

# ASSESSING THE LEVEL OF POPULARITY OF EUROPEAN STAG TOURISM DESTINATIONS

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**ABSTRACT:** The primary objective of this article is to determine the degree of popularity of stag tourism destinations in Europe. Research was based on the search engine method, involving an analysis of the highest positioned offers of travel agencies in the most commonly used search engines in Europe (Google, Bing, Yahoo). The analysis divided the studied cities into four categories in terms of popularity. Conducting the said analysis is strongly justified, because academic publications have so far not provided studies which have determined the degree of popularity of stag destinations on a continental scale.

**KEYWORDS:** stag tourism, stag destinations, stag regions, search engine, city break

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## Introduction

The development of urban tourism (including stag party tourism) in Europe accompanied the deregulation of the aviation market in the mid-1990s, resulting in the development of low cost airlines (Dunne et al. 2010, Graham, Shaw 2008, Thurnell-Read 2011). Due to low ticket prices and a developed network of connections offered by particular airlines, travelling to many cities of the continent has become available to the majority of potential tourists. As a consequence, a new type of tourism developed called city breaks (Grigolon et al. 2012, Hughes, Allen 2009). It can be described as short, usually weekend-long travel to one particular city with no overnight stay in another city (Trew, Cockerell 2002). City breaks can be undertaken for shopping dates, clubbing, or stag weekends (Dunne et al. 2010).

The objective of a stag weekend is a pre-wedding male party. In Europe it is known as a stag party, in Australia as buck's night, and in North America as bachelor party. They are usually organised within several days to several weeks before the wedding. They increasingly involve travel abroad (Thurnell-Read 2012). Such a form of travel in the European continent is particularly popular among the British who are the dominant group among European stag party tourists (Boazman 2010).

Considerable changes occurred in the European stag tourism market and city break tourism overall after 2004. They were caused by the expansion of the European Union by new Central and East European countries. Low prices of flights and affordability of services (among others accommodation, prices of alcohol and food), combined with the "exotic" character of former Soviet countries for an average tourist

from West Europe, contributed to the great popularity of certain centres in the region among stag tourists (Thurnell-Read 2012).

The primary objective of the article is a detailed determination of the degree of popularity of particular stag tourism centres in Europe based on the search engine method, involving the analysis of the highest positioned offers of travel agencies. The analysis concerns popularity among European tourists, with the British as the dominant nation in stag tourism in Europe in terms of numbers. This is reflected in the content of the analysed offers.

Conducting the said analysis is strongly justified, because academic publications have not so far determined the degree of popularity of stag destinations on a continental scale. Filling this gap can contribute to research on stag tourism, particularly from a geographical perspective. Moreover, it will be a pioneer attempt to apply the search engine method for the purpose of calculating the degree of popularity of stag tourism centres.

In parallel to the primary objective, the correlation between the popularity of particular destinations and their transport accessibility was also analysed (flight connections determining the development of city break tourism), as well as the degree of development of nightlife infrastructure. The authors hypothesised that easy transport accessibility and a multitude of nightlife facilities, i.e. seemingly two primary factors determining the attractiveness of a given stag centre, do not necessarily lead to a greater number of stag tourists in a given city.

An additional objective of the article was to demonstrate the division of Europe into particular stag tourism regions. The division was based on the detailed analysis of components of offers of the analysed travel agencies. This constitutes the first scientific attempt to identify the regionalisation of the stag tourism market.

## Literature review

### Stag tourism

In terms of travel objectives, stag party tourism belongs to a more extensive area of party tourism, whereas particular types of activity

among stag tourists are classified under clubbing tourism (visits to night clubs and discos), alcohol tourism (pub crawl, vodka party), and sex tourism (visits to strip clubs, using services of prostitutes).

The development of this type of tourism contributed to an increased interest among scientists, particularly in terms of research on the related negative aspects. Some authors describe stag party tourism in the context of alcohol abuse (Andrews 2005, Bell 2008), whereas Rohrer (2006) calls participants of such travel "drunken invaders" (p. 1). Other authors analyse this type of tourism in relation to its associations with sex tourism (Boazman 2010, Hubbard, Mhowell 2008), or describe the behaviour of stag party tourists sociologically (Elbridge, Roberts 2008, Kinnaird, Hall 1994, Thurnell-Read 2011).

Inappropriate behaviour of some stag party groups during trips abroad was so disturbing that the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office (as cited in Thurnell-Read 2012) published a report on the contribution of such travel to the bad reputation of British tourists among the inhabitants of foreign destination places. An English newspaper called *The Daily Mail* also provided news and articles on the negative aspects of this type of travel. An example can be the idea of the mayor of Riga to establish a special Police department to deal with drunken groups of British stag party tourists (Low 2009). The primary reason for proposing such an idea was inappropriate behaviour of some British tourists in the city centre, including urinating on the Freedom Monument, or climbing it naked to take photographs. The situation was so tense that in one of his interviews, the contemporary Latvian Minister of Home Affairs described participants of stag party weekends as "dirty pigs" (Low 2009: 1).

Such controversial statements by prominent politicians suggest that mass stag tourism is a serious problem for local communities. It seems that the initial enthusiasm related to an increase in tourist traffic and therefore an increase in income from tourism is replaced with a more selective approach to tourism product development. Many popular stag tourism centres do not want to be associated with drinking, peace disturbance, or indecent behaviour of tourists any more (Graham, Shaw 2008, Smith, Puczko 2010, Thurnell-Read 2012).

## Popularity of stag tourism destinations

It is estimated that more than 2 million European tourists annually travel abroad for the purpose of participating in stag parties (Boazman 2010). In spite of such high tourist traffic, academic analyses of particular destinations are currently scarce. Certain publications provide information concerning the most popular stag tourism centres, but they only mention destinations such as: Budapest (Smith, Puczko 2010), Tallin (McLaughlin 2006), Bratislava, Cracow (Thurnell-Read 2012), Amsterdam, Berlin, and Prague (Bowes 2004), or refer to entire countries or regions associated with this type of tourism, among others Central and Eastern Europe (Dunne et al. 2010), or particular countries of the regions, such as the Czech Republic, Poland, Hungary, and Latvia (Thurnell-Read 2012). Many clubbing destinations are also popular among stag tourists, e.g. Polish cities are examples of such centres (Iwanicki, Dłużewska 2014, 2015).

