

# “Rapped Resistance and Capitalism”: Contexts, Identities, and Distribution of DIY Rap in Poland<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract:** Based on 32 interviews the following paper explores the contexts of current popularity of hip-hop culture Poland. I hypothesize that technological development and popularization of the internet is the crucial element in enabling the inclusive development and popularity of the music. By focusing on local, unknown artists, I outline their activities and locate them in a bigger picture of the Polish hip-hop culture and industry. I claim that an increasing availability of personal computers in Poland, home internet and development of on-line streaming video-channels removed barriers and allowed the fans and artists to communicate.

**Keywords:** hip-hop, globalization, Eastern Europe, Poland

## **Introduction**

This article addresses issues at the crossroad of the discussion about cultural production in post-communist societies and the debates concerning the development of global hip-hop. It analyzes the conditions of this development as well as shows its relation to global hip-hop culture. In the paper, I show how local contexts, such as the Polish urban environment, historical context and social development, interact and influence the music and its narratives. Trying to avoid reductions, I take into consideration selected factors establishing the current popularity of hip-hop culture. I hypothesize that technological development and popularization of the internet is the crucial element in enabling the inclusive development and popularity of the music. I claim that an increasing availability of personal computers in Poland, especially popularization of home internet and development of on-line streaming video-channels removed barriers and allowed the fans and artists to communicate. My article depicts how rappers participate in hip-hop culture through the internet by posting their songs as well as downloading music. I argue that technology is one of the key factors generating the popularity of the genre. In addition to that, I consider the role of the transition to a free-market economy in forming the identities of artists and post-EU migrations, which mostly touched the generation of today's hip-hoppers.

The analysis focuses on the cultural production of local, unknown rappers who have been devoted to musical production for years. In the paper, I outline their activities and locate them in a bigger picture of the Polish hip-hop culture and industry. By looking at the Polish hip-hop environment, I try to present the relation between popular rappers and local artists doing their hip-hop at home. I look at the different levels of cultural production. Firstly, my paper focuses on the local, unknown or debuting rappers producing music in a do-it-yourself manner, mostly as a hobby. This part is based on my ethnographic research conducted in 2011, when I acquired 31 in-depth interviews with local MCs and observed their practices. Secondly, in order to keep my findings complete, I rely on the popular, officially and professionally published artists, for whom hip-hop is a significant source of income. Some arguments are illustrated with quotes from their lyrics. I identify them as expressing a position of the legal part of the hip-hop scene. In other words, using Polish hip-hop slang, in

this study I explore respectively the “underground” cultural production and put it in the relation to the “legal” one.

An additional goal of the paper is to show that hip-hop in Central and Eastern Europe, strangely rarely explored by social science scholars, serves a number of important functions in public life. The paper briefly outlines those functions, especially focusing on the role of hip-hop for identity-making, its distribution channels and relation to the mainstream culture. This article fits into the stream of researching local variations of hip-hop with a focus on how the local context shapes the global cultural pattern of hip-hop (Condry 2006; Dennis 2012; Mitchell 2001; Weiss 2009). Although the role of hip-hop for identity-making has been previously addressed in the literature (Krekow and Steiner 2002; Menrath 2001), by exploring this topic in the context of Central and Eastern Europe, an important field for research is uncovered. I believe that showing this sphere provides valuable insight into contemporary urban cultural production in similar post-Communist neighborhoods as well as contributes to the discussions about post-communist street culture. My study continues in the vein of some work on the underground hip-hop scene, such as ethnographic fieldwork with inner-city men who rap at the ‘Project Blowed’, a hip-hop “open mic” contest in Los Angeles, conducted by Jooyoung Lee (Lee 2009).

