



Love of Freedom - Freedom to love

By Uffe Elbæk, Director, World Outgames 2009, April 2008

World Outgames History

World Outgames has only been held once before – in 2006 in Montreal, Canada. Originally Montreal had won the bid to host Gay Games, the first serious sport event aimed at the LGBT community, which was held for the first time in San Francisco in 1982.

Due to an irresolvable conflict between the Gay Games Federation – the organisation that owns the Gay Games 'trademark' - and the city of Montreal about the economic management of the event, in 2003 an entirely new international sports organisation saw the light of day: GLISA – The Gay and Lesbian International Sports Association. One of the purposes of GLISA is to hold a major international sports, culture and human rights event for the global LGBT community every fourth year.

GLISA owns the 'trademark' World Outgames, and Montreal was host for the first World Outgames in 2006. The event included an extensive and ambitious sports programme and a smaller arts and culture programme. Central was the three-day Human Rights conference which resulted in The Declaration of Montreal, a historical watershed encompassing all aspects of Human Rights, from the guarantee of fundamental freedoms to the prevention of discrimination against LGBT people in healthcare, education and immigration. A total of 12,500 people from 110 countries participated in the first World Outgames in Montreal.

Just two weeks before the first World Outgames opened in Montreal, Gay Games was held in Chicago. So there were now two international sports and cultural events to choose between. You could either go to Montreal or Chicago - or both, which happily many chose to do.

In 2006 Copenhagen, the capital city of Denmark, contacted GLISA to investigate the possibility of hosting the second World Outgames. After a rigorous application process Copenhagen won the bid to host the games. The city decided to hold World Outgames early - in 2009 - so as not to coincide or create any conflict with Gay Games in Cologne, Germany, in 2010.

In late autumn 2006 politicians in Copenhagen granted the first 20 million DKK in support of the event, and at the beginning of 2007 the 5-man core team responsible for planning and holding World Outgames 2009 was appointed.

Today, World Outgames has 22 paid members of staff, who together with hundreds of voluntary activists are working hard to get ready to welcome the whole world to Copenhagen – Denmark's beautiful capital – in the last week of July next year.

A Scandinavian Version of World Outgames

There's no doubt that World Outgames 2009 will be a different World Outgames to the one held in Montreal. Not only because we're in a different part of the world, but also because Copenhagen is a very different city to Montreal. Among the World Outgames staff and the local LGBT community in Copenhagen the consensus is that we should make a virtue out of presenting a Scandinavian version of World Outgames to the world.



The entire event is guided by the fact that we take participants' needs seriously - and that we're aiming for a humane, affectionate and playful week. This is something every participant should feel from the moment they step onto Danish soil, to their departure a week later.

Whilst the atmosphere throughout the week will be humane, playful and affectionate, we never lose sight of the very serious social issues that form the basis for World Outgames 2009. Because it's still a fact that one third of the countries in the world still criminalizes love between people of the same gender. And that active homosexuality is punished by the death penalty in seven countries.

Which is why it's essential that the participants in World Outgames 2009 are aware of the dual nature of the event: That World Outgames is a joyous and celebratory event, but that this celebration springs from the deeply serious social oppression that is a fact of life for many people in the global LGBT community.

So the goal of World Outgames 2009 is to celebrate and document the vitality of the LGBT community - a vitality that exists despite the social oppression and violence that all too many LGBT people meet every day across the globe. Which is why the slogan for World Outgames in Copenhagen next year is "Love of Freedom - Freedom to Love"- a declaration of love for democratic societies that make it possible for you and me and everyone to love and live their life with whoever they choose, regardless of ethnicity, politics, religion or sexual orientation.

An Event for the Head, Heart and Body

The programme for World Outgames 2009 has three equally important pillars: An extensive sports programme (with competitions in 38 sports disciplines), an ambitious arts and culture programme (with festivals, exhibitions - and not least eight OutCities venues), and a three-day international Human Rights conference. In other words, World Outgames 2009 appeals to the head, the heart and the body: the head through the Human Rights conference, the heart through culture, and the body through the sports programme.

