactions even more when compared to general settings. As mentioned by Participant 11, Facebook and Instagram help spread the word about LGBTIQ+ events, and Facebook groups specifically aimed at the LGBTIQ+ community help establish online connections and encourage socialisation.

Apps such as Tinder, which are primarily dating apps, also help in connecting people and building friendships. Participant 28 revealed how their usage of Tinder helped them acquire local LGBTIQ+ friends, expand their circle, and integrate into Maltese society. This participant had also attended various events before the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, but when the pandemic spread, Tinder became their main socialisation method. The feeling of similarity felt by individuals frequenting LGBTIQ+ oriented events and social media expands their sense of acceptance and belonging in the community as they feel more connected through their

shared identity in specific spaces. As Participant 28 said, the people present in such spaces are already considered 'others', so having individuals who are other kinds of 'other' is not so significant in such open-minded heterogenous groups. This coincides with McPhail, McNulty and Hutchings (2016) and shows how the non-Maltese identity in the Maltese LGBTIQ+ scene was not a disadvantaged identity for this participant.

I faced discrimination on LGBTIQ+ dating apps in Malta because I'm foreign
52 responses
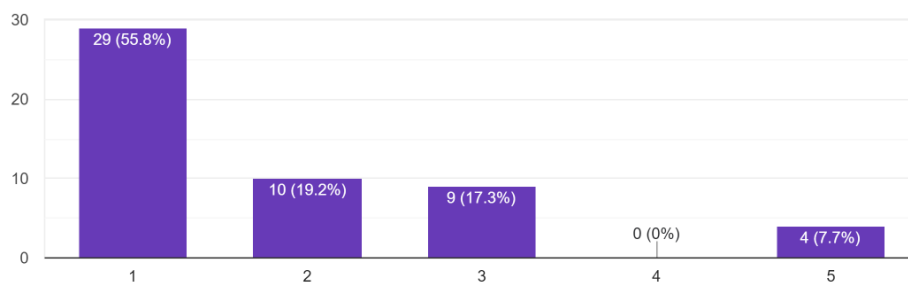
I face discrimination on LGBTIQ+ dating apps in Malta because I'm foreign
51 responses
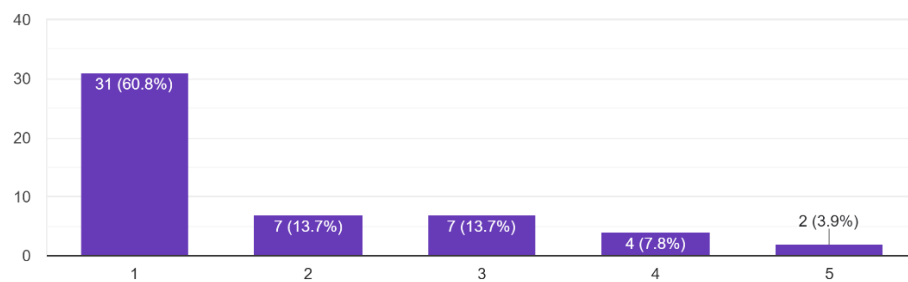
Survey answers: Discrimination on dating apps

Observing the survey answers to the optional questions for those who used/use dating apps, the absolute majority of the sample reported not facing any discrimination due to their non-Maltese identity in Malta. The answers remained generally similar between the first expatriation period and now, although there was a slight increase in those facing discrimination on dating apps nowadays. Among the 4 individuals who suffered discrimination on dating apps on the basis of being non-Maltese in their initial expatriation period, only 1 did not experience prejudice as a result of their intersectional identities. 2 of the 4 individuals on dating apps improved their ranking slightly in terms of the discrimination they face nowadays. Among those 6 individuals who face discrimination on dating apps nowadays, 3 have faced it beforehand and 4 faced prejudice for both their intersectional identities before with 2 still facing it now. It comes to no surprise, therefore, that 4 of these 6

individuals feel safer with LGBTIQ+ non-Maltese residents rather than with LGBTIQ+ Maltese individuals.

Participant 28 mentioned a very important point which is identical to a point from the study by McPhail, McNulty and Hutchings (2016), whereby their non-Maltese straight friends had not managed to integrate as much as this participant did. Being part of the LGBTIQ+ community, this participant used targeted LGBTIQ+ social media, namely the app Tinder, as well as LGBTIQ+ events before the start of the COVID-19 pandemic as a means to socialise and integrate with the locals. Whilst their straight friends could not find a way to break into the local sphere, this participant used limited channels of LGBTIQ+ socialisation as a vehicle for integration (McPhail, McNulty and Hutchings, 2016) and consequentially turned their disadvantaged LGBTIQ+ identity into a privilege since it provided an environment where they could safely belong in the host country (Bowleg, 2013). Due to the small size of the queer community when compared to the general population, its members tend to be more connected and so they are able to form more meaningful bonds between one another.

However, the small size of the LGBTIQ+ community in a small country like Malta could also be a disadvantage. The experience recounted by Participant 46 actually contrasts with McPhail, McNulty and Hutchings (2016) and with Participant 28 as this interviewee did not find it easy to make friends, especially on dating apps. Whilst she did take initiative whenever she could, her shyness and lack of people on dating apps impeded her from expanding her local friend circle as she felt like there were too few people using these platforms. Coming from a much bigger country, Participant 46 felt that the 'imagined community' (Formby, 2017) in Malta was almost non-existent as since Malta has a very small population, it consequentially has a very small LGBTIQ+ population as well. This participant knew that there were people like her in Malta, but she was not sure if she would be able to find them due to the country being so small and due to her shyness around strangers.

Socialisation methods involving the internet are particularly useful for people who may not be so social offline, or who find it difficult to start conversations with strangers face-to-face. The internet bridges this issue and may even help individuals reach more people than in offline settings due to the possibility of chatting to more than one person on more than one app at the same time. This is something unachievable with physical interactions, as an individual cannot be at more than one physical event at the same time. Furthermore,

particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, the internet proved to be a major tool, if not the only tool, for communicating during sick periods, quarantines, and lockdowns. This coincides with the LGBTIQ+ expatriates' remark in the Gozo study whereby they would have benefitted from online spaces during the pandemic (LGBTI+ Gozo and Jakob, 2022). These methods replaced most of face-to-face interaction over the last couple of years, so engagement in apps and social media was essential to keep on socialising and making new friends in this timeframe.

> "Because before the pandemic I had a lot of friends living here from all over the world and as the pandemic went on, a lot of them left and now I have like, 1 foreign friend left and the rest of my friends are all Maltese, my partner is Maltese, so."

Participant 28

25-34, Non-Binary, Queer, 2-4 years in Malta

The major events of the last couple of years, namely the pandemic and everything associated with it, could have helped or hindered the expansion of different types of friend circles. The effects of the pandemic have also manifested themselves in the demographics of the people in Malta. Whereas before COVID-19 there were various non-Maltese residents on the islands, the pandemic has led many of them to go back to their native countries. According to Von Plato and Zeeck (2021), Malta's attractiveness as a destination for expatriates has decreased drastically in the last couple of years, so the loss of expatriates due to the pandemic was also coupled with such low rankings concerning quality of life. Therefore, these two reasons have contributed to expatriates taking advantage of the COVID-19 situation to stop their expatriation period in Malta, manifesting themselves as major push factors during this timeframe (Bhugra *et al.*, 2010). In relation to this study, this process indirectly affected the demographics of the social circles of non-Maltese residents who decided to remain in Malta. This meant that whilst before COVID-19 there were many non-natives available to be friends with, the pandemic shifted possible friend circles to include a bigger proportion of Maltese people due to them remaining in the country. This resulted in non-Maltese residents expanding local friend circles and involuntarily integrating more with locals when socialising, in an attempt to avoid suffering from loneliness like the LGBTIQ+ expatriates in the Gozitan study did (LGBTI+ Gozo and Jakob, 2022). Furthermore, particularly for Participant 28, a bigger proportion of local friends during this time was also helpful in other ways such as in

understanding the host culture better since an attempt to avoid suffering from loneliness during this period resulted in a greater immersion in local activities.

5.6 Freedom and belonging

> "I think in the Three Cities, there are lots of LGBT in the Three Cities [...] and there are a lot that are Maltese that we see but they're not as comfortable. And that's a shame because, but I understand them again. There's family issues and things."

<div align="right">

Participant 23

55-64, Male, Gay, 6-8 years in Malta

</div>

> "It seems like there's a two-tier system, right? It's ok that I'm an LGBT foreigner, but it seems like local Maltese LGBT people have a lot harder time? [...] A lot of the Maltese people I know are like 'I'm not out to my family' [...] and so that's what I mean by like two tiers 'cause it's like LGBT people are fine, so long as it's not one of us."

<div align="right">

Participant 13

18-24, Male, Gay/Ace, 2-4 years in Malta

</div>

These participants highlight the difference between expatriates and locals, whereby expatriates do not have their families around them and consequentially have more freedom than the locals. Locals, in this case forming part of the LGBTIQ+ community, may have unsupportive families and may not feel comfortable being authentic in their hometowns especially due to the insular culture of Malta where people know each other and each other's families. Expatriates, on the other hand, do not have familial attachments in the host country and therefore find it much easier to be themselves without such repercussions. As Participant 13 stated, there is a division between the LGBTIQ+ non-Maltese in Malta and native Maltese LGBTIQ+ as the close-knit structure of Maltese society at times inhibits locals from coming out. This manifests itself in a greater acceptance of queer non-Maltese individuals since they are not related to Maltese families, which turns the non-Maltese 'disadvantage' into a privilege in this scenario (Bowleg, 2013). Similarly, queer Maltese individuals have a 'disadvantage' in being locals as families may be uncomfortable having an LGBTIQ+ family member. Therefore, compared with the Maltese LGBTIQ+, queer expatriates enjoy a bigger freedom and have a greater possibility of being authentic. This point brings similarities with a point by McPhail, McNulty, and Hutchings (2016), whereby expatriates are often excused for

displaying behaviour which is not accepted among locals. Whilst non-conforming behaviour among locals tends to be generally unproblematic in Malta, it depends greatly on the environment and the surrounding people, such that locals might not be able to exhibit non-conforming behaviour in all contexts in Malta like expatriates can. Therefore, this exists even in Malta, where there is a greater acceptance of different behaviours by 'others' (the non-Maltese) than by the Maltese.

Although expatriates mingle with locals, they also mingle with other expatriates and form a strong network of expatriate subcultures in areas where there is a concentration of them in the same place. Such an area which has been mentioned by some participants is the Three Cities, whereby there is a big community of expatriates with a good proportion of them forming part of the LGBTIQ+ community.

