

The Emergence and Evolution of Lesbian and Gay Police Associations in Europe

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Abstract¹

Four nearly 30 years, LGBT police associations have been working within police agencies to create better working conditions for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) officers and staff as well as to improve relations between the agencies and LGBT communities. The exploratory research examines the formation, structure, and impact of these associations on police agencies throughout Europe. Based on focus group and survey data from eight lesbian and gay police associations in Europe, this research highlights unique and common elements of their evolution and articulates a path forward to stay relevant in ever-changing political and social environments. Based on the data gathered, there appear to be opportunities to expand the efforts of these associations to include more visibility and open interactions with local LGBT communities. Through collective action and support via the European LGBT police association, current lesbian and gay police associations could be more extensively utilised to form and expand LGBT police associations in other parts of Europe and beyond.

Keywords: *Police associations, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender (LGBT), police agencies, employee resource groups*

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Introduction

This research explores the formation, structure, and impact of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) police associations in Europe.² Since the founding of the first formal LGBT police association in 1990 in the United Kingdom, 14 additional associations have emerged across the continent. These associations, while differing significantly from state to state, share many common interests and objectives that are coordinated through the umbrella organisation: the European LGBT Police Association. In studying these police associations, this research seeks to better understand their roles within policing, their structure and design, and impact on law enforcement, criminal justice, and communities at large.

Literature Review

Beyond research on unions, there is a dearth of information about employee associations (Welbourne et al., 2015). Research on police or LGBT employee associations is even rarer (Holdaway & O'Neill, 2004; O'Neill & Holdaway, 2007; Colvin, 2012; Ozeren, 2014; McNulty, McPhail, Inversi, Dundon & Nechanska, 2018). Employee associations are "groups of employees in an organisation formed to act as a resource for both members and the organisation" (Kaplan et al., 2009: 2). Such associations are typically based on a demographic (e.g. women), life stage (e.g. Generation Y), or function (e.g. sales). Minority status-based associations are usually dedicated to fostering a supportive work environment within the context of the organisation's mission, values, goals, practices, and objectives (Kaplan et al., 2009). Employee associations can be sponsored and/or recognised by the organisation, but they are usually staffed and operated by volunteers. Employees take it upon themselves to support the organisation by being members of one or more associations in their organisation (Bell, 2011). Thus, these associations can be environments where employees are engaged in organisational citizenship. Although associations can originate at the management or leadership level of an organisation, in most cases, employees are the individuals who initially start the associations (Creed & Cooper, 2008). It is not uncommon for associations to begin as informal social meetings of like-minded individuals (O'Neill & Holdaway, 2007; McNulty, McPhail, Inversi, Dundon & Nechanska, 2018).

Employee associations have been to produce several benefits at the organisational level. Kaplan et al. concluded that employee associations were "a critical element in creating a culture of inclusion and a workplace that supports the diversity of background, though, and perspective" (2009: 3). Furthermore, they suggested that associations are beneficial in leadership development, helping employees to bridge cultural differences across

² Sometimes referred to as employee resource groups, employee networks, or affinity groups.

organisational boundaries, and build a connection with the community (Kaplan et al., 2009). Githens and Aragon (2009) observed that LGBT associations can effectively aid in changing the culture and operations of their organisation.

In addition to organisation-level outcomes, employee associations are designed to benefit employees. Employees receive personal and professional development opportunities, such as educational and networking activities (Kaplan et al., 2009). Friedman and Craig (2004) observed that mentoring within the employee associations contributed to positive outlooks for black managers regarding their careers. Employee associations also appeared to help aid the process of information sharing between members, along with enabling “creative problem solving and collaboration” (McGrath & Sparks, 2005: p.48). Similarly, Van Aken et al. (1994) identified several positive outcomes of employee associations: communication within and across groups, problem-solving, professional development, building a culture of trust and community, and increased knowledge of the organisation.

