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Ghetto Games Phenomena

How Action Sports Event Is Changing Street Culture In Riga

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Abstract

Streets of Riga are becoming alive after Latvia regained its freedom from Soviet Union in 1991. In last ten-years the street culture has been developing through action sports and taking a stand in stubborn resident mind's. One of the biggest activists in developing the field is Ghetto Games; series of street culture and action sports events, which happen all around Latvia. With cultural analysis method it is possible to see the changes and impact how this phenomena is structuring the street culture movement and developing the surroundings around them.

Keywords: street culture, action sports, Ghetto Games, Latvia

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Introduction

Action sports world has always been something in what I have been interested in more deeply than just a spectator. I grew up with guys who never took the skateboard off their feet, rolling around with them made me appreciate all sides of this sport: the adrenaline, the rush, the injuries, the pain, the excitement, the patience, the determination and most of all the passion you share with the people who have the same interests as you do. During winters we exchanged the skateboards for some snow equipment and once again we had a new passion - snowboarding. Our group of friends expanded and soon the community of snowboarders, skateboarders, BMX¹ riders and inline skaters started to organize extreme sport events in the biggest cities in Latvia. These events gathered together riders, who were fearless and wanted to improve their skills as well as show off the new learned tricks to others. It brought together different people from all around Latvia and once again you could see how one passion connects so many people.

If in the beginning it was about being out in the streets, doing sports others did not know about, then later it was about belonging to the certain group, movement and even community. We started reading and exchanging extreme sports magazines, tried to take pictures similar as we saw in the posters, searched for videos and filmed ourselves, remade our clothes so we could go with the style; we became part of something we believed in. Because of my love for action sports I got my first job at Red Bull, the energy drink company, which supports extreme sports-events and athletes. During three and a half years while working for Red Bull I broadened my horizons for extreme sports by far and my attachment to this lifestyle grew stronger then ever. For the first time I was not just someone, who loves extreme sports and the adrenaline rush, but I was part of the extreme sports culture, I was one of those who made it happen in Latvia. During that time my and Ghetto Games' path crossed and I was able to see and experience how it developed from a small street basketball tournament into an extreme sports event.

¹ BMX abbreviation for a bicycle designed for bicycle motocross; stunt riding over obstacle track.

Within five years, Ghetto Games has established itself from a street basketball tournament in only one district of Riga, into an event hosting over 70 sport occasions with 18 different disciplines around Latvia. It has its own Internet TV channel and they have realised two documentaries about the previous seasons. The movies are called *This Is Our Freedom* and *This Is Only the Beginning* and have been premiered in the biggest movie theatre in Riga as well as in the cinemas around Latvia during March and April of 2014.

Ghetto Games is the name for a series of events, which happen every summer, since 2008. It starts with the opening event in May in Grizinkalns², Riga, and moves around to the biggest cities of Latvia during summer. On August 8th till 10th the Ghetto Games Festival takes place in Ventspils, which is the city by the Baltic Sea, and it gathers together extreme sports athletes from the Baltics and abroad. Since 2012, this festival is annual and it is one of the biggest extreme sports events in the Baltic States. At the end of the season, which is the last day of August, the Ghetto Games Finals takes place in Riga, on the biggest avenue next to the river Daugava.

My personal background and the fact, that I have had the possibility to experience the Ghetto Games first hand helped me, while comparing the reality in the event and the depiction of the event in the documentaries. Even though I have a strong connection to the Ghetto Games, I am looking at the event and documentaries from objective opinion as it is in my best interest to explore and find out how the event has changed the street culture movement in Riga and what impact it has had to the community. For the last four years, I have not been living in Riga, which helps me depicting the changes in the city street life, every time I visit. Thereby I am able to develop my thesis topic more thoroughly.

This master thesis is exploring the beginning of Ghetto Games in one of Riga's districts Grizinkalns, where the Ghetto Games started during the economical crisis and which still is the headquarters for the organization. The location plays an important role in the development of Ghetto Games, therefor it is crucial to understand the districts history, in order to see the social and economical changes in Grizinkalns, since the arrival of Ghetto Games. The second chapter concentrates on the development of the

² In Latvian Grīziņkalns – the hill of Grizins

street culture movement in Latvia, how action sports were brought to the streets of Riga and the comparison between the atmosphere in the team sports competitions and action sports tournaments, as well as the description of Generation – Y, which covers the biggest part of Ghetto Games audience. The third chapter looks at the visual material – two documentaries *This Is Our Freedom* and *This Is Only the Beginning*, which are compared against each other, further research on what do the films represent and how does Ghetto Games position itself, is conducted, as well.

Research Question

The main research question for thesis is “How the street culture has changed in Riga because of the Ghetto Games and what has this event done to the community?” To answer the research question the analysis of the documentaries are made with help of the cultural analysis method, as well as the scanning of the media coverage on Ghetto Games event. In addition an interview with the former Ghetto Games member Kristaps Pipars has been held.

Previous Studies

Ghetto Games are the first extreme sports series of events, which happen around Latvia, therefor there has not been made any research about the organization or the Ghetto Games tour yet. My research, which is focusing on the street culture in Riga, and how Ghetto Games have changed it, is the first one of this kind. This fact allows me to look at the field with fresh eyes, not being impacted by the previous studies.

Method

To analyze the documentaries I have chosen to use the cultural analysis. With this method I have depicted the visible changes of the street culture in Riga using the documentaries as the main material, which shows how Ghetto Games have impacted the street culture in Riga and what has it changed for those living in Grizinkalns, the district of Ghetto Games origin. The cultural analysis method will explore the history of the area of Ghetto Games origins and how the action sports formed in the street culture life of Riga.

The cultural analysis is following these criteria's: narrative and the narrators' voice in the documentaries, the chapter division, the depiction of the Ghetto Games Festival, the film language, the use of music in the film and the technical development.

Chapter 1

1.1 Grizinkalns - from ghetto to urban district

Riga is the capital and the biggest city of Latvia, a country located in the northeastern Europe. The population in the capital counts 733,000, which is one third of the country's total inhabitants. Latvia is one of the Baltic States, located by the Baltic Sea, it borders with Estonia, Lithuania, Russia, Belarus and by maritime with Sweden³. In 1991 Latvia regained its independence from the Soviet Union and in 2004 it joined European Union.⁴

Latvia is the home country of Olympic Game double gold medalist in BMX cycling Maris Strombergs⁵, who won gold in Beijing in 2008 and in London in 2012. In the 2012 survey⁶ about most popular sports in Latvia, basketball got most votes according to the Sports Marketing of Latvia, but there is also an up-growing trend for action sports within the new generation.

In 2008 the Global Financial Crisis hit the Republic of Latvia and became the major economical and political crisis in the territory. With the drop of the easy credit market a lot of people got unemployed and many companies went bankrupt. During the first period of the crisis a lot of people left the country in search of better employment, many families stayed with only one parent around which led to more kids skipping school and spending their days in the streets. Grizinkalns, which is the name of the district in Riga that is known as the sleeping berth area for factory workers, was one of the places for young people to meet, as it had the first outdoors skate park in Riga, which opened in 2003. When looking at the history of the Grizinkalns it is possible to draw parallels with ghetto⁷ districts in American Society during late 1960s. Ulf Hannerz in his book *Soulside: Inquiries into Ghetto Culture and Community* is doing research based on

³ 'National Geographic Facts' <http://travel.nationalgeographic.com/travel/countries/latvia-facts/>, 2014, (accessed on 24.03.2014).

⁴ 'Europa web page' http://europa.eu/about-eu/countries/member-countries/latvia/index_en.htm, 2014, (accessed on 24.03.2014).

⁵ In Latvian Māris Štrombergs

⁶ 'Sports Marketing' <http://www.sportamarketings.lv>, 2014, (accessed on 09.04.2014).

⁷ The part of the city in which the members of a particular group or race lives in poor conditions because of legal, economical and social pressure. It is known to be the poorest part of the city. <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/ghetto>, 2014, (accessed on 09.04.2014).

his fieldwork in the Winston Street neighborhood of Washington D.C. In his research one can find similarities with the situation in Riga in 1990s; “*ghetto* is commonly used as an anti-euphemism for the same area in a Northern U.S. city which some prefer to call “inner city” and others still call “slum”.”⁸ In the sociological sense the ghetto is an area, where inhabitants share the same outstanding social characteristics. In 1960s America these characteristics were the colour of the skin, but in 1990s in Latvia it was the social status; poor workers, drunks, prostitutes, street kids and overall the bad living conditions. The reason why the comparison between America in 1960s and Latvia in 1990s is made, is because the development of the Baltic countries was delayed during the Soviet Union times (Cold War). Hannerz’s description of the surroundings of the Winston Street in Washington D.C. has some common characteristics with the way Grizinkalns surroundings looked like, but mostly because of the social situation in this area it is possible to draw the similarities between Grizinkalns and the ghetto.

It is important to look into the history of the district Grizinkalns as the event has taken place there since the launch of the Ghetto Games, up until today. In the next paragraph the development of Grizinkalns from the ghetto area till UNESCO World heritage list will be depicted.

The history of Grizinkalns starts in the 18th century, when it got its name after a small hill – an old sand dune, which belonged to Grizenberg⁹ estate. The district stayed uninhabited until late 19th century and only in the beginning of the 20th century, the area became developed through factories and industrial buildings. New streets and houses were set where workers from the surrounding factories made their homes. The architecture in this area is unique as it was built to be simple and practical for workers: walk through the kitchen, which also served as a hallway and a tiny room. The small area got crowded with wooden architecture and some years later the art nouveau buildings found the space between them. Even though Grizinkalns has always been known for its lack of wealth in the community, the architecture is unique and today the

⁸ U Hannerz, *Soulside. Inquiries into Chetto Culture and Community*, Almqvist & Wiksell, Stockholm, Sweden, 1969, p. 11.

⁹ Grizenberg was the surname of the owner of the estate.

whole district is a part of the Latvian cultural heritage and since 1997 it is included in the UNESCO World heritage¹⁰ list.

Being under the UNESCO World heritage title for Riga city means, that the historical and cultural legacy is being passed on to the future generations, for Ghetto Games it means, that the area, from where the roots and the name of the event comes from, changes together with them. What once used to be known as a ghetto of the town now has developed into spruce neighborhood with more possibilities for its residents. In the next paragraph I will explore why the district of Grizinkalns was the best place for the Ghetto Games to begin.