### **The genesis of Polish hip-hop**

*“Man, beginnings of hip-hop? My association is Chicago Bulls hats, tape-recorders and cheap fake clothes from abroad (...). I could say that rap came to Poland in the 1990s on the same truck as the other things from the West. Together with German porn, Marlboros and fakes of navy-blue Helly Hansen coats (...)” (AD - interview)*

To start discussing Polish hip-hop, it is necessary to go back to its beginnings. In a similar way as in numerous studies about hip-hop around the world, it is possible to identify the foundations of the hip-hop culture as a part of a narrow trend of Americanization of the early 1990s (Ntarangwi 2009; Sharma 2010). However, due to the historical setting of Central and Eastern Europe, the global flows arrived as communism ended. Poland, as a relatively liberal country in its pre-transition stage, witnessed some elements of market and social freedom (Patton 2012). At this time, in the late 1980s, the first break-dancers, partially inspired by the 1980s movies “Beat Street” and “Break Dance – The Movie”, started to practice in Poland. Although they did not treat their discipline as anything related to hip-hop and practiced in local houses of culture and gymnasiums, their movements, activities and accessories were very strongly embedded in the global hip-hop culture. White headbands, baggy tracksuits, chains and high top shoes were at this time eccentric, shocking and attention-catching.<sup>2</sup> Until today, for many Polish hip-hoppers those early pioneers are a strong point of reference and seem to be predecessors of the wider cultural movement. The changes that emerged later - opening the borders, introducing market freedom, continuing state reforms and democratization of social life - caused an evolution of social life and put Polish independent cultural production into motion.

One of my respondents, whom I will call here Daniel<sup>3</sup>, is a 27-year old computer analyst in Krakow, Poland, and has been a do-it-yourself rapper for about seven years. He tells me the story of his fascination with the music. In his words, Polish hip-hop's development is parallel to the birth of the market-economy and democracy, and just like transition, is a part of his life. He claims: *“Hip hop was born on unstable display stands made from camping beds, where people were selling anything possible, including pirated rap*

tapes” (DD, interview). Opening the market created an entrepreneurial opportunity and a lack of copyright laws and an ease of copying a tape-recording made the distribution of music chaotic but quite easy and accessible. The music was widely distributed and reached wide audiences (Roman 2003). At the time of the first years of Eastern European systemic transition, hip-hop groups were topping hit lists in the United States. Thus, in a natural way their records were imported and diffused to the Polish audience, which was hungry for new music that could be played on the newly-arrived Western stereos. Daniel’s first hip-hop inspirations were Run DMC and the Beastie Boys and as he said, at this point he could not understand anything from the lyrics but the musical value and general aesthetic hit the right notes, so to speak. In 1990, MC Hammer’s “Can’t touch this” was released. In Daniel’s words, in Poland it was played everywhere, including school discos, radio stations and television. Along with the commercial success, more genuine, street-originating groups such as Run DMC, the Sugar Hill Gang, the Wu-Tang Clan and NWA circulated. Additionally, break-dance videos and AND1 basketball-tricks tapes with hip-hop in the background started to be available. As the cultural transfer progressed, quite soon the first national varieties emerged.

An actual boom for musical production of Polish hip-hop music began in the mid-1990s. The first rap album was recorded by a Polish artist in English in 1992. The album, called “*East on da Mic*”, was a mixture of heavily accented rapping in English with moves in the style of Vanilla Ice in the music video which promoted it. The music did not achieve national success at the time of its release and the clip gained popularity later, mostly due to the fact that it is the first Polish rap video. Later, the same artist recorded a new album under the nickname Liroy. His 1995 LP, called “*Alboom*”, reached an unparalleled success with sales of 500,000 copies. As I learned from my interviewees, mostly because of his commercial character and lack of “true meaning”, Liroy was pushed away from “the scene”, which was forming and self-defining at this time. The very controversial figure of the singer, who became a part of broader consciousness, with vulgar language and tattoos that were at this time shocking, did not fit in with the early beginnings of hip-hop culture. This is where a clear distinction was made: rap was an activity; hip-hop was a way of living, expressed in the music, graffiti, break-dance and skating or rollerblading.<sup>4</sup> Liroy, with his stylized image, did not express the urban lifestyle and did not address the problems that the “true” hip-hoppers did.

The actual hip-hop boom happened in parallel to Liroy’s success. In 1993 in Warsaw, the radio announcer Bogna Świątkowska, later named the god-mother of Polish hip-hop, started a musical audition entitled “*Kolorszok*”. There is a wide consensus that it was a milestone for the music. During the late evening hours, Świątkowska invited young hip-hoppers to the studio and allowed them to present their work. She aimed at playing tunes which she claims were neither easy nor had a commercial character.