It is this holistic thinking behind the event - taking all aspects of human existence seriously - that makes World Outgames both unique and relevant. All too often the three elements are separated, but during World Outgames 2009 all three of them - the head, the heart and the body - are taken equally seriously with the ambition of creating an event that can be experienced holistically by every participant.

New Friends and New Networks

We're expecting at least 8,000 paying participants from around the world, as well as 10,000 tourists arriving in Copenhagen specifically for World Outgames 2009. Out of the 8,000 paying participants we're expecting 6,000 for the sports programme, 1,000 in the World Outgames cultural festivals, and 1,000 at the international Human Rights conference.

Even though the programme is vast, it's important for the World Outgames staff that we create the space for participants to meet not only each other - across the three programme pillars - but also the LGBT community in Copenhagen.



There will be plenty of time to experience Copenhagen city life. And there will also be hosted housing and hosted dinners in the private homes of the many Copenhageners who are opening their doors to World Outgames participants.

It is, after all, these meetings between people that are the most important and valuable moments at an event like World Outgames – those quality moments where LGBT people from totally different parts of the world have the opportunity to make new friends and establish social and professional networks beyond the boundaries of nation and culture.

So no matter how serious a sportsperson, arts lover, or Human Rights activist you are, the programme at World Outgames 2009 is planned so that all participants have both the time and opportunity to meet new friends and acquaintances beyond their own specialised interests.

Gender, Identity and Diversity

In planning the sports, cultural and Human Rights programme the staff at World Outgames is focussing on three central concepts: gender, identity and diversity.

Because these three concepts will not only be raised and debated in vastly different ways and in very different social spaces during the entire World Outgames week, they also guide how the staff at World Outgames interact - and our understanding of the task we've been given by the politicians at Copenhagen City Hall.

This includes the staff's ambition that the World Outgames programme appeals to and represents women's needs and interests as much as those of men. Because LGBT events like World Outgames still often have an imbalance when it comes to female and male participants - with women often being clearly underrepresented.

This is something we want to change next year in Copenhagen. This is why the World Outgames staff have the ultimate goal of making the 2009 programme equally appealing and exciting for women and for men.

We also want to create a forum for what we could call 'The Queer Community,' by which I mean the many people in the LGBT community who do not identify as gay or lesbian. Because today the LGBT community includes a lot of people who have consciously chosen an identity or way of life that goes beyond seeing themselves as either lesbians or gays.

So we're making World Outgames 2009 a truly diverse event. An event in which debating gender and identity is central to the agenda. Not only in a Scandinavian context, but in a global context. Because it's not only the individual LGBT person that is 'coming out' in Copenhagen. No – the entire world is 'coming out' in Copenhagen, not least through the highly visible presence of the eight OutCities that are invited to Copenhagen during the week of World Outgames.

World Outgames 2009 – A Global LGBT Meeting Place

By inviting cities like Melbourne, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, Mexico City, Montreal, Tel Aviv, Amsterdam and Aarhus, Denmark to Copenhagen during World Outgames, the Copenhagen team have sent a very clear signal that World Outgames is not only an event for the LGBT community in North America and Northern Europe. No, World Outgames 2009 is an event and meeting place for everyone in the global LGBT community.



This is something we want to see happen not only during the Human Rights conference, but also on the streets and squares of Copenhagen during World Outgames 2009. Which is why we've invited these cities of the world to bring their very best arts and culture to Copenhagen next year.

During the week these international city-culture programmes will reflect the very different lives lived by LGBT people under very different circumstances in very different parts of the world.

The goal is to create a dynamic interaction between arts and culture in the public realm – Copenhagen's streets, squares and backyards – and the more direct political discussions at the Human Rights conference. Between these two poles the agenda of 'Love of Freedom - Freedom to Love' will unfold, with the goal that everyone who is a part of World Outgames 2009 takes the agenda with all its central LGBT issues back to their own city, workplace or place of education.