One of the main attractions in the area is the park, which is located in the heart of the Grizinkalns. The park opened in 1903 and it served as a meeting point and live concert place for the people living around. During the First World War a lot of buildings were demolished and the park was decayed. Only in 1930s the parks reconstruction started and a new kids' playground, swimming pool, sculptures and the place for concerts were built in it.

Today at the foot of the hill there is a skate park, which opened in 2003 as the first skate park in Riga. In summer 2008, Raimonds Elbakjans there organized the first street basketball tournament. He was an enthusiast of the game, who wanted to arrange an activity for those, who did not have a lot of options due to the economical situation in the country. The tournament was lacking the name, until, while bringing the park in order, R. Elbakjans looked around and saw prostitutes on the opposite street, the drunks and the let down park and thought of the slogan *Ghetto Basket*.¹¹ Later that year R. Elbakjans established the organization "Ghetto Family" and became the owner of the Grizinkalns skate park.

The reconstruction of the whole park is still going on, as in 2010 the district got financed from European Union for historical reconstruction in the whole district of Grizinkalns. In April 2013 Ghetto Family established organization called "The Patriot of Grizinkalns"¹², which, how R. Elbakjans explains it, protects the cultural heritage and

¹⁰ Republic of Latvia 'State Inspection For Heritage Protection' <http://www.mantojums.lv/?lang=en&cat=703> , 2014, (accessed on 01.04.2014).

¹¹ J. Freimanis 'Ja pretinieks nokrit, padod roku, jo ta ir tikai spele'' <http://www.apollo.lv/zinas/raimonds-elbakjans-ja-pretinieks-nokrit-padod-roku-jo-ta-ir-tikai-spele/567137> , 2013, (accessed on 24.05.2014).

¹² 'Lursoft' <http://company.lursoft.lv/esmu-grizinkalna-patriots> , 2014, (accessed on 01.04.2014).

works in order to improve the environment and encourages the economical growth of the district. It also promotes the youth participation in different informal educational disciplines, which encourages the young people to work and participate in active lifestyle. In other interviews he states that the district has outgrown the ghetto label; the buildings are reconstructed, new businesses are being opened, and youth is participating in establishing the neighbourhood, but the word ghetto is what reminds them of where they come from.¹³ How one can read in Ghetto Family web page, this ghetto does not bring you down, but lifts you up!¹⁴ According to Hannerz, the ghetto in some ways is a united community with common cultural and social interests, which marks them off from surrounding society,¹⁵ but in case of Grizinkalns, historically the park has been a meeting point for different people not only from the area, but also from other districts of Riga, so it is hard to mention Grizinkalns as excluded ghetto area.

Nevertheless, since 2000s Grizinkalns has become more urbanized, according to Sharon Zukin's books *Naked City: The Death and Life of Authentic Urban Places* she makes out the statement how big cities have lost their authenticity. For example, Zukin claims that New York has lost its soul, or maybe it even never had one, as it is the city, which always has grown by shedding its past, tearing down old neighbourhoods and erecting new ones in their place.¹⁶ Even though Riga territorially cannot compete with New York, it is the biggest city of the Baltic States and has widely developed since 1990s. Riga is 813¹⁷ years old; its historic buildings are the main part of Riga's panorama and different neighbourhoods are known for their unique and authentic architecture. As mentioned above, Grizinkalns, the birth and centre location for Ghetto Games is one of these areas.

Further in her book, S. Zukin refers to Walter Benjamin and Jean Baudrillard's theory, which explains that through technology, imitation of novelty, and the normal type of customer culture, experience is increasingly seduced by appearances. In other

¹³ J. Freimanis 'Ja pretinieks nokrit, padod roku, jo ta ir tikai spele' <http://www.apollo.lv/zinas/raimonds-elbakjans-ja-pretinieks-nokrit-padod-roku-jo-ta-ir-tikai-spele/567137>, 2013, (accessed on 24.05.2014).

¹⁴ 'Ghetto Family' http://www.ghettofamily.com/family/par_mums/wtfisghetto/, 2014, (accessed on 01.04.2014).

¹⁵ U Hannerz, *Soulside. Inquiries into Chetto Culture and Community*, Almqvist & Wiksell, Stockholm, Sweden, 1969, p. 139.

¹⁶ S Zukin, *Naked City: The Death and Life of Authentic Urban Places*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2010, p. 1-2.

¹⁷ 'Municipal Portal of Riga' https://www.riga.lv/EN/Channels/About_Riga/History_of_Riga/default.htm, 2014, (accessed on 01.04.2014).

words, the city is authentic if it can create the experience of origins, as lately the meaning of authenticity has drifted from the origins to style, it is important that an area preserves the historical districts and encourages the development of small scale businesses to distinctive cultural identities.¹⁸ Grizinkalns and its skate park where the Ghetto Games takes place as mentioned above is included in UNESCO heritage list that way the authenticity of the district is being protected, but with the entering of Ghetto Games event new businesses, which stamp Grizinkalns identity, are starting to appear. Also we should not forget that the city is always changing and remaking its appearance, that is why it should not only be the origins that determine the authenticity of the neighbourhood.

New stores and new people produce new urban terroirs, localities with a specific cultural product and character that can be marked around the world, drawing tourists and investors and making the city safe, though not cheap, for the middle class.¹⁹

As R. Elbakjans has stated in several interviews and on his organization's web page that it is his aim to improve the territory and the lives for the people of the Grizinkalns community, and to make the label Ghetto Games recognized even outside the Latvian borders. Ghetto Games is bringing more recognition and more business to the neighbourhood, which is why the property prices for 1m² has risen up for 1,1% since last February.²⁰ However, the large emigrations during the Economical Crisis led to many buildings being unoccupied and a general drop of the real estate market. The rise might not seem high in the global context, but after the Economical Crisis and the real estate market drop in 2008 the property price till today was low and stable. Today the situation is changing as the city council, together with the Latvian Government, has started the economical rehabilitation program to improve the living conditions in different parts of Riga, including Grizinkalns.

¹⁸ S Zukin, *Naked City: The Death and Life of Authentic Urban Places*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2010, p. 3.

¹⁹ S Zukin, *Naked City: The Death and Life of Authentic Urban Places*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2010, p. 4.

²⁰ Balsts <http://www.balsts.lv/lat/jaunumi/?doc=1168>, 2014, (accessed on 09.04.2014).

When walking through Grizinkalns today, it is hard to use the word *ghetto* for describing the district; a lot has changed since 2008 and because of being the part of the UNESCO heritage list, a lot is still about to change. As mentioned in previous paragraphs, the only characteristics that connected Grizinkalns to other typical ghetto areas around the world were the outlook of the neighbourhood, which today is cleared out. One of the reasons for this cultural change is Ghetto Family's effort to improve the living conditions for the local inhabitants, which has been done by popularizing the neighbourhood as a safer place, with new possibilities.

1.2 How Grizinkalns became popular

The previous section looks into the history of Grizinkalns and how it has developed from the ghetto area; this section will be devoted to find out, how the Grizinkalns area changed because of the Ghetto Games, or in other words, how and why this area has become popular.

S. Zukin talks about Jane Jacobi's idea that old buildings with low rents will act as incubators of new activities.²¹ In previous paragraphs it has been found out, that because of the Economical Crisis in Riga, many buildings became abandoned and businesses had to shut down. However, because of the crisis, the real estate market dropped and in couple of years it was possible to rent out space for lower cost than before the 2008 Economical Crisis.

In the same book in the chapter *How Brooklyn Became Cool*, Zukin researches how the historical district Williamsburg in Brooklyn, was the area, which made part of Brooklyn what it is today – a hipster²² locale. Grizinkalns has experienced the same change, from the slum area it has grown into a popular place for people to meet, except Williamsburg's neighbourhood in Brooklyn reinvented the community as a new *terroir* for indie music, alternative art, and trendy restaurant cuisine,²³ but Ghetto Games has been reinventing the Grizinkalns area as a cultural and active lifestyle's place. Zukin

²¹ S Zukin, *Naked City: The Death and Life of Authentic Urban Places*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2010, p. 38.

²² Hipster is a person who follows the latest trends and fashions. 'Urban Dictionary' <http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=hipster>, 2014, (accessed on 09.04.2014.)

²³ S Zukin, *Naked City: The Death and Life of Authentic Urban Places*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2010, p. 38.

states that this new image would not have worked, though, if new creative people had not moved into Brooklyn.²⁴ This is also the case with Grizinkalns, whose social status turned around after Ghetto Games leader's R. Elbakjans initiative "The patriot of Grizinkalns" took over the area. The initiative works for the community of Grizinkalns; they organize workshops, seminars, and classes for everybody to attend, as well as every spring the annual Grizinkalns joint work movement is taking place, where everybody who wants can help to clean out the neighbourhood from the trash. This movement has helped to change the look of Grizinkalns, and similarly as in Zukin's book she states that for most of the twentieth century Brooklyn had a sorry reputation as a place where artists and writers were born but were eager to escape from.²⁵ Also Grizinkalns used to be the area from which people wanted to leave as soon as they could, but mostly because of the development and change of the district. Now it is the place, where people want to come back and stay.

Grizinkalns neighbourhood has been recognized for its park and skate park before the Ghetto Games organized their first event there, but because of the organizations efforts, the skate park and the surroundings have been cleaned and fixed. Like R. Elbakjans is stating on the organization's webpage, the district is not a ghetto anymore, but the label still remains so the people would not forget where they are coming from.²⁶

²⁴ S Zukin, *Naked City: The Death and Life of Authentic Urban Places*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2010, p. 38.

²⁵ S Zukin, *Naked City: The Death and Life of Authentic Urban Places*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2010, p. 39.

²⁶ 'Ghetto Family' http://www.ghettofamily.com/family/par_mums/wtfisghetto/, 2014, (accessed on 12.05.2014).

Chapter 2

2.1 Street culture movement in Latvia

Latvian street art first got noticed in the streets of Riga in 1980s as a protest against the Soviet Union and their attempts of replacing Latvian culture with the Russian one. Graffiti tags with slogans and political messages in Latvian language appeared on the walls of the high buildings and bridges. As the trends and news got to the Baltics later, these graffiti tags were similar to New York graffiti scenes of 1960s.²⁷ With the fall of the Soviet Union, and Latvia regaining its freedom and independence in 1991, the borders opened and the trends and ideas from the Western Europe influenced people, especially artists. New materials and instruments were more easily accessible, but most importantly the Soviet rules were fallen together with the system and a lot more options and places for art were opened. In ten-years time the street art in Riga was finally catching up with the rest of the Europe; city walls came alive with the help of graffiti tags and murals, with stencils and designed art pieces. However, the society and government were not as ready to receive street art in the streets of Riga quite yet, that is why the graffiti writers were hiding in the dark behind black bandanas and searching for new places to put the tags on. In Riga it was not about the amount of the tags, but about the location: on top of the high building, unreachable spot on the bridge or any other place, which seemed impossible to reach. However, the news and ideas about the graffiti and street art were not the only ones, which came with delay to Latvia, the acceptance and understanding from the society had to take the hardest walk. With the first tags in the streets of Riga, the newspapers' titles foreshadowed the scribbles on the walls as the act of vandalism and rebellion of the law in force. The stagnation of the Soviet Union times was still present and the unknown made the society suspicious, especially because of the kids who were hiding their faces and walking through the night with the spray-paint.