LGBT Employee Associations

Rod Githens and Steven Aragon (2009) have identified four categories of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) employee associations: conventional, internally responsive informal, organised unofficial, and queer/radical. Each type of association is defined, in part, according to its relationship to its broader environment. Conventional associations are commonly commissioned or approved by the employing organisations and usually emphasise connections to the goals of the employer, such as diversity or employee satisfaction. Internally responsive informal associations are generally not officially recognised, are loosely structured, and are responsive to the needs of constituent employees on an “as needed” basis. Organised unofficial associations are formed outside the workplace and usually seek change both within the workplace and throughout the broader society. Finally, queer/radical associations are focused on more extensive social changes and have little desire to formalise their relationships with other institutions. As Githens and Aragon noted about all of these types of associations, “the groups typically exist to bring about some type of change. Change can be aimed toward improving organisational effectiveness or toward broader social goals, which can include the betterment of society” (2009: 26). While organisational goals and societal goals might seem contradictory, in many cases they are actually complementary. Thus, lesbian and gay police associations may have the additional goals of providing social support for officers (internal focus) and of improving policing-LGBT community relations (external focus).

In addition to Githens and Aragon (2009), Bell et al. (2011) found the LGBT employee associations were emerging as vehicles that provided employees with a collective voice within the organisation. Similarly, Raeburn (2004) found that employee associations

could serve as particularly powerful tools and resources to promote change within organizations. These groups can facilitate the increased awareness of managers and other employees of LGBT issues.

Although the LGBT community's relationship with law enforcement has been a turbulent one (Hodge and Sexton, 2018), the acceptance of openly lesbian and gay officers in the police services have helped to change institutional behaviours and attitudes (Colvin, 2012). Of all the factors aiding in the acceptance and integration of openly lesbian and gay police officers, LGBT police associations are significant, because they operate as both external and internal mechanisms for change within law enforcement. These associations have been relevant to both individual lesbian and gay officers and the police agencies for which they work. For individual officers, the associations provide support and advice and create a sense of community or group identity (Holdaway and O'Neill, 2007). For police agencies, such associations create partners for diversity training and access points for community policing within the lesbian and gay community.

LGBT Police Associations in Europe

At present, there are 15 LGBT police associations (England, Wales, and Northern Ireland [together forming ENWI], Germany, France, the Netherlands, Ireland, Switzerland, Spain, Italy, Belgium, Sweden, Norway, Greece, Serbia, Scotland, and Austria).³ These associations collectively form the umbrella organisation, the European LGBT (formerly Gay) Police Association.⁴ The international association was founded in 2004 and is charged to bringing together LGBT police organisations from across Europe “to provide a platform to share knowledge, best practice, and working together to tackle discrimination facing LGBT people both within policing and externally” (EGPA, 2019). Specifically, the objectives of the association include: supporting police employees who are LGBT; collaborating with LGBT community members to improve reporting of crimes in the community; supporting the development of additional nation-based associations; supporting police forces and national police in the development of operational policing knowledge and services specific to the LGBT community that will enhance services to the LGBT community; and encouraging representativeness and inclusiveness of the LGBT community in law enforcement (EGPA, 2019).

Although affiliated and committed to similar aims, the state-level associations maintain the autonomy of their organizations. Their specific objectives – as well as structure and design – have all been informed by the police culture and context in which they were

3 At the time of this research, there were only eleven associations: United Kingdom, Germany, Austria, France, the Netherlands, Ireland, Switzerland, Spain, Italy, Belgium, and Sweden.

4 For simplicity, the association uses its original acronym, EGPA, which this paper also uses.

developed. For example, while the Irish LGBT police association (G-Force) is a nationally representative body that is based in Dublin and administered from the city, the German association (VelsPol) is decentralised, with German states (where police functions are carried out) leading the initiatives for each state. This difference in design and decision-making is a result of a national versus a state-level law enforcement system.

Methods: Data about LGBT Police Associations in Europe

To gain data about lesbian and gay police associations, in-country focus group sessions were conducted. For each state association, the current president and secretary for the association were contacted via the e-mail address available through the European LGBT police association's main website. The requests to meet with each association asked for a session with „founders, current leaders, and members with extensive knowledge about the history and development of the association.“ Included in the e-mail solicitation were seven semi-structured, open-ended questions that were to frame the focus group session. The proposed focus group questions were presented in English and the official language of the respective country. In addition to the questions, associations were given the option of participating in the focus group sessions in the official language of their respective countries. Of the 11 state associations in the European LGBT police association, eight associations participated in the study.