> "We went to live in Senglea after a few years and there was an active expat community and also an active LGBTI community, and everything came together."
>
> Participant 26
>
> 65+, Female, Bisexual, 6-8 years in Malta

Apart from making the area culturally diverse, this also aids in adding another sense of belonging. Besides bonding with LGBTIQ+ locals on the basis of being LGBTIQ+ and to help break into local social circles, a strong LGBTIQ+ expatriate community adds another feature of commonality as members can bond on both their LGBTIQ+ and non-Maltese identities and assist each other through their own experiences in the host country. This means that they can understand each other more as well as understand the struggles that other members might be facing in their adaptation to Maltese life, and serve as a support system in times of need. Being such a multicultural area with a rich expatriate community, the Three Cities have consequentially developed a subculture of expatriates as well as a subculture of LGBTIQ+ expatriates (Paisley and Tayar, 2016).

The LGBTIQ+ expatriate community in this area can be compared to the British diaspora in Malta mentioned by Innes (2008) as, although hailing from different countries and continents and consequentially not having ethnic links, this community is closely-knit and helpful nonetheless. Participant 23 has revealed that in his case, he is so involved in the LGBTIQ+ expatriate community in the Three Cities that when other non-Maltese LGBTIQ+ individuals

relocate to Malta, they get referred to him as a first point of contact for them to integrate in the local LGBTIQ+ expatriate scene, leading to the expansion of this community and its support system. It is important to note, however, that diasporic communities have not been mentioned in the interviews as the interviewees either referred to the general expatriate community of Malta or the LGBTIQ+ expatriate community.

5.7   The non-Maltese contribution to the local LGBTIQ+ scene

I attend LGBTIQ+ organised events often
57 responses
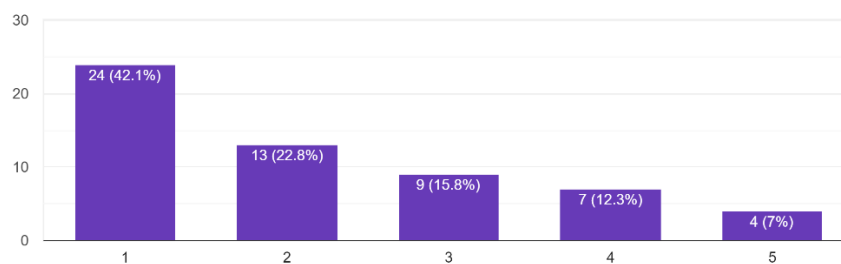
I feel welcome at LGBTIQ+ organised events
54 responses
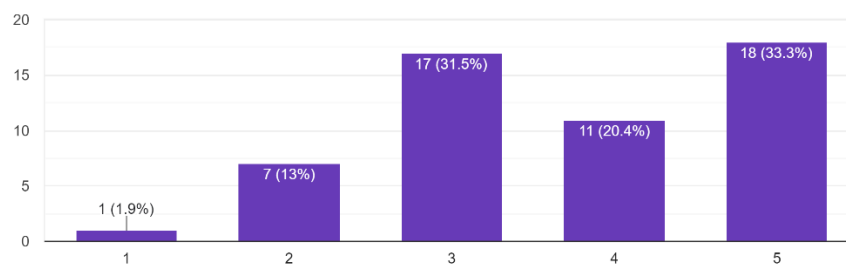
Survey answers: LGBTIQ+ events

As depicted in the above graphs, the majority of the survey sample does not attend LGBTIQ+ events often, but when they do, more than half of them feel welcome. It comes to no surprise that most of the individuals attending LGBTIQ+ events often are out in all settings except 18% who are only out in some settings. Almost all of the sample in this sub-group reported finding Malta an LGBTIQ+ accepting host country, with just 9% facing discrimination on dating apps in their initial expatriation period and 18% facing it now. 82% of those attending LGBTIQ+ events often marked themselves proud of their LGBTIQ+ identity whilst all reported feeling welcome at LGBTIQ+ oriented events. However, not all those who are proud of their LGBTIQ+ identity attend events often. 62% of those who are proud of their sexuality reported not attending targeted events often, therefore, pride does not guarantee the desire to attend

such events. An interesting observation is the fact that from those who attend LGBTIQ+ events often, 36% are not members of an LGBTIQ+ NGO, 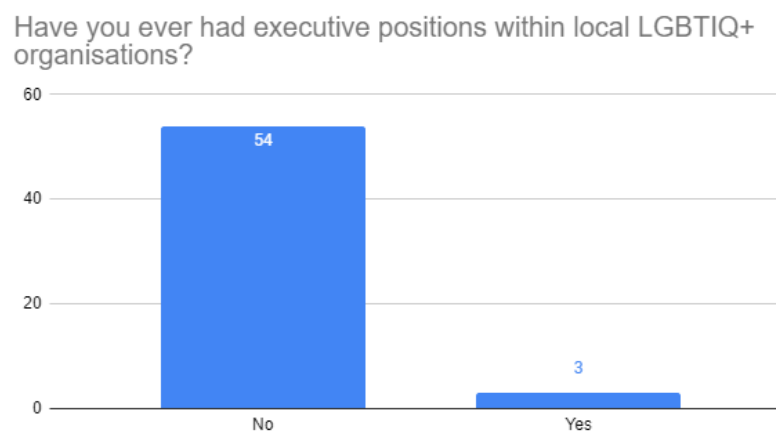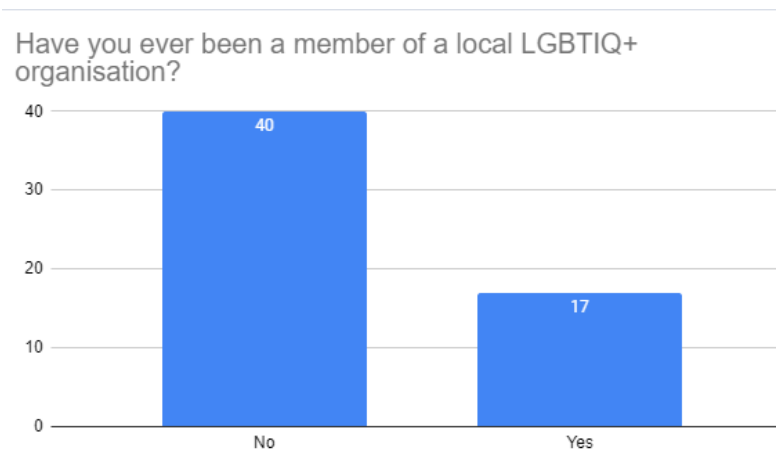which highlights the accessibility of local LGBTIQ+ organisations whereby individuals do not necessarily have to be members to stay updated about the community and participate in events which, as discussed before, could be attributed to a strong presence of LGBTIQ+ NGOs on social media (Doan and Higgins, 2011).

Among those who do not attend LGBTIQ+ events often, only 19% are members of an LGBTIQ+ NGO and 30% are not proud of their LGBTIQ+ identity. The former exemplifies the perspective of individuals like Participant 24 who want to know what goes on in the LGBTIQ+ community but do not wish to personally engage with its activities often. In fact, the survey shows that among those who feel welcomed at LGBTIQ+ oriented events, more than half do not attend them often and more than half are not members of any LGBTIQ+ NGO. Feelings of belonging, therefore, also do not influence how often queer expatriates attend targeted events. Furthermore, from those individuals who feel very welcome at LGBTIQ+ events, 3% are not out to anyone, 17% faced and still face prejudice because of their intersectional identities, and 7% do not feel proud of their LGBTIQ+ identity. 17% of this sub-group expressed that they do not have many Maltese friends with 10% feeling safer with the LGBTIQ+ non-Maltese than with the LGBTIQ+ Maltese.

On the other hand, from those LGBTIQ+ expatriates who reported not feeling welcome at LGBTIQ+ events, 63% are female. This could be a direct result of the general tendency for such events to be greatly attended and dominated by males, making females feel out of place. As a result, most of those who do not feel welcome do not attend LGBTIQ+ events often and 38% of them are members of an LGBTIQ+ NGO. From this sub-group, 50% expressed facing initial prejudice in Malta with 13% still facing it nowadays. Whilst the prejudice faced nowadays is much lower than that faced initially, the presence of initial prejudice may be more effective in contributing to feeling unwelcome, particularly since the expatriate would still be trying to adapt to and belong in Malta during that period. Prejudice in the initial expatriation period might make the LGBTIQ+ expatriate unwilling to venture further with other attempts of trying to belong, and such behaviour might be taken up as a defence mechanism to reduce the chances of being further subjected to prejudice.

5.7.1 Engagement in LGBTIQ+ NGOs

Have you ever been a member of a local LGBTIQ+ organisation?

Have you ever had executive positions within local LGBTIQ+ organisations?

Survey answers: Engagement with LGBTIQ+ NGOs

As can be seen in the above charts, the majority of the survey sample are not members of any local LGBTIQ+ NGO, with the absolute majority not having had any executive positions within such NGOs. This translates to 30% of the sample being members and only 5% having had executive positions, which contrasts with the study by LGBTI+ Gozo and Jakob (2022) whereby half the LGBTIQ+ expatriates in Gozo expressed interest in engaging with the NGO LGBTI+ Gozo. Shifting our focus back to this study, it comes to no surprise that those survey respondents who are members of LGBTIQ+ NGOs are all out about their sexuality, either in all settings or in some, meaning that no members are closeted. From the members, 18% have faced and still face prejudice being both non-Maltese and LGBTIQ+, 6% suffered discrimination on dating apps in their initial expatriation phase as well as now, 41% attend LGBTIQ+ organised events often, and 71% feel welcome at such events. 24% of the LGBTIQ+ NGO members reported identifying more with their race rather than their sexuality, with one individual marking themselves not proud of their LGBTIQ+ identity. This gives a clear picture of the fact that LGBTIQ+ NGO memberships do not necessarily influence LGBTIQ+ oriented

event attendance, as one might not become an NGO member for socialisation purposes. Similarly, NGO membership does not indicate the extent of personal belonging as an LGBTIQ+ individual.

To get an idea of the demographics behind LGBTIQ+ NGO memberships, they can be split into age groups. The age bracket with the highest percentage of NGO memberships is 55-64 years with 80%, followed by the 65+ age group with 40%, the 35-44 age bracket with 38%, 45-54 years at 33%, 25-34 years at 24%, and 18-24 years at 13%.

5.7.2 LGBTIQ+ expatriates in executive positions

All of those who have occupied executive positions within local LGBTIQ+ NGOs have coincidentally lived in Malta for between 6 to 8 years, and due to the public role of such positions, all of them are out in all settings. None of these executive members reported facing discrimination on dating apps due to their non-Maltese identity both during their initial expatriation period as well as now. All the sample of this sub-group marked themselves very proud of being LGBTIQ+ in Malta, attending LGBTIQ+ events often, and feeling very welcome at these events. Their experiences as executive members in the local LGBTIQ+ scene were all ranked as positive. 67% of executive members have many Maltese friends and 67% identify more with their race rather than with their LGBTIQ+ identity. This shows how people in LGBTIQ+ executive positions might not necessarily consider sexuality as the most important identity that they possess as they might still prefer identifying in other ways. Therefore, being very proud of being an LGBTIQ+ person does not automatically mean that an individual identifies with their sexuality more than with their other identities.