²⁷ K. Pavare, 'Graffiti Vesture' <http://www.ritmainstituts.lv/?11=blog&12=207>, 2014, (accessed on 09.04.2014).

2.2 Action sport development within the street culture in Riga

Skateboarding had a faster development in Latvian culture. In 1984 the Latvian company *Ripo*²⁸ started to produce skateboards after seeing the up-growing popularity within the youth, who started off with the self-made boards from the cheap plywood and rollerblade wheels. Even if *Ripo* skateboards were mass-produced they still were primitive; the sides were not rolled up and the wheels were too big. The equipment and the information about skateboarding did not fully come to Latvia; therefore people were still making the boards themselves. With the regaining of the independence the information in the shape of magazines and videos come to Riga and the enthusiasts learned more aggressive and extreme tricks. The videos showed not only the progressive skateboarding, but also the environment; skate parks covered with graffiti, skating in the streets and in the background – new music beats. Latvian skateboarders picked up the urban culture vibes from the American videos and started to build that environment around them. They were the ones who brought street art culture to the streets of Riga; skateboarding by the monuments, tagging the walls, making stencils, listening to the rap music, and adopting the clothing style. The streets had become the place for youth to express themselves. The beginning of 2000s started with great news for skateboarders and graffiti artists – city of Ventspils had built the first skate park and graffiti artists had sprayed their designs around it. The cable TV was accessible with the Extreme Sports channel and a lot more tournaments in Latvia were being organized.

Nevertheless, these were good news only for the street culture movements' enthusiasts, like mentioned in previous paragraphs, the stagnation and the unwillingness to accept new trends were still popular among the biggest part of the society. The youngsters, who took part in active sports and street art, were called vandals, hooligans, and sluggards, and not necessarily without a reason; they gathered together near cultural monuments and used the edges as slides and rails for tricks, most of the time they left behind spray-painted tags and stencils. As one of the solutions the city council financed the building of skate parks. VEF, which was an old factory complex in Riga, was one of

²⁸ Avantis 'Skeitbords latviesu gaume jau 25 gadus', http://www.delfi.lv/sports/news/other_kinds/other/skeitbords-latviesu-gaume-jau-25gadu.d?id=13051439, 2005, (accessed on 01.04.2014).

the places where new inside skate parks was put in. This became a place where all types of active sports participants and street artists could meet.

2.3 First street art and graffiti festivals in Riga

During 2000s more extreme sports events and competitions started to appear in the streets of Riga and with every tournament the number of participants was rising. Also graffiti and street art events were trying to carve its way into society. In 2006 the first graffiti and street art festival took place in Riga, which gathered together artists from all three Baltic States.²⁹ The festival was located in the Daugava's Stadium and each artist had 2 times 4 m high wall to paint on. The festival also included workshops and other events for spectators. Even with the high number of participating graffiti artists, the event did not receive recognition within the audience; not many people came to spectate at the show. The festival was organized for three more years; it received positive reviews, but still was not recognized outside the street culture population. In 2010 the annual music festival *Positivus* organized the "Paint-club", which was the competition for graffiti artists, illustrators and other visual expression artists.³⁰ The festival itself was well recognized and it gathered together 15 000 visitors.³¹ In 2013 happened the 7th annual *Positivus Festival*³² and it had grown to be the biggest art and music festival in the Baltics, and the fifth in Europe. After the successful art performances in 2010, street artists and other visual expression representatives took persistent part of the festival. The Music Festival *Positivus* was not the only one which took street art under its roof, Ghetto Games, as already mentioned, started as a street basketball tournament for friends but grew and developed into an action sport event, which goes hand in hand with the street culture movement. The logo, web page design and the whole Ghetto Games identity was made and drawn by the local artist Vladislav

²⁹ Leta 'Septembri Riga pulcesies Baltijas valstu labakie graffiti makslinieki' <http://www.easyget.lv/latvija-un-pasaule/read/2115/>, 2007, (accessed on 09.04.2014).

³⁰ Live Riga 'Positivus festival notiks graffiti sacensibas' <http://www.liveriga.com/lv/2376-positivus-festivala-notiks-grafi>, 2013, (accessed on 09.04.2014).

³¹ <http://www.positivus.com/news/index.php?id=20218>, (accessed on 09.04.2014).

³² 'About Positivus' <https://www.positivusfestival.com/en/about-positivus/history/>, 2014, (accessed on 09.04.2014).

Lakse³³ who has been with Ghetto Games since the beginning. V. Lakse has studied art in the Latvian Art academy and as he himself says, it was destiny for him and the Ghetto Games to meet; he is a basketball enthusiast and has always visualized raising emotions in people with his designs. He also says that academically taught artists are usually looking with a snobbery attitude at street art, but for him joining Ghetto Games was in a way an experiment, to prove that street art and the academic knowledge can be combined into street culture, especially because there is no snobbism and hypocrisy, but positive emotions and attitude within the street culture.³⁴

Martin Irvine states in his chapter *The work on the Street: Street Art and Visual Culture*, in the book by Barry Sandywell and Ian Heywood *The Handbook of Visual Culture*;

*Street art is a paradigm of hybridity in global visual culture, a post-modern genre being defined more by real-time practice than by any sense of unified theory, movement, or message. Many artists associated with the “urban art movement” don’t consider themselves “street” or “graffiti” artists, but as artists who consider the city their necessary working environment.*³⁵

This statement can be associated with Latvian street culture movement, as many of the street art artists and graffiti writers do not necessarily put themselves only in the category of street art. Today it is more about the possibilities of what artists can achieve by combining the different styles and techniques while still using the “street” as a medium. Street culture has become the movement in Latvia in a very short time. It only took a couple of years from when it first appeared on the walls of Riga, till it received major recognition from the youth culture. One of the reasons is that this era is well documented by digital media, as soon as the artwork is out in the streets, it is also saved in the Internet memory through social networking sites, such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. Even beforehand, the graffiti and street art styles got recognized within the

³³ Ghetto Family ‘Vladislavs Lakse – Ghetto Games galvenais makslinieks’ http://www.ghettofamily.com/gg/lat/family/family/?text_id=1401546, 2013, (accessed on 09.04.2014).

³⁴ Ghetto Family ‘Vladislavs Lakse – Ghetto Games galvenais makslinieks’ http://www.ghettofamily.com/gg/lat/family/family/?text_id=1401546, 2013, (accessed on 09.04.2014).

³⁵ M Irvine, ‘The Work on the Street: Street Art and Visual Culture’ in *The Handbook of Visual Culture*, B Sandywell and I Heywood (eds), London & New York, Berg, 2012, p. 1.

fashion and design industries in the shape of apparel, action sports equipment designs, and branding logos. Urban environment is where the street art and action sports meet and melt into one organism – street culture movement; artists are riding BMX bikes or skateboards, fixed biking or basketball enthusiasts are making their own designs using the street art and graffiti visual elements. As said by Irvin, that street culture is a movement with the meaning and context; it makes statements about visual culture and the effects of the controlled visibility in the urban environment of the city.³⁶ In Latvian street culture, the line between the street art and action sports is slowly disappearing; everyone is willing to multitask. Latvian fixed gear bike organization *Tru Fix Kru*³⁷, which also started with the passion for fixed gear biking sports among three friends, grew into apparel brand for anyone who likes street culture. Last autumn they presented their second T-shirt and legging collection “Stolen”, which quickly spread in the streets of Riga. Ghetto Games moves into a slightly different direction, instead of launching an apparel design clothing line, they opened a burger restaurant called “Ghetto Burger” on 1st of August 2013. It is located right across from the Grizinkalns’ skate park, which, as mentioned earlier, is the headquarters for the organization. The interior is decorated with the Ghetto Games artists V. Lakse’s drawings, some as big as the size of the wall, also the artist has drawn the logo and the name of the restaurant on the signboard. Ghetto Games is more concentrating on the appearance of their image, the event itself is the brand and with the documentaries they want to show that to the audience.

2.4 Action sports and generation - y

The action sports, which collectively have been organized as extreme, alternative, core and lifestyle sports have been described as individualistic, risky, and unorthodox compared to traditional team sports. These sports include, but not exclude other disciplines such as BMX bike riding, aggressive in-line skating, wakeboarding,

³⁶ M Irvine, ‘The Work on the Street: Street Art and Visual Culture’ in *The Handbook of Visual Culture*, B Sandywell and I Heywood (eds), London & New York, Berg, 2012, p. 4.

³⁷ Tru Fix Kru <http://www.trufixkru.com/blog>, 2014, (accessed on 09.04.2014).

freestyle motocross, surfing, downhill skateboarding and snowboarding.³⁸ As mentioned previously, Ghetto Games started with and still takes huge part in street basketball, nevertheless, all of the above mentioned action sport disciplines play a major role in the regular Ghetto Games events, especially during the Ghetto Games Festival in Ventspils. These sports have increasingly grown within the youth in Latvia, due to the Generation – Y³⁹ characteristics. These young people, according to American surveys, are characterized as self-centered, ambitious, high demanding and in their own way unique.⁴⁰ They are more racially and ethnically diverse than the generation before (gen-x), they have a high understanding of technologies, and they are immune to most of the traditional marketing tricks. Additionally they are not loyal to one certain brand and because of the fast Internet they are changing their fashion and style more frequently.⁴¹ Growing up in the century filled with television, mobile phones, Internet and social networking, this generation has been highly influenced from the movies, music, fashion, video games and live action entertainment. Media consumes a large part of Generation-Y members' time and the lifestyle habits of this generation have been well documented through social networking channels such as YouTube and Vimeo. In addition, the members of Generation – Y are highly active; they do not just view the sports, but assume the lifestyle and actively participate in the action sports. This description can in a way apply to the youth in Latvia, even though there are no surveys about the identifying features of the gen-y in Latvia. The number of participants in the sport disciplines, as well as the spectators in the Ghetto Games, increase every year, and that can be observed mainly through youth activities in the social network: photos, videos, status updates and hash-tags from the events, but mostly through the documentary material produced by Ghetto Games themselves. The next chapter will analyze and compare the two documentaries from previous Ghetto Games seasons, where it will be possible to see the

³⁸ Y Tsuj, G Bennett, J Zhang, 'Consumer Satisfaction with an Action Sports Event', *Sport Marketing Quarterly*, vol. 16, no. 4, 2007, p. 199.