In recent literature one paper aimed to determine the popularity of stag tourism destinations (Iwanicki 2014). In that work the author attempted to determine the popularity of stag tourism centres in Poland, based on the offers of particular travel agencies. However, the choice of travel agencies was made subjectively and therefore this analysis is not suitable for universal use.

Various rankings of stag tourism centres are available on the internet, usually under the headings *top 5 stag destinations*, or *top 10 stag destinations*. Due to the lack of specified methodology of preparing the rankings, which are probably a form of advertising, it is worth emphasising that their scientific value is highly questionable. One such ranking is provided by the website *Confetti* (dedicated to any matters related to wedding planning). According to the website, the most popular stag tourist centres in the world include: Las Vegas, Bangkok, New York, Amsterdam, and London (Thompson 2014). The first two places on the list served as locations for the most popular films on stag tourism in the history of the cinema – *The Hangover* and *The Hangover Part II* directed by Todd Phillips. Both of the films screened in 2009 and 2011 respectively, generated a total income of more than one billion dollars (<http://www.imdb.com>). Another ranking is a summary prepared by website *ThePlunge*. According to the

website, the most popular bachelor destinations in North America include Montreal, Las Vegas, Miami, New Orleans, Whistler, Cancun, and New York (The Plunge 2013). As for rankings concerning European stag tourism centres *The Wedding Community* mentions five cities enjoying the highest popularity: Riga, Benidorm, Amsterdam, Prague, and Berlin (Walker 2013). Newspaper *The Independent* presents a ranking in which the first 12 places are taken by: Amsterdam, Dublin, Cork, Barcelona, Brussels, Riga, Tallin, Bratislava, Prague, Wrocław, Cracow, and Budapest (Taylor 2008). Another ranking, prepared by website *SimplytheBestMan*, includes the following cities: Dublin, Tallin, Barcelona, Amsterdam, Riga, Algarve, Ibiza, Bratislava, Prague, and Malaga (StBM 2014).

Due to the current lack of scientific studies determining the degree of popularity of particular stag destinations, the authors of this article decided to fill the gap by means of the search engine method. It allows a detailed analysis of the popularity of a given destination among tourists based on the review of offers of the most frequently selected travel agencies providing stag tourism services.

## Issue of search engines

Increasingly more people have been using the Internet for travel planning in recent years. The contribution among Americans amounts to 86% of the entire population (Fesenmaier et al. 2011). Due to the considerable role of the internet in the life of the majority of tourists, search engines have become an important element of tourist marketing. Website positioning in internet results has become the key factor in competition for potential customers (not only in the tourist market). As a result, current literature provides many publications referring to research on the multi-aspect role of search engines. The publications include work on IT describing website positioning algorithms (Brin, Page 1998, Gandal 2001, Joachims 2002, Ghose et al. 2012), articles concerning the effect of cultural and demographic differences among internet users on their behaviour related to the use of search engines (Jansen et al. 2007, 2008, Jansen, Pooch 2001, Jansen, Spink 2005, 2006, 2009), publications on marketing analysing the issue of sponsored positioning (Agarwal et

al. 2011, Feng et al. 2007, Ghose et al. 2014), and work on tourism analysing the relationship between search results and competitiveness of travel agencies and particular destinations (Xiang, Fesenmaier 2005, 2006, Hwang et al. 2006, Xiang et al. 2008, Pan et al. 2011).

In spite of rich literature resources referring to the role of search engines, the possibilities of use of search results for the purpose of determining the degree of popularity of particular destinations among tourists has not been analysed so far in academic research. The authors of the article decided to apply this method based on the example of European stag tourism centres.

## Material and methods

### Search engine method

In order to determine the degree of popularity of particular stag tourism centres, the chosen method was based on the frequency of occurrence of particular destinations in offers of selected tour operators organising stag party trips. The most popular tour operators (the most frequently viewed and recommended by tourists), i.e. those with the most representative offer of destinations in terms of presentation of current trends in stag tourism, were selected based on results obtained by means of the most commonly used search engines in Europe (Google, Bing, Yahoo) (Rosoff 2014). The study involved entering the following phrases into each of the specified search engines: stag weekend, stag party, stag do, stag abroad. A vast majority of the stag tourism market are British, thus the stakeholders involved in this type of tourism are mostly focused on their exigencies. The second most common group are Scandinavians, many of whom (especially those aged 20–25) speak fluent English. With this in mind, the authors decided to use English terminology only when searching for products. A final argument was based on the cultural dimensions of typical stag tourism activities. Stag tourist behavior (using striptease dancers, abusing alcohol) right before marriage, is often not common practice in some other countries. Algorithms applied by internet search engines position search results. The top places were usually occupied by websites of tour operators visited by internet

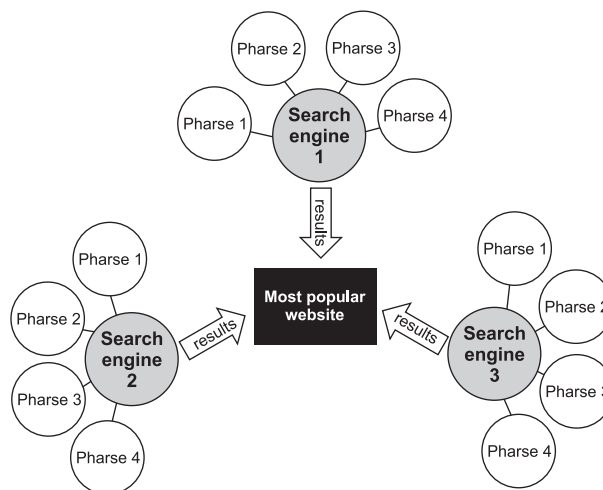


Fig. 1. Scheme of the search engine method applied in the article.