The focus group sessions for the eight participating associations occurred between September 2015 and January 2016.⁵ The focus group sessions were coordinated around each association's schedule. At the request of three associations, the researcher was accompanied by a translator for other-than-English focus group sessions. This ensured maximum participation for all individuals. Each focus group session was audio-recorded and lasted on average one hour. Each of the seven focus group sessions consisted of three to six individuals, and all included at least one founding member of the association. Survey data from the UK was based on over 300 responses.

⁵ The data and results include information about the UK, which participated in a survey and interview in the previous year, prior to its disbandment. The results and analysis will reflect eight participants.

LGBT Association	Police	Location	Focus Group Date	Number of Participants	Time
FLAG! (France)		Paris	10/2/2015	3	1 hour
Vespol (German)		Munster	9/18/2015	4	1 hour, 5 minutes
G-Force (Ireland)		Dublin	11/27/2015	4	1 hour, 15 minutes
Polis Aperta (Italy)		Pistoia	10/24/2015	6	45 minutes
Roze in Blauw (Netherlands)		Amsterdam	10/9/2015	5	45 minutes
Gaylespol (Spain)		Barcelona	11/4/2015	5	1 hour, 30 minutes
Gaypolisen (Sweden)		Stockholm	11/17/2015	4	1 hour, 10 minutes
Gay Police Association (UK)		London	6/1/2014	NA	NA

Once all the focus group sessions were concluded, the audio recordings were transcribed over the next year. Since translators performed on-the-spot translation, all of the transcripts included conversations in English. After the transcription, approximately 10 percent of the audio-recorded focus group sessions were transcribed by a second person to check for inter-coder reliability. Few errors were identified between the coders. The coefficient was .90. After transcription, common themes and ideas were drawn based on each of the seven semi-structured questions. Like the original transcriptions, approximately 30 percent of the transcriptions were examined and coded for common themes and ideas by a second coder. The inter-coder reliability for this coding was .95.

Analysis and Results

The participating associations included: UK, Germany, France, the Netherlands, Ireland, Spain, Italy, and Sweden. As noted earlier, the associations across Europe are as diverse as the countries in which they serve. However, we can aggregate some of the focus group responses and note commonalities across the units. See Table 2 for an overview.

LGBT Police Associations in Europe		UNITED KINGDOM	GERMANY	NETHERLANDS	ITALY	IRELAND	SPAIN	SWEDEN	FRANCE
Year of Inception	1990	1994	1998	2005	2005	2006	2000	2001	
Primary Focus: Internal, External or Both	Internal	Internal	Both	Internal	Internal	Internal	Both	Internal	Internal
Focusing Event for Association	Media story	Media story	Behest of the Commissioner in Amsterdam	Other GPAs	Other GPAs	Other GPAs	Europride 1999	General unrest by LGBT officers	
Initial LGBTQ Community Reaction	Neutral	Neutral	Positive	Positive	Positive	Positive	Positive	Neutral	
Initial General Public Reaction	Neutral	Neutral	Positive	Positive	Positive	Positive	Neutral	Neutral	
Initial Police Organization Reaction	Negative	Negative	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Positive	Negative	Neutral	
Did you get support from other GPAs	NA	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Indirect	
Relations with other Associations	No - None exists	No	Yes	No - None exists	No - None exists	No	No	No - None exists	
Official Relationship with Police Agency	Independent	Independent	Internal	Independent	Independent	Independent	Independent	Internal	
Funding Source	Force, member donations	Membership	Force	Membership	Membership	Membership	Membership	Force, member donations	
Involved in Recruitment	No	No	Yes (Ads, outreach)	No	No	Yes (Ads)	No	No	
Involved in Retention	No	No	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	

Origin and Support

The first LGBT police associations were founded in the 1990s in the UK (Lesbian and Gay Police Association) and Germany (VelsPol Deutschland). In both cases, the need for an organised association emerged from rank-and-file officers in large forces – in London and Berlin. Founding officers in both associations mentioned feeling isolated and longing to connect with other officers in their respective forces as reasons for seeking others out.

One German officer noted, *"... in 1994, I knew one other gay police officer, and this person knew one other. That is 3 officers in my state."*⁶

During this early period, social media was limited, so officers used LGBT print media and word-of-mouth to form informal social networks. The eventual formation of the associations brought with it, structure, mission, resources, and attention. Although the official creation brought few consequences from the general public or the LGBT communities, however, both associations encountered resistance from their respective police agencies.