³⁹ Generation Y (gen-y) also called the Millennial Generation refers to the demographic cohort born between 1980s and 2000s. Financial Times Lexicon <http://lexicon.ft.com/Term?term=generation-Y> (accessed on 09.04.2014).

⁴⁰ R. Kahn, M. Price 'Millennials: The Me Me Me Generation' <http://time.com/247/millennials-the-me-me-me-generation/>, 2013, (accessed on 09.04.2014).

⁴¹ W. J. Schroer 'Generations X, Y, Z and Others' <http://www.socialmarketing.org/newsletter/features/generation3.htm>, (accessed on 09.04.2014).

up-growing participant number, development of the event and the impact of street culture in Riga and the Grizinkalns community.

As I have found out earlier, action sports have increasingly grown over the past decade especially among Generation – Y audience. These sports have become the lifestyle that has merged with art, music, film industry and apparel. The interest of organized street contest in action sports disciplines has increased and festivals such as X Games, Gravity Games and other action sport tours have found a concrete niche within the sports industry. These action sports events are mostly held as multi-day events not only with sport competitions, but also with music and art festivities in festival villages, where the spectators can experience the action sports lifestyle. These events have led to commercial success for sponsors, media, and athletes as the action sport culture includes numerous apparel lines, video games, movies and documentaries, events and concert tours. One of these annual events is the Vans Warped Tour, which has been on the tour throughout the United States since 1995⁴² and internationally since 1998, and combines costume-designed apparel, live bands, and action sports.

One of the first events, which combined various action sport disciplines and broadcasted them, was X Games or on the premiere in 1995 known as Extreme Games. This competition took place on Rhode Island, USA after TV channel ESPN saw that football and baseball broadcasts do not gather that many spectators anymore, especially among gen-y audience.⁴³ The first competition included skateboarding, sky surfing, bungee jumping, mountain biking, and street lugging and was at first meant to be as a biennial, but after the successful round they decided to held as an annual event and in 1997 ESPN added the Winter X Games with snowboarding, skiing, ice climbing, and if that was not extreme enough, snowmobile freestyle. Not everyone took the event seriously; some of the first comments from the newspapers the next day titled the event “Look ma, No Hands Olympics”⁴⁴ and described the event as ridiculous and mostly dangerous. However the event gathered 200 000 spectators and is known as one of the icebreakers for extreme sports like snowboarding and freestyle skiing to get into the

⁴² Vans Warped Tour <http://vanswarpedtour.com>, (accessed on 01.04.2014).

⁴³ K. Pickert ‘The X Games’ <http://content.time.com/time/nation/article/0,8599,1873166,00.html>, 2009, (accessed on 01.04.2014).

⁴⁴X-Games and Popular Culture [web blog], 2011, <http://xgamespopculture.blogspot.se/p/history.html>, (accessed on 09.04.2014).

Olympic Games. In 1998 snowboarding appeared for the first time at the Winter Olympics in Nagano, Japan⁴⁵. Even though participating in the Olympic Games is the ultimate achievement for most athletes, some of the world's best snowboarders decided to boycott the games, as snowboarding is not only an action sports discipline, it is a lifestyle, and as one of the Norway's best snowboarders Terje Haakonsen describes, "snowboarding is about personal expression and self-enjoyment, not about governing bodies, big money and being judged."⁴⁶

In 2008 BMX cycling first appeared in Beijing, China, where Latvian athlete Maris Strombergs got the gold medal and after four years in London, UK he defended his title by winning his second gold medal⁴⁷. This was and still is a huge achievement for the Latvian athlete to be the leading sportsman in action sports discipline and the development of Latvian BMX and cycling culture since then has evidently increased. The city of Riga has built more cycling roads and the Latvian federation of cycling has invested more in the development of BMX and other cycling sports by building more treks and organizing competitions, as well as sponsoring Latvian athletes for participation in international tournaments.⁴⁸ The Olympic achievement has increased the number of cyclists in the streets and together with various action sports events it has improved the youth participation in active lifestyle and street culture movement. One of the visible indicators for this trend is Ghetto Games first documentary *This Is Our Freedom*, which premiered in 2012 and it is about the previous season. The documentary was premiered in the biggest movie theatre in Riga and afterwards shown on the national TV channel LTV7. The movie was well received among the youth audience, Ghetto Games were described as the biggest street culture movement in Latvia.

As well as internationally known X Games, also Ghetto Games has high-risk injuries level; the accidents during the competitions happen regularly, some are even deadly. In 2013 the snowmobile stunt performer Caleb Moore died a week after he performed and crashed his snowmobile at Winter X Games, this also draws the first

⁴⁵ K. Ruby 'Snowboarding History'

<http://www.fielliday.com/cbc/olympics/sports/snowboarding/history/index.html>, 2002, (accessed on 09.04.2014).

⁴⁶ T. Haakonsen 'Why I Still Hate the Olympics' <http://whitelines.com/features/comment/terje-haakonsen-why-i-still-hate-the-olympics.html>, 2014, (accessed on 09.04.2014).

⁴⁷ Official Website of the Olympic Movement <http://www.olympic.org/cycling-bmx>, 2014, (accessed on 09.04.2014).

⁴⁸ Latvijas Ritenbrauksanas Federacija <http://lrf.lv>, 2012, (accessed on 09.04.2014).

death accident during the Winter X Games.⁴⁹ Also during Ghetto Games tour athletes deal with injuries if they happen to fall while performing a trick; the 2012 Ghetto Games Festival in Ventspils was lethal for Arturs Grikis, a 17 years old BMX rider who, while performing a trick, crashed his bike and died in the hospital the next day. Both documentaries show the lifestyle of the riders and how they deal with the falls and injuries, and what helps them to overcome the fear.

During the action sport event it is a must in Latvia to have an ambulance team ready in case of an accident, but firstly all the participating athletes need to have a helmet. All the other safety and body protective gear suits are up to athletes themselves. Some athletes prefer not to wear full safety protective gear, as those do not allow the movement while performing tricks to be as fluent as without them. However, this seems to be a trend within gen-y action sports athletes, who in that way are acting out to the audience as well as keeping their adrenalin level up. A similar trend can also be seen within street culture; a lot of graffiti writers and street artists do not consider drawing in a studio a street art as it takes away the adrenaline of being out in the streets. If one considers himself a true street artist, the art should also be made in the streets.

2.5 *The thirst for daredevilry*

Since the ancient times people have had unfading fascination for bloody sports; starting with the gladiator games in the coliseum of the ancient Rome till even today's action sports games, which also happen to take place in huge arenas. Red Bull X-Fighters is a freestyle motocross bike stunt tournament, which since 2001 happens annually in the biggest cities of the world⁵⁰. For example, in Madrid, Spain the competition takes place in the *Plaza de Toros de Las Ventas*, which is still generally used for bullfighting spectacle and is the most important bullring in the world.⁵¹ Also in Mexico City the venue for the tournament is a bullfighting arena *Monumental Plaza de*

⁴⁹ R. George 'Caleb Moore dies after injuries in X Games crash' <http://www.usatoday.com/story/sports/olympics/2013/01/31/caleb-moore-dies-after-injuries-x-games-crash-snowmobile/1880587/>, 2013, (accessed on 09.04.2014).

⁵⁰ Red Bull X Fighters http://www.redbullxfighters.com/en_INT/tour-stops, 2014, (accessed on 09.04.2014)

⁵¹ Lasventas Tour <http://www.lasventastour.com/en/la-plaza/las-corridas-de-toros/>, 2014, (accessed on 09.04.2014).

Toros, which is the biggest bullring in the world.⁵² These events gather together world's best FMX⁵³ riders who are invited to perform stunts in front of more than 10 thousand people and compete for the gold medal. The tournament itself is a spectacle; the riders are greeted with the drumrolls or trumpet fanfares before their run, as well as the audience participates by waving white rags.

During Ghetto Games Finals the basketball teams, which play for the first place have a similar spectacle when entering the street basket court; the alley through which the players are entering, is filled with smokes and dancing cheerleaders and the crowd is being kept alert with loud hip-hop music. This spectacle with up-beat music and combination of lights and smoke is mainly organized for the audience, although it also brings up the adrenaline for the participating teams.

In the article *Athletes' involvement in violence and aggression within the context of sports competition* Michaela Marasescu states that

*Hyper-masculine sports dominate American sports culture and epitomize manliness. There is no way of determining whether sports breed aggressive characteristics, or aggressive individuals gravitate towards sports.*⁵⁴

Active sports are described as aggressive and masculine, also the majority of the athletes in these sports are males. Further in the article Marasescu states, that passion uncovers some of the processes underlying aggressive behaviour in sports.⁵⁵ So it could be said, that participants and spectators are equally generating the aggression and even violence in the sports competitions and tournaments, because they share the same passion for sports. However, active sports are individual and athletes are competing more with themselves, than others; performing new stunts and unseen tricks, pushing one's boundaries and sharing these emotions with the other athletes. It is common that active sports athletes participate in the same tournaments and have the same sponsors;

⁵² La Mexico <http://www.lamexico.com/historia.php>, 2014, (accessed on 09.04.2014).

⁵³ Short for Freestyle Motocross

⁵⁴ M Marasescu 'Athletes' involvement in the violence and aggression within the context of sports competitions', *Contemporary Readings in Law and Social Justice*, vol. 5, no. 2, 2013, p. 184

⁵⁵ M Marasescu 'Athletes' involvement in the violence and aggression within the context of sports competitions', *Contemporary Readings in Law and Social Justice*, vol. 5, no. 2, 2013, p. 184

therefore they have built their own community, whereas it is different in team sports, where the whole team is against one common enemy – the opponent team.

Instrumental aggression consists in causing a strategic nuisance to an opponent in a desire to hinder one's performance, whereas reactive aggression usually involves frustration or anger along with the intent to harm or injure another. Players with a predominant obsessive passion are more likely to behave with reactive aggression.⁵⁶

In the team sports also the audience is divided into two parts, therefore the aggression is more tense as it is in the action sports tournaments, where even if the audience has a favourite rider, everyone is cheering for a great spectacle.