*“It is not an easy, nice and pleasant music but those guys want to show something (...). It is not sugared, faked – pop songs: where a lady swivels her hips and it’s nice. That it is not a product for sale. They cannot do it in a different way. If they want to express themselves, they do it the way that hip-hop sounds.”<sup>5</sup>*

Similarly, in 1995 in Szczecin, a city in northwestern Poland, the radio announcer Aśka Tyszkiewicz developed a radio-program called “Wu Doo”.

Both auditions generated a big audience and an increased interest in the music as well as the culture. *Kolorszok* and *Wu Doo* promoted already-working artists and inspired many

fans to record in Polish and take part in the national hip-hop scene. The radio studios where the programs were produced were an important source of new contacts and integration of the scene. Some of the new contacts resulted in long-lasting collaborations and later-formed popular groups. The most important early representatives of hip-hop scene had their premieres in those programs. Warsaw especially bloomed under *Kolorszok* and until now it remains the most powerful center of hip-hop production. The common roots of the Warsaw hip-hoppers created the most powerful and the strongest hip-hop environment and the main pillars of the culture. In parallel to the events in the capital, peripheral towns and cities started to rap on a lower scale and without significant publicity. In the process, various styles emerged: from vulgar *Slums Attack*, psychedelic *Kaliber 44* to the almost sociopolitical narration of *Lona i Weber*.

The gradual development of a national hip-hop scene created a trend leading to the commercial success of a large number of artists. The hip-hoppers' popularity reached its peak at the beginning of the 2000s. The success included the highest presence of the hip-hop scene in the mass-media and peaking sales of albums, along with the presence of the albums on the hit lists. In reaction, two leading Polish music stations, MTV and VIVA!, started broadcasting hip-hop profiled auditions such as Yo!MTV Raps, *Rap Pakamera* and *Rap Kanciapa*. The commercial success generated a sub-genre, which had an artificial, commercial character and was condemned as destroying the "true meaning of hip-hop": *hip-hopolo*<sup>6</sup>. The mass media bust ended after two seasons and in fact hip-hop disappeared from the public culture entirely. The interest in the streets of Poland was decreasing. A symbolic moment was the introduction by TV stations of a music video policy, which banned the clips with swear words, smoking or drinking. Due to the dropping inflow of money and the stations' policy, most of the artists boycotted the clip production and returned to the non-mainstream media. Broadband internet was at this time dynamically developing. A direct result of media non-presence was decreased sales of records and closure of contracts with the major distributors. At this stage, many artists decided to either give up or take a track of continuous, stable development. In effect, some of the top-notch rappers established self-managed micro-companies specializing in various disciplines: music labels aimed at promoting independent music; companies offering services necessary for music production such as recording music videos and renting equipment; or they started their own clothing brands.

Currently Polish hip-hop culture contains active music, graffiti and dance scenes as well as a dynamic clothing industry and a number of alternative music clubs. Every week new hip-hop videos promoting new albums are uploaded to the internet and it is hardly possible to find a music bestseller list without a Polish rapper. Polish hip-hoppers play concerts every weekend and appear in clubs in major cities, but also in the small-sized dives on the peripheries. The most famous artists are booked half a year in advance, sometimes playing more than three concerts a week. At the same time, local, unknown artists produce countless numbers of new tracks and albums, which also circulate on the internet. Still, all of hip-hop production is unified by a common understanding of the world and approach to reality. Hip-hop serves a number of functions, expresses desires, gives advice and serves as a chronicle of the events in towns and cities.

### **Being a part of Global Hip Hop**

As with varieties of hip-hop around the world, the combination of the local and global components creates a unique aesthetic and lyrical form. Christopher Dennis, writing about Afro-Colombian rap, noticed that within this context "*youth's identification with the lower-*

*class urban imaginary of old school, socially conscious and especially gangsta rap has influenced local meanings of authenticity”* (Dennis: 44). This authenticity, embedded in the experiences on the streets and careful observations, serves as a universal rule of hip-hop everywhere in the world (Jeffries 2011). The awareness of the existence of international varieties allows international musicians to integrate and at the same time produce common music, which uses the same components (the beat, rhythm and rapping) but is performed using different references and varying aesthetics. Paradoxically, in the case of Polish rap, very little is said by my respondents about the Western, especially American, rappers. Instead of that, contacts with Central and Eastern European as well as British artists intensify.