One German officer noted, *"...there was no internet, there was nothing. We started with announcements in local and regional [gay] magazines ... it took two or three years before we were able to meet and form the network ... each state was different. In my state, the ministries nor the chiefs would meet with us. In states, like Berlin, it was much easier."*

Although also formed in the 1990s, the association in the Netherlands (Roze in Blauw) had a different origin and formation. Created in 1998, Roze in Blauw was established in Amsterdam at the behest of the Police Commissioner in conjunction with the Gay Games that were to be held there. The Games of 1998 were the first in Europe, and the municipal government wanted to send a positive message to the participants from around Europe and the world. Because the Dutch had a history of supporting police officers and staff of variable backgrounds and had been working toward equity for LGBT police officers over the previous decade, the establishment of the association was a logical next step.

As one Dutch officer told it, *"... Gay people were coming to Amsterdam and the Commissioners said we needed to do something for them. We want them to feel welcomed ... it was very easy [to formalise our network]. Our Commissioner wanted these networks. He knew it is a big plus for our work ..."*

Over the initial years of association formation (between 1990 and 2006), the reception from various stakeholders varied from state to state. Table 1 shows the general level of support from each of the three major categories: the public, the LGBT community, and police agency.

6 Some quotes were edited slightly for clarity.

In terms of the public, we can see that the reception for local associations was either positive or neutral. In no case, among the associations, was there an overtly negative reception by the public. In the case of England and Germany, media outlets ran stories that questioned the need or utility of such associations, but in both cases, members of the organisations did not feel that these news stories represented the general attitude of the public about their police associations.

In terms of the LGBT communities, the reception for the lesbian and gay police association was also either positive or neutral. While the positive responses were expected, the indifferent reception probably reflects historical animus between the police and LGBT communities. Like the public, there were no adverse reactions from LGBT communities. In the case of Spain, there were community members who voiced some concern over the negative history between the LGBT communities and the police, which had manifested as anti-LGBT harassment (and in some cases, violence).

As one Spanish officer noted, "... after we explained our goals, community members basically said, 'we like it, we like that inside the police there are gay people who understand us ...'"

It is in police agencies that we see the most varied reactions to the formation of lesbian and gay police associations. As noted earlier, only in the Dutch situation was the inception and creation of a police association at the behest of police leadership, and thus positively received. In addition to Roze in Blauw, the Spanish were well-received by their police agencies. In all other contexts, the lesbian and gay police associations were viewed with suspicion, hostility, and/or ambivalence by their police agencies.

As one German officer noted, "... the Bavarian Ministry of the Interior ignored us for the first three years. We wrote at least five letters to the chief of police but, we didn't get an answer ..."

An Irish officer noted, "I remember going to meetings with assistant commissioners, and it [sic] was very, very hostile towards us ... I remember leaving those meetings thinking that I will never last in this organisation if this person has anything to do with it."

Finally, as an Italian officer explained, "A police officer from Bologna, the commander of a district there, declared to a newspaper there that he was very afraid of this; he was very disappointed about the creation of this association."

Of the participating association members, there were only two cases where the inception and formation of the association were met with positive support from the general public, the LGBT communities, and the police agencies. This trifecta of positive support was received by Roze in Blauw in the Netherlands, and GaylesPol of Spain. In all other situations, the associations were created with some stakeholder opposition.

Focus, Funding, and Activities

The focus of each state-level lesbian and gay police association and their funding sources provide insights about the activities and interests of each association. In terms of focus, we can determine whether or not an association is primarily interested in police officers and staff, or if they have an external focus -- facing outward to the LGBT communities or other stakeholders. The overwhelming majority – six out of eight – of the associations have an internal, employee-facing focus. The remaining two indicated that they focus on both employees and the broader LGBT communities. There were no associations that focused exclusively on external stakeholders.

As a police officer from Ireland noted, *"... our restriction is [that] there is a part of the organisation that deals with policy and community relations – which would deal with the LGBT community – but they have not brought us in to work with them even though we've offered. So we are restricted in what we can do."*

Additionally, an officer from France offered another perspective, *"...we started in the beginning only between us ... our directive was only for police officers – to combat against homophobia. Most officers did not understand how we could be police officers and gay. That continues to be our primary mission."* A review of the associations' mission and objectives confirms their goals and focus (EGPA, 2019).

