universität wien

MASTERARBEIT / MASTER'S THESIS

Titel der Masterarbeit / Title of the Master's Thesis

A feminist approach to sport:
Reimagining the sport institution through roller derby

verfasst von / submitted by

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angestrebter akademischer Grad / in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts (MA)

Wien, 2022 / Vienna, 2022

Studienkennzahl lt. Studienblatt / degree programme code as it appears on the student record sheet:	UA 066 589
Studienrichtung lt. Studienblatt / degree programme as it appears on the student record sheet:	Masterstudium Internationale Entwicklung
Betreut von / Supervisor:	Mag.a Dr.in Sabine Prokop

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my gratitude to Mag.a Dr.in Sabine Prokop for agreeing to be my thesis supervisor and for her constant feedback and support through the writing and researching process.

I also want to thank all the roller derby leagues and skaters that made part of this thesis possible by sharing their time and knowledge with me. Presented in alphabetical order, I would like to especially thank Dianamite from *Steelcity Rollers* (Linz), Ellie Harrison from the National Museum of Roller Derby (NMRD), Jenny Noble and Kerry Irving from the Glasgow Women's Library/NMRD, Marta Popowska from *Stuttgart Valley Roller Derby*, Pantybreaker from *Vienna Roller Derby*, Patti No Regretti from *SBG KNOCKouts* (Salzburg), Reckless Spice from *Dust City Rollers* (Graz), and Sandy Crush from *Fearless Bruisers* (Innsbruck).

Finally, thank you Gorka, Vicky, Manue and the streetfootballworld/Common Goal team for welcoming me into the world of Sport for Development. This thesis would have not been written had I not had the chance to work with you.

Abstract

In the America of the early 20th century, a women's place was still very much relegated to the home. Nonetheless, women, especially those in the upper- and middle-classes were also allowed to carry out what were considered 'light' physical activities—such as dancing or roller skating. In 1935 roller derby—a competitive team activity on roller skates—emerged as a new form of entertainment in which both men and women were welcomed to participate. This new form of entertainment countered widespread beliefs about women's participation in sport by fostering gender equality among skaters. However, by the 1980s several circumstances had left the sport dormant, but not for long. In the early 2000s roller derby was revived as a feminist endeavour that reimagined the sport institution as known until then. Twenty years after its re-emergence, this thesis analyses what remains of that movement and what the changes in the sport have meant for its counterhegemonic potential. To answer these questions semi-structured interviews were conducted with skaters of the five Austrian roller derby leagues. Findings have shown that (self-)reflection has always been part of the sport and that it's a key aspect if the sport wishes to maintain its inclusive character. Similarly, keeping the do-it-yourself (DIY) ethos alive, which accompanies the sport since the revival, not only enables the creation of sense of community within and between leagues, but also has an empowering effect for the skaters. Finally, the marginalisation of roller derby by mainstream sports continues to be the biggest burden for the skaters and although the sport is becoming more and more professionalised through uniformization and increased levels of athleticism, the skaters in the Austrian leagues oppose the trade-off of their political values for the recognition of the sport.

Keywords: *roller derby, sport, counterculture, feminism, do-it-yourself (DIY)*

Deutsch

Im Amerika des frühen 20. Jahrhunderts war der Platz der Frau noch sehr stark auf das Haus beschränkt. Dennoch durften auch Frauen, vor allem aus der Ober- und Mittelschicht, ‚leichte' körperliche Aktivitäten ausüben, wie Tanzen oder Rollschuhlaufen. 1935 entstand mit Roller Derby, einem Mannschaftswettkampf auf Rollschuhen, eine neue Form der Unterhaltung, an der sowohl Männer als auch Frauen teilnehmen durften. Diese neue Form der Unterhaltung wirkte den weit verbreiteten Vorstellungen über die Beteiligung von Frauen am Sport entgegen, indem sie die Gleichstellung der Geschlechter unter allen Rollschuhläufern und Rollschuhläuferinnen förderte. In den 1980er Jahren wurde der Sport

jedoch aufgrund verschiedener Umstände wieder eingestellt, aber nicht für lange. In den frühen 2000er Jahren wurde Roller Derby als feministisches Projekt wiederbelebt, das die bis dahin bekannte Sportinstitution neu definierte. Zwanzig Jahre nach seinem Wiederauftauchen analysiert diese Arbeit, was von dieser Bewegung übriggeblieben ist und was die Veränderungen im Sport für sein gegenhegemoniales Potenzial bedeutet haben. Um diese Fragen zu beantworten, wurden semistrukturierte Interviews mit Skaterinnen der fünf österreichischen Roller Derby Ligen geführt. Die Ergebnisse haben gezeigt, dass (Selbst-)Reflexion schon immer Teil des Sports war und dass dies ein Schlüsselaspekt ist, wenn der Sport seinen inklusiven Charakter beibehalten will. Ebenso ermöglicht die Aufrechterhaltung des DIY-Ethos, der den Sport seit seiner Wiederbelebung begleitet, nicht nur die Schaffung eines Gemeinschaftsgefühls innerhalb und zwischen den Ligen, sondern hat auch eine stärkende Wirkung auf die Skater*innen. Schließlich ist die Marginalisierung des Roller Derbys durch den Mainstream-Sport nach wie vor die größte Belastung für die Skater*innen, und obwohl der Sport durch Uniformierung und ein höheres Maß an Athletik immer professioneller wird, wehren sich die Skater*innen in den österreichischen Ligen dagegen, dass ihre politischen Werte für die Anerkennung des Sports geopfert werden.