Note: Phrases: (1) stag weekend, (2) stag party, (3) stag do, (4) stag abroad; Search engines: (1) Google Search, (2) Bing, (3) Yahoo Search.

users including a stag tourism offer. The analysis only concerned travel agencies whose websites appeared on the first two pages of results at least in one of the search engines, and after entering at least one of the phrases specified above (see Fig. 1). Moreover, for the purpose of performing the analysis for the entire continent, the analysis only considered tour operators having an offer concerning centres located in at least three different countries. This measure led to the exclusion of those operators who provided an offer in only one city or destinations located in a single region.

The study was conducted at the beginning of the summer season 2014. It refers to the popularity of particular destinations in the summer holiday season. The applied research method, however, is of universal character, and an analogical study can be conducted by means of the method in any tourist season, also in relation to other branches of tourism.

Offers of the following 20 tour operators qualified for the analysis as a result of the adopted methodology: Chillisauc, Designa Venture, Eclipse Leisure, Escape Trips, Freedom Ltd, Go Bananas, Go Stag.com, Last Minute.com, Last Night of Freedom, Maximise, Pissup, Red 7, Simply Stags, The Stag and Hen Experience, Stag.com, Stag&Hens, Stag for You, Stagmania, Stag Web, and The Stag Company.

The selected tour operators provided a total of 885 offers concerning stag nights in 54 British centres and 75 cities in the remaining part of

Europe. The study determined the frequency of occurrence of a given destination in all of the analysed offers, which according to our hypothesis directly corresponds to the degree of popularity of particular centres among tourists.

A four-grade scale of popularity was applied, dividing all of the analysed destinations into four categories. The first one (very high popularity) includes centres which appeared in the offer of at least 75% of the studied tour operators (15–20 offers). The second category (high popularity) includes cities in the range 50–74% (10–14 offers). The third one (medium popularity) is ascribed to destinations appearing in the offer of 15–49% of companies (5–9 offers). The fourth category (low popularity) includes the least popular centres (1–4 offers).

Because this type of tourism is particularly targeted at the inhabitants of Great Britain, the majority of offers feature a clear division into British and other European cities. The division was kept in the article in the results section.

### Transport accessibility and nightlife infrastructure versus popularity

The development of stag tourism in the form of a city break in a given city on a mass scale requires meeting two basic criteria. The first one is well developed flight network connectivity with other European cities, constituting a factor determining all city break tourism in Europe. The second factor, emphasised in every stag tourism offer, is the attractiveness of the nightlife infrastructure, i.e. a factor which is characteristic of party tourism too.

The determination of the degree of transport accessibility involved the analysis of connections to international airports operating in 75 centres. Because the study concerns the popularity of stag destinations in the summer holiday season 2014, only regular connections in the summer season were considered. In addition to flights operated by low cost airlines, connections of traditional airlines were also taken into account whose ticket prices were frequently comparable to those of low-cost carriers. The data were collected from official websites of 73 analysed airports. The obtained number of outbound connections from a given city was compared in a scatter plot with the number of offers of stag weekends provided

by the analysed tour operators with the purpose of determining the existing correlations between those two properties.

The second selected factor with potential effect on the development of stag tourism in a given centre is the number of popular features of nightlife infrastructure (discos, pubs, bars, and erotic clubs). It was assumed that the best source of data concerning this type of venue, in addition to considering the opinion of a high number of European tourists, is the database of the website TripAdvisor, which is popular all over the world and available in 44 language versions. The website was created in 2000, and quickly gained popularity among tourists around the world.

It is the only source of information describing nightlife infrastructure in all countries in Europe on such a large scale. At the same time it facilitates the qualitative analysis of selected offers based on customers' comments. For the young generation (e.g. stag tourists) social media are an important source of information before travelling to a given destination. TripAdvisor has become so popular that it provides the basis for scientific analyses in the context of tourism (O'Connor 2010, Aghdam et al. 2014, Linnes et al. 2014).

Data concerning nightlife infrastructure came from June 2014, and covers 4467 features located in all of the 129 analysed centres in 32 European countries, whereas the total number of opinions about those features exceeds 30 thousand. Analogically as in the case of transport accessibility, the obtained numbers of features of nightlife infrastructure were compared in a scatter plot with the number of stag weekend offers for the purpose of presenting the existing correlations between both parameters.

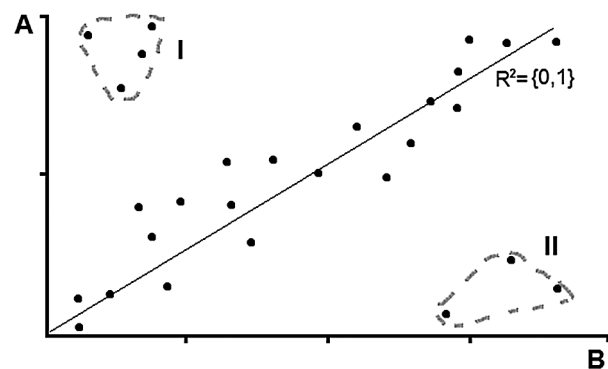


Fig. 2. Example of correlation diagram between researched variables.

Sample variables of the correlation diagrams used in the article are shown below (Fig. 2). The variable A (number of offers proposed by tour operators chosen for research that corresponds to the popularity of a given city) was placed in the  $y$  axis. The variable B (number of nightlife clubs/ or number of direct flight connections depending on the figure) was placed on the  $x$  axis. The figure includes a trend line with correlation coefficient  $R^2$  whose value ranges from 0 (lack of correlation) to 1 (completely positive correlation). Further from the trend line given points are placed with the strongest representing the difference in given destinations between variables A and B. In order to make the interpretation easier, the groups of destinations differing strongly are underlined with the dotted line and numbered. Number I includes cities of high popularity despite the low value of variable B, and II - the opposite - cities of low popularity despite the high value of variable B. We would discuss this result in more detail in Popularity of stag party destination part of this article.