During my meetings with the representatives of the hip-hop culture, I was surprised at how little was said about the hip-hop world outside Poland. Before conducting my research, I expected most of my respondents to speak about new musical trends and popular American hip-hop artists. I wrongly assumed that popular trends from the outside are imitated locally. During my research, my interviewees claimed that the current state of art of American hip-hop does not suit their tastes and they prefer the older songs, “the oldschool”. A Warsaw rapper informed me that most of the beginning rappers start by using the ready instrumentals available on the internet, which are known and recognized and provide a simple pace and beat, ready to use for any beginning rapper (RD, expert interview). What struck me was the fact that another MC, HG, told me that he actually does not like the current work of American hip-hoppers, except for one - Tyler the Creator. He expressed the highest appreciation for the oldschool works and said that the shining stars such as NAS, Jay-Z, Kanye West, Eminem and Snoop Dog are the founding fathers and icons for Polish hip-hoppers but not a living inspiration. Instead, in the lyrics “the oldschool” rappers are widely appreciated. Naming them proves a vast knowledge of the discipline and history of hip-hop as well as educates the younger generations of fans.

*I love Sugar Hill Gang after 25 years,  
I still look for an ideal beat like Bambaataa,  
All the time I listen to those records from the years ago and on tracks  
I often hear MCs older than my dad  
I know the history, and know well that here,  
The first tags were drawn by Tucky, and Rock Steady Crew danced,  
The first club was warmed by Coke la Rock and Kool Herc,  
Thanks to them I have so many albums on my shelf,  
it's DJ Hollywood, Grand Master Flash, people from Zulu,  
Furious Five, Jazzy Jeff, I remember about oldschool,  
I know well who is Kool Moe Dee, Red Alert and seriously  
I remember well where I am today and who was here before<sup>7</sup>.*

The historic icons are present in the Polish rap songs describing the first experiences with hip-hop and the development of the discipline. The current activities of the founding fathers are rather unmentioned and do not constitute any important part of hip-hop identity or influence the lyrics. This situation might be understood in two ways. Firstly, at the time of the commercial success of the American rappers, the Polish counterparts were beginning their journey into hip-hop. Secondly, American hip-hop went a long way towards commercialization: the artists got richer and wealthier and became part of mainstream pop-music, which is less attractive than the Brooklyn recordings of the early 1990s.

Polish underground performers in particular neglect the commercial way of participating in the culture. What surprised me during my research was the fact that all of my

respondents stressed that they still do not aim at reaching popularity and commercial success. GW argued that the way he does his rap is about training and improving the technique in order to be appreciated (expert interview). He claimed that the better it is, the bigger the chances of being seen and appreciated by the audience. Similarly, Daniel confirmed that the musical production is a way of creative relaxation, which might bring fame if the product is good. GW told me that none of the Polish rappers considers expanding outside Poland, obviously because of the language barrier and the only attempts were made through the clothing lines – mostly to Central and Eastern Europe. At the same time, he confirmed that tours of most popular artists often include the United Kingdom and Ireland; mostly, however, to perform for the Polish diaspora.

I was not surprised to see that the artists I spoke to knew a lot about the genre, especially its history. What struck me was the fact that they all used the same set of arguments in order to convince me about the position of Polish hip-hop in the global context.

*Look at the UK, Germany, France and Poland. Those variations have nothing in common, except for the drums and flow. (...) I firstly loved German rap, at this time it was popular, I knew that it is impossible that Poland will stay behind. And our rappers did it the Polish way, without complexes or limits. And two years later there was hip-hop on TV and on the lists. (...) Now we have big-shot rappers, our producers sell beats to the USA, we are good because it is real music. (Interview: KK)*

The logic behind those arguments matches the classical sociological understanding of cultural hybridization and interference (Appadurai 1996; Ong and Collier 2005). Local paradigms bring their own components to the model of hip-hop, which spreads worldwide. Because the localized model is well incorporated, it is experienced like a locally generated, unique product.