The size of Ghetto Games is not comparable with the world famous action sports events, but the characteristics are similar; also in Ghetto Games the audience is supporting all the riders, and because the majority of them are going around Ghetto Games tour, the community of athletes and audience is in some way joint together. Also the fact, that Ghetto Games involves action sports disciplines as well as team sports, like street basketball, street football and rugby, does not change much in the sense of aggression and violence during the tournaments. This can be observed also from the Ghetto Games documentaries, where the street basketball players talk about the tournaments and explain, that of course they are there to win, but the positive atmosphere and healthy competition environment is, what keeps them going.

The performed tricks with every tournament are only getting more complicated, higher in altitude and more dangerous, but even with the high-risk injury level the participant number is raising and the age when the athletes become engaged with the sport is decreasing younger. The factors, which should warn the athletes and make them consider the lethal consciences, are only popularizing the field and driving it closer to the mainstream.

As stated above, the street culture and action sports in Latvia have a common history and similar path in development, and within recent years this development has grown into mainstream culture in Riga. Ghetto Games documentaries are a good visual

⁵⁶ M Marasescu 'Athletes' involvement in the violence and aggression within the context of sports competitions', *Contemporary Readings in Law and Social Justice*, vol. 5, no. 2, 2013, p. 184

example, which show this change. Comparing the two documentaries, as well as looking at the change before and after Ghetto Games events. This comparison will be researched in the next chapter.

Chapter 3

In the previous chapters I have historicized Grizinkalns, the neighbourhood of Riga, where Ghetto Games originated, the development of street culture and action sports in Riga and Latvia and talked about the gen-y, which started the street culture movement in Latvia and is the biggest part of the audience in Ghetto Games events. The films *This Is Our Freedom* and *This Is Only the Beginning* is the visual material, which will be analyzed and researched in this chapter, in order to find the disposition for how the Ghetto Games events have changed the street culture movement in Riga and what has it done for the society. With help of the cultural analysis method I will look at the visual changes in Grizinkalns, how the district is portrayed in the documentaries and what are the visible changes, what are the Ghetto Games organization members telling about the organization itself and how in their opinions they are changing the street culture in Riga and Latvia. The aspects, which will be chosen when comparing the documentaries, are the narrators voice in the films, the narrative or the story behind the films, what is the image the Ghetto Family is trying to represent and the overall message they are bringing to the audience. I will also compare how the shots have been filmed and edited, the technical parameters, and the use of the music in the films.

The two films are the main visual material from which the disposition questions will be answered, for that reason the comparison between two documentaries will be made to see the development of Ghetto Games events and to understand the way, the Ghetto Family has chosen, in order to achieve their goals.

3.1 Documentary – a non-fictional film

Before I start the analytical process of the documentaries, it is crucial to comprehend if it is probable to call the Ghetto Games films documentaries. Bill Nichols starts his book “Introduction to Documentaries” by saying that

Every film is a documentary. Even the most whimsical of fictions gives evidence of the culture that produced it and reproduces the likenesses of the people who perform within it. In fact, we could say that there are two kinds of film: (1) documentaries of wish-

*fulfillment and (2) documentaries of social representation. Each type tells a story, but the stories, or narratives, are of different sorts.*⁵⁷

None fictional ones, or the social representational documentaries are the ones, which represent the aspects of the world and make the social reality visible, although, in the way the filmmaker decides to depict it. Ghetto Games two films are a clear product of the organization themselves, that is shown already in the title of the first film, which came out in December 2012, *This Is Our Freedom* where the main accent is put on the word *our*. *This Is Only the Beginning*, the second film, which came out in February 2014, is the sequence and from the title the audience can suspect that there will be a continuance of the Ghetto Games documentaries and the events. However, because the Ghetto Games films give evidence of the cultural and social change, they are clear documental materials from which it is possible to see the change in Latvian street culture life, which will be analyzed in the next paragraphs. However, as found out in the interview with the former Ghetto Family member K. Pipars, these documentaries do not show the bad sides of the Ghetto Games; the long working hours for volunteers, the mistakes, which happen during the events, the misfortunes and the reactions to those. The documentaries are made to look back at the previous season, but only to the successful part. This makes the documentaries a subjective interpretation for the retrospect of the Ghetto Games events.

As I have clarified in the paragraph about street culture in Riga, graffiti and street art had a delayed way into the street culture of Riga and acceptance in peoples' minds. Nevertheless, with the help of street art festivals and action sport events, the street culture in Latvia has been developing its own and unique way of representation. Like mentioned before, everyone was and still is multitasking and that was possible because graffiti writers, artists, skateboarders, BMX riders, DJs, cyclist and apparel designers were meeting at the same places – skate parks. During 2000s skate parks became the place, where different events started to appear, not only action sports competitions, but also parties, exhibitions and gatherings. This movement was self-taught and went its own independent way; it received the biggest recognition within the Generation – Y, but it was still an underground movement, which until recent years was not displayed in the

⁵⁷ N. Bill, *Introduction to Documentary*, Indiana University Press, Indiana, 2001, p. 1.

news, but mainly got recognized through social networking sites, for example, such as Facebook.

Because of my personal background and interest in street culture in Riga and Latvia, I have experienced these changes and seen the development. In my opinion, the street art's and action sport's merger in the urban environment has made Riga more attractive to gen-y and not only for Latvians, but also to people from abroad. Even though the action sports take big part of street culture in Latvia, the street culture movement should not exclude street art, but on the contrary – should encourage new trends and expressions. This is something Ghetto Games in the future should emphasize more effort on, as emanated from the interview with K. Pipars it is noticeable, that Ghetto Family as street culture considers only action sports happening in the urban environment.

3.2 Grizinkalns – the visible changes

As mentioned above, Grizinkalns is the headquarters of the Ghetto Family organization and the Grizinkalns skate park is the place, where Ghetto Games were born and from where the season starts every May. During the 2012 season the council of Riga sponsored new surfacing for the park in 1200 m acreage⁵⁸, in that way the skate park's territory got bigger and more leveled. Sandra Bruna⁵⁹, PR and sponsor coordinator of Ghetto Games explains in the film, that because of the new surface, it is possible to have more participants and wider space for the action sports tournaments. The new surface is not only an acquisition for the Ghetto Games organization, but also for the Grizinkalns community, as the skate park is free of charge and people who are interested in action sports, basketball, street football or any other activity, can spend their time in the park. Even though this is a positive achievement for the youngsters of the community, not every resident of Grizinkalns is happy about the skate park activities. The typical negative comments are the noise complains during the events and the youngsters who are smoking outside the park, as it is forbidden to smoke or use alcohol in the skate park territory. The people living in Grizinkalns complain, that after the events the

⁵⁸ Binders <http://www.binders.lv/lv/aktualitates/get/nid/49>, (accessed on 13.05.2014).

⁵⁹ In Latvian Sandra Brūna

surroundings are more trashed than usually, however, the Ghetto Games organization “Patriot of the Grizinkalns” which I explained more detailed in the Chapter 1 section *How Grizinkalns Became Popular*, is frequently organizing the cleaning and tidying the territory sessions in which Grizinkalns inhabitants and people who like the neighbourhood are welcomed to come and help.⁶⁰

During the first minute of the documentary *This Is Our Freedom* the skate parks security director Nellija is explaining, that the Grizinkalns district will always have the drunks and drug addicts, because of that, the neighbourhood will always have the shadow of the *ghetto*, but as for the others, everything is in order.

One of the biggest social problems today in Riga among youngsters is the easy access to “legal drug” called *spice*.⁶¹ Because of the incomplete law structure in the Constitution about the allowed and banned substances in Latvia, these drugs are allowed and can be legal. In February 2014 was the first “legal drug” death case of 18-year-old high school boy. Only after this accident the government and police are finally starting to act against “legal drug” issue. Ghetto Family is one of the biggest anti-legal drug activists. R. Elbakjans together with other well-known Latvian people are actively involved in the anti-legal drug campaign. They promote active lifestyle and healthy living, furthermore they are gathering signatures in order to change the law, which allows the dangerous substances found under “legal drug” *spice*.⁶² Ghetto Games and Grizinkalns in this campaign are promoted as a place, where youngsters can gather, participate in sports disciplines, make new friends and stay off the streets, where the drugs are available. Because of the Ghetto Family’s participation in this campaign a lot more youngsters have become aware of the danger, which drugs can bring, even if in front of the law they are legal. Because this issue has been brought up only since the first death case of “legal drugs” in February 2014, there has not yet been made statistic report about the positive or negative outcomes from the Ghetto Games campaign, however,

⁶⁰ Apkaimes <http://www.apkaimes.lv/sakums/grizinkalns/news>, (accessed on 13.05.2014).

⁶¹ Euronews ‘Really? These drugs are legal’ <http://www.euronews.com/2013/09/02/psychoactive-substances-really-these-drugs-are-legal/>, 2013, (accessed on 19.05.2014).

⁶² M. Apskrums ‘Elbakjans aicina nelietot un nelegaliet’ http://epadomi.lv/atputas_briziem/tv_raidijs/30102013-raimonds_elbakjans_uzruna_visus_kas_lieto, 2013, (accessed on 19.05.2014).

during the last couple of months the number of places, where these “legal drugs” could be sold, has decreased.⁶³

The second documentary *This Is Only the Beginning* starts with the chapter of history of Grizinkalns and what has Ghetto Family changed in the skate park and its surroundings since they became the owners. The pictures and videos from the first Ghetto Basket tournaments are shown; how the basketball baskets were established and the park put in order. This clip from the second film is the best visible evidence of the Ghetto Family’s achievements in Grizinkalns; starting from changing the environment for local people till making the neighbourhood recognizable as an active lifestyle place in Riga and outside city’s borders. During this chapter, R. Elbakjans is the only person talking about these changes, so it may seem as a subjective one person’s opinion about the development of the skate park and the neighbourhood.