> "So it was then an awakening period […] probably a Maltese person might not feel the same, but as a foreigner to feel that pride, that you are giving back [to] a certain country, feeling that belonging while you are not from that country, […] it has for me a different sense of achievement. And I could not do that in my own country […] so it is a compensation mechanism that I do as well."
>
> Participant 4
>
> 35-44, Male, Gay, 6-8 years in Malta

Attempts to belong to a country can take different forms. Engaging in activism is one way to integrate into the local LGBTIQ+ community whilst simultaneously helping the community at

large. Matching with the concept of cultural belonging presented by Formby (2017), this engagement with LGBTIQ+ institutions opens the door for making further friendships and learning about the host country. In the case of Participant 4, although he was openly gay in his home country, he was never in the LGBTIQ+ activism scene and he could not engage in it. The fact that he expatriated to a place which has a visible LGBTIQ+ activism scene gave this participant a new freedom whereby he felt comfortable and satisfied engaging in such settings and simultaneously giving back to the Maltese community. The participant himself has used the term 'compensation mechanism', which refers to his contribution to the Maltese LGBTIQ+ activism as a compensation for not being able to contribute to his native country's LGBTIQ+ activism. His activism in Malta is seen as a way to thank the host country for accepting him and an opportunity for him to do what he wished to do in his native country but could not. Therefore, since Malta is his new home, he opted to fulfil that wish in Malta instead.

Participant 23 also contributes to local LGBTIQ+ activism, however, he did not engage in it as his vehicle for integration. Arriving in Malta with his husband, meeting other same-sex couples was his method of integrating. Similar to Participant 4, Participant 23 had also never contributed to LGBTIQ+ activism before in his home country, but upon relocation to Malta he wanted to lend a helping hand to the local LGBTIQ+ community, through which he also got to meet much more LGBTIQ+ individuals and expand his circle of friends. This helped him establish himself further in the LGBTIQ+ community and bridge his career with one of his identities. As Participant 23 stated, he never had the wish to engage in activism for the sake of advocating, but rather he decided to help a local LGBTIQ+ NGO with its operation, taking a less vocal role and helping with management from his own business experience.

One of the interviewees was active in LGBTIQ+ activism before relocating to Malta, and remained active after relocation as well. In her native country, Participant 26 actively advocated on bisexual issues, and transferred her skills and experiences with her to Malta. She recounted how her integration improved when she became active in local LGBTIQ+ activism as, coinciding with Participant 4 and Participant 23, she got to know many queer individuals and made more friends through activism. These participants prove the claim by Doan and Higgins (2011) to be true as the accessibility and welcoming attitude of LGBTIQ+ organisations made it easier for them to join and provide valuable input. This means that the

NGOs provided a 'comfort factor' (McPhail and McNulty, 2015) whereby useful contributions were welcomed irrespective of who the people contributing were. Maltese LGBTIQ+ NGOs constantly advocate for diversity and inclusion, so the contribution of non-Maltese residents is encouraged to enrich the organisations as well as to learn from different cultures.

Although only a very small percentage (5%) of the survey sample occupied executive positions, their experiences contrast with the point by McPhail, McNulty and Hutchings (2016) which states that LGBTIQ+ immigrants may choose not to engage in activism in the host country because they are not locals. As discussed, most of the interviewees in executive positions were not active in LGBTIQ+ activism before their expatriation but became active in Malta, both as an integration mechanism and as a way to give back to the host community. These expatriates are similar to the expatriate Poles in Germany discussed earlier in the literature (Ayoub, 2013), whereby their desire to engage in LGBTIQ+ activism arose after leaving their native country. Participant 26 was active in her native country as well as in Malta, meaning that expatriation did not affect her decision to engage in activism. On the opposite end, there are expatriates like Participant 24 who not only never participated in LGBTIQ+ activism in both his native country and his host country, but also never attended a Pride march.

Similar to Participant 26, expatriation also did not affect Participant 24's decision to not engage in activism. Although Participant 24 is openly gay, he does not give too much importance to his sexuality, which makes him fit in partially to the claim by Wong and Tolkach (2017) which states that individuals who do not consider their sexuality important are not so inclined to visit gay spaces. This participant mentioned how he attends some formal LGBTIQ+ events like talks and documentary screenings, however, his lack of participation in more frequent and more social LGBTIQ+ events and in the Pride march itself, which is the biggest event of all, highlights the fact that casual socialisation with other LGBTIQ+ individuals is not a priority for him. As this participant himself has stated, he chooses to remain under the radar about his life in general, including his sexuality, so when he attends events, he prefers cultural and educational activities rather than socio-political events. The lack of interest in social events contrasts with the LGBTIQ+ expatriates in the Gozitan study whereby, particularly during the period of the pandemic, they expressed an interest in having online events focusing on socialisation (LGBTI+ Gozo and Jakob, 2022).

5.8 The effects of structural intersectionality

I faced prejudice being foreign and LGBTIQ+ in Malta
57 responses
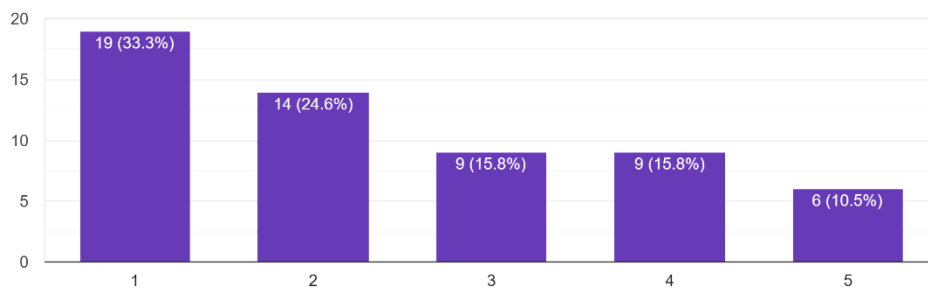
I face prejudice being foreign and LGBTIQ+ in Malta
57 responses
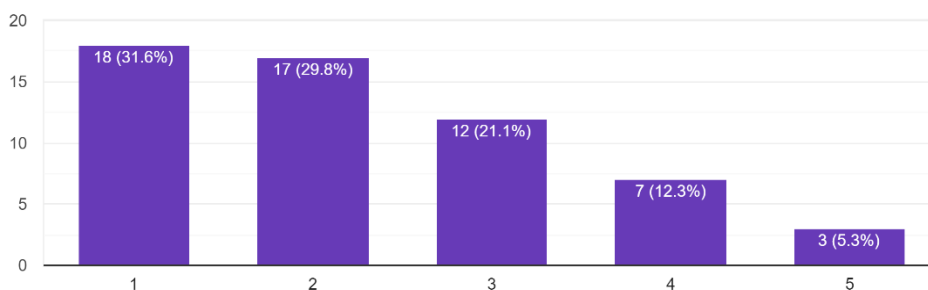
Survey answers: Prejudice

Analysing the extent of double discrimination faced by the survey respondents, more than half the sample faced no prejudice being simultaneously foreign and LGBTIQ+ in their initial relocation phase as well as nowadays. However, 26% reported suffering from this prejudice in the beginning and 18% nowadays. Although in various cases the effects of intersectional identities cannot be split, the results of this study suggest that the identity which brings more prejudice with it in the Maltese context is the non-Maltese identity rather than the LGBTIQ+ identity, so the negative answers to the above survey questions could reflect the effects of the non-Maltese identity more than the effects of the LGBTIQ+ identity.

From those individuals who suffered initial prejudice, 38% remained with the prejudice up till now and the rest improved their ranking. The lower amounts of intersectional prejudice suffered nowadays compared to the initial expatriation period suggests that LGBTIQ+ expatriates in Malta have integrated better as time went by, resulting in a lesser sense of prejudice as this negative feeling started being replaced by a sense of belonging over time. 19% of those with initial double discrimination also reported suffering discrimination on dating apps due to their non-Maltese identity compared to 25% suffering from dating app

discrimination now. 60% of those who currently experience intersectional prejudice have also faced it in their initial expatriation period. This shows that although on average the double discrimination faced by this sample decreased through time, the discrimination faced on dating apps increased slightly.

To get an even more accurate picture of who suffers from double discrimination the most, the responses of the LGBTIQ+ expatriates to the above questions have been split into age groups. The highest amounts were recorded by the 35-44 age group where 50% of the sample faced initial intersectional prejudice with only 13% facing it now, followed by the 55-64 age bracket where 20% faced initial prejudice but 40% reported suffering from it nowadays. The prejudice faced by other age groups are 29% initially and 24% now for the 25-34 age bracket, 13% initially as well as now for the 18-24 age bracket, 33% initially and 0% now for the 45-54 age bracket, and 20% initially and 0% now for the 65+ age group.

"I think the younger generation is a little bit more open towards expats and also on top of that LGBTQ, because it got more integrated into the normal lifestyle, the norm almost, that we have people of LGBTQ and we have expats in the community. […] But when you look at the older generation, or people who don't necessarily know you, they feel more judgemental towards that you come to their country and they have this mentality of that almost you're taking away a part of their culture."

Participant 25

25-34, Male, Queer, 6-8 years in Malta

Various interviewees have mentioned how from the Maltese population, it is mostly the older generation that gives them issues. Older Maltese people were not as exposed to diversity as much as the younger generation nowadays, so at times they might be racist and judgemental against others whom they consider as different from them. Whilst the younger Maltese are used to having LGBTIQ+ individuals and expatriates among them in their everyday lives, the older generation might feel threatened, particularly by the non-Maltese identity as non-Maltese individuals have different cultures which might be perceived as erasing the Maltese culture in the long run. This mentality is the same mentality as that referred to in the survey by LGBTI+ Gozo and Jakob (2022), whereby host natives may act superior and may make expatriates feel unwelcome because they are afraid of people who are 'others'. The erasure of the host culture is very highly unlikely during the expatriation process as, in the process of becoming a successful expatriate, it is actually the expatriate who takes up the local culture

and adapts to it (Vukovic, 2013). As Participant 25 commented, the presence of expatriates in a culture does not take away any of it but it actually enriches it, as it allows for beneficial processes such as 'norm brokerage' and mutual education (Ayoub and Bauman, 2018).