The omnipresence of brands associated with hip-hop worldwide is natural as both global and local varieties of music are present in Poland. The most recurring product in Polish hip-hop is Nike sneakers, especially the “Air Force” model, which is a fundamental, yet expensive accessory. Without any advertisement sponsorships, in countless songs Polish rappers praise Nikes and boast how many pairs they have, stress their comfort and aesthetic value or show how to wear them. To a smaller degree, other goods taken from the American hoods are cult objects: honey-brown Timberland boots (“*Hip-hop took me under its wing like Air Forces and Timberlands and screw that it did not give me the money for Timberlands*”<sup>8</sup>), New Era baseball caps (“*my shoes, a shirt, trousers, New Era*”<sup>9</sup>) and a French influence: Lacoste polo shirts and tracksuits (“*In the Insert to 'Lights' I have a polo with alligator, Many of us like the brand although the costs are high*”<sup>10</sup>). In this sense, Polish rappers follow the global trend and agree with its model by treating the necessary accessories as a part of their heritage. At the same time, many of the other stereotypical elements of hip-hop were never transferred. The best example is how few rappers feel like wearing jewelry. “*The only chain I carry is DNA*”<sup>11</sup>. “Bling” and showing off money is mostly considered inappropriate and the few rappers who decided to have their names produced in gold and hung them on chains gave these up after a number of seasons.

On the other hand, besides the typical hip-hop accessories of global origin, the Polish hip-hop market generated a very large number of products, which are shown in the music videos and worn on the streets. This set of products brings pride to the rappers as it proves the ability of the culture to be original and genuine. The owners of the companies, mostly top rappers, claim that the profits from the activity of their companies allows them to finance their musical production and helps them to attain the life stability necessary for concentrating

on writing new songs. A countless number of micro-enterprises are run by the artists themselves. In those, rappers not only advertise the brand but work on the design of t-shirts or even help with packing the boxes and addressing them. The brands are present in the lyrics, names of the albums or group names. The leader of the market is a multi-oriented company “*Prosto*”, which sells clothes, recordings, and even once sponsored a boxing team. Being a musical label, it relies mostly on sales to the fans of the music. The articles are distributed either through the internet or specialized shops, such as the Urban Art Shop. The other company, named PLNY, one of the pioneers in this model of business, operates in a similar manner, offering all kinds of articles, including skiing trips and paid workshops for hip-hop dance.

The example of *Prosto* shows a particular approach of thinking about the scene. *Prosto*, being both a label and a clothing line, is wide open for the artists from outside Poland, especially from the East. The company, established by a rapper named *Sokół*, has a goal of promoting East European hip-hop and uniting hip-hoppers. The company’s music label has produced a number of international albums, including collaborations with rappers from the neighboring countries, such as the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Russia. It has also promoted hip-hoppers from Cuba and France by distributing their records and recording music videos together with Polish artists. The company promotes itself with a slogan in English: ‘straight Slavic flavour’<sup>12</sup>. On one of the t-shirts that I found in their internet shop, on a black background there is a map with what they call “Slavic states”, which are formed from the brand’s logo<sup>13</sup>. Another t-shirt contains the slogan accompanied by all of the flags of the states fitting into this category. During my interview with GG, who personally wears a *Prosto* gray-and-black sweatshirt, model “*klasyk*”, I was told that for many consumers the purchase of a relatively expensive accessory is more prestigious than any Western branded t-shirt or shoes.

*I do not swear at product placement, how should I finance clips?  
They do swear, and then it’s funny; rapping logotypes,  
There is no shame, everybody lives like that, if he lives from rap  
professional artists, not hobbyists, whose mommy feeds them<sup>14</sup>*

Hip-hop generates additional sales, which are a main source of income for many of the artists. T-shirts, hats, belts, socks, trousers, fanny packs, and watches are a standard range of products available on-line. Because of internet piracy, the hip-hop companies look for a number of strategies in order to attract direct sales of music. In order to achieve sales, rappers advertise their brands in the lyrics and music videos and the labels try to gratify customers who choose to buy the music directly from them. *Alkopoligamia*, one of the MC-owned labels, sells extended album editions with additional tracks or DVDs only through their webpage, whereas standard one-CD editions are sold through external distributors. It is intended to attract direct sales, omit the intermediary costs and regulate the quality of the product. A norm in this industry is adding freebies, such as stickers. But there are also more elaborate examples. *WielkieJol* was launching editions of limited, numbered t-shirts added to the purchases and packed in a pizza box; *DobrzeWiesz* attached a shot-glass to one of the LPs. Some of the labels stress that the goods are produced in Poland, and in this way contribute to the economy. Quite importantly, the trend for internet sales makes the hip-hop-originating brands compete with other non-hip-hop fashion micro-brands, which offer the same products in a different aesthetic.