As the focus of associations directly connects to the activities of the organisation, the sources of funding also inform us about the capacity and scope of the association. For the majority of the associations in Europe, membership dues are the primary source of revenue. In only two cases did associations report receiving funding from their police agencies and/or other-than-membership sources, and in only two situations did funds come from both membership dues and the police agency.

LGBT police associations may engage in an array of different activities within policing and the public. It is common for US-based police associations to participate in recruitment and retention as a common practice to help bring in qualified individuals who can add to the diversity of the organisation. However, this design is not typical within the European association context, where there were three associations involved in the recruitment of officers and only one association engaged in retention strategies with the police agency. As one Spanish officer noted, *"... so we had been talking to Cataluña's Police director, to see if we could place ads on the street as we made ads in the newspapers, also in the gay magazines as well, and they approved it and they said that it was very positive."*

The Dutch reported both active and passive recruitment of LGBT people, namely tabling events, passing out flyers, and attending community organisation meetings. Roze in Blauw in the Netherlands was the only association to have organised retention activities.

The focus and funding of the associations also help to explain how they describe their relationships with their respective police agencies. In the five cases where funds were raised from membership dues, each association described themselves as independent of the police agency.

A German officer viewed this design as positive, noting, *"We are an association, we are not part of the department ... We can criticise the department officially as an officer."*

One Irish officer suggested that their outsider status was a hindrance. She noted, *"... but the fact that we are not part of the organization means that it is very difficult to really affect change where it is needed."*

In the three cases where associations reported funds from their police agency, the associations described themselves as internal to the police structure.

In summary, the most common design for the lesbian and gay police associations is a membership-based organisation that is independent of the official police agency. The associations are mostly focused on internal endeavours to improve the policing environment for officers and staff. Since the associations are primarily focused on police officers and staff as employees, it is not surprising that their efforts have not extended to external recruitment of police officers. Surprisingly, associations report minimal activities in terms of specific retention activities or plans for LGBT police officers and staff.

Measurable Association Outcomes

When asked about the impact of their gay police associations, members noted several achievements they thought were directly related to the efforts of the association. The most common outcome noted was inclusive training efforts. These training efforts ranged from simple awareness training for leadership (where police officials are made aware of issues or concerns of LGBT officers and staff) to structured and formalised training efforts for cadets in the academy.

The training efforts to leadership, fellow officers, and cadets helped to raise the visibility of LGBT officers and staff, and their concerns – both as police officials and as employees in the police agencies.

As one Irish officer noted, *"Increased visibility helped people see the need for training..."*

A French officer noted, *"last year we sponsored a communication campaign inside every academy and workplace to say whether you are gay or straight you are doing the same job. It was very positive."*

In the case of the Dutch, external visibility was also a measurable outcome of their work. Members of the LGBT communities recognised them in the community and often reached out to them for advice.

A Dutch officer expressed it this way: *"...there is a lot of discussion with straight police about the [Pride] boat. Most of them are ignorant as to why we are there [at the Pride parade]. They mostly see us as only partying, but it is about being visible for the LGBT community."*

Finally, the associations all reported social and professional support for LGBT officers and staff as a measurable outcome of success. As noted earlier, many associations started as social gatherings with a focus on supporting members of the law enforcement community regardless of their disclosure status (out or not). Even after formal recognition within policing, the associations have maintained the social aspects of their activities. In addition, social support comes with professional support and advice.

Challenges and Struggles

The state of LGBT police associations is not without its challenges and struggles. Three issues surfaced across associations: statewide representation, external visibility, and mission loss. The first issue commonly mentioned was the lack of statewide representation. While officers felt uniformly positive about the recent changes in their police agencies, they also noted that many of these gains have only been realised in the urban centres across Europe. LGBT officers and staff in smaller communities may still be isolated from the larger communities in the cities.