The attitudes of the native population reflect the literature by Assimakopoulos and Vella Muskat (2018), whereby the LGBTIQ+ identity is not considered so different from Maltese people when compared to the non-Maltese identity. Since various LGBTIQ+ individuals are present within the local Maltese population, individuals possessing this identity are not perceived as 'others' as much as individuals possessing a non-Maltese identity who have nothing in common with the Maltese. As stated by Assimakopoulos and Vella Muskat (2018), this manifests itself with issues such as racism being more prevalent than homophobia in Malta. This can also be extended to what Participant 13 has said, whereby LGBTIQ+ non-Maltese residents are greatly accepted for their sexuality by Maltese people and their intersectionality acts as a privilege compared to the LGBTIQ+ Maltese who have familial links and consequentially might not feel as free to be themselves. In turn, it is the non-Maltese status that is perceived as the biggest 'threat' to Maltese culture, particularly since different cultures are perceived as more harmful to the Maltese culture than different sexualities are. Therefore, gender and sexual diversity in Malta are more accepted than ethnic diversity.

5.8.1 Issues with the non-Maltese identity
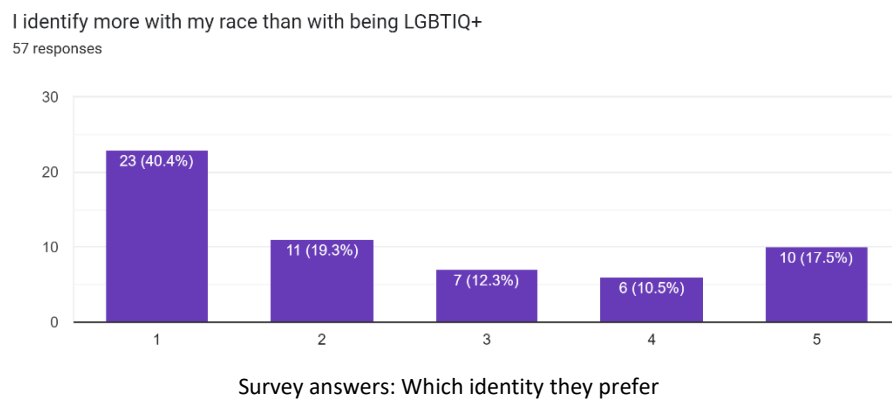
I identify more with my race than with being LGBTIQ+
57 responses

Survey answers: Which identity they prefer

More than half the survey sample revealed that they identify more with their LGBTIQ+ identity than with their race. However, only 29% of those identifying more with their sexuality are members of an LGBTIQ+ NGO and only 18% go to LGBTIQ+ events often, highlighting the fact that there are other reasons which motivate LGBTIQ+ expatriates to engage with LGBTIQ+

NGOs and targeted events besides their personal identification. 65% reported having many Maltese friends, with 21% feeling safer with other non-Maltese individuals rather than with Maltese individuals and 6% feeling safer with other LGBTIQ+ non-Maltese residents rather than with the LGBTIQ+ Maltese.

On the other hand, from those who identify more with their race, 31% have many Maltese friends, 44% feel safer with other non-Maltese residents compared to the Maltese, and 13% feel safer with other LGBTIQ+ non-Maltese resdients compared to the LGBTIQ+ Maltese. This highlights a correlation between race and integration, whereby those who identify more with their race do not feel as comfortable mingling with host locals as much as those who do not identify greatly with it, therefore, those who identify more as LGBTIQ+ feel a better sense of belonging with host locals. This stems as a result of the previous point by Assimakopoulos and Vella Muskat (2018) since LGBTIQ+ expatriates who identify more with their sexuality feel more integrated due to their sexuality being accepted very easily in Malta. Furthermore, the expatriates who identify more with race could be victims of discriminations like racism and xenophobia, which ultimately affect their feelings of belonging with host natives such that they prefer mingling with other non-Maltese residents instead.

The interviewed participants concord that the identity that brings the most problems with it as an LGBTIQ+ non-Maltese in Malta is the non-Maltese identity. Various participants have shared how they have little to no problem with their sexuality in Malta, however, the fact that they are non-Maltese brings certain challenges. Whilst various interviewees recognise that their identity as non-Maltese is privileged due to their whiteness and their ability to blend in, they know that this privilege is not enjoyed by all non-Maltese in Malta, so other non-Maltese individuals who are visibly different may have different experiences from them. On this note, although Participant 4 is the only interviewee of Arab ethnicity, he did not report being discriminated against because of his race. Interestingly, Participant 4 actually reported that his ethnicity acted as a privilege for him since a lot of people love his country, so in his case it is the LGBTIQ+ identity that presented the most issues for him in Malta. However, race was not explored in detail with the rest of the interviewees since they did not mention having any problems with their Caucasian ethnicity. The main challenge mentioned by the interviewees was being taken advantage of because they are not Maltese and do not speak the Maltese language.

"If I go on Marketplace I want to buy something and I know the person isn't going to speak English very well because of the way they've written the ad, I will likely have a Maltese person call just to not get screwed on the price. […] If 2 guys show up to pick up the item we never get treated in a strange way."

Participant 23

55-64, Male, Gay, 6-8 years in Malta

"I think if anything we have more problems with being foreigners than we do with being gay. So we talked to other expat friends and there's a very real sense that as foreigners we are taken advantage of in Malta […] so there's a foreigner's price, local's price, and then maybe even a Gozitan price, you know? So we encounter this kind of stuff and I don't think any of it has to do with being gay."

Participant 24

55-64, Male, Gay, 4-6 years in Malta

Despite their non-Maltese identity and the fact that they do not speak Maltese, most of the interviewees mentioned that they did not experience a language barrier when making friends in Malta (Innes, 2008; Vukovic, 2013). This comes to no surprise, as English is the country's second language and is very widely spoken. The ability to form friendships with local people was not hindered, however, their lack of Maltese acted as a disadvantage in some contexts. Relating this information to the concept of privileges and disadvantages put forward by Bowleg (2013), the majority of the interviewees possess a privilege in being white and not so visually different from the local population, however, their non-Maltese identity and inability to speak the Maltese language acts as a disadvantage in their relations with the locals. This results in context-depending discrimination (Stevens and Thijs, 2018) as these expatriates are only discriminated against in specific scenarios, not in all contexts. A case in point is being charged more for products, which was mentioned by Participant 24 and echoes the LGBTIQ+ expatriates in the Gozitan survey (LGBTI+ Gozo and Jakob, 2022).

Another issue mentioned by one interviewee concerns the fact that due to her lack of Maltese, she sometimes feels a boundary between her and LGBTIQ+ Maltese people as it hinders her from trying to break into local friend circles. She expressed this issue with Maltese-speaking local circles, whereby she keeps back from socialising with Maltese-speaking groups since she cannot contribute to them or understand what is being said. Similar to Vukovic (2013), this makes her more prone to socialise with other LGBTIQ+ non-Maltese individuals instead since this reduces the feeling of barging into strangers' conversations and

forcing them to switch the language to accommodate her lack of Maltese. However, on the whole, the everyday lives of LGBTIQ+ expatriates in Malta have been described as satisfactory, though at times clouded by these few instances of inequality and boundaries.

5.8.1.1 Barriers in linguistic attempts at integration

> "I am learning Maltese, but it's a SLOW process, […] there are days when I feel really happy speaking Maltese and then there are days [where] I'm so tired […] to have the creativity to conjure sentences in the language. […] On days like that I feel like, I feel like I'm less integrated than on the days where […] I can go about my days speaking Maltese."

> Participant 28

> 25-34, Non-Binary, Queer, 2-4 years in Malta

Only one interviewee mentioned that they are learning Maltese, which is obviously a long process. This language learning journey affects their perception of integration, as they feel more integrated when practicing Maltese in their everyday life compared to when they use English. Although they try to make an effort to practice their Maltese in different scenarios, this participant has expressed how at times they are not given the opportunity to do so, resulting in a sense of boundary in their linguistic integration (Vukovic, 2013). When trying to speak in Maltese as a non-Maltese person, Maltese people realise that the person is not Maltese and so they change the language to English so that they can understand better. However, this is counterproductive to the language learning efforts of the non-Maltese person, as their chance to practice and develop their skills further is taken away from them. In reality, in the case of Malta, non-Maltese residents do not need to learn Maltese to integrate fully since English is very widely spoken and is one of the national languages of the country. Therefore, a non-Maltese resident who willingly decides to start learning the local language without being pressured to do so wishes a more immersive kind of integration, which in this case results in dissatisfaction when their speaking attempts are ignored.

Although this participant has noted that the locals' language switching is done with good intentions, locals do not realise that Maltese learners do not necessarily wish the language switch as it highlights the difference between natives and non-Maltese. Whilst the non-Maltese' spoken Maltese will sound strange due to mistakes and unfamiliar accents, the use

of Maltese helps them feel more connected to the locals as well as increase their sense of belonging. Despite Participant 28 being a successful expatriate, complete belonging is inhibited through this lack of language practice. In this sense, the Maltese language is also used as a vehicle for further integration.

Another factor is that more effort is required by locals to understand and speak to a non-Maltese person speaking in Maltese, as the mistakes and unfamiliar accent require locals to be more alert to understand exactly what the non-Maltese is trying to say. Consequentially, this may effect the local people's willingness to communicate in Maltese with non-Maltese individuals compared to communicating with other locals, as the communication between locals happens naturally and effortlessly. Therefore, Maltese people may prefer speaking in Maltese to a Maltese person rather than to a non-Maltese. When this simple communication between locals happens around non-Maltese individuals, it helps increase their understanding of the language and expand their vocabulary, particularly when frequently exposed to specific phrases in specific scenarios. However, due to the fact that this is the experience of just one interviewee which cannot be compared to other experiences, one should be careful not to generalise this information.

Participant 28's sense of integration in relation to language can be compared to Participant 46's account, particularly her point about the language spoken in different Maltese friend circles. Participant 46 expressed that she considers an English-speaking Maltese friend circle as more accessible than a Maltese-speaking Maltese friend circle as this gives her the opportunity to attempt integrating with them through the use of English. This brings up an interesting point regarding how languages are perceived as aiding or hindering integration. Whilst Participant 28 mentioned how they feel more integrated when listening to and speaking in Maltese with locals, Participant 46 interprets the Maltese language as a boundary and in turn feels a better sense of integration when the language that is spoken is English. Although this heavily depends on the fact that Participant 28 started learning Maltese and Participant 46 did not, their attitudes towards the bilingual nature of Maltese individuals are contrasting, especially since none of the other interviewees in this study have learnt Maltese and they still do not consider the Maltese language as a barrier.