At the same time, a new trend is emerging. The new wave of artists, such as a very famous debutant of the recent years named *Malpa*, claim that they do not care about the downloading of bootlegs, as they do it too, and post their products on the internet. At the same time they sell CDs through their homepage or myspace.com. Paradoxically, the demand for *Malpa's* first album, openly available on the internet, was so high that the prices on the internet auctions obligated the artist to produce additional copies and outsource the packaging and shipment to an external company. Similarly, other artists, such as *Wena-Rasmentalism*, produce their albums with a clear intention of independent direct sales, not bothering to register the copyrights or sign a distribution contract with a label.

### **Role of Technology in Production and Exchange**

Polish hip-hop at its current stage fulfills important functions by not only giving a voice to the artists and a strong message to the audience but it also embodies a wider representation of Polish society, including plural values and attitudes regarding the scene as well as other spheres of social life. Its composition, just like in the other parts of Central and Eastern Europe, contains a significant sample of population living in the urban blocks of flats, who live in communist *blokowiska* or *osiedla*<sup>15</sup>. A flattening of the social structure during the Polish People's Republic and mixing up the social strata, which later became the basis of the urban population living in the blocks, created specific conditions of common experience, which is crucial for understanding how hip-hop became a trademark of Polish *osiedla*. Daniel claimed during our interview that in Poland "*today every bloc has a hip-hop group – just like every tribe had a musician*". The scale of impact and variety of the genre is indisputable and as I show below, the current stage of hip-hop leaves behind all the previous moments of popularity, mostly because of its inclusiveness.

*Anybody can produce because if you have a PC to get the beats from the internet, the only thing you need is a serious head for the rhymes* (BD, interview)

An enormous influence is created by technology. From the beginnings of the genre, rappers neglected expensive equipment and claim that a unique rapping technique and good writing is what makes a good rapper. Legendary rapper NAS said "*all I need is one mic*" and those traditions, at least on the grassroots level, seem to be maintained. My respondents stressed that the first recordings of the Polish rappers were registered on a home stereo and a PC at home and although the technical level was low, the recordings have an indisputable value for them. Those do-it-yourself traditions continue until now. According to the statistical data provided by the Central Statistical Office of Poland, the access of internet and possession of computers is growing significantly, especially in urban areas (GUS 2010). Popularization of the internet and availability of computers which have in-built microphones serves as an enabling mechanism providing easy access to hip-hop materials and enables inclusiveness for prosperous artists. A relatively small prerequisite for becoming a rapper causes many hip-hop fans to join the production. All of my respondents began with very simple technology, following a desire to express themselves in their lyrics. An established belief is that expensive technology is unnecessary to be a rapper.

*Jazz had its beginning when bums started to do music. But they knew how to play. Then, there was punk rock, when they knew how to play only a little bit. But they needed equipment, and a place to practice. So you have hip-hop. Any loop, stolen or sampled, buds, joints and you make music. The entry level has lowered and now any person with a vision can do music. You just have to be persistent. (Daniel, interview)*

A key role is performed by the current technological development, which breaks the barrier of musical production. DJ LD from a small town in Western Poland told me that thanks to internet access, he is able to download up-to date programs used by professional producers around the world. Moreover, internet forums and on-line manuals provided him with a sufficient foundation to develop his producing skills. His music, made mostly from home-cut samples from mp3 files, is enough to create a satisfying piece. Although it's not the most professional way, he claims to be making it "with an open-source intention to share, not sell". Not only the customers but also many music producers do not care about legality of software and their collections. As Mattelart proves in his paper, the internet is a major means of access to the products of local, regional and international cultural industries and it is no different in the case of hip-hop in Central and Eastern Europe (Mattelart 2009).

The Polish musical market is very difficult for musical artists. Like in other parts of the world, sales of CDs are dropping because of the popularity of mp3 files and easy access to illegal content. Currently, a big segment of the market is disappearing as the audience is unwilling to purchase hip-hop, choosing instead an illegal download from the links available on the numerous forums. Published hip-hoppers admit that operating in such an environment requires from them changing profit-making strategies, especially since paying for digital files is one of the least popular ways of acquiring music in Poland. Since the beginnings of Polish hip-hop the artists have been supported by their most devoted fans. A slogan repeated everywhere in the lyrics symbolizes this symbiosis: "*kupujcie polskie rap-płyty*" - "buy Polish rap albums". This phrase represents the unity between the artist and the audience and as I am told it is still understood as a call for paying the artists for the work, as they will not produce the music anymore, unless they are supported by their audience.