### Regionalisation

An additional objective of the study was the determination of tourist regions based on similarities of components of offers in the most popular stag tourism centres. Based on the analysis of 885 offers included in information catalogues of 20 selected tour operators, four such regions were distinguished with a Roman number ascribed to each (I, II, III, and IV). The regions were distinguished according to the types of attractions available within the offers. Attractions and types of activity in a given city offered by individual tour operators were considered.

## Popularity of stag party destinations

### British cities

As mentioned before, British cities in the majority of the analysed tour operators were presented as separate offers. This suggests an evident division of the stag party travel market into centres located in Great Britain and the remaining European destinations. The division also confirms the thesis on the quantitative

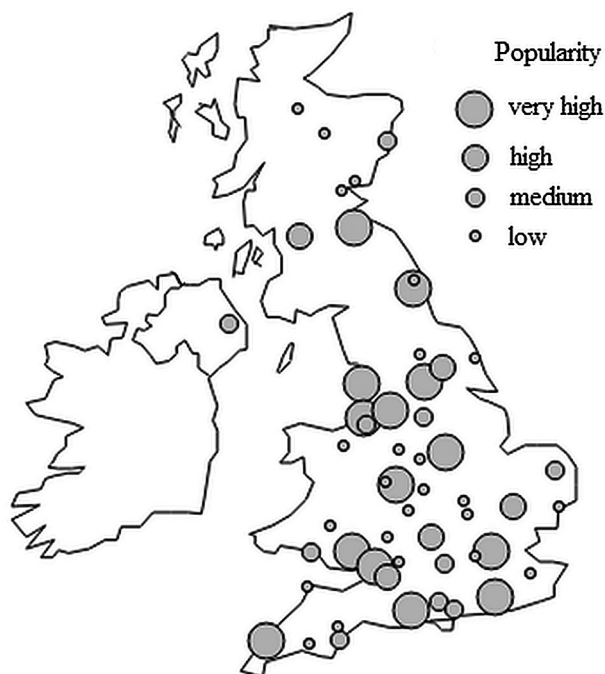


Fig. 3. Popularity of British stag party tourism centres based on the analyzed offers.

predominance of the British among stag party tourists in Europe.

The majority (42) out of 54 British cities appearing in the studied offers (see Fig. 3) were located in England. Twelve were located in the remaining parts of the United Kingdom, including seven in Scotland, four in Wales, and one city in Northern Ireland (Belfast).

The category of very high popularity included 14 cities. They can be divided into two groups. The first group covers the main urban centres in the country (Birmingham, Cardiff, Edinburgh, London, Manchester, Newcastle, Bristol, Leeds, Liverpool, and Nottingham). The second group includes popular seaside resorts (Bournemouth, Blackpool, Brighton, and Newquay). The high popularity category includes the following cities: Bath, Cambridge, Glasgow, Oxford, and York. Detailed information on all of the British centres subject to analysis is presented in the table below (see Table 1).

The comparison of the number of offers for a given city with a number of night clubs included in the database of TripAdvisor shows an evident correlation (see Fig. 4). The most popular British stag tourism destinations have a high number of night clubs in their territory, and nine of the cities included 100 such features (Brighton, Edinburgh, London, Manchester, Newcastle, Bristol, Leeds,

Table 1. Popularity of British stag party tourism centres based on the analysed offer.

City	Offers	City	Offers	City	Offers	City	Offers
Birmingham	17	Glasgow	14	Norwich	5	Coventry	1
Bournemouth	17	Oxford	12	Leicester	4	Derby	1
Brighton	17	York	12	Milton Keynes	4	Dundee	1
Cardiff	17	Bath	11	Exeter	3	Ipswich	1
Edinburgh	17	Cambridge	10	Llangollen	3	Northampton	1
London	17	Reading	9	Alton	2	Perth	1
Manchester	17	Sheffield	9	Brecon	2	Plymouth	1
Newcastle	17	Southampton	9	Cheltenham	2	Scarborough	1
Bristol	16	Chester	8	Harrogate	2	Swindon	1
Leeds	16	Swansea	8	Inverness	2	Whitley Bay	1
Liverpool	16	Belfast	6	Maidstone	2	Windsor	1
Nottingham	16	Portsmouth	6	Stratford	2	Wolverhampton	1
Blackpool	15	Torquay	6	Woolacombe	2		
Newquay	15	Aberdeen	5	Aviemore	1		

Liverpool, Nottingham). Exceptions in this group of centres include Bournemouth and particularly Newquay with 47 and 15 night clubs, respectively.

Among the least popular cities with stag tourists, Ipswich is distinguished by an exceptionally high number of nightlife infrastructure features (66), as well as Plymouth (118). One of the main reasons is that these are student-friendly cities with large universities. A rich night club offer therefore does not necessarily correspond to the number of stag weekend offered in those cities, or indeed, to tourism at all.

**European cities**

Four areas of concentration of popular stag party destinations can be identified (see Fig. 5). The first one is Ireland (forming the region of British Isles together with Great Britain). The

second area of concentration includes the Iberian Peninsula, and particularly its eastern and southern coasts. The third one is the area of Central Europe with the Czech Republic, Germany, Poland, Slovakia, and Hungary. The fourth area is constituted by the Baltic States.

The category of destinations with very high popularity includes six cities in Central-Eastern Europe (Bratislava, Budapest, Cracow, Prague, Riga, and Tallinn), and four cities from the remaining part of Europe (Amsterdam, Barcelona, Berlin, and Dublin). High popularity concerned cities located in Spain (Benidorm, Ibiza, Madrid, Marbella, Magaluf, and Valencia), as well as Brno, Sofia, and Vilnius. Destinations with

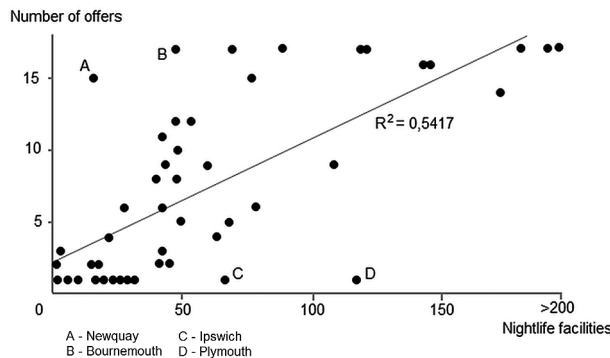


Fig. 4. Correlation between the popularity of British stag tourism destinations and the number of night clubs based on the analyzed offers and data from TripAdvisor.