3.3 Cultural analysis

The first documentary by Ghetto Games *This Is Our Freedom* is an hour-and-four minute long film, which as covered in the biggest daily newspaper in Latvia “Diena” is the biggest street culture and action sport event movement in Latvia.⁶⁴ The film was made by the Ghetto Family team and was released in December 2012 about the 2012 summer season, the athletes participating in the tour, and about the Ghetto Family themselves; what does Ghetto Games mean to the organizers and how they are overcoming the every day obstacles in order to build the quality behind the event Ghetto Games. As mentioned in the films description, it is more about the behind the scenes action, the belief in the idea and the volunteer work to organize more than 60 events in 90 days, as well as, how with the help of almost 100 volunteers, it was possible to make the biggest street culture and action sports festival in the Baltic States.⁶⁵

The second film *This Is Only the Beginning* is an hour-and-16 minute long, it was released in February 2014 and is about the 2013 summer season. The films theme is

⁶³ Ir ‘90% “legalo narkotiku” tirdzniecibas vietu atrodas Riga un tas tuvuma’ <http://www.ir.lv/2014/3/25/90-no-legalo-narkotiku-tirdzniecibas-vietu-atrodas-riga-un-tas-regiona>, 2014, (accessed on 19.05.2014).

⁶⁴ I. Auzane, ‘Lai saprot, ka viss ir iespējams, ja dara’, *Diena*, February 21, 2014, p 16.

⁶⁵ Latvijas Reitingi <http://www.reitingi.lv/lv/news/atputa/77796-ghetto-games-2012-gada-sezonas-filma-ta-ir-musu-briviba-kanala-ltv7.html>, 2013, (accessed on 13.05.2014).

the passion, which motivates the individual to get up in the mornings and keep fighting and developing; about living the life, not just exist in the greedy society system.⁶⁶ This story is the narrative throughout the film; different athletes are shot in the morning; how they are physically waking up, getting out of bed and going to practice.

3.2.1 Narrators voice and narrative

Paul Ward in book “Documentary: The Margins of Reality” is saying, how

It is clear that documentary as a category is now as vibrant and dynamic as it has ever been – both on the small and large screens. This is partly due to the ways in which those practitioners working in the field have responded to the changing climate of deregulations, and means that there are some fascinating recent trends in documentary and factual filmmaking.⁶⁷

This applies to both documentaries as they are not following any certain filmmaking rules in narrative, structure or style, but rather made to entertain the audience and show to those who do not know anything about Ghetto Games, what the organization is and how it works. It can be said, that both documentaries are a promotional material made by Ghetto Family about the Ghetto Games; they have chosen themselves what to depict in the films and how to present the Ghetto Games tour to the audience. However, each film has a common theme, it tries to follow through. The narrative in the first film is the theme “so similar so different”, which is also the theme for the Ghetto Games tour designs made by organizations artist V. Lakse. In the film he explains how the idea that the athletes who participate in the Ghetto Games tournament are all similar, as they have the same interest about the sports, but different, because they come from different backgrounds. The slogan also is applied to the people who work for Ghetto Games; everybody has different reasons and ways, how they have found Ghetto Games, but being the part of Ghetto Family contacts them similar.

⁶⁶ ‘Ghetto Games Film’s “Tas ir tikai sakums” trailer’ [online video] 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9cYyvWNIBAk>, (accessed on 13.05.2014).

⁶⁷ P. Ward *Documentary. The Margins of Reality*, A Wallflower Paperback, London, 2005, p. 100.



Picture no 1
Screenshot from film *This Is Our Freedom*

In the first documentary there are 12 people from Ghetto Family talking in front of the camera about how they became the part of the organization, their role in Ghetto Games and what has been their biggest achievement during the last season, and what are their goals for the next ones. These monologues with the camera divides the documentary in 12 chapters as each of the members talk about certain part they are involved with the Ghetto Games. Renars Zeltins⁶⁸, who is the TV director, the voice and host of Ghetto Games events, combines chapters with small clips where he interacts with the local people on the location the Ghetto Games tour has an event. He makes sure the audience in front of the screen as well as during the events gets entertained; he is singing with the local kids, asking local people about their thoughts, for example, of the bad weather during the event or just interfering with people by asking amusing questions.

The second film *This Is Only the Beginning* is also divided into chapters, but this time these chapters are clearly marked; every new section starts with the black background on which, in white letters appears the title of the chapter. In this film they are seven: The Prime Origin, Ghetto Athletes, Evolution, The Winners and The Losers, Best Of The Best Every Day, Ghetto Games Festival and Ghetto Alliance. R. Zeltins still is the host and the face of Ghetto Games and, as in the first film also in the second one, he has interactions with local people to entertain the audience, in the actual events and behind the screens. These amusing interactions have become a trademark for Ghetto Games events and Ghetto TV, as these interaction clips are published on the Internet media, like YouTube and Vimeo.

⁶⁸ In Latvian Renārs Zeltiņš



Picture no 2
Screenshots from film *This Is Our Freedom*

In the first film, all 12 people are introduced to the audience by having their name and occupation with Ghetto Games written on the bottom left corner of the screen (see picture no 1), except for R. Zeltins; in none of his appearances on the screen, there is a slide with his name and occupation. If the viewer has not attended any of the Ghetto Games events or watched any of the videos from the Ghetto Games TV channel, he is still clueless about this person's involvement with the Ghetto Family. The second film has R. Zeltins as the narrator for the documentary; his voice throughout the film tells the story of Ghetto Games, but as in the first film, he is not introduced to the audience nor he introduces himself.

Another remaining feature from the first film is the interviews with the Ghetto Family members, this time, except the Ghetto Games athletes, who are sharing with the audience their experience with injuries, losses and what keeps them fighting for their dreams and passions, it is only R. Elbakjans, who represents the Ghetto Games organization. This makes the second film more about one person's interpretation of Ghetto Games as it is only R. Elbakjans who is talking about his vision on how to develop Ghetto Games into internationally recognized event and develop street culture in Latvia. This brings the promotional feeling to the documentary; it is not anymore about depicting behind the scenes of Ghetto Games, it is about attracting new participants and sponsors for the Ghetto Games events. As also found out from the interview, R. Elbakjans has the last word for the included materials in the documentaries, which conforms my observation that the film is more about showing the Ghetto Family's interpretation of the events, rather than reality.

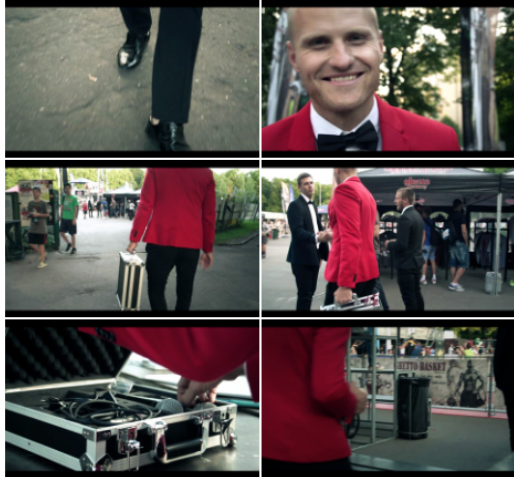
When comparing the narrative in both documentaries, it is easy to see the development of the story line; if in the first film, there was no clear division among

film's chapters and there was no narrators voice at all, the second film is more thought through: clear chapter divisions and narrators voice keeps the story line through out the whole film.

Both films are not just the depiction of the Ghetto Games season, but they also show the new trend of documentary; as stated in P. Wards book that documentary has close relationships with other forms of expression – drama/fiction, comedy, animation – and that we need to think carefully about how these relationships might have changed what we think documentary can be.⁶⁹ *This Is Our Freedom* has all of the above-mentioned characteristics in the film; the opening scene shows the meeting of the Ghetto Family members where they are discussing the upcoming season and the problems what might occur. During the meeting the arguments and problems are discussed and the conversation gets intense among some members. The meeting scene and the argument seem to be staged to add the dramatic mood to the beginning of the film. However, in the opening frame of the film the green banner is shown, which before the international trailers say “This preview has been approved for all audiences” for Ghetto Games documentary has been translated and changed to Latvian. It says “The following video MATERIAL is approved for demonstration to ALL GHETTO GAMES current and potential viewers. The video has been evaluated as full of humor. The content entertains, reduces stress and does not leave indifferent. Good intentions, straight language, no censorship.” (See picture no 1 in appendices.) With this banner the Ghetto Family team wants to show, that not only the movie itself is supposed to be entertaining and funny, but also the Ghetto Games events, especially the festival, which takes place in Ventspils one will leave with positive emotions.

The second film starts with the theatrical clip (see picture 3); the first frame is the areal shot of Riga and of the Ghetto Games events, after those follows the close-up shot of black shoes walking into the Grizinkalns skate park, the camera moves up and one can see the man in a read suite, in the close-up shot the man's face appears, it is R. Zeltins, he is smiling and in the background the narrator, who is also R. Zeltins, explains

⁶⁹ P. Ward *Documentary. The Margins of Reality*, A Wallflower Paperback, London, 2005, p. 102.



Picture no 3
Screenshots from film *This Is Only the Beginning*

his own feelings and emotions he gets, when he walks into Ghetto Games event. He introduces the theme of the film to the audience by telling, that every morning everyone has two options – keep sleeping or get up and do something, and that this will be the story about people, who are following their dreams every morning.

3.3.2 Technical improvements

In the first film as the main material were used video clips, which throughout the season were filmed for the Ghetto TV, and additionally to the documentary the interviews with Ghetto Family members were filmed. The second film, on the other hand, was more thought through since the beginning; as found out from the former Ghetto Games technical director K. Pipars, the film crew started to use higher quality cameras, learned more about different angle shots and editing processes. The technical outgrowth is well noticeable already from the opening frames of the second film in which the aerial shots of Riga have been used, go-pro shots from athletes while riding, and, as mentioned above, the opening theatrical scene with R. Zeltins entering the Grizinkalna skate park and the narrators voice in the background adds more professional look to the film. When comparing both films' first frames in which to the audience is presented that Ghetto Games or Ghetto TV presents these films, the most noticeable feature is the usage of the lettering (see picture 4). In the first film, it is the Ghetto Games logo on the graphical background with animated skateboard, which rides through the frame under the title. In the second film's opening frame, the font for "Ghetto TV presents" is in basic Arial font with the background of moving Riga panorama view. The first films



Picture no 4
Screenshots from film *This Is Our Freedom*
and *This Is Only the Beginning*

frame is in a way blank and does not give any personal attachment, however, the second film's first frame sends the message that Ghetto Games is from Riga, in that way becoming more personal with the location and the people in it.

In the film *This Is Our Freedom* there are used following types of frames: close-ups, long shots, mid-shots, and point-of-view shots, as for the camera angle: high-angle, eye-level, low-angle, and for the camera movement Ghetto Games filming crew has mostly used the hand-held shots. Even with the variety of camera shots, all the frames are static and still, that is especially noticeable in the interview scenes with Ghetto Family members: every person in shot from the front in the eye-level angle, while they are looking and speaking into the camera. Even though the surroundings for each person differ, all the frames seem similar as everyone is filmed in the medium detailed shot (see picture 1).