Popularization of computer technology is creating a condition for access to information and content exchange. The internet enables limitless access to the music but at the same time provides inclusiveness. Most of my respondents all began recording their music on a personal computer without any additional software: just by using a simple, freeware voice recorder. They all admit that in order to begin, the most important thing is to be brave enough to start rapping, and have any type of a computer. The skills develop through practice and experience. DD, who paid for his hardware by working in the United Kingdom, admits that buying a microphone and other professional equipment was rather fulfilling his dreams than a necessity. Reflecting on the entry barriers to the cultural production, DJ LD informed me that in his opinion participating in hip-hop very strongly differs from playing an instrument. He argued that unlike a rock band, a single person can begin a career by finding an instrumental on youtube.com and by assembling lines, practically anytime and anywhere. The only precondition is feeling the rhythm, clear speech and patience to record the piece.

The inclusiveness is visible especially on the pages hosting open-access videos and music, such as myspace.com and youtube.com. Along with homemade clips, local artists post their music and videos, quite often created using a simple mobile phone camera or a compact digital camera. The preparation of the contribution to the cultural production is paradoxically very short. Some of the clips take place on the street: on a bus, on the street or at school. A lot of improvisation is involved. Quick freestyles or raps gain either big popularity, completely

no fame, or become internet viral videos, which put the artist outside of the hip-hop bracket and in a negative way create a label of an internet personality.

A very important role of moderating the circulation of the music is held by the internet portals profiled on alternative music. The most prominent, Popkiller, *Codzienna Gazeta Muzyczna* and tabloid-style *GlamRap*, operate as the most important medium, featuring interviews with the artists as well as music videos. Among the artists who show up on these webpages are both well-known performers and debutantes, who need to prove themselves and show that they can produce professional material. Additionally, the artists and labels establish their own sites and youtube channels. Pages such as Aloha Entertainment, *Alkopoligamia*, *DobrzeWiesz MaxFlo*, *Szpadyzator Records*, *WielkieJol* and other record-related enterprises provide up-to date information about the artists that belong to the label, publish backstage footage and inform fans about plans and concerts, as well as directly sell the CDs and fashion. Additionally, most of the prominent rappers are active in social networks, where they have their official profiles, usually supervised by themselves personally.

At the same time, the underground stimulates the legal scene. Recent initiatives such as *RapOneShot* and *WyskoczDoTego* continue the tradition of improvised music videos. Within the project, the staff provides the professional video equipment and a popular or unknown rapper, under the same conditions, records his video clip with only one improvised shot, just like it is usually done in the underground. Later, the video is displayed on the video channel, the legal arm in arm with underground artists.

## **Conclusions**

This paper described the context of the production of Polish hip-hop. By focusing on rapping, I showed the history of Polish hip-hop music, which as I claimed was parallel to the Polish systemic transition and the development of free-market capitalism. I argued that in Poland, underground hip-hop production is heterogeneous and democratic and accommodates many points of view and interpretations of hip hop. I also showed how beginning rappers understand the common heritage and common interest of the hip-hop scene.

In the next parts, I analyzed the relation of Polish hip-hop to its global model and outlined the role of American artists in the Polish rappers' consciousness; that role is mostly as iconic founding fathers. I also described how global hip-hop consumer products, such as New Era hats and Nikes, are outnumbered by local hip-hop products, which are produced and distributed by the micro-companies owned and run by rappers. I showed how non-music activities finance the production of hip-hop, and gave examples of various strategies aimed at attracting direct sales.

I also considered what role technology plays in the process of popularization and promotion of hip-hop production and consumption. My argument was that technology is a crucial element and plays the key role in production and distribution. It is especially the wide availability of computers with built-in microphones and low-cost internet that enables high participation and makes the genre very inclusive. This inclusiveness was confirmed by my respondents, who all claimed that the biggest asset in successful rapping is skills rather than expensive equipment. Finally, I showed how technology works as a medium for hip-hop, allowing the fans to stay updated with current music videos and music.