As one German officer noted, *"The city of Berlin has a really big community. You can't replicate it to the landscape of Bavaria – there is no community. The only community is on Grindr or Scruff... you have to take a different model... the only group that has no members is called the Group 17. There are 16 states in Germany, and we call them the members of Group 17 if they come from a state without a local association..."*

A Swedish officer said, *"...but mostly for Stockholm. There is still a big difference between Stockholm and the smaller cities. They have had huge problems with openly gay officers in Gothenburg, the second largest city in Sweden."*

The second challenge faced by lesbian and gay police associations is that of external visibility to the LGBT community. There are several components to this challenge that make visibility more difficult. As noted earlier, the members of the lesbian and gay police associations are primarily focused on the internal culture and operations of police agencies. They are in effect, as Githens and Aragon (2009) noted, conventional employee resource groups. This inward focus makes it difficult for the associations to work with, or support, external community-based organisations in meaningful ways. While several

associations did mention some community-based interventions and interactions – for example, working with community groups around hate crime issues – for the most part, external relations or collaborations are minimal. As the Irish officer noted, the community outreach division handles external relations and the association does not want to cross into their territory. One of the challenges mentioned by a British police officer was the fact that community members have a hard time identifying LGBT police officers, as they are an invisible minority within policing. Some LGBT officers in the UK were allowed to wear small pins on their uniforms that indicated they were part of the association, but this varied from agency to agency. This small concession was not common among other lesbian and gay police associations in Europe, except the Netherlands.

Finally, several individuals in the focus groups mentioned a sense of their primary mission being accomplished or the need to find new goals to reinvigorate their lesbian and gay police association. Through the efforts of associations, unions, and other employee groups, many of the issues and challenges faced by LGBT police officers have been changed positively. However, since 2019, two associations have closed their doors in Europe (Sweden and the United Kingdom), and two others reported minimal activity in their associations.

One Swedish officer captured the issue when she said, *“We have done many good things, and many members now have left because they don’t think they need us anymore.”*

Discussion

Lesbian and gay police associations play many different roles in police agencies as well as in communities. All over Europe, such associations primarily serve as bridges between police agencies and their LGBT employees, with an emphasis on collaboration. These associations are also semiautonomous, in that their work with police agencies is usually unofficial and independent. Lesbian and gay police associations and police agencies have worked together closely in several areas, including advice and support to lesbian and gay officers on the force. Of course, some chiefs and agencies were less gay-friendly than others, and so revealing one’s sexual orientation at work is not always a good idea. Thus, police associations also play a vital role in supporting officers in ways that police agencies do not. For example, associations might raise money to help police officers or connect the officers to resources that are gay-related or gay-friendly.

More recently, lesbian and gay police associations have also been active in developing training modules for police officers and staff, including training for new recruits, training for current officers, and specialised training for lesbian and gay liaison officers. For new recruits, training takes place at the academy and therefore may present recruits with their first exposure to the LGBT community. These modules complement the training that new

officers receive in diversity, hate crimes, profiling, and intimate-partner violence. For officers who have completed academy training, the associations have fought hard to ensure that training certificates and advancement standards include sufficient understanding of the lesbian and gay community and its unique challenges.

Of course, these associations have also been very active in recruiting lesbian and gay police officers and in helping develop recruitment strategies. For instance, an association may use its membership to provide outreach to friends, family, and acquaintances who may have an interest in policing but have never talked to an openly lesbian or gay officer. Associations' recruiting efforts also include coordinating outreach at gay-related events and networking with other organisations that serve the lesbian and gay community.

Whether developing policies or conducting outreach, lesbian and gay associations provide a critical connection between police agencies and lesbian and gay officers. The collective knowledge and expertise of such associations can help improve the work lives of police and staff, and the collective energy of these associations can force police agencies to become more gay-friendly and supportive.

Lesbian and gay police associations have had a profound effect on police agencies, lesbian and gay communities, and individual officers. Forming groups and advocating en-masse has served other police groups well, therefore it makes sense that these strategies have also proven useful for lesbian and gay officers. The external nature of these organisations has given lesbian and gay officers a place outside the chain of command, where they can gain support and share information. This external nature has also given these associations the ability to force change through external pressure and influence.

As Marc Burke (1993) noted, *"in the United Kingdom the Home Office had no idea about the size or influence of the Gay Police Association. It did not know whether the GPA represented 10 officers or 1,000 or 10,000. This led to significant victories in reforming the police to become more inclusive."*

The emergence of lesbian and gay police associations traces closes with the trend of individuals identifying themselves as lesbian or gay, and with the growing insistence by minority communities for more equitable and effective police service. While varying in form, structure, and activities, the associations have shown to be a positive contribution to police agencies and lesbian and gay individuals in law enforcement.

