

The project focuses on the development and significance of ballroom culture in Poland – from its emergence in 2012 to the present – and aims to produce the first comprehensive study of this phenomenon in a local context.

Ballroom culture originated in the 1970s in Harlem, New York, created by queer BIPOC individuals, particularly transgender women, as a safe space for those marginalized by mainstream society. Balls, during which participants “walk” in performative categories, are acts of resistance against dominant norms related to gender, race, and social class. Ballroom reached Poland relatively recently, mainly through the popularization of dance – voguing. Enthusiasts began to form their own houses, organize balls, and lead workshops. Over time, ballroom began to fulfill not only an artistic function but also a social one – becoming an important space of community, visibility, and resistance for queer individuals, including those with migration or refugee experiences and racialized minorities.

The aim of the project is to examine ballroom as a phenomenon that is both imported and locally rooted. The project will explore the evolution of the ballroom scene in Poland in relation to specific socio-political conditions: the situation of LGBTQ+ individuals, the national political climate, and levels of social acceptance. It will also reflect on the functioning of ballroom in the tension between cultural appropriation and recognition, between counterculture and pop culture, between activism and commercialization. Ballroom will be analyzed as a space for queer visibility, identity formation, and survival strategies under oppressive conditions.

Key research questions include:

- What role does ballroom culture play in Poland, and what kinds of communities does it create?
- How do local socio-political conditions influence the form and function of ballroom?
- In what ways does ballroom operate as a space of resistance, affirmation, and community for marginalized individuals?
- How is ballroom culture transformed by its transition into the mainstream?
- How are gender, sexual, and racial identities performed, negotiated, and affirmed through ballroom practices?

The preliminary hypothesis is that ballroom in Poland initially developed mainly as an aesthetic phenomenon – through fascination with voguing and pop culture – rather than as a political or communal movement. In contrast to the United States, where ballroom emerged as a survival strategy for BIPOC LGBTQ+ communities and only later entered the mainstream, in Poland its stronger political and communal dimension has only gradually come to the fore.

The project will use qualitative research methods, including analysis of visual, archival, and media materials. The research will involve interviews, participant observation, and documentation of events and performances. A key element will also be consultations with international researchers (from the USA and France).

The significance of the project lies in addressing a substantial research gap. While reflections on queer club culture appear in the humanities and social sciences, ballroom remains largely unexplored – especially in contemporary contexts and outside of the U.S. Globally, only one monograph has been published on the contemporary ballroom scene – now outdated and focused solely on the American context. In Poland, no academic study of the local ballroom scene has been conducted to date, despite its growing presence in culture, social media, and activist discourse.

Beyond documenting the history of Polish ballroom and producing the first comprehensive study of the phenomenon in its local context, the results of my research may have a broader social impact. They can contribute to increasing the visibility of the Polish queer scene and provide critical tools for the ballroom community itself.