5.8.2 Issues with the LGBTIQ+ identity

Are you out as LGBTIQ+ in Malta:

Survey answers: Disclosure of sexual orientation
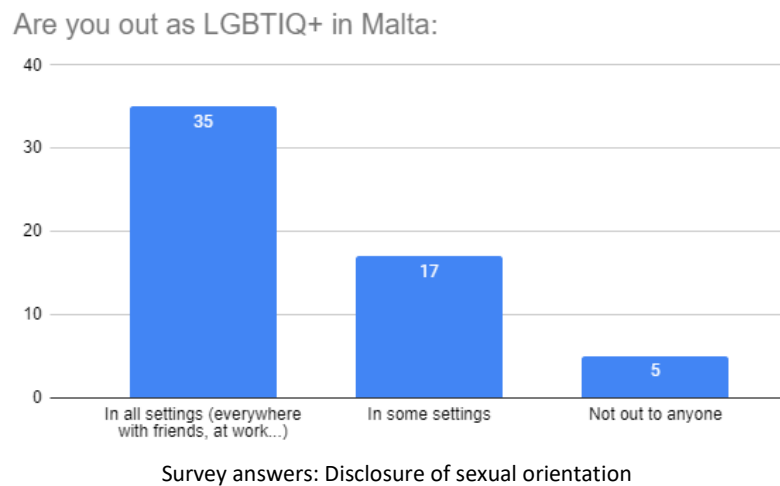
The majority of the survey sample (61%) are out as LGBTIQ+ in all settings of their lives in Malta, with 30% out in some settings and 9% not out to anyone. From those individuals who are out in some settings only, 76% are female, 65% are bisexual or pansexual, 71% expatriated alone, and 24% are members of an LGBTIQ+ NGO. These percentages show that females are less likely to come out in all settings, perhaps as a result of their intersectional identities being LGBTIQ+, non-Maltese, and women at the same time which could increase the amount of issues in their lives. However, this contrasts with the literature by Kim and Von Glinow (2017) which states that lesbians and bisexual women are generally more accepted by society than gay and bisexual men. On the other hand, the majority of those out in some settings only are in fact bisexual or pansexual, which could reflect the presence of prejudice against bisexuals and pansexuals known as biphobia. It comes to no surprise that the majority of those out in some settings only did not expatriate with a partner or spouse as, particularly if they had to relocate with a partner or spouse of the same sex, it would not have been as easy to remain in the closet. Therefore, if an individual expatriates alone they can decide themselves when to 'come out' and to whom.

However, if an LGBTIQ+ expatriate relocates with a partner or spouse of the opposite sex, their sexuality might be 'invisible', in which case they might not feel the need to be out as LGBTIQ+. This may be the case with the majority of the survey sample who is not out to anyone, whereby 60% relocated with their partner and 80% are bisexual or pansexual. This might suggest that the partners in question are of the opposite sex and strengthens the argument by Kim and Von Glinow (2017) regarding the fact that bisexuals are often less

inclined to reveal their sexual orientation when compared to gay or lesbian individuals. In fact, from the survey sample that is not out to anyone, only 20% are proud of their LGBTIQ+ identity. This shows a link between pride and being out, since if a person is not out about their sexuality they will very likely not consider that identity important to them. For this reason, it comes to no surprise that those not out to anyone do not attend LGBTIQ+ oriented events often, and none of these individuals and those out in some settings have ever occupied executive positions within LGBTIQ+ NGOs due to the public nature of such roles.

5.8.2.1 Gender expression and non-conforming behaviour

"I think that I had several benefits, your 2 categories are LGBTQ and foreigner and I fit into those but, for me it was relatively easy because there's also all those other identities that come into it like race, if I was foreign and not white I think my experience would have been much different, or if I was foreign and even male perhaps? Because sometimes it's harder if you're male and you appear more effeminate."

Participant 46

25-34, Female, Lesbian, 2-4 years in Malta

"For me, it's not like I'm a very flamboyant person […] I'm not like that, so I would say that if I were one of those I would maybe have more issues here. I think it also has to do with like how you present yourself?"

Participant 11
25-34, Female, Bisexual, 2-4 years in Malta

The interviewees, who are out in all or in some settings, reported little to no issues regarding their LGBTIQ+ identity, however, an important point has been raised. Some participants feel like gender expression affects how LGBTIQ+ individuals get treated as they might attract harassment. As stated by Participant 46, an LGBTIQ+ male who appears effeminate might have more issues than an LGBTIQ+ female who appears masculine, which translates into a disadvantage (Bowleg, 2013) for men when compared to women. This is especially the case since it is more socially acceptable for women to deviate from gender norms than it is for men, highlighting the difference in acceptance between the genders (Alonso, 2013). Similar to UNHCR and IE SOGI (2021) and coinciding with Participant 11's remark about flamboyant individuals, if someone deviates from the gender norm and is perceived as being different, they might be targeted. Therefore, if someone is not visibly different, they have a lesser chance of being targeted. It is interesting to note that this point on visible LGBTIQ+ identities

and how they present themselves was only mentioned by interviewees under 35 years of age. Interviewees in older age brackets did not mention gender expression as a possible issue or basis of harassment, meaning that this perception is highly linked to specific age groups. However, Participant 28, who is also under 35, mentioned how their partner who looks androgynous does not get harassed but instead instigates curiosity. This participant feels like this reaction is more linked to assumptions about gender and sexuality rather than as a result of discrimination or harassment;

> "Me and my partner don't see negative comments when we're out. And my partner is a bit more androgynous looking than I am so sometimes she gets like a few looks and you hear people being like 'is that a man or a woman?'. But I mean that's everywhere you go you get that, but you don't get as much abuse in public spaces as I feel I have done in other countries […] but the cishet norm is still a massive assumption here."

> Participant 28

> 25-34, Non-Binary, Queer, 2-4 years in Malta

> "I guess maybe I'm like a bit straight-passing so no one has like harassed me or anything, but I'd almost be surprised if harassment was even common at all for anyone that was maybe a little more, looked more a certain way […] because like even my friend came to visit America over winter, and someone harassed him cause he had a scarf on, cause in America that's seen as gay, right? But I've never been harassed here for anything."

> Participant 13

> 18-24, Male, Gay/Ace, 2-4 years in Malta

Participant 13 has had such a positive experience of Malta so far that he actually expressed that even if a person is flamboyant and visibly part of the LGBTIQ+ community, he still thinks it would be highly unlikely that they get harassed. Besides his positive reality in Malta, this perception also stems from the fact that this participant compared the attitudes of the locals between his native country and his host country and found that people in the United States, which is typically portrayed as an open and liberal country, are more prone to harassing LGBTIQ+ individuals than the people of Malta. As a result, this makes Participant 13 feel like Malta is more accepting of people who deviate from gender norms. The same feeling was expressed by another American interviewee whereby she also noted that in Malta it is less problematic to have a non-conforming gender expression when compared to her native state, as she concords that in general, people in Malta can be visibly LGBTIQ+ without negative repercussions.

These remarks and Participant 13's quote can be compared to the literature by Adur (2018) whereby the reality of being an LGBTIQ+ person in the US is at times very different from the expected experience, which leads to discrepancies regarding the behaviours that one expects to find and the true attitudes. Furthermore, this point goes against Paisley and Tayar (2016) which used the US as an example of a heterogenous culture in which behavioural differences are more accepted due to the presence of a variety of individuals from many ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Whilst it is true that individuals in the US come from different backgrounds and the population of the US is very used to diversity, this did not spare the participant's friend from being harassed, something which the participant never experienced or witnessed in the Maltese islands. For this reason, various participants have noted that Malta is safer than other countries in this regard, as locals tend to be indifferent to gender norm deviances and consequentially do not care if people are part of the LGBTIQ+ community or not. This links to Assimakopoulos and Vella Muskat (2018) whereby gender diversity is more accepted in Malta than other types of diversity.

5.8.2.2 Other issues

For these expatriates, the relatively little harassment on the basis of being LGBTIQ+ presented itself from other expatriates and from the Maltese. Since the legal framework in Malta protects LGBTIQ+ individuals, as stated by Austin and Wojcik (2018), it is the people who might harass the LGBTIQ+ community rather than the institutions. Participants have mentioned how at times online hate comments might pop up from heterosexual expatriates or older generation Maltese people, although the vast majority of people in Malta are tolerant. As discussed in the study by LGBTI+ Gozo and Jakob (2022), the mentality of the older generation may make individuals uneasy with being open about their sexuality. The avoidance of some expatriates to reduce homophobia from their end can be compared to the case study by Bowleg (2013), whereby black gay and bisexual men did not feel comfortable being LGBTIQ+ in the black community. Although the expatriates in Malta do not all share the same racial link like the black participants within the black community in Bowleg's study, there are large expatriate communities in Malta, which may present similarities in cases where an LGBTIQ+ expatriate does not feel welcome in the expatriate community as an LGBTIQ+ person. This might be true within large expatriate communities which are usually not so

accepting, such as Eastern European communities in Malta. None of the interviewees mentioned their diasporic communities and their personal engagement in them, so no assumptions should be made as this point cannot be compared to the study by Munro *et al.* (2013).

Other subtle feelings of being unwelcome have been stated by Participant 25, such as the uncomfortableness of hand-holding in public places which are not gay spaces, which highlights the division between gay and straight spaces and the behaviour one can engage in in these places (Wong and Tolkach, 2017). This underlines the intersectionality of places, as different places and the people that are present in them will define how an individual perceives the place and behaves in it (Chikwendu, 2013), as well as influence the extent of material belonging an individual feels (Formby, 2017).

Although this participant has never experienced any public harassment or discrimination on the basis of his sexuality, he is very aware of this division of places, and feels like opposite-sex public displays of affection are a privilege which is taken for granted as such actions can be carried out in all places without problems. This proves partially similar to the previous point about gender expression, whereby if a person is visibly LGBTIQ+, they might be targeted (UNHCR and IE SOGI, 2021). Furthermore, echoing Alonso (2013), the fact that Participant 25 is a male adds more anxiety as it is less socially acceptable for males to show closeness in public when compared to females. This point was also previously mentioned by Participant 46 whereby she recognised her privilege in being female and able to display her authentic self without too many issues compared to males. Similarly, Participant 25 is careful because if he and his partner engage in same-sex public displays of affection in places other than gay spaces, they might be targeted. The uncomfortableness experienced in straight spaces is a perceived discrimination resulting from self-consciousness rather than blatant discrimination. With regards to the other interviewees, this division between gay and straight spaces was not mentioned as they did not report feeling uncomfortable outside gay spaces.

5.8.2.3   Internal stigmatisation

> "I feel like because of the bisexuality my problems were actually more, […] like we are stuck with discredibility, that is mostly what I experience."

The bisexual interviewees in this sample mentioned another type of problem they come across; biphobia. Individuals who identify as bisexual or pansexual are often perceived as promiscuous and undecisive, which leads them to suffer from additional stigma even within the LGBTIQ+ community itself. The stigma that Participant 11 mentioned that she suffers from in Malta as a bisexual presents itself as a bigger issue than the fact that she is non-Maltese. Going back to the notion of the LGBTIQ+ community as a collective community, biphobia, along with other kinds of prejudice present within the LGBTIQ+ community itself, proves how at times this diverse group is not as united as one would expect it to be (Formby, 2017). The variety of experiences and identities may result in members not understanding the experiences of other members of the community, leading to internal marginalisation and discrimination. Furthermore, if this feeling is transmitted by both the LGBTIQ+ community and heterosexuals, bisexuals and pansexuals are subjected to double discrimination as, similar to Formby (2017), they would not be able to feel a sense of belonging to either group.