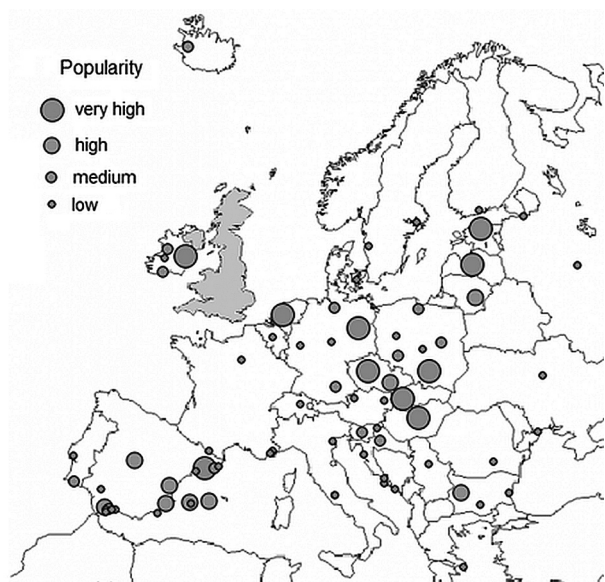


Fig. 5. Popularity of European stag party tourism centres based on the analyzed offers.

medium popularity include centres in Spain (Benalmadena, Lloret de Mar, and Tenerife), Poland (Gdansk, Warsaw, and Wrocław), Germany (Hamburg and Munich), Ireland (Cork and Galway), as well as Albufeira, Ljubljana, Reykjavik, and Zagreb. The remaining cities appearing in the analysed offers show low popularity in terms of stag party tourism.

When considering the number of centres from a given country included in the analysed offers, Spain takes first place with 19 stag tourism destinations. In second place is Poland with 6 centres. Germany and Croatia are in joint third place (5 cities each). These are followed by Ireland (4 cities) and Bulgaria (3 cities). The remaining countries featured in the analysed offers include two or one stag tourism centre.

When considering the total number of offers of all of the analysed tour operators, the highest number, i.e. 135 offers, meant spending the stag night in Spain. 82.9% of such offers covered resorts located by the Mediterranean Sea (21.5% in the Valencia and Murcia regions; 20.7% in

Cataluña; 20.7% on Balearic Islands; and 20.0% in Andalusia). The remaining offers concerned the interior of the country (Madrid, Seville), and the Canary Islands (Tenerife). The country second in terms of number of offers is Poland (42 offers), where Cracow was distinguished by a high degree of popularity among the remaining 5 Polish cities covered by the analysis (Wrocław, Warsaw, Gdańsk, Poznań, Łódź). Slightly fewer offers concerned spending the stag night in Germany (37 offers), whereas Berlin (similarly to Cracow in Poland) dominated among German centres.

Detailed data concerning all of the 75 European centres considered in the offers of tour operators are included in the table below (see Table 2).

Correlations between particular centres and the number of nightlife infrastructure features are presented in the illustration below (see Fig. 6). It should be noted that the top left part of the diagram (high popularity combined with a low number of clubs) only includes centres from Central Eastern Europe and Spain,

Table 2. Number of offers concerning particular stag party tourism centres based on the analysed offers.

<i>Country/city</i>	<i>Offers</i>	<i>Country/city</i>	<i>Offers</i>	<i>Country/city</i>	<i>Offers</i>	<i>Country/city</i>	<i>Offers</i>
<i>Spain</i>	135	<i>Germany</i>	37	Amsterdam	16	<i>Austria</i>	2
Barcelona	19	Berlin	17	<i>Croatia</i>	13	Salzburg	1
Benidorm	14	Hambur	8	Zagreb	6	Vienna	1
Madrid	14	Munich	8	Dubrovnik	3	<i>France</i>	2
Ibiza	13	Cologne	3	Hvar	2	Paris	1
Magaluf	13	Braunlage	1	Split	1	Nice	1
Marbella	12	<i>Czech Rep.</i>	31	Pag	1	<i>Russia</i>	2
Valencia	12	Prague	19	<i>Portugal</i>	12	Moscow	1
Tenerife	7	Brno	12	Albufeira	9	St. Petersburg	1
Lloret de Mar	6	<i>Ireland</i>	29	Lisbon	3	<i>Sweden</i>	2
Benalmadena	5	Dublin	15	<i>Lithuania</i>	11	Gothenburg	1
Puerto Benus	4	Cork	6	Vilnius	11	Stockholm	1
La Manga	3	Galway	6	<i>Slovenia</i>	7	<i>Andorra</i>	2
Malaga	3	Limerick	2	Ljubljana	6	Andorra	2
Fuengirola	2	<i>Bulgaria</i>	20	Maribor	1	<i>Denmark</i>	2
Palma	2	Sofia	14	<i>Ukraine</i>	5	Copenhagen	2
Salou	2	Sunny Beach	4	Kiev	4	<i>Belgium</i>	1
Seville	2	Plovdiv	1	Odessa	1	Brussels	1
Torremolinos	1	<i>Hungary</i>	19	<i>Iceland</i>	5	<i>Finland</i>	1
Tossa de Mar	1	Budapest	19	Reykjavik	5	Helsinki	1
<i>Poland</i>	42	<i>Latvia</i>	19	<i>Romania</i>	4	<i>Greece</i>	1
Krakow	18	Riga	19	Bucharest	4	Athens	1
Wrocław	9	<i>Slovakia</i>	19	<i>Serbia</i>	4	<i>Monaco</i>	1
Warsaw	6	Bratislava	19	Belgrade	4	Monte Carlo	1
Gdansk	5	<i>Estonia</i>	16	<i>Italy</i>	3	<i>Switzerland</i>	1
Poznan	3	Tallinn	16	Rome	2	Zurich	1
Lodz	1	<i>Netherlands</i>	16	Venice	1		