As my research proves, Polish hip-hop is vibrant and organic. It reaches new generations, responds to technological developments, and has created a stable industry. Polish hip-hop is only one among several varieties of hip-hop in Eastern Europe. I believe that

studying them from the perspective of various disciplines could significantly develop the field of hip-hop studies. As works from this stream prove, hip-hop deserves interdisciplinary academic attention. Connecting the earlier developed approaches to studying hip-hop with studies concerning Eastern Europe might also be of interest to scholars studying social phenomena in the region.

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<sup>2</sup> I was pointed to the pictures available on-line: <http://oldschoolerscrew.blogspot.com/2010/09/breakdance-w-polsce-85.htm> [accessed 08.10.2012]

<sup>3</sup> The persons described in the text are real people—not composites—and I have changed all names and nicknames to protect their anonymity.

<sup>4</sup> The best expression of a difference between rap and hip-hop was explained by KRS one „rap is something you do, hip-hop is something you live” (KRS One - “Hip Hop Vs. Rap”)

<sup>5</sup> Own translation of an interview fragment in a film “Blokersi” (2000, dir. Sylwester Latkowski: Solopan)

<sup>6</sup> Hip-hopolo was an offensive word for the hip-hop groups and artists in order to achieve commercial success and popularity. Because the music was usually simple and the lyrics were touching rather light topics, in contrast to hard reality of hip-hop, the genre was named after disco-polo, a very simple and kitschy keyboard-based music popular in Poland in the 1990s.

<sup>7</sup> Own translation from Polish: *Kocham SugarHill Gang, po 25 latach / Wciąż szukam idealnego bitu jak Bambaataa / Wciąż słucham tych nagrań sprzed lat a na trackach / Często słyszę MCs starszych niż mój tata / Dziś znam historię i dobrze wiem, że wtedy tu / Pierwsze tagi kreslił Tucky, tańczyło Rock Steady Crew / Pierwszy klub rozgrzewał Coke La Rock i Kool Herc / To dzięki nim mam dzisiaj tyle płyt na półce / To DJ Hollywood, Grandmaster Flash, ludzie z Zulu / Furious Five, Jazzy Jeff pamiętam o oldschoolu / Wiem kim jest Kool Moe Dee, Red Alert i serio / Pamiętam gdzie jestem dziś i kto był tu przede mną*  
Source: Małpa – “Pamiętaj”; Kilka numerów o czymś, underground record (distr. Asphalt)

<sup>8</sup> Own translation from Polish: *Hip-hop wziął mnie pod skrzydła jak Air Force'y i Timberlandy / I chuj, że nie dał mi forsy na Timberlandy*. Source: Ortega Cartel (feat.Reno) - “Dobre czasy”; Lavorama

<sup>9</sup> Own translation from Polish: *Moje buty, koszula, spodnie, New Era*. Source: O.S.T.R. - "Introstan"; Jazz, Dwa, Trzy; Asphalt Records

<sup>10</sup> Own translation from Polish: *Na wkładce światła mam polo z aligatorem / Wielu z nas lubi tą markę chociaż koszty są spore*. Source: Eldo (feat. Pjus) - "Szyk"; 27; MyMusic

<sup>11</sup> Own Translation from Polish: *Jedyny łańcuch, który noszę to DNA*  
Source: Tetris & DJ Tort - "Dawaj respekt"; Stick 2 My name Right

<sup>12</sup> Original spelling kept.

<sup>13</sup> Item available at: <http://www.prosto.pl/?l=pl&m=sklep&w=ubraniaszczegoly&rodzaj=szon&pro=560>  
[accessed 08.04.2012]

<sup>14</sup> Own Translation from Polish: *Nie bluźnię na product placement, skąd niby brać na klipy? / Bluźnię, a potem jest śmiesznie rapujące logotypy. / Nie ma wstydu, przecież każdy tak żyje, jak żyje z rapu, zawodowi artyści, a nie hobbyści którym mama nakłada papu*. Source: Borixon (feat. Ten Typ Mes) - "Sponsor"; Rap Not Dead; DigitalFlowGroup

<sup>15</sup> Osiedle (pl. Osiedla) is a neighbourhood of block of flats. Polish hip-hoppers often refer to Osiedle in as the projects, which follows the development projects in the USA.