Looking at the survey answers of bisexual and pansexual individuals, there is a clear division between their feelings and the feelings of other members of the LGBTIQ+ community. When it comes to the disclosure of their sexuality, only 35% of bisexuals and pansexuals reported being out in all settings compared to 82% of other queer respondents, as the majority are either out in some settings only or not out at all. 71% of those having few Maltese friends are bisexual or pansexual compared to 29% who are gay or lesbian. Furthermore, bisexuals and pansexuals make up 63% of those who do not feel welcome at LGBTIQ+ oriented events, 38% of those who are proud of their sexuality in Malta, and 63% of those who identify more with their race than with their sexuality. These statistics highlight the presence of potential issues that bisexuals and pansexuals face within society in general as well as within the LGBTIQ+ community, whereby they might feel uneasy mingling with other LGBTIQ+ individuals as it might result in feeling unwelcome.

One of the bisexuals in this study, Participant 26, is the only interviewee in a straight-passing relationship, so she might be perceived by society as being a heterosexual. This assumption may decrease the amount of issues in her experience compared to other LGBTIQ+ individuals in same-sex relationships, as her 'otherness' is not so visible and may act as a privilege. This

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means that she and her partner may not attract harassment due to their relationship conforming to the heterosexual norm, so they are not perceived as deviating from it, reducing their chances of getting targeted (UNHCR and IE SOGI, 2021). However, this may make her and her partner subject to biphobia within the LGBTIQ+ community due to internal discriminations and stigma against bisexuals, making them feel like they do not belong (Formby, 2017). As Participant 26 recounts, processes such as coming out are more difficult for bisexuals as they are more prone to psychological problems than gays or lesbians. Participant 26 and her partner did not experience biphobia as an opposite-sex couple within the Maltese LGBTIQ+ community. This diversity of realities emphasises why the LGBTIQ+ community should not be thought of as one homogenous group of 'gays', as such a perception erases a major part of the LGBTIQ+ community and their struggles. As Participant 23 stated, there are various groups or communities within the LGBTIQ+ community, so it would be wrong to throw everyone under the same category or to assume that they all have the same needs.

Other diverse sub-groups within the LGBTIQ+ community include non-binary individuals and transgender individuals. Whilst they have both been very minimally represented in the survey sample, both groups reported identifying more with their LGBTIQ+ identity rather than their race and both have not had any executive positions in local LGBTIQ+ NGOs. Furthermore, in the case of transgender survey respondents, even though all marked themselves as proud of their LGBTIQ+ identity, none of them are members of any LGBTIQ+ NGO. As stated previously, personal identification and engagement in queer activities and spaces depends mainly on individual characteristics, although diverse representation is encouraged in the local LGBTIQ+ context.

5.8.3 Issues with both identities

One difficulty that combines both the non-Maltese identity and the LGBTIQ+ identity was mentioned by Participant 25. In his case, the feeling of uncomfortableness and self-consciousness extends further in relation to his Maltese partner's family as he feels slightly unwelcome by his partner's parents for being simultaneously LGBTIQ+ and non-Maltese. Being part of the older generation, these parents are not so open to people who are

considered different, and as a result Participant 25 feels like there is a barrier in between as they do not relate and understand each other very much. Therefore, whilst the majority of the effects of the other participants' intersectional identities can be split and traced back to their main component identities; either due to their non-Maltese identity or their LGBTIQ+ identity, Participant 25 is not able to split his intersectional identities in this case as they both amplify and redefine each other (Chikwendu, 2013; Parent, DeBlaere and Moradi, 2013).

Concording with the notion of structural intersectionality by Lee and Brotman (2013), being simultaneously non-Maltese and LGBTIQ+ leads Participant 25 to feel more unwelcome by his Maltese partner's parents compared to if he were non-Maltese only or LGBTIQ+ only as he gets subjected to double discrimination (Kim and Von Glinow, 2017). This participant's identities influence each other and make him more self-concious about his intersections. In fact, it is this self-conciousness that affects his perception of places, as it makes him very aware of where he can be safely 'out' and where he cannot. However, he feels very happy and comfortable being himself in the majority of places in Malta, so this self-conciousness manifests itself only in specific scenarios. The double discrimination and uncomfortableness faced by this participant is context-depending (Stevens and Thijs, 2018), as different environments will affect how self-concious he feels. This coincides with Manalansan's claim about reshaped opportunities and inequalities (Luibhéid, 2008) as this participant's expatriation to Malta brought with it a new opportunity in the form of personal freedom but it also altered the kind of inequality experienced in some settings, namely with his Maltese partner's family.

Chapter 6: Discussions and Conclusions

6.1 Research objectives and results

This dissertation set out to investigate the lived experiences of LGBTIQ+ expatriates in Malta and identify how these two intersectional identities affect each other. The aim was to pinpoint the extent of structural intersectionality as well as the presence of other issues that can be easily attributed to individual component identities. Real narratives have indeed been analysed in this study through a mixed-methods approach that helped in understanding experiences holistically. The way that these identities work individually and together has been presented in the Analysis chapter, which provides answers to the research questions that motivated this study. This concluding chapter recapitulates the major points that were put forward in the Analysis whilst giving suggestions for future research on this topic. Finally, the researcher provides some thoughts about the study and highlights its relevance in relation to the contribution to the existing knowledge.

6.2 Main findings and discussion

Whilst the majority of the LGBTIQ+ expatriate sample hailed from Western or Central Europe and the UK, the major reasons behind their expatriations were the search for work, education, and the climate and culture of the Maltese islands. The choice of the host country was not undertaken in the same way by all the expatriates. Some took the relocation decision very seriously and took everything into account before committing themselves to the place whilst others were more adventurous in their approach and preferred experiencing the host country and culture personally. The laws and reputation of the place were not necessarily considered by all the LGBTIQ+ expatriates since their expatriation was generally fuelled by the same motivations that heterosexual expatriates possess. Therefore, LGBTIQ+ expatriates may not necessarily expatriate to the most LGBTIQ+ accepting destination for its openness as there are also other factors that are considered.

Some minor reasons behind the relocation of LGBTIQ+ expatriates include Malta's progressive rights, retirement, and life changes. The expectations of Malta's safety for LGBTIQ+

individuals prior to expatriation were generally high, which remained very similar after experiencing the true host culture. Some expatriates reported having high expectations of Malta but then experiencing a bad reality upon relocation, possibly due to discrimination and intersectional prejudice.

Different attitudes in different parts of the country are also present in a small country like Malta, particularly when comparing Malta with Gozo. Moving between such regions represent shifts from areas of repression to areas of liberation where more opportunities and openness exist. Mentalities differ from one region to another, and similarly an individual's comfortableness and self-consciousness depend on the feelings transmitted in such places. The shifts from repression to liberation can also be seen between different countries whereby it is easier to talk about sexuality in some countries more than in others, although cities tend to be the most open spaces. This also affects the disclosure of personal information since different environments will affect the individual's willingness to come out or undergo depersonalization. Therefore, open environments make the disclosure of sexual orientation a voluntary choice based on how much an individual is willing to reveal about themselves, and creates a division between personal life and public life. Furthermore, identities may be invisible if they conform to the heterosexual norm, such as in the case of bisexual or pansexual individuals in opposite-sex relationships, whose identities might remain hidden unless disclosed.

Coming from other countries, the LGBTIQ+ expatriates in this study reported instances of culture shocks particularly concerning the insular culture of the Maltese islands. As a result of the small size of the country and its people being more closely-knit, the country has been described as concentrated and friend circles in Malta have been described as inaccessible during the first expatriation period. Other culture shocks concern the intersection between religion and sexuality as well as the lack of specific LGBTIQ+ oriented businesses and products in Malta, due to the de facto inclusive behaviour of local service providers. However, the LGBTIQ+ expatriates in this study showed that they have integrated successfully in Malta and the majority have surpassed the judgemental phase of expatriation. Most of them are able to explain their lived experiences in Malta in relation to the country's culture and lifestyle, primarily those who had expatriated various times before their relocation to Malta.

The process of successful expatriation might start on the basis of shared identities with similar people, however, not all the members of the LGBTIQ+ community share the same experiences or identities. Some LGBTIQ+ expatriates consider a common sexual orientation as good ground to build a bond with someone new, whilst others give equal importance to their sexual orientation and would not be willing to bond with a stranger over a common sexuality only. Individual preferences and the extent of identification with specific identities are highly subjective as they vary from one person to another. Some individuals may feel a strong urge to bond with others like them whilst other individuals may not necessarily want to engage with the broader LGBTIQ+ community.

The majority of the LGBTIQ+ expatriates in this study have many Maltese friends and feel safe around Maltese people. The minority that does not have many local friends and prefer the company of other non-Maltese individuals could be explained as a result of feelings of prejudice and discrimination. Even within the LGBTIQ+ community itself, the absolute majority of the survey sample feels safe around LGBTIQ+ Maltese individuals. However, in this case, nationality and language may be factors of similarity or 'otherness' between people in the same community, which may determine the extent of belonging between strangers. Integration depends on personal effort and characteristics, and in fact shyness has been mentioned as a barrier to the expansion of local friend circles along with the spoken language.

The status of the expatriates may also alter the way with which their integrations proceed. Single expatriates or those on work assignments may be perceived as temporary visitors and so they might not be allowed to develop deep friendships in the host country due to the possibility of leaving the country without constraints, which hinders their total belonging. Expatriates on work assignments may also encounter another issue if the work environment does not have much input from the host country itself. Such experiences create a boundary between the culture lived in the work environment and the true culture of the place, inhibiting the process of successful integration. However, such issues can be easily overcome by the individuals if they are willing to explore other channels of integrating into the host country and culture, and they might not be equally successful in the different spheres of integration either. Particularly for those LGBTIQ+ expatriates who relocated to Malta alone, the wish to avoid feeling lost and lonely in a new country motivated their willingness to find the local LGBTIQ+ community and spaces and engage with them. This major desire was not

as accentuated among LGBTIQ+ expatriates who relocated to Malta as a couple since both individuals could benefit from each other's friend circles and found it generally easier to make local friends.

LGBTIQ+ expatriates under the age of 35 mentioned how the internet and social media were important tools for them to integrate into the Maltese LGBTIQ+ sphere, and they were also used to build new friendships during the COVID-19 pandemic. Targeted Facebook groups, Instagram pages, and dating apps like Tinder were deemed essential to compensate for the lack of physical interaction that happened either as a direct result of the pandemic or as a voluntary choice for those who are shy or do not enjoy being so social offline. The absolute majority of the survey sample who used and/or still use dating apps in Malta reported not facing any discrimination based on their non-Maltese identities, although the number of those facing discrimination nowadays increased slightly in comparison.

