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## THE NETHERLANDS IN MAPS

# SPATIAL PATTERNS RELATING TO THE LGTB COMMUNITY IN THE NETHERLANDS

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### INTRODUCTION

Sexuality is related to different lifestyles and sub-cultures, and as such it is an interesting item for this year's series of *The Netherlands in Maps* which aims to picture spatial aspects of 'multicultural society' in the Netherlands. The interaction between sexuality, space and place has been a subject of geographer's interest since the 1970s, especially among cultural geographers, but attained wider attention in the 1990s. A large body of research has developed since then, which was originally focused on the geographies of lesbians and gay men, but later also encompassed studies of the heterosexuality of everyday space, the geography of HIV/AIDS, so-called 'queer geographies', geographies of heterosexuality, and feminist inspired critiques of the masculinity and heteronormativity of geography as a discipline (Valentine 2000). Gradually, the acronym LGTB (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender) was introduced to cover the whole terrain of non-heterosexual identities. Part of the geographically inspired research on LGTB issues concerns the subjects of homophobia and heterosexism (Brown 2000). This also covers a wide array of approaches and subjects, ranging from the mapping of homophobia-inspired incidents or no-go areas for homosexuals to the use of pseudonyms by LGTB authors or gender-inspired controversies within university geography departments and faculties. A famous example of the latter is the decision to close Harvard University's geography department in 1948, which was claimed to be influenced by heterosexism and homophobia (Smith 1987; Brown 2000; Baskerville 2015).

### LGTB CULTURE IN THE NETHERLANDS: GAY AND LESBIAN BARS AND CAFÉS

There is no abundant formal statistical information about the LGTB community in the Netherlands, because there is no formal registration of sexual identities. Data enabling the exposure of spatial patterns are even scarcer. Occasionally figures about same-sex marriages (and domestic partnerships for couples) are published by Statistics Netherlands, but such figures are never detailed to the regional or local level. To show, in spite of that, an impression of the spatially related aspects of the LGTB community in the Netherlands, we chose to depict two issues that more or less represent two sides of LGTB life in the Netherlands, that is, the relative abundance of gay and lesbian establishments in the world of entertainment, especially bars and cafés on one hand, and the reluctance in certain social, religious and political circles to accept the general assimilation of non-heterosexual identities as for instance in formal marriages, on the other. Both issues show specific and totally different spatial patterns. The spread of gay and lesbian bars and cafés is visualised as a dot map, based on recordings on two different web inventories (<https://gaybars.eu/ned/nl/index.php> and <http://www.zijaanzij.nl/uitgaan/land/Nederland>). The map is heavily dominated by a big concentration in Amsterdam, hosting no less than 40 per cent of the total population of bars and cafés in this recording. This was to be expected, as the city has a world reputation for gay nightlife, and for its liberal climate of gay rights, exemplified by the famous yearly 'gay

THE NETHERLANDS IN MAPS  
Multicultural Society (Part 3)

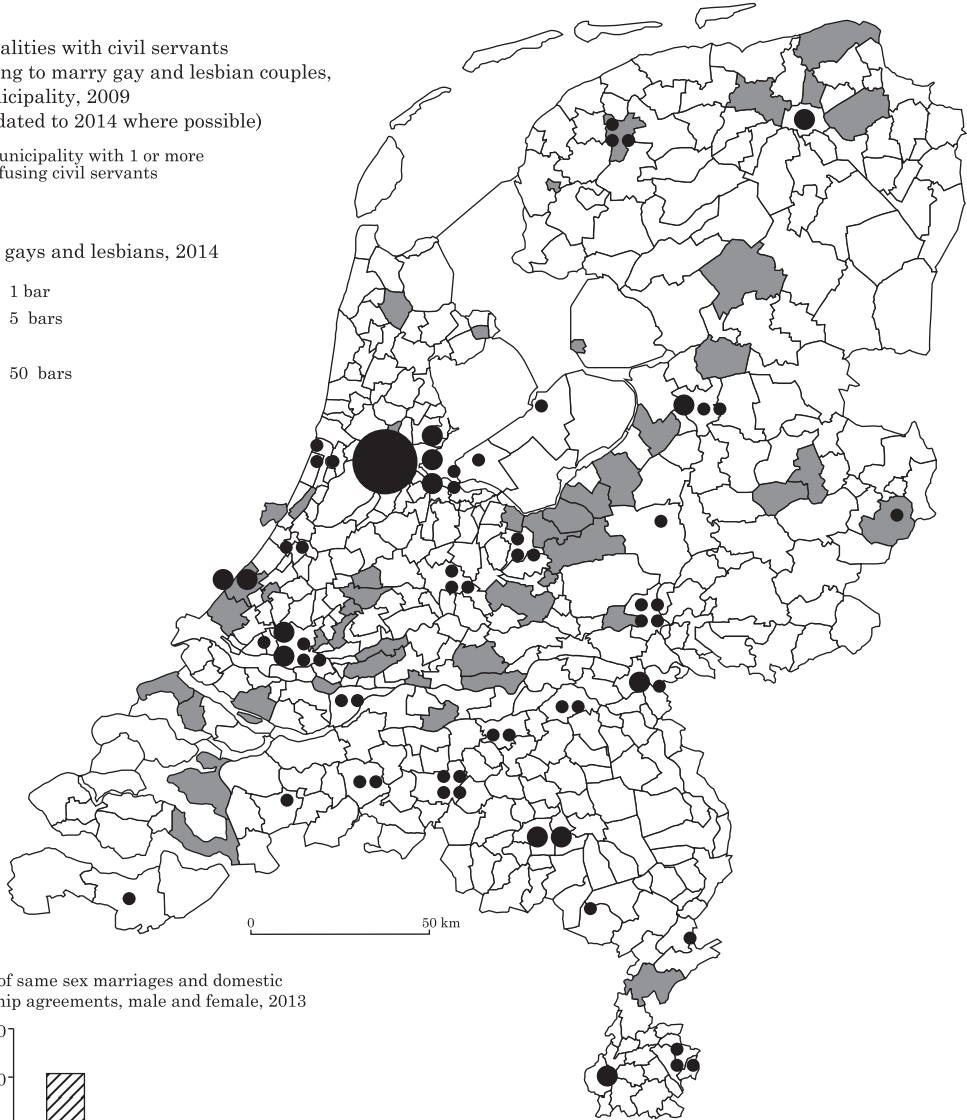
**LGTB IN THE NETHERLANDS:  
GAY AND LESBIAN BARS,  
AND REFUSING MARRIAGE SERVANTS**