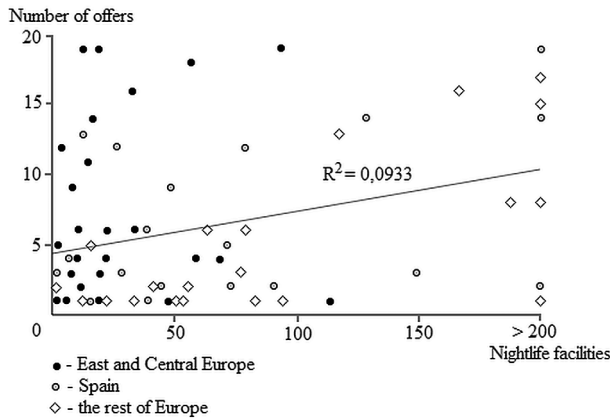


Fig. 6. Popularity of stag party tourism destinations in relation to nightlife infrastructure based on the analyzed offers and data from TripAdvisor.

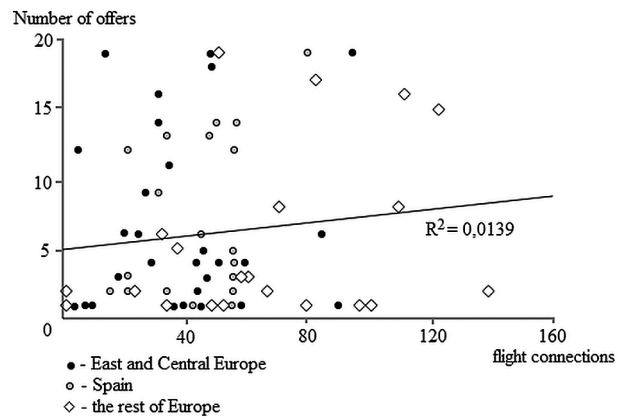


Fig. 7. Correlations between the popularity of stag party tourism centres and the number of regular flight connections with European cities based on the analyzed offers and data of particular airports.

including eight cities from the categories of very high and high popularity, with less than 50 night clubs. The other extreme in terms of popularity includes cities marked in the bottom right part of the diagram. They include the representative of Eastern Europe – Moscow. The same part of the diagram also includes two cities from the Iberian Peninsula (Lisbon and Seville), as well as Paris and Rome. In spite of highly developed nightlife infrastructure and a high degree of tourist attractiveness, the number of offers of stag weekends in these cities is very low. The reasons for this can be a high price of clubbing (alcohol) as well as the dominance of culture and heritage tourism well promoted in both destinations.

It should be emphasised that the cities of Central – East Europe do not constitute a uniform group in terms of correlation between the popularity of a given destination and the degree of development of nightlife infrastructure. Apart from Moscow, which appeared in the analysed stag tourism offers only once (in spite of its 113 night clubs), also Saint Petersburg together with Kiev and Bucharest (47 clubs/1 offer; 68 clubs/4 offer; 58 clubs/4 offers, respectively) are distinguished among the cities of the region in these terms.

A similar situation is presented in the plot showing correlations between the number of regular flight connections with European cities and the number of stag weekend offers (see Fig. 7). Also in this case, cities of Central and Eastern Europe as well as Spain largely stand out among the remaining European cities. Their high popularity among stag party tourists does not always

correspond to good transport accessibility (direct and budget flights accessibility).

## Offers of stag weekends

### Trip schedule

Travel for stag party tourism usually takes place on weekends, whereas the combination of particular days of stay can be as follows:

- arrival on Friday, departure on Saturday
- arrival on Friday, departure on Sunday
- arrival on Saturday, departure on Sunday.

Travel including two overnight stays (arrival on Friday, departure on Sunday) is the most popular option. In this type of offer, the first day of stay is limited to accommodating the participants (the additional option of transfer airport-hotel is popular) and evening activities, usually in the form of a guided pub crawl, clubbing, and visits to strip clubs. The second day

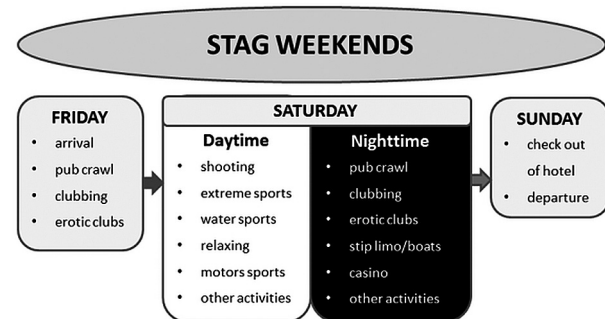


Fig. 8. Typical schedule of a stag weekend based on the analyzed offers.

(Saturday) is filled with attractions (depending on the purchased package). They can be divided into day activities (extreme sports, various types of relaxation, sightseeing trips, recreational sports), and evening and night activities (pub crawl, clubbing, striptease, casinos). On Sunday, the participants usually check out of the hotel and travel back. Some packages, however, also fill the third day of stay with attractions (usually some kind of relaxation, e.g. SPA & wellness). A typical schedule of a stag weekend is presented below (see Fig. 8).

### Regional similarities

Names of packages used by particular tour operators are usually different, but can be classified into categories in terms of their subject matter. Leading categories of a high variety of attractions included in the analysed offers for stag party tourists include extreme sports, shooting, clubbing, alcohol degustation, and eroticism. The division also influenced the choice of destinations, showing evident regional similarities. Four regions of centres showing numerous similarities can be distinguished (see Fig. 9).

The first region is Ireland (I), closely related to Great Britain in terms of language and culture. Packages to Irish centres frequently emphasise the Irish tradition of beer drinking and large number of pubs. The offer of Irish destinations is usually directed at the British valuing the geographical vicinity of the island (with the simultaneous factor of staying in another country), the cultural similarities, and large number of renowned pubs.

The second region includes the eastern and southern coast of the Iberian Peninsula and Balearic Islands (II). As mentioned before, the centres have become well known among Europeans as clubbing and electronic music event centres for two decades. In addition to clubbing, the primary component of offers from the region are water sports related to varied types of activity at sea, as well as beach going. Destinations offering this type of stay have been growing in the European market in recent years, and there are also centres located on the Croatian coast and islands in the area (II).