Such targeted channels of socialisation proved to be both advantageous and disadvantageous. Whilst apps and events aimed specifically at the LGBTIQ+ community have helped some LGBTIQ+ expatriates find the community and slowly break into it, others found that Malta is too small a country to find a broad community like one would find in larger countries. Furthermore, with the limited number of queer people in Malta, the main issue that surfaced was how to break into this tight-knit community and make friends as an outsider with no connections to locals. This issue became more complicated over the last couple of years due to the pandemic, whereby many non-Maltese residents left Malta during COVID-19, resulting in the remaining non-Maltese residents feeling lonely in Malta and having to socialise more with locals rather than other non-Maltese individuals.

However, having no connections to locals acts as an advantage in some cases. The interviewed LGBTIQ+ expatriates felt that they possess more freedom in Malta when compared to the native LGBTIQ+ due to the lack of familial attachments. At times, Maltese LGBTIQ+ individuals may not feel entirely comfortable being themselves or engaging in non-conforming behaviour in local spaces as a result of the insular culture of the islands whereby they may meet people they know in various places, consequentially outing themselves to people they may not want to out themselves to. For this reason, non-Maltese individuals have a broader sense of freedom and their diversity is accepted more than that of locals, who might be pressured to

conform to local customs and family traditions. This difference in acceptance highlights the division between locals and non-locals.

When several non-locals live in the same community or are connected to one another, a subculture is formed. In Malta, the subcultures that have been mentioned by the interviewees were the general expatriate community and the LGBTIQ+ expatriate community. A strong LGBTIQ+ expatriate community has been mentioned, particularly in the area of the Three Cities, which provides community members with belonging and support despite its members hailing from different countries.

The quantitative part of this study showed that most of the sample does not attend LGBTIQ+ events often, but this is not due to feeling unwelcome. In fact, more than half the sample reported feeling welcome at such events, so the wish to attend targeted events or not in this case does not depend on the feelings transmitted by the LGBTIQ+ community. Furthermore, engagement in social media platforms might make some LGBTIQ+ expatriates opt for online socialisation rather than offline. Not attending LGBTIQ+ oriented events often does not necessarily signify a lack of interest in the community, but rather that socialisation is not the main priority for such individuals. Therefore, such individuals may still wish to be kept in the loop about the community's work and events. The minority that reported feeling unwelcome at targeted events comprised mostly of females and included individuals who had faced intersectional prejudice in Malta during their initial expatriation period.

Most of the LGBTIQ+ expatriates in this study are not members of any local LGBTIQ+ NGO, however, this does not mean that they do not engage with the organisations. Due to the local NGOs' exceptional online presence, interaction with them and knowledge about their work is very easily accessible through the internet. This means that interested individuals do not necessarily need to be formal members of the organisations. Only 5% of the survey sample has held executive positions within local LGBTIQ+ NGOs, and such positions have helped these individuals broaden their friend circles, integrate more into the Maltese queer scene, and give back to the Maltese community. The majority of those who have held executive positions in Malta were not active in LGBTIQ+ activism in their native countries, though they were openly queer.

Most of the survey sample did not face double discrimination being simultaneously non-Maltese and LGBTIQ+ in Malta, however, the most problematic identity for LGBTIQ+ expatriates tended to be the non-Maltese identity. The greatest issues have been reported to arise from older Maltese people who were revealed to be the most judgemental against people who are 'others', whereas younger Maltese people are more used to diverse individuals and do not give as much issues. Furthermore, in terms of identity, the queer identity may be perceived as less threatening to Maltese culture than the non-Maltese identity, whereby different cultures in Malta may be seen as erasing the local culture in the long run, unlike different sexualities. The Maltese population consists of queer individuals, and so they are not considered as different as non-Maltese individuals who may not have anything in common with the Maltese.

The majority of the survey sample revealed that they identify more with their LGBTIQ+ identity rather than with their race. From the interviewed participants whose majority was of Caucasian ethnicity, they did not report instances of blatant racism, however, the major obstacle concerned being taken advantage of due to their non-Maltese identity and lack of Maltese. Surprisingly, their lack of Maltese did not translate to a language barrier when trying to make friends but presented itself only in specific business scenarios with locals. Only one interviewee mentioned a language barrier, whereas another interviewee started learning Maltese to feel more integrated although at times the lack of opportunities to practice spoken Maltese proved counter-productive to their efforts.

When it comes to the LGBTIQ+ identity, whilst the majority of the survey sample are out as queer in all settings in Malta and did not personally experience issues with their identity, the majority of the interviewees felt that a non-conforming gender expression is the main quality that fuels harassment or discrimination. This notion affects males more than females, as it is less socially acceptable for males to be visibly different than it is for females. For this reason, some individuals may be self-conscious about their transitions from straight to gay spaces as different environments will affect how an individual behaves. Even within gay spaces and the LGBTIQ+ community itself, one might not feel entirely comfortable as internal prejudices such as biphobia and transphobia exist within the queer community. In the case of one interviewee, the biphobia she experienced in Malta was greater than the prejudice she experienced as a non-Maltese person.

Overall, the interviewees have expressed that they are mostly integrated in the local LGBTIQ+ community and in society at large, having no major problems due to their non-Maltese identity in the Maltese context. This means that the participants have no issues identifying as non-Maltese and LGBTIQ+ at the same time. They did not report feeling the need to identify with their race only or with their sexuality only in order to feel accepted in specific contexts, therefore, they do not experience the sense of in-between (Bowleg, 2013; Munro *et al.*, 2013) as the majority feel entirely welcome both in the local LGBTIQ+ community as well as with other expatriates. Matching with McPhail and McNulty (2015) and Formby (2017), the 'comfort factor' and the sense of relational belonging are very important to be able to ground oneself and belong to a place. As described by the participants, these feelings were essential for them to feel more integrated in the local LGBTIQ+ scene as well as in Malta in general.

Coinciding with the point by Doan and Higgins (2011) regarding the accessibility of LGBTIQ+ organisations, individuals in Malta do not necessarily have to be members of such organisations to be informed about LGBTIQ+ events and attend them. Due to the strong social media presence of LGBTIQ+ organisations, individuals might feel the sense of belonging through online groups and interactions besides physical events. This means that LGBTIQ+ individuals do not need to attend targeted events either to stay updated about the community, as everyone is reached through the internet.

One major issue hindering integration in Malta is the insular culture. Gozo is a smaller and more isolated island than Malta, meaning that Gozo has an even more insular culture as groups there are even more closely-knit and difficult to access as an outsider. The literature can be compared to this study whereby expatriates in the Gozitan study (LGBTI+ Gozo and Jakob, 2022) contrast with individuals like Participant 4 who suffered from loneliness before the COVID-19 pandemic but did not report suffering from it during the pandemic. This came as a result of him being already established and integrated in the Maltese LGBTIQ+ sphere by the time the pandemic started, suggesting that the LGBTIQ+ expatriates in Gozo were not as integrated before the start of the pandemic, which led them to suffer more. Furthermore, such a comparison highlights the point by Doan and Higgins (2011) regarding the accessibility of LGBTIQ+ organisations, as Participant 4's engagement in a local LGBTIQ+ NGO helped him avoid the negative mental health impacts of the pandemic due to a constant sense of community, whereas the fragmented nature of the LGBTIQ+ community in Gozo impacted

queer expatriates negatively due to a lack of belonging and a weak presence of the LGBTIQ+ organisation.

The interviews expose that when expatriates show great initiative, Maltese people are willing to include them in their conversations. The fact that the language barrier when trying to make local friends was not mentioned by any other interviewee except for Participant 46 shows that the biggest challenge in such scenarios is still the structure of local friend circles due to the insular culture rather than the language that is spoken within them. Consequentially, the majority of the interviewed participants did not report the Maltese language being an issue when trying to belong with locals.

The results show that LGBTIQ+ expatriates in Malta do integrate successfully, and the greatest issues they face concern their non-Maltese identity rather than their queer identity. Although the surveys present the self-assessed feelings of 57 LGBTIQ+ expatriates in Malta and the interviews offer the in-depth experiences of 9 of them, these answers should still not be generalised as personal realities are unique. The results of this study are aimed to give insight on the lived experiences of individuals possessing intersectional identities within the minority communities in question.

6.3   Recommendations

Since this study was conducted during the end of the COVID-19 pandemic, the experiences gathered through this study have also reflected some integration processes related to virtual belonging to make up for the lack of physical socialisation of the pandemic period. It is recommended that such a study is replicated after the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic disappear, so as to be able to compare it better to everyday life outside the pandemic conditions as well as to ensure that the minimum requirement of years, in this case 2 years residing in Malta, truly reflects 2 years of socialisation and integration into the host country and its communities.

For more accurate demographic data on the LGBTIQ+ expatriate community in Malta, if this study had to be replicated, it is proposed that the nationality question in the questionnaire includes more options for non-Europeans in order to differentiate between the diverse

regions of large continents. A suggestion includes, for example, splitting the broad Asia category into smaller regions like Middle East, Central Asia, East Asia, and South East Asia for better ethnic representation. Furthermore, to analyse the effects of race among LGBTIQ+ expatriates better particularly in the survey part of the research, a specific question on racial identity is recommended. This gives deeper insight into the effects of non-Maltese identities as specific survey answers concerning feelings could be linked and attributed to particular races, which could highlight any possible patterns between members of the same race.

Although highly dependent on participant will, it is suggested that future interviews with LGBTIQ+ expatriates in Malta include representation of transgender experiences and more accounts of racially diverse individuals. This allows the study to delve deeper into gender variants and the non-Maltese identity by having first-hand accounts of how gender and race impact the expatriation experience.

For more accurate data on the engagement of LGBTIQ+ expatriates within LGBTIQ+ NGOs through activism, it is recommended that the survey includes a question on whether the respondents were active in LGBTIQ+ activism in their home countries prior to expatriation. This could provide a broader perspective to be able to compare the amount of LGBTIQ+ expatriates who stopped their engagement in LGBTIQ+ activism upon relocating to Malta due to being in a foreign country with those who were not active before relocation but became activists after expatriation.

To understand better the relationships between LGBTIQ+ expatriates and their respective diasporas, specific survey and interview questions are recommended to explore the feelings, association, and belonging of these expatriates within their diasporic communities as part of the LGBTIQ+ community. Such questions would also serve to give more insight into self-categorization and any possible depersonalization processes in the host country.

To be able to expand further on the point concerning different areas of a country having different acceptance levels, it is suggested that if the quantitative survey had to be replicated, the LGBTIQ+ expatriates are asked to write the locality in which they reside in Malta. Such a question, when combined with other survey questions concerning the feelings of belonging and integration of the expatriates, is able to provide insight on which areas of Malta have the most successful LGBTIQ+ expatriates. Although successful expatriation depends on the

individual in question, this question can give a general idea as the average feelings of different regions of Malta can be compared to one another.