Recommendations and Next Steps

The success of lesbian and gay police associations in Europe as employee resource groups has been notable. Early innovators such as the UK, Germany, and the Netherlands forged through uncharted issues, such as training in LGBT-specific policing matters, recognition by various actors and stakeholders, and developing safe environments for all employees regardless of sexual orientation. Most recently, lesbian and gay associations have benefited from the collective knowledge of other EPGA member associations. This is evidenced, for example, by the universally positive reception received by the Italian lesbian and gay association by the LGBT community, the broader community, and the police agencies in the country. The EGPA worked closely with Spanish police officers to create a Spain-centered lesbian and gay police association in 2005. Most recently, the EGPA has worked to launch associations in Serbia, Finland, Greece, and Norway.

While the association has increased in size in recent years, there have also been some closures as well. The 2014 disbandment of the UK LGBT police association and the 2016 disbandment of the Swedish LGBT police association is concerning. Their dissolution raises questions about the future for “mature” or established Europe-based lesbian and gay police associations. With social values changing, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people joining more facets of society – including law enforcement – is there still a need for such associations? Some have called for a more intersectional approach as a way to keep these associations relevant. That is to say, moving beyond the single identity model (in this case, sexual orientation) and instead embracing efforts that ensure other aspects of officers’ identities, like ethnicity, sex, class, and religion are central to improving the work lives of police officers. This more intentional and inclusive approach would acknowledge, as Paik noted, “that experiences and lives cannot be separated into distinct identities of race, class, and gender. Rather, those identities overlap, crossing over into one another in various ways, depending on the context and situation” (Paik, 2017, 5).

There are three specific areas where associations might look for future successes. The first recommendation is to consider continuing and expanding lesbian and gay police associations to other European states. The Dutch, Irish, and Swedish noted working with other countries, in an informal manner.

The Dutch noted the challenges for such an endeavour, “... In Albania and Ukraine, it is difficult to find openly LGBT officers, maybe one or two... we gave a four or five hour training in Albania. Someone from Albania stood up and told us how they cannot offer a chair to someone who comes into the police station, that they do not even have a chair for themselves. Someone from Ukraine said they only have one computer for the entire police station.”

Despite its challenges, this effort has to hold benefits as well. Through the efforts of establishing and supporting new associations, the EGPA can expand its capacity and support throughout Europe. With each new member state, the international association’s

best practices and innovations will emerge. For example, best practices for interviewing same-sex partners in criminal investigations could be developed. Of course, there will be states that will be more amendable than others, for forming an association. The EGPA should prioritise those states most likely to support the creation of such associations.

Second, existing associations should consider increasing their external funding to support broader and deeper connections in the LGBT communities and neighbouring countries. The additional external funds will ensure the autonomy of the state associations and the EGPA to engage in recruitment and capacity-building in other states. Given that a large number of associations who described their activities as primarily internal and employer-based, there appears to be an excellent opportunity to expand the efforts, thereby increasing external collaboration among the states. This is especially important in our current environment of community policing and problem-based policing. An external-facing campaign with the LGBT community could focus on many issues, including bullying, hate crimes, youth empowerment, and substance abuse. These issues have historically been of interest to the LGBT communities and could be better addressed with the support and expertise of a lesbian and gay police officers association.

Finally, in addition to efforts in helping police agencies recruit LGBT individuals to serve in law enforcement, lesbian and gay police associations should become more active in retention efforts for these individuals as well. While social support and networking exist in all eight associations, a more deliberative and systematic approach to retention is critical. Recruitment of individuals is only one aspect of the issue. Retaining good officers through retention efforts should also be part of the goal.

Conclusion

This exploratory research attempts to show the breadth and depth of state-level lesbian and gay police associations across Europe. There is much diversity among the associations, yet many of the issues, challenges, and successes that they face are similar. The police associations in this study share a common desire to make police agencies more LGBT friendly and inclusive through training visibility, and social and professional support. Since the creation of the first association over 30 years ago, these groups have led the effort for training leaders, coworkers, and future police officers about the unique aspects and issues of the LGBT communities. There is room to expand the focus, mission, and goals for these associations to include more visibility and open interactions with the local LGBT communities. Current social media technologies make available collaboration tools inexpensive and more attainable across nation-states. Through collective action and mutual support, the benefits of the innovation gathered from present lesbian and gay police associations could be realised and expanded to police agencies in the east.

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