

Emancipatory performance. Socio-cultural dimensions of the Polish drag scene.

Summary

The main objective of the research project is to evaluate the socio-cultural meaning and emancipatory potential of queer performances. The queer performative sphere will be investigated as a product of social life, arising in a particular cultural-political context. It is assumed that queer performances are not only a kind of art but are also dedicated to demonstrating the social and cultural values of the queer community as well as they can play a role as a tool of emancipation and a way of political and identity activism and recognition. To address the main objective of the project, the study will consider the strategic character of performance in the emancipation process of the LGBTQ+ community on the example of the individual experiences of respondents involved in the Polish drag scene and Polish ballroom culture. The project examines the following main research questions: What kind of social and cultural values are demonstrated by queer performances? How the queer performances like drag shows contribute to the emancipation processes of the LGBTQ+ community? How does the artistic activity of the respondents affect the visibility of their social group?

One sociological theory used in the research process is the macro-sociological model of social action as a cultural performance by Jeffrey Alexander. The cultural performance is described as a social process by which social actors demonstrate the meaning of their social situation to others. Alexander's approach will be implemented in the project to address the question referring to the drag's performance as a way of demonstrating the values of the marginalized community. The queer theory will be another theoretical approach framing the research project. This approach provides analytical tools that can show that such categories as identity, gender and sexuality are in fact socially constructed concepts and contribute to keeping individuals within the prescribed normative boundaries. In the context of queer theory, the proposed research will treat the performance as a tool to challenge the institutionalised, normative heterosexuality and as the act of emancipation. Performance can be perceived as a method of social change, and performers create the opportunity to change the social consciousness about their own experiences. Performance can give critical and reflective perspectives and can initiate social action.

The research will be divided into two stages: (1) the initial stage consisting of (a) desk research and literature review, (b) the netnography of drag artists' profiles in social media; (2) the main stage consisting of (a) individual in-depth interviews (IDI) with drag artists - 30 IDI's, (b) conducting participatory observations of drag performances, (c) individual in-depth interviews (IDI) with LGBTQ+ activist - 10 IDI's.

The results of the project will contribute to the development of queer sociology which is institutionally located on the periphery of mainstream sociology in Poland. At the same time, Polish research may be an object of interest for sociologists from other countries that do not have access to Polish drag culture. This project is highly innovative in the Polish context, however, it will also contribute to the existing knowledge of drag culture. The attempt to investigate the Polish drag community and the emancipatory potential of their performances is innovative in Polish academia. There is a huge gap in research in this field, despite the fact, that Poland is one of the biggest countries in Central Europe, it is a member of the European Union. The project can contribute to the development of sensitivity in social studies and bring out some issues that queer people in Poland need to face. Furthermore, the impact of the project can contribute to the development of the research field and scientific discipline. The drag scene was always strongly connected to the LGBTQ+ culture and drag artists have had an impact on the emancipatory processes in other countries. The project focuses on drag artists in Central and Eastern Europe which has been largely overlooked in international and local studies. The Polish drag scene is understudied, and in the context of discrimination that queer people experience in Poland, the impact of drag artists on the emancipatory processes can have significant importance.