During the interview phase, it would have been beneficial if there were interviewees from all the continents to compare the expectations of Malta as a destination between different parts of the world. It is recommended that if such a study is replicated, there would be a bigger diversity of continents as this also contributes to identifying further culture shocks.

A final recommendation concerns points which were not explored in this dissertation. It would have been insightful if the interviews included LGBTIQ+ expatriates who relocated with their child/children. Although one such person answered the questionnaire, they did not volunteer for the interview, which could have provided information on the willingness to come out as an LGBTIQ+ family as well as any issues with childcare providers or educational institutions.

6.4 Final remark and contribution to knowledge

This phenomenological research has been a very exciting study since the beginning. All the phases of this dissertation were interesting and they have allowed me to adopt new research methods and grow as a researcher. Personally, this has been a great opportunity that enabled me to learn so much, build on my previous dissertation about current LGBTIQ+ activism in Malta, and enjoy all of the processes that constructing a Masters dissertation requires.

This study will prove beneficial in filling the academic void on intersectional LGBTIQ+ expatriate identities in the Maltese context. Such an investigation gives insight into how minority identities work together, exposing the reader to realities which are present in our community but often go unexplored. Besides giving a voice to this sub-community, this research can be used to identify the key points and prevalent issues in the lives of LGBTIQ+ expatriates in an attempt to understand and integrate them better, as well as to give them opportunities to contribute to and enrich the Maltese context. Such an investigation allows the reader to understand diverse groups whilst keeping in mind that diversity exists within such groups as well.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Survey Questions

QUESTIONNAIRE CONSENT – POSSIBLE COLLECTION OF PERSONAL DATA

My name is Elisabeth Grima and I am currently reading for a Master of Arts in Sociology at the **University of Malta**.

I am currently conducting research that aims to discover the experience and assimilation process of foreign LGBTIQ+ people in the Maltese context as well as their acceptance in the local LGBTIQ+ community. To achieve this, I am inviting LGBTIQ+ expatriates who have been living in Malta for at least 2 years or more to take this survey as part of this study. This will take you approximately 5 minutes to complete. Any data collected from this survey will be used solely for purposes of this study. There are no direct benefits or anticipated risks in taking part. Participation is entirely voluntary, i.e., you are free to accept or refuse to participate.

Your name (or any other personal information that could lead to you being identified) will not appear in the dissertation or in any other publications resulting from this study. This survey is being conducted through Google Forms as it does not collect IP addresses, ensuring full anonymity of participants. Completed questionnaires will be encrypted and stored on a password-protected computer as well as my password protected encrypted drive Boxcryptor. Only my supervisor and myself (and in exceptional cases, examiners) will have access to this data. Please note that, as a participant, you have the right under the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and national legislation to access, rectify and where applicable ask for the data concerning you to be erased. All data collected will be stored in an anonymised form on completion of the study and kept for a further 2 years from completion of the study.

If you wish to participate in this study, please click the button that says "I agree to participate". If not, please close the browser window (or click "I do not wish to participate").

Should you have any questions or concerns, you may contact myself or my supervisor on the details provided below.

Yours Sincerely,

Elisabeth Grima   Dr. Valerie Visanich

elisabeth.grima.15@um.edu.mt   valerie.visanich@um.edu.mt

                                                    2340 2238

                                                    Research Supervisor

DECLARATION BY RESPONDENT: I hereby confirm that I am 18 years of age or older. I am aware that completing and submitting this questionnaire implies that I am participating voluntarily and with full informed consent on the conditions listed above.

- I agree to participate – begin survey
- I do not wish to participate – exit the survey

Age: □ 18-24   □ 25-34   □ 35-44   □ 45-54   □ 55-64   □ 65+

Gender: _____   Sexual Orientation: _____

Nationality: □ UK

            □ Western or Central Europe

            □ Eastern Europe

            □ Asia

            □ Africa

            □ Australia

            □ North America

            □ South America

How many years have you lived in Malta?   □ 2-4   □ 4-6   □ 6-8   □ 8-10   □ 10+

What made you move to Malta?   □ Work: My company sent me here

                          □ Work: I moved here voluntarily

                          □ I moved because of the climate and culture

                          □ I moved because of Malta's LGBTIQ+ rights

                          □ Other (you may specify): _____

Did you move to Malta: □ Alone   □ With partner   □ With child/children

Are you out as LGBTIQ+ in Malta: □ In all settings (everywhere with friends, at work…)

                          □ In some settings

                          □ Not out to anyone

Based on your experience when you underline first moved to Malta, do you agree with these statements: (1 highly disagree, 5 highly agree)

I expected Malta to be very safe before moving (as an LGBTIQ+ person)   □ 1   □ 2   □ 3   □ 4   □ 5

I found Malta very safe after moving (as an LGBTIQ+ person)   □ 1   □ 2   □ 3   □ 4   □ 5

I faced prejudice being foreign and LGBTIQ+ in Malta   □ 1   □ 2   □ 3   □ 4   □ 5

I faced discrimination on LGBTIQ+ dating apps in Malta because I'm foreign □ 1   □ 2   □ 3   □ 4   □ 5

Based on your experience living in Malta <u>nowadays</u>, do you agree with these statements: (1 highly disagree, 5 highly agree)

I feel proud being LGBTIQ+ in Malta   □ 1   □ 2   □ 3   □ 4   □ 5

I face prejudice being foreign and LGBTIQ+ in Malta   □ 1   □ 2   □ 3   □ 4   □ 5

I identify more with my race than with being LGBTIQ+   □ 1   □ 2   □ 3   □ 4   □ 5

I have many Maltese friends   □ 1   □ 2   □ 3   □ 4   □ 5

I feel safer with other foreigners than with the Maltese   □ 1   □ 2   □ 3   □ 4   □ 5

I feel safer with other LGBTIQ+ foreigners than the LGBTIQ+ Maltese   □ 1   □ 2   □ 3   □ 4   □ 5

I face discrimination on LGBTIQ+ dating apps in Malta because I'm foreign   □ 1   □ 2   □ 3   □ 4   □ 5

I attend LGBTIQ+ organised events often   □ 1   □ 2   □ 3   □ 4   □ 5

I feel welcome at LGBTIQ+ organised events   □ 1   □ 2   □ 3   □ 4   □ 5

Have you ever been a member of a local LGBTIQ+ organisation?   □ Yes   □ No

Have you ever had executive positions within local LGBTIQ+ organisations?   □ Yes   □ No

If yes, how was your experience as a foreigner?   Very bad □ 1   □ 2   □ 3   □ 4   □ 5   Very good

To understand the integration process better, I will also be needing participants for in-depth one-on-one Zoom interviews. If you wish to be anonymously interviewed about your experience, please write your email below and I will contact you with more information and a formal invitation. If you do not wish to be interviewed, thank you for taking this survey and you can proceed to submitting your responses.

Email (optional): _____

Appendix 2: Interview consent form

Date

<u>Information about the study</u>

My name is Elisabeth Grima and I am a full-time student at the University of Malta, reading for a Master of Arts in Sociology. I am presently conducting research as part of my dissertation titled 'Diversity within Diversity: The experience of LGBTIQ+ foreigners residing in Malta'; this is being supervised by Dr. Valerie Visanich (valerie.visanich@um.edu.mt Tel: 2340 2238). The aim of my study is to discover the experience and assimilation process of foreign LGBTIQ+ people in the Maltese context as well as their acceptance in the local LGBTIQ+ community. To achieve this, I need to conduct interviews with 8-10 LGBTIQ+ expatriates who have been living in Malta for at least 2 years or more.

Your Participation

Any data collected from this research will be used solely for purposes of this study.

Should you choose to participate, you will be asked to attend an in-depth one-on-one online interview where you will be asked about your personal experience as an LGBTIQ+ foreigner living in Malta. The interview will be carried out through Zoom, audio recorded only, and accessible only by me.

Data collected will be gathered through use of a one time one-on-one interview, which may vary in duration between 30 minutes and 60 minutes depending on the circumstances.

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary; in other words, you are free to accept or refuse to participate, without needing to give a reason.

You are also free to withdraw from the study at any time, without needing to provide any explanation and without any negative repercussions for you. Should you choose to withdraw, any data collected from your interview will be erased, therefore not to be used in the study. You are fully aware that you can stop your participation at any part of the interview.

If you choose to participate, please note that there are no direct benefits to you.

Your participation involves the anticipated risk of answering questions which may cause distress. Should there be any feelings of distress, support can be obtained by getting in touch with Malta LGBTIQ+ Rights Movement MGRM (Telephone: +356 2143 0009, Mobile: +356 9925 5559, or Email: mgrm@maltagayrights.org).

All data collected from your interview will be stored pseudonymously using codes and you will never be referred to by your name in the records or publication of this study.

Data Management

The data collected will be treated confidentially and will only be handled personally by me for research purposes. Under exceptional circumstances, the supervisor and examiners may require access to the data (for verification purposes), in which case the data will also be treated confidentially. All data collected about the participants will be pseudonymised, meaning that the transcripts will be assigned codes and will be stored securely and separately from any codes and personal data.

The personal and research data gathered will be obtained online through end-to-end encrypted Zoom calls and securely stored on my password protected laptop as well as my password protected encrypted drive Boxcryptor, allowing nobody else to gain access. Digital identifiable data (including recordings) will be stored on Boxcryptor for extra security, as password protection and cloud storage may not provide adequate security for personal data.

Please note also that, as a participant, you have the right under the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and national legislation to access, rectify and where applicable ask for the data concerning you to be erased.

All identifiable data collected will be erased from my laptop upon completion of the study but it will be kept for a further 2 years on my encrypted Boxcryptor. After 2 years from the completion of the study, all identifiable data will also be erased from Boxcryptor. Other anonymised data may be kept indefinitely for archival purposes.

Your identity will never be revealed/attributed.

Participant's consent

- ☐ I hereby declare to have read the information about the nature of the study, my involvement and data management.
- ☐ I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study and my questions have been satisfactorily answered.
- ☐ I declare that I am 18 years or older.
- ☐ I understand that should I have any further queries, I can contact Elisabeth Grima (elisabeth.grima.15@um.edu.mt) or on mobile 9927 5979
- ☐ I agree to participate in this research study.

_____   _____

Participant's name (in block)   Researcher's name (in block)

_____   _____

Participant' signature   Researcher's signature

_____

Date

Appendix 3: Interview questions

- Did you move to Malta alone, with your partner, and/or with your children?

- How was your integration process in Malta after moving?

- Did the fact that you are an LGBTIQ+ person affect your experience?

- Do you feel proud to be LGBTIQ+ in Malta?

- How did you integrate in the local LGBTIQ+ community?

- Do you currently face any difficulties because of your identity in Malta; as a foreigner and as LGBTIQ+?