Because for the staff at World Outgames 2009 the success criteria is not only creating a fantastic event during the last week of July next year, but that World Outgames 2009 also leaves a lasting mark. Not only for the participants who come to Copenhagen, but for their entire LGBT community.

It is our heartfelt hope that the experiences participants have during World Outgames 2009 are of a quality and seriousness that can inspire and enrich debates and social interventions in the local sphere of every participant when they get back home.

As well as inspiring each and every participant to share the knowledge and social and professional networks they gain in Copenhagen, the staff here have already entered strategic partnerships with The Danish Institute for Human Rights and Amnesty International to develop a more systematic collation of the results generated by World Outgames 2009.

This systematic collation of experience, knowledge and contacts will subsequently be made available via the Internet to the global LGBT community, who will thus be given the tools to refocus on the complex and often problematic living conditions of LGBT people.

Our main message is that World Outgames 2009 is not over before everyone that has experienced the event in Copenhagen during the last week of July next year has implemented their World Outgames experience in positive actions that can improve the quality of life and rights of LGBT people – regardless of where they live or work. Because only through positive real-life action can World Outgames 2009 create a lasting legacy. For the individual and society as a whole.

Sport

From 100-meter sprints to the 200-meter backstroke, from badminton to wrestling, sport is one of the main attractions at World Outgames 2009. Planning is underway to accommodate a minimum of 6,500 athletes in more than 38 disciplines and a range of workshops.

Through a close collaboration with the [GLISA](#), [EGLSF](#), [Pan Sports](#) and many national and local sports clubs and associations, we will provide the facilities and logistical support to make World Outgames 2009 an open, competitive, fair and life-affirming experience for everyone involved.

Cultural Programme

A serious focus on culture at an LGBT event like World Outgames is a new departure that puts global arts and culture firmly on the LGBT map.

Under the themes of gender, identity and diversity, World Outgames 2009 is hosting exhibitions, performances, concerts and workshops - and a whole week of parties.

We're delighted to announce that Copenhagen's art and cultural spaces have opened their doors and hearts to World Outgames - but we'll also be celebrating on the streets.

From July 26th - August 1st the 8 global cities invited as OutCities will take over the streets and squares of Copenhagen to present the very best they have of world culture - with a queer twist.

We're also offering our guests four exclusive programmes for the dancers, singers and film fans and fetishists who sign up for the World Outgames Cultural Packages of Tango, Choir, Film and Leather.

A celebration of the talents of LGBT artists from around the world in Copenhagen in 2009.

Conference

The conference will be held in Copenhagen from July 27th - July 29th 2009.

The name of the conference "Love of Freedom - Freedom to Love" summarizes what it is all about: the love of the freedom that allows us our love life, our sexuality and our gender identity without fear, discrimination or criminalization.

Under this banner, the overall goal of the conference is to reaffirm and defend the human right of every LGBT-person in the world to participate fully, equally and openly in every aspect of life.

We also encourage you to help us collect good practices - concrete initiatives that make a positive difference for LGBT people in your region, organisation, workplace, children's school, country, etc. In June 2008 the call for good practices opens on our website. The conference will mark the finalization of the Copenhagen Catalogue of Good Practices - a collation of good practices to remind us of the progress we have made so far, and send us home with new ideas and resources.

**OutCities**

With OutCities World Outgames 2009 is taking over the streets of Copenhagen in a manifestation and celebration of tolerance and diversity in the world today.

The Lord Mayor of Copenhagen has invited the mayors of global cities to join their local LGBT community in bringing their best queer arts and culture to the OutCities world festival week from July 26th - August 1st.

So far Rio de Janeiro, Tel Aviv, Amsterdam, Mexico City, Melbourne and Denmark's very own Aarhus have accepted the invitation to fill the squares and streets with 150 artists creating music, installations, events, and performances on the themes of gender, identity and diversity.

For more information see:
www.copenhagen2009.org