The third region (III) includes Western European cities known for sexual freedom,

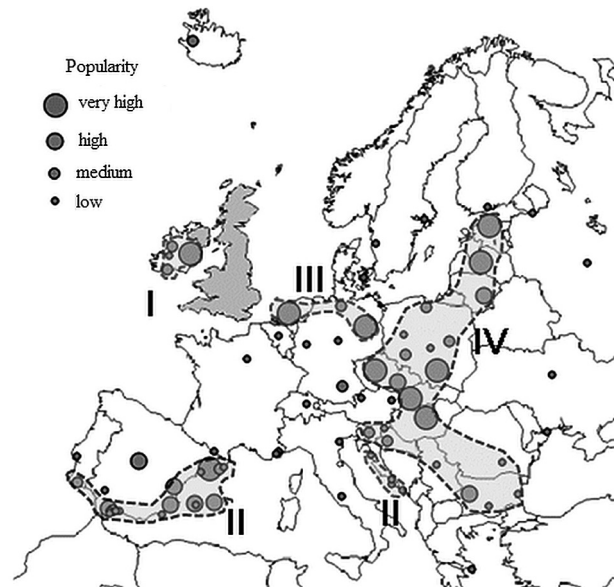


Fig. 9. Stag weekend thematic regions  
Note: I - British Isles, II - Mediterranean Region, III - Red Light Districts' Region, IV - Central and East European Region based on the analyzed offers.

legal prostitution, and abundance of strip clubs (Amsterdam, Berlin, and Hamburg). The majority of this type of attraction is concentrated in so-called red light districts, i.e. districts offering many possibilities of satisfying the needs of enthusiasts of erotic adventures.

The last of the discussed regions is also the largest in terms of area. It includes countries from the former socialist states (IV) which have become extremely popular in stag party tourism over the last decade. Their popularity results from several factors. The dominant one is their "exotic" character for the inhabitants of the remaining regions of Europe. Other factors contributing to the choice of those destinations include:

- lower prices of services in such countries,
- the myth of beautiful women accepting a traditional role in society,
- the culture of drinking strong liquors in such countries,
- frequent stereotypes according to which it is a different, underdeveloped part of Europe (Thurnell-Read 2012).

Packages offered by tour operators to particular centres in the region of Central and Eastern Europe emphasise three motives usually not occurring in the remaining parts of Europe. The first one is the erotic-social motif with the main focus on beautiful women who are "less emancipated" than women in Western Europe.

Table 3. Detailed stag weekend offer in European cities based on the analysed offers.

Activities	Detailed offer
extreme sports	climbing, axe throwing, bobsleigh, bungee jumping, canoeing, canopy capers, canyoning, caving, cliff jumping, coastering, hydrospeed, gorge scrambling, free fall simulator, fencing, quad biking, mud buggies, jousting, kite surfing, paragliding, raft building, skiing, sky diving, sphering, surfing, zip lining, parachute jumping, 4x4 off road driving, blindfold driving, blow karting, buggy racing, endurance karting, grass karts, hovercrafts, mini moto, raily cross, speedway racing, tank driving, horse raiding, jet skiing, kayaking, wakeboarding, white water rafting
shooting	archery, paintballing, target shooting, rifle shooting, pistol shooting, laser quest, Kalashnikov shooting, crossbows, machine gun shooting
adult entertainment	lap dancing, strip club visiting, boat charter and stripper, body eating, lesbian dinner party, limousine and stripper, mud wrestling, pirates adult show, table dancing, red light tour, sauna party, visits to brothels,
relax & games	swimming pool, water park, massage, football playing, golf, bowling, casino, karaoke, thermal baths, beach volleyball
alcohol and food	pub & bar crawl, vodka party, cocktail making, wine tasting, local meals
clubbing	party tram, lounge cruise, club tour bus, club crawl, yacht party
sightseeing	city tour, bike tour, places associated with communism
entertainment	escape from the hounds, stag kidnap, jail break, bull running

Moreover, a stereotype still exists that women from this part of Europe look forward to an opportunity to meet a foreigner from a richer country.

Another motive used by tour operators is the culture of drinking strong alcohol in the countries of the region, and particularly drinking various kinds of vodka. For the inhabitants of the remaining part of Europe who are used to beer, wines, or weaker cocktails, partying with vodka may seem to be an attractive way of spending an evening in male company.

The last of the motives is related to political-historical factors. This is manifested in offers concerning sightseeing in a given city or its area. Such offers still emphasise places and objects related to the socialist era which the inhabitants of Western Europe have only known from newspapers or TV for several decades.

In spite of the existence of certain leading motives for visiting the four thematic regions distinguished above, each of them also includes other offer components from a wide range of thematic categories both in terms of day and evening activities. Packages are frequently combined, and their final form and therefore abundance of attractions depends solely on the customers. The Table below (see Table 3) presents a detailed breakdown of offers with division into main thematic categories: extreme sports, shooting, eroticism, relaxation and games, alcohol, clubbing, gastronomy, sightseeing, or directed adventures.

## Discussion and conclusions

The study results obtained by means of the search engine method are largely in accordance with data on the most popular stag tourism destinations existing in the cited literature (and in the cited internet rankings). In comparison to website *TheWeddingCommunity*, Benidorm was classified in the second category (high popularity) together with Madrid, lower than Barcelona which did not appear in the cited ranking at all. *The Independent* included Cork, Wrocław, and Brussels in the most popular stag destinations. The former two cities enjoyed moderate popularity according to our methodology (medium popularity category). Brussels, only present in one offer, belonged to cities with the lowest popularity. The ranking on website *SimplyTheBestMan* (StBM 2014) included among others Albufeira (Algarve), Ibiza, and Malaga which in our ranking belonged to categories of high popularity (Ibiza), medium popularity (Albufeira), and low popularity (Malaga).

