

## Emancipatory Impact of Pride Events

Written by Frank Van Dalen

What is perceived by many as just a party-event, is for others a tool to improve the social and legal climate for LGBTI people. The impact of pride events on LGBTI emancipation is also perceived differently by pride organizers themselves. In a survey from InterPride in which over one hundred prides participated shows that pride organizers in Europe perceive the impact fairly high, where in the USA this is more limited. In Asia the picture is more diffuse.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, countries in Eastern Europe joined the European Union. Most of these countries with strong conservative and orthodox religion forces resented pride events for many years. Having prides organized in these countries took years of uphill battles and massive pressure of the European Union and international solidarity of activists and politicians from around Europe. The pride events symbolized the right to be visible and vocal as LGBTI communities - and it worked. EPOA president Kristine Garina made clear at the InterPride conference in Las Vegas last year the Baltic States should no longer be considered LGBTI hostile. Even in Belgrade, Serbia where the pride in 2010 met severe violence, the pride in 2015 was, although still heavily guarded by the police, without incidents.

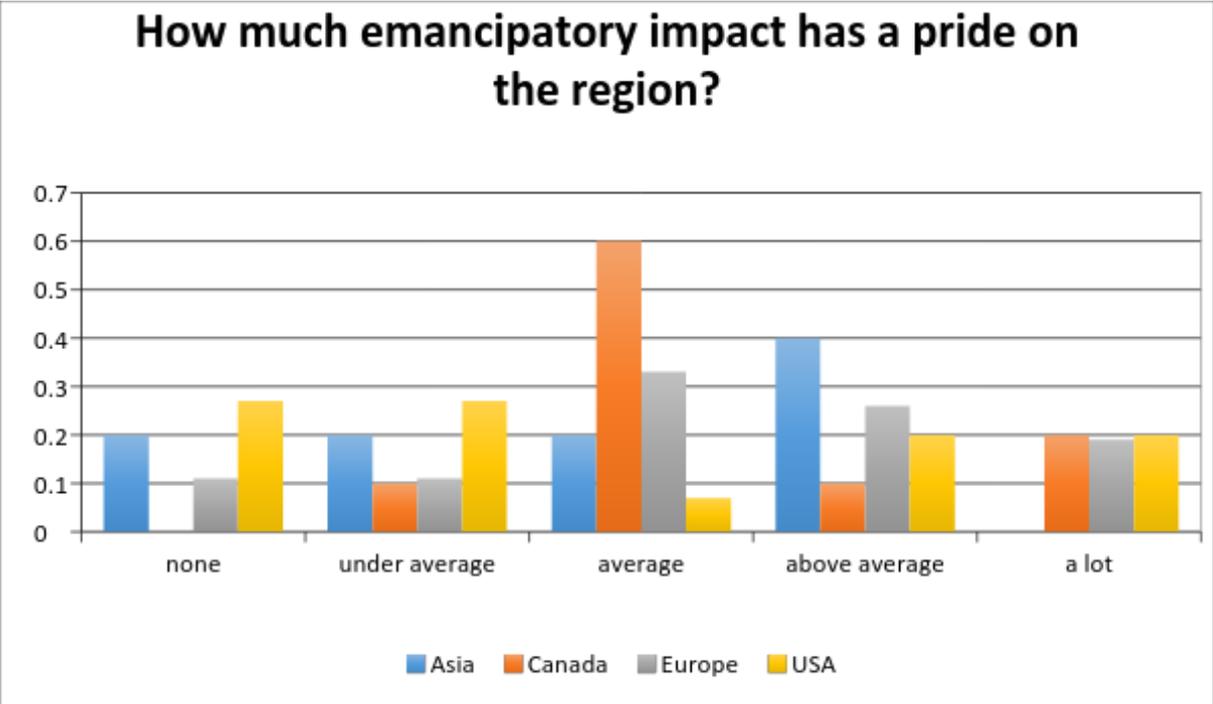
Prides in other European countries still have emancipatory roles to play. In 2007 teenage LGBTI youngsters wanted to participate in Amsterdam Gay Pride. It led to a heated debate, but they eventually participated with the support of the majority of Amsterdam. In the slipstream in most cities in the Netherlands, newly created groups Young & Out were established, and in 2010 the government statistical bureau concluded that the events in 2007 contributed heavily in having the coming out age dropping with 1.5 years.

Last year, the mayor of Venice in Italy stated that if LGBTI people wanted to have a pride parade, they should go to Milan. Also the growth of the Muslim community in many Western European countries, the asylum crisis and as a result the clashes of value systems result in movement to defend LGBTI rights on one side and give empowerment to LGBTI people within the Muslim community and amongst asylum seekers at the other side. It is not the support of the politicians that is required. They are in most cases already fully supportive on LGBTI rights. It is about the social climate. Making visible what might be invisible is one of the key strategies here. Frank van Dalen, former chair of the Gay Pride in Amsterdam and now vice-president of InterPride, explains the strategy as one of the key benefits pride events have to offer. "What is visible cannot be ignored and has to be dealt with." he says.

And although in the United States the LGBTI agenda is not absent, the battle for same-sex marriage rights was mainly fought in the courtrooms and the social climate for LGBTI youngster got its voice from the Trevor project." For that it is a decision for pride organizers to decide if they want to play a role as an emancipatory engine or not," van Dalen says. It means you have to make your pride event political and take a stance on social issues that relate to LGBTI-themes. Not every pride organizer is willing to do so, where in Europe often there is less space for deliberations of such.

In Asia the situation is different. In Taiwan the newly elected president Tsai Ing-wen and her Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) endorsed LGBTI politics heavily and took presence during the pride in Taipei in October 2015. Such political collaboration we see more often. In Hong Kong, the pride movement endorsed the Umbrella Movement. This was the protest movement claiming the right to choose the Hong Kong leadership via real democratic elections. Many of the pride leaders were also involved in the Umbrella Movement against the central government of China. At the same time in many Asian countries there are autocratic governments active. A pride event in Phuket, Thailand for example focuses on HIV-prevention in support of its own LGBTI community. With a military coup only two years ago and military ruling the country they are suppressing all events that they consider to be a threat of the happiness-doctrine they pushed upon the country. The LGBTI community is hard to blame for a non-political pride event.

The survey of InterPride as part of the Pride Radar project only uncovers the perception as pride organizers see the impact of their events on the emancipation of LGBTI people. “It would be good if more in depth research is done, so strategies to further strengthen prides as a tool for pro-LGBTI developments can be developed,” van Dalen says, “but it is clear that pride events are important, because small or big, they will have impact. Just look at Uganda where this year for the fifth time a pride event will be held. The social climate has not improved, the anti-gay laws are not taken of the table, but self-confidence and strength of the LGBTI community has grown. And that is also something that counts”.



“What is visible cannot be ignored and has to be dealt with”, is one of the key-messages of Frank van Dalen, former chair of the Dutch LGBTI movement COC and Gay Pride in Amsterdam and Vice President of InterPride.