Municipalities with civil servants not willing to marry gay and lesbian couples, per municipality, 2009 (and updated to 2014 where possible)

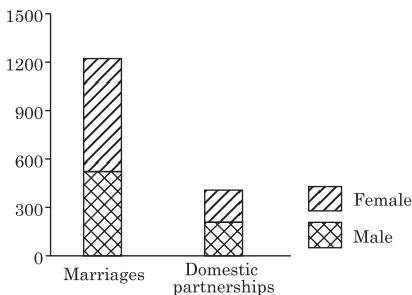
■ Municipality with 1 or more refusing civil servants

Bars for gays and lesbians, 2014

● 1 bar  
● 5 bars  
● 50 bars



Number of same sex marriages and domestic partnership agreements, male and female, 2013



Source: [www.gaybars.eu/ned](http://www.gaybars.eu/ned), [www.zijaanzij.nl](http://www.zijaanzij.nl)  
[www.coc.nl](http://www.coc.nl)

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pride' on a boat parade along the inner city canals. Many of the other cities in the Netherlands with 100,000 or more inhabitants follow behind Amsterdam on the list of cities with at least two or more gay and lesbian bars or cafes, but only a few (Rotterdam, The Hague, Eindhoven) have ten or more. Zwolle and Maastricht, ranking only 20th and 21st in terms of population, surprise with a top ten ranking on the gay nightlife dot map. Apart from the Amsterdam cluster, the dotmap pattern leaves a general impression of a rather even spatial distribution, following more or less the spread of the population as a whole. Provinces with small populations (Flevoland, Zeeland, Drenthe, Friesland) lack gay bars or have only a few. A national 'heatmap' of violence against homosexuals (Segerink 2013) closely follows the same pattern, with a big concentration in Amsterdam, and smaller ones in Rotterdam, the Hague, Utrecht, Nijmegen and Eindhoven. Apparently, more gay bars and cafés do not forebode more tolerant attitudes. The more peripheral cities Groningen, Zwolle and Maastricht do not figure significantly on the heatmap.

### REFUSING CIVIL SERVANTS

Same-sex marriages were made possible by law in the Netherlands in 2001, when this was the first country to end the exclusion of same-sex couples from formal marriage. Seventeen more countries have now followed this example (Sarkar and Torre 2015). The absolute number of formal same sex marriages is relatively small. The annual number for 2013 was 1,222 marriages and 407 partnership registrations on a total of 74,000 marriages and partnerships, which is a little more than 2 per cent. The inset diagram in the map tells us that females outnumber males in same sex marriages; in same sex domestic partnerships these shares are more equal (CBS 2015).

One particular phenomenon that attracts attention in the case of same-sex marriages in the Netherlands is the occurrence of so-called 'refusing civil servants' (*weigerambtenaren*). This term refers to a sub-group of those municipal officials who have officially been designated and sworn in to solemnise marriages. After the legalisation of same-sex marriage in 2001, some of these officials refused to perform the marriage service to such couples, on the strength of their

religious convictions. Since then, there has been occasional political turmoil about the question of whether such unwillingness is tolerable under the new marriage law or not. The map shows those municipalities where one or more 'refusing civil servants' still function, as shaded areas (figures from 2009 were updated to actual data where possible). Most of these municipalities are located in the band stretching from Southwest to Northeast that we know as the 'Bible Belt', a zone with a strong representation of orthodox protestants, which was also clearly visible on the previous edition of the *Netherlands in Maps*, on religious diversity (Pellenbarg & van Steen 2015). In point of fact, in all of these municipalities other registrars will always be available to enable same-sex marriages.

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