An almost complete lack of stag weekend offers concerning countries considered very attractive in terms of tourism is observed, such as Belgium, France, Greece, or Italy. The same situation concerns Alpine and Scandinavian countries. This is in contrast to the popularity of destinations located in the countries of Central-Eastern Europe, and particularly those located in the Baltic states, countries of the Visegrad Group, and in the Balkans (thematic region No. IV discussed above).

Such a spatial distribution of popular stag weekend centres is related to the character of travel for stag party tourism, and to the fact that the British are the dominant nation among this type of tourists. As a rule, stag weekends constitute an exceptional adventure for the participants. This is most probably the reason for the high popularity of countries considered to be more "exotic" for the inhabitants of Great Britain and Western Europe, i.e. countries of Central and Eastern Europe. Prices of services, alcohol, and accommodation in Central and Eastern Europe are considerably lower than those in other regions of the continent. In spite of their excellent transport accessibility and strongly developed nightlife infrastructure, popular holiday destinations in Western, Northern, and Southern Europe are clearly of no interest to stag party tourists. The exceptions to the rule include:

- Spain, since the late 1980s associated with clubbing, including high alcohol and drug consumption and beach parties (thematic region No. II),
- Ireland, neighbouring Great Britain (with convenient transport connections), known for its bars and pubs (thematic region No. I),
- The Netherlands (Amsterdam) and Germany (particularly Berlin and Hamburg), i.e. centres including famous red light districts (De Wallen, St. Pauli, and Mitte), and known for sexual freedom (legal prostitution) and numerous clubbing festivals (thematic region No. III).

The lack of correlation between the number of nightlife infrastructure features and number of flight connections and popularity of stag destinations also concerns several centres located in Eastern Europe (Moscow, Saint Petersburg, Kiev, Bucharest) and on the Iberian Peninsula (Lisbon, Seville). Low popularity of Russian cities particularly results from relatively high prices in the two mentioned metropolises. Moreover, the visa obligation and unstable political situation discourage visits to those centres (Kiev is also an example of a city where tourism suffers due to political events). Lisbon and Seville are not popular among stag tourists, because they are not seaside resorts. Tourists are more likely to choose nearby Albufeira (instead of Lisbon) or centres on Costa del Sol (instead of Seville).

Based on the analysis of stag weekend offers existing in the market, and data concerning transport accessibility, as well as the number of popular nightlife facilities, the article determines the precise level of popularity of particular stag party tourism centres. In addition to confirming the thesis on high popularity of centres in Central and Eastern Europe (observed particularly in the case of: Bratislava, Brno, Budapest, Cracow, Prague, Riga, Sofia, Tallinn, and Vilnius), the high popularity of Spanish cities and seaside resorts was determined (Barcelona, Benidorm, Ibiza, Madrid, Marbella, Magaluf, and Valencia), as well as several destinations in Western Europe (Amsterdam, Berlin, and Dublin). In spite of their excellent transport accessibility and abundance of nightlife facilities, popular tourist centres such as Athens, Brussels, Milan, Paris, Rome, and Venice enjoy very low popularity. A possible reason for this can be high price of alcohol in those places.

The detailed analysis of components of offers for all of the analysed centres also enabled the identification of thematic regions, almost entirely corresponding with areas of concentration of popular stag party destinations, namely the British Isles, eastern and southern coast of Spain, "the land of red-light districts" (i.e. Amsterdam, Berlin, and Hamburg), and Central and Eastern Europe.

The position of Central and Eastern Europe is much lower in all rankings regarding both: individual and organized travels. One of the reasons for this can be the marketing budgets of these cities – extremely low comparing with West Europe ones but still it cannot be the only explanation. The percentage of offers to the countries above is much lower for city breaks and clubbing than for stag tourism.

The obtained results enabled the determination of current trends in stag night tourism in Europe. The applied method also enabled the determination of changes in the popularity of given destinations on a temporal scale, particularly that the role of the internet in the travel planning process will probably continue to increase. Due to the lack of academic research about the degree of popularity of stag tourism destinations from a geographical perspective, the results obtained by the authors are based on data obtained from

social media and on the sociological literature only.

Stag tourism differs dramatically from a classical city break or even from clubbing tourism. In city break the main purpose of the visit is sight-seeing. The most popular cities are destinations with a rich history and a high number of cultural attractions (e.g. Paris or Rome). Important factors in city break tourism destination choice are also attractive accommodation (mostly in the city center), direct flights connections and attractive price of flight ticket. Both – accommodation and flights can be easily bought via internet, thus in the case of city breaks, the whole trip is often organized by individuals, with no help from tour operators.

Differences with regard to stag tourism and clubbing include source market (not only British and Scandinavian), most popular destinations and whole trip organization. Selected cities of Eastern and Central Europe (like Belgrade or Budapest) are also present, but in a higher position are the Mediterranean (Balearic islands, Spanish Coast, Greek and Croatian Islands) and Western Europe cities having established clubbing prestige, such as Amsterdam, Berlin, London, Paris, Milan, Rome, Copenhagen, Antwerp and others. The whole trip is mostly organized by individuals, with no help of tour operator.

Stag tourists mostly travel in large groups, sometimes over a dozen, thus the reservation of airport transport (often by limousine), hotel reservation, pub crawl, parties in erotic clubs as well as other attractions (e.g. extreme sports, shooting range reservations and others) will be extremely difficult with no knowledge of the local language. Moreover stag tourists are often under the influence of alcohol already when they start the trip – at the airport in their own country. Drinking alcohol at the destination is one of the key attractions in the program. All of this makes the trip organization and local trip control very difficult. With this in mind, it is no surprise that stag tourism relies on specialized operators to organize and lead the trip. The offers available from tour operators reflect stag market needs and could be used in the search for engines for stag tourism.

However to achieve a 100% certainty about the efficiency of the method proposed in this

article, field studies in numerous stag tourism destinations should be conducted. The proposed method for determining the degree of popularity based on the most important tour operators' offers, helps to determine the actual trends of stag tourism in Europe with quite a high degree of accuracy, and indicates the destinations that should be chosen for deeper field research, such interviews and questionnaires within stag tourists.

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