The simple technical characteristics used in the first Ghetto Games documentary does not seem to go together with the action sports excitement. Ghetto Family promotes themselves as developers of the street culture and action sports in Latvia, but for the main visual material, which has been released for the huge number of current and prospective audience, they have chosen to present themselves in a calm office type environment. Also the video montages from the events are shot in eye-level while using mid-angle shots. The video montages from the events are shot in eye-level while using mid-angle shots, which does not bring the excitement of the action sports to the screen.

In the second documentary *This Is Only the Beginning*, as mentioned above, the film and editing crew has put more effort to achieve the excitement and thrill one can get at the Ghetto Games events also in the film. Camera angles and framing has mostly stayed similar to the first film, but the most noticeable changes have been added to the camera movement. In addition to hand-held shots it is possible to recognize areal shots,

pans, dolly or tracking shots, zoomed shots and the fish eye movement. These new characteristics are seen through out the whole film, but mostly it is noticeable in the action sports clips, however, the interview frames with the Ghetto Games leader R. Elbakjans and Ghetto Family athletes have stayed almost the same as in the first film, except in the second film, the person is not shot only in one way. The interview frames are positioned from the front, when person looks and talks into the camera, from the profile and in full and medium shots. Also the surroundings for the interviews have changed, athletes' interviews are being held in their natural surroundings; basketball player is being interviewed in the basketball field, aggressive inline skater in the skate park, stunt motorbike rider in his garage and R. Elbakjans in Ghetto Burger restaurant. (See picture no 2 in appendices.)

3.2.3 Film language

The film editors have used a variety of special effects to make the film more appealing to the audience. In the fifty-six minute of the film, in the screen appears planet Earth and the voice as from the astronaut space base is saying unrecognizable words, which sounds like from a radio transmitter, which has some connection problems, then an animated carrot brakes the glass and flies to the zoomed-in Riga and lands in Grizinkalns skate park. That is the introduction to the next clip about the Ghetto Games Finals, which happen annually at the end of the summer. *Carrot*, as found out in the interview with the former Ghetto Family employer K. Pipars, used to be his nickname and R. Balkis, one of the editors of the film thought it might be an amusing feature, but this information is not shared with the audience, so for the viewer the flying carrot does not make any sense.

The planet Earth and the zoomed-in Riga scene is also the opening shot for the films trailer, which might be interpreted as symbol for cultural determination; it is Riga, where this event is happening and even if Latvia is a comparatively small country, there are starting to happen big events. Also, as mentioned before, R. Elbakjans has stated that his aim is for Ghetto Games to become an internationally recognized event and with this shot people from abroad, who do not know where Latvia is located, can have the image and place it on the map. Although, as the film is in Latvian and with no English

subtitles, there is almost no chance, that a person with no Latvian language knowledge will ever watch this film. This should be something the Ghetto Family thinks about when making the third film, as their aim is to become recognizable beyond Latvia's borders.

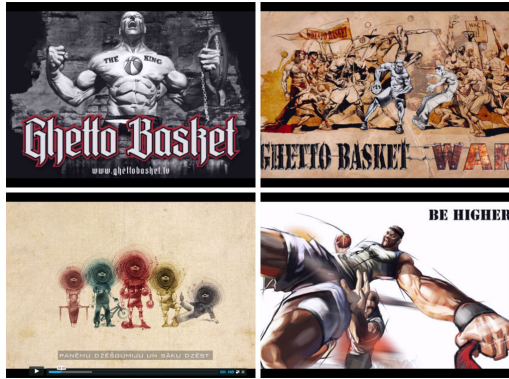
The second documentary *This Is Only the Beginning* does not have any animated features, or warnings about the entertainment level in the film. This can be interpreted as growth within Ghetto Family; they are no more just people, who like street culture, active sports and good entertainment, but they are professionals in what they do. This is also displayed in R. Elbakjans monologue in the film's last chapter Ghetto Alliance, where he explains that Ghetto Family is ready to use their knowledge in organizing and promoting different events and they can be hired as event producers. He says how Ghetto Family needs help in order to organize the biggest street culture and active sports event in the Baltics and reinvent Grizinkalna as the most active lifestyle neighbourhood in Riga. This open invitation is a clear employment promotion for Ghetto Family to be the producers and the job opportunity for people, who are willing to be part of, as R. Elbakjans states in the film, the organization, which will be the main developers for street culture in Riga. Also the first film R. Elbakjans ends by saying that the main task is to continue to work better and better and that Ghetto Family has taken upon the huge responsibility and they will go till the end. This can be interpreted as a warning that Ghetto Family will not give up, and, as the next film already presents in the title *This Is Only the Beginning*, they are keeping their promise. The second film ends with R. Elbakjans giving a promise to the audience, this time his allocution is, that Ghetto Family have had five years to practice and only now the real Ghetto Games will begin, the ones he has seen in his visions. This speech sounds ambitious, but it also leaves the feeling of individualism. If the first documentary was more about the team work behind the Ghetto Games and everyone's involvement and everyone's ideas, which Ghetto Family can combine in order to organize street culture events, then after the second documentary it starts to appear as a one man's show. R. Elbakjans wants to be the one, who changes, develops and moves the street culture in Riga and Latvia, and because of this approach the street culture might draw nearer to mainstream interpretation of street culture.

Another noticeable feature, which appears in the second film *This Is Only the Beginning* is the use of Latvian symbols; in the areal shots of Riga in the close-up appears the Monument of Freedom with “Milda” which is the national symbol, the tower of the Dome church and the St. Peters Church’s cock, newly built Latvian National library and also one of the most famous Latvian street artist Kiwie wall mural (see picture 3 in appendices). These frames repeat during the documentary from different angles and in different video montages. However, when the narrators voice introduces that this film is about the people who do not want to live in the greedy money system, the frame in the background is falling United States dollar bills covered with blood stains (see picture 4 in appendices). This rises a question why use foreign currency if the film is about the Latvian athletes in Latvia?

In January 2014 Latvian currency Lats (LVL) was replaced by Euro, so it would be more reasonable to use, at the time, upcoming money bills, however, if Ghetto Family wants to show the patriotism for their Latvian nationality it would have been a historic advantage to use Latvian, soon to forgotten, currency.

3.3.4. Ghetto Games image

Ghetto Games have been putting a lot of effort in their image and how they are being presented in Grizinkalns and around Latvia’s tour events. The drawings by V. Lakse are used for all the Ghetto Games symbols, such as, posters, banners, t-shirts, prizes, basketball baskets and others. The designs (see picture no 5) have become the trademark for Ghetto Games and as stated by R. Elbakjans in the second documentary, Ghetto Family always makes sure that 50% of the space in the area is left for sponsor logos, but the other half goes to, as they call it – Ghetto Design, in that way Ghetto Games keep their identity and image as the priority.



Picture no 5
Screenshots from film *This Is Only the Beginning*

The drawings do not leave the viewer indifferent, and that is the aim for the Ghetto Games designs, as well as the artist says himself, his motto is to surprise and convince and that he is putting these emotions in his drawings. As M. Irvin has explained

Whether the street works seem utopian or anarchic, aggressive or sympathetic, stunningly well-executed or juvenile, original or derivative, most street artists seriously working in the genre begin with a deep identification and empathy with the city: they are compelled to state something in and with the city, whether as forms of protest, critique, irony, humor, beauty, subversion, clear prank or all of the above. The pieces can be ephemeral, gratuitous acts of beauty or forms of counter-iconography, inhabiting spaces of abandonment and decay, or signal jams in a zone of hyper-commercial messaging. [...] Whether the medium and motives of the work, the city is the assumed interlocutor, framework, and essential precondition for making the artwork work.⁷⁰

V. Lakse's drawings are about the people, the people who live in the city of Riga, who participate in Ghetto Games and who are willing to achieve their dreams. He is depicting the fears, the pain, the eagerness to win, the individuality but also the team spirit and friendship in that way communicating with the audience. V. Lakse, as mentioned before, has been with Ghetto Games since the beginning and he has developed his own style and ambitions through the Ghetto Games, however, even though his designs appear on the streets, those streets are only there while the Ghetto Games event takes place and as soon as the event is over, also the designs, which would represent the street culture, disappear. That is the reason why in my opinion it is hard to call Ghetto Games, even

⁷⁰ M Irvine, 'The Work on the Street: Street Art and Visual Culture' in *The Handbook of Visual Culture*, B Sandywell and I Heywood (eds), London & New York, Berg, 2012, p. 3.

with their unique designs, as street culture developers, as their drawings do not stay in the streets after the Ghetto Games have left the town. In the same book M. Irvine states that “Street art synthesizes and circulates a visual vocabulary and set of stylistic register that have become instantly recognizable through mass culture.”⁷¹ Ghetto Games designs are reaching high level of recognition within its target auditory as the designs are used for all the Ghetto Games event posters, as well as during the Ghetto Games Festival it is possible to purchase T-shirts with slogans and drawings, but once again, these designs get recognized and accepted mostly only during the events, as they do not appear in any other form, except posters, in the street culture in Riga.

3.3.5 Music comparison

Soundtracks for the documentaries:

This Is Our Freedom

1. The Kooks – Naïve
2. Kid Cudi, Common – Make Her Say
3. Skrillex – Bangarang (feat. Sirah)
4. Rick Ross – Every Day I’m Hustellin
5. Phaeleh – Should Be True
6. Raimonds Pauls - Miega vilcienins⁷²
7. Stereo MCs Rattleshake mix - I Changed My Mind
8. Classified – That Ain’t Classy
9. Staind – Epiphany
10. Raimonds Pauls - Annina Vannina⁷³
11. Z-kalns feat. Riga Gospel Choir – Mana briviba⁷⁴

This Is Only the Beginning

1. Flume feat. Chet Faker - Left alone (Ta-Ku Remix)
2. Limp Bizkit - May Way
3. Jay-Z – Dirt Off Your Shoulders
4. Wale Ft. Sam Dew - LoveHate Thing
5. Lil’ Wyte - Get High
6. Ohuong Madley – Green Pastures
7. Cypress Hill - Get It Anyway
8. Mr. J Medeiros - Pale Blue Dot (20sly Remix)
9. The XX – Intro
10. 2 Chainz Wiz – We Own It
11. Limp Bizkit - Ready To Go
12. Everlast - Blinded By The Sun
13. Civil Twilight – Letters From The Sky
14. The Avalanches – Frontier Psychiatrist
15. Peter Gabriel – My Body Is A Cage
16. Cypress Hill - Get It Anyways
17. Imperial Teen – Runaway
18. Montefroid – Led 2000
19. The Roots – The Fire
20. Pharell – Happy
21. Beastie Boys feat. Santigold - Don’t Play No Game That I Can’t Win

⁷¹ M Irvine, ‘The Work on the Street: Street Art and Visual Culture’ in *The Handbook of Visual Culture*, B Sandywell and I Heywood (eds), London & New York, Berg, 2012, p. 1.

