

## **THROUGH BODY IN MOTION. ANTHROPOLOGICAL STUDY OF EMBODIED EXPERIENCES AND IDENTITY TRANSITION OF FEMALE FITNESS CULTURE PARTICIPANTS**

The project embraces research on embodied experiences and movement practices of female participants of fitness culture in Poland, more precisely in Warsaw. The main aim of the project is to investigate how female fitness culture participants' engagement with movement practices influences their embodied experiences and individual female identity transition.

For the purposes of the project, female fitness culture is understood as movement culture, i.e. culture which focuses on the body in the practice of movement. In Poland, women constitute the largest group of people who participate in fitness culture, therefore the orientation at the female experience. Additionally, as a fitness instructor myself I also co-create and co-live the 'world' of female fitness culture participants. Present studies on the fitness culture, processes of (re)defining and (re)producing patterns of femininity, and processes of (re)constructing identity in Western culture and popular imagination refer mostly to women's appearance and the objectified body. Such a perspective can lead to strengthen stereotypical approaches that distort the complexity of a female movement culture. Although the body is a crucial element in female fitness culture participants' identity construction, it cannot be limited to the objectified body and women's relationship with it. I propose a new anthropological approach focusing on experience, embodiment and action in order to analyze the female participants' engagement in movement practices and its results in the whole diversity, reaches far beyond the objectified body. I believe that corporeality and movement, which are experienced by the individual subjectively and "first-person" and in many ways, can be treated as tools through which the individual constructs her interactions with other subjects and thus her individual and collective identity. Additionally, drawing inspiration from Anne Birgitte Leseth's concept of "embodied movement practices" (2014) I propose to broaden the scope of research so as to include everyday movement practices, and to analyze the whole within a wider spatial-temporal context.

Within the project fieldwork will be conducted with the use of ethnographic methods by one person in one Warsaw fitness chain, during unpaid trainings arranged for fitness instructors by this chain and during paid workshops arranged for fitness instructors by professional fitness schools operating in Poland. The chosen commercial chain is middle-sized and middle-standard and it owns 15 fitness clubs in different district of Warsaw. I am employed there as a fitness instructor. Interviews will be conducted with female master instructors (the well-known trainers who conduct trainings for fitness instructors), ordinary female fitness instructors, and ordinary women participating in group trainings as they all shape and change female fitness culture. In order to not lose the specificity of experience and the sense of movement I intend to use also non-discursive research methods, among others a variety of body work techniques.

Project results will contribute to the modern reflection upon identity processes. The research on female fitness culture-gendered identity relations will offer a broader diagnosis of contemporary culture. Analysis of active participation of women in fitness culture in Poland enables to negotiate the role of the female body in culture and articulate critical interpretations of embodiment as a mode of being-in-the-world. In the same time the project allows investigating the role of female fitness culture in East-Central Europe where it has developed differently than in the West, however it has received little attention from researchers. Tangible results of the project will consist of a series of English language articles and the English language manuscript of a book devoted to embodied experiences and identity transition of female fitness culture participants.