⁷² Latvian song

⁷³ Latvian song

⁷⁴ Ghetto Games hymn in Latvian

22. Nicki Minaj – Up In Flames

23. Baauer – Higher

When comparing the soundtrack for both documentaries the first noticeable thing is the amount of the songs for each film; *This Is Our Freedom* contains 11 songs and *This Is Only the Beginning* 23. The second film is longer only by 12 minutes, but includes 12 more songs than the first one. This can be explained by the fact, that almost no song in the first film has been used in full version for the clips; on the other hand, the second film contains full-length songs for the featured music clips. The second film has gained not only the visual development, but has reached the audio-visual experience, especially because the second film contains synchronized music and action sports clip montages from the events.

It can be observed that both film soundtracks' consist of well know songs within the generation – Y, and most of these songs are in hip-hop and R&B genre. This brings the contemporaneity to the documentaries and acceptance among the youngsters – the target auditory.

3.3.6 Depiction of Ghetto Games Festival in the films

Ghetto Games claim, that Ghetto Games Festival, which since 2012 happens annually is the biggest street culture and action sports event in Baltic States and for this event both documentaries has a separate chapter. In the next paragraphs I have analyzed the depiction of the festival in both Ghetto Games films in order to see the changes between the past events and to see what the Ghetto Family has planned for the development of street culture in Latvia.

The Ghetto Games Festival in the first film has 11 minutes section, as it is the biggest event of the Ghetto Games tour. This event in the film is disclosed in fullest; starting with the preparations and the areas equipping till the distinctions of the results for the festival. In between the shots R. Elbakjans explains in front of the camera that organizing small events is no more their ambition, but rather a social responsibility, so those youngsters around Latvia would have a place and a possibility to participate in the tournaments. However, his own ambition as for now are to organize big festivals and

huge events to catch once again the feeling of agitation, because the feeling of adrenalin is what they, the Ghetto Family, are living for. The film continues with the clip in which the participants of the festival are riding, playing team sports or dancing and the crowd of audience is supporting them while the hip-hop music is being played. These small clips are similar to action sports videos in the social media such as YouTube. Later S. Bruna talks about biggest achievements during Ghetto Games Festival; she thinks that the biggest success was that for the first time so many athletes from 5 different countries in 18 different disciplines were gathered together. The positive outcome of the festival was, what makes her believe, that they are writing the history of Latvian street culture. Even though the clip leaves positive emotions on the viewer, it is mainly because of the music and happy faces in the clip. S. Bruna claims, Ghetto Games Festival is writing the history, but the only claim she mentions for that is, the large number of participants, which seems to be in Ghetto Family's opinion the only necessity for the street cultures development. Also further in the film, all of the members and involved people in Ghetto Games mention the large and with every event rising participant number, which is possible to observe not only from the documentary but also from the media coverage. Although, the growing athlete and audience number is a valid measurement for development of street culture, it most definitely should not be the only device in order to change and continue the street culture.

The Ghetto Games Festival section for the *This Is Our Freedom* film ends with R. Elbakjans stating, that besides the ambition of large participant number the organization wants the festival to become international and to show others the beauty of street culture in Riga, but once again, there is no clear explanation of what does Ghetto Games mean by street culture and its development.

The second documentary *This Is Only the Beginning* has also a special chapter for Ghetto Games Festival, in this film the event from 2013 season has been depicted in 12 minutes. The opening frame is the areal shot of festival territory with the basketball players, active sports participants and audience; further R. Elbakjans tells how Latvia needs a huge street culture event which would gather together the best international riders. He continues with stating that for now they have managed to gather few, but in a five-year time their aim is to make Ghetto Games Festival the world's event. This is almost the same speech R. Elbakjans is giving in the first film, except this time, he is

stating the exact time for their goal realization, however, he adds that the main field Ghetto Games wants to develop is the active sports disciplines.

In the interview with K. Pipars it is noticeable, that in his opinion the only street culture's means of expression is active sports, as his answer to the question, how Ghetto Games have changed the street culture in Riga, is that because of Ghetto Games more people are participating in active sports and sports in general. This realization makes me doubt that Ghetto Family is trying to change the street culture in Latvia outside their events or that they fully understand what street culture should be.

When comparing the films depictions of the festival the biggest change is the altitude of the event itself: territory wise, participant and spectator number and the more complex level of the performed action sports tricks. That is the evidence of Ghetto Games keeping their promise in organizing the biggest action sports event in Baltic States. However, if they want to keep up with the slogan 'biggest street culture and action sports event', they need to work on finding the balance between action sports part and street culture.

Conclusion

I am trying to think about my life without skateboarding in it. I cannot, and to be honest, I do not want to. Action sports have taken me where I am today; it brought me together with people who I share the same interests, it helped me test my limits and overcome my fears, and when the right time came, it helped me while deciding where to go next. Through skateboarding I learned about street culture, which for me has always gone hand in hand with action sports. As my Bachelor studies I chose to take Graphic Design and Visual Arts, because I wanted to improve my knowledge about street art and develop my skills, so in the future I could contribute to the street culture. My final Bachelor degree paper was “Graphic art expressions of street art in city environment” where I proved that urban environment is the place where street art and action sports meet. On top of that I developed the graphical identity for freestyle ski crew “Cesu Greks”, which included logo, business cards and forms, and apparel and ski designs.

My Masters degree thesis paper about Ghetto Games contribution to Latvian street culture have helped me to understand today's street art situation in Riga and how action sports events are forming the street culture movement. It is important to me as a Latvian to be part of this process as I regard to the street culture as a form of art, which should be available for everybody.

When I first attended Ghetto Basket tournament in May 2008, I could only hope that the amplitude of the Thursday night get-together with friends to play basketball would grow into events, which today are a big part of the street culture in Latvia. Now looking back at the history of Grizinkalns, street culture and action sport development and Latvian economical situation in 2008, it can be said, that the right people at the right time and in the right place found an easy solution for one problem – how to stay active and entertained in financial crisis?

Ghetto Games is a phenomenon in Latvian street culture and action sports for this reason. Ghetto Family saw an opportunity from which in five-years time they have established their own legacy, which does not concentrate only on the Ghetto Games success, but is also working for the Grizinkalns community. However, it is easy to pass an objective judgment when media, social networking and Ghetto Family organization themselves are issuing only the positive outcomes of the Ghetto Games impact. Without

doubt when Ghetto Games took over the Grizinkalns skate-park, the surroundings were the reason why the organization caught a sight of a ghetto and decided to use this term for their identity. However, Ghetto Family is not the only reason the neighbourhood has spurted out from being the slum. In 1997 the district of Grizinkalns was included in UNESCO World heritage list because of its unique wooden and art nouveau architecture and in 2010 it got the financing from the European Union for historical reconstruction. Although slowly, but since then the houses are being renewed and the neighbourhood has lost its ghetto look.

Ghetto Family is putting a lot of effort to be accepted among the community of Grizinkalns. In 2013 R. Elbakjans established his own initiative “The Patriot of Grizinkalns”, which provides the local inhabitants with different workshops and encourages people to do sports, as it is one of the Ghetto Family’s goals for Grizinkalns to be recognized as the place for active lifestyle. The skate-park consists of action sports ramps, basketball area and street gymnastics utilities, which have been put in for the Ghetto Games needs, but can be used by anyone.

The neighbourhood is developing and it can be said, that Ghetto Games have helped to speed up the process. Also because of “The Patriot of Grizinkalns” organized workshops local inhabitants have activities to attend closer to their homes.

Street culture in Riga has walked a long and hard way to get accepted and evaluated in the eyes of its local people. Only in recent ten-years time the walls of Riga are becoming alive with graffiti murals and other street art expressions. Although the wheel has started to roll, to remove the stagnation and carved in opinions from the majority of residents, more time will still be needed. 2014 is the year for Riga as Europe’s Culture capital, which introduces and encourages people to talk more about street art and street culture. The activities, such as Blank Canvas festival⁷⁵, which happened during May 13th till 17th, raised discussions and brought attention to the fact, that there is a street culture in Riga and it has been developing around us all the time, even if majority of people have not been aware of it.

Ghetto Games claim that they are developing and keeping the street culture in Riga alive, however, when looking at the researched visual material – two documentaries by Ghetto Family, it can be said, that the organization is concentrating

⁷⁵ Blank Canvas <http://www.blankcanvas.lv/en/>, 2014, (accessed on 23.05.2014).

only on the action sports field. Also when interviewing the former member of Ghetto Family K. Pipars it can be said, that the organization does not have a concrete opinion of what is street culture in Riga. Never the less, they consider the action sports presence in the streets of Riga as the street culture movement. In my opinion, street culture is an always growing and changing organism, which develops through the people living in the city and events, such as Ghetto Games, could speed up this process. Action sports are one of the means how street culture is developing, but it should not be the only one. However, after analyzing the documentaries, the impression Ghetto Games leave to the audience, is that they are working to develop their idea about street culture. It seems that Ghetto Family is turning street culture in Riga in their organized movement, not leaving the option of street culture's development to the street artists and people of Riga, who are not involved directly with Ghetto Games. Even more, their approach is taking the street culture and action sports closer to the mainstream ideas about how this organism should develop.

Through the cultural analysis I have answered my research question "How the street culture has changed in Riga because of the Ghetto Games and what has this event done to the community?" Ghetto Games are changing the street culture in Riga; however, with their approach this process is turning into organized movement, which develops only the Ghetto Games interests for action sports in street culture. Like I have stated above, street culture is an art form, which belongs to the people of the city and it should not turn into arranged one organizations' movement. Never the less, because of the Ghetto Games arrival to Grizinkalns, the neighbourhood has renewed facilities and the residents have more possibilities for informal education and entertainment.

This research has broadened my understanding about street culture movement in Riga. It is in my best interests to continue the research of street culture's and action sports' development in Latvia, as, like I have mentioned above, urban environment is the place where street art and action sports join together.

Appendices



Picture no 1



Picture no 2



Picture no 3



Picture no 4

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