Schlagwörter: *Roller Derby, Sport, Gegenkultur, Feminismus, Do-it-yourself (DIY)*

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1 Introduction

> "It is not hard to see the relationship between discrimination against women and girls and its extrapolation into sports. However, even though this same expression of gender discrimination and disparity appears within the sporting community, sports presents a very strong avenue to combat the scourge.
>
> Sports can be a powerful platform for advocacy and raising awareness, leading to the abolishment of all forms of discrimination against women and girls". (Sustainable Development Goals Fund 2018: 36)

For the past fifty decades, women in the West have been claiming their space in the sport realm. In response, national and international development organisations (e.g. UNICEF, UN Women, etc.), sport institutions (e.g. UEFA Foundation for Children), sport clubs and sport brands worldwide have started investing in and adopting policies in the name of gender equality. In some countries, national laws have also been amended to legally enforce gender equality in sport (e.g. Title IX) and efforts are being made transnationally to ensure equal representation of women in all institutional and organisational levels as well as equal participation in professional sport events, such as the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games—where women made up 48.8% of the athletes (IOC n.d.). Despite these improvements, gender (and other forms of) discrimination within sport still exists and women as well as people who do not identify within the gender binary continue to be excluded and underrepresented.

This is perhaps unsurprising considering that sport was conceived by and for men. As such, sport has always been a male dominated arena, one that explicitly denied access to participation to women for centuries and that continues to marginalise women's sports and to keep men in positions of power within most sport organisations. Beyond the problematic that binary thinking in the sport arena generates—that is, the exclusion of those who do not abide by dominant ideologies of gender—and despite presumed efforts to increase female[1] participation in all sports and to place women higher in the organisational hierarchy, progress is slow and not without its challenges. Moreover, the fact that advancements on the pitch are easily visible (e.g. increase in the number of

[1] Mainstream sports and their gender equity initiatives are focused mostly on *biological* females.

female athletes, change of regulation in sportswear, etc.) as compared to those happening outside of the pitch—which go beyond sport per se (e.g. female players' portrayal in the media)—risks losing the potential of sport as a broader arena to bring about change once gender equality is achieved on the pitch. While mainstream sports have started to rethink how to become more inclusive, a new sport has emerged that may lead by example.

Roller derby is a contact sport that originated in the USA in the 1930s as co-ed but was reinvented in the 2000s as a feminist movement aiming to set women[2] at the centre of the sport. Despite its still marginalised position in the sports field, it is becoming more and more popular with leagues spread throughout the world (in America, Europe, Africa, Asia, and Australia/Oceania). Although there are a few men's* roller derby leagues currently playing, roller derby remains largely a women's* sport (444 female leagues vs. 54 male leagues, that is 89% to 11%, respectively) (WFTDA n.d.-a; MRDA n.d.-a).

As an emerging sport, roller derby is constantly subject to change and with increasing popularity it runs the risk of losing its original character, as has happened with other sports that initially countered mainstream values[3] (e.g. surfing, snowboarding, etc.). This is a major challenge common to counterhegemonic sports and third-wave feminism, both of which roller derby is an example of (Dworkin and Wachs 2009; Wheaton 2013). Indeed, in its short existence relevant changes within the sport/movement are starting to be seen.

1.1 State of research

Earlier studies analysing roller derby defined it as a site of cultural resistance and an alternative to male-dominated sport (Arendt 2019). Most of these studies focused on how skaters resisted gender stereotypes and created inclusive spaces (e.g. Carlson 2010;

[2] Although the sport was initially led and played by biological females—in the text indicated as women—, it soon became inclusive of gender diverse people (including non-binary, transgender, gender queer, and other gender identities)—in the text indicated as women*. The same applies to men/men's* roller derby. My aim in using the asterisk [*] is to respect and give visibility to the diversity of the skaters.

[3] The professionalisation of the sport through the incorporation of uniforms would be an example of how sports start moving towards mainstreaming processes.

Finley 2010; Beaver 2012; Molloy 2012; Toews 2012; Whitlock 2012; Pavlidis 2013; Giseler 2014), while the macro-level received less attention. As the sport evolves, scholars have become more interested in other aspects of the sport, such as how being taken seriously is now becoming central for the leagues (e.g. Breeze 2014; Liu, Bradley and Burk 2016) or how those involved in roller derby balance the leisure and the work aspects of the sport (e.g. Draft 2019).

"Derby can look differently depending on geographic location, stage of infrastructural development, level of competitiveness, and ruleset" (Draft 2022: 261). Because it originated and it is more prominent in the USA, most of the literature published on roller derby explores the North American context (Finley 2010; Beaver 2012; Carlson 2010; Liu, Bradley and Burk 2016; Masberg and Eklund 2018), with some regular contributions from Australia (Pavlidis 2010, 2013, 2021; Pavlidis and Fullagar 2013, 2015) and only a few contributions from Europe (Donnelly 2014; Breeze 2014; Draft 2019) and non-Western contexts (Pavlidis and O'Brien 2017; Rodriguez Castro et al. 2021).

While comparing the earlier and most recent literature, it seemed evident that roller derby is no longer the radical project it had started as. In fact, by the time it arrived in Austria (in 2011), where this master's thesis is written, the sport was at a turning point[4]: the leagues had started to open up to gender-diverse skaters, the skaters' attire—which earlier scholars had identified as a means to resist gender norms—had changed, the skaters were becoming more interested in mainstream sport values such as competition, etc., but what does that mean for the sport today? Did those changes weaken the potential of the sport as a counterhegemonic movement or is resistance to dominant values still part of the sport?

[4] The dates of this turning point are approximate as there is no research so far analysing this transitioning period. However, the time frame can be estimated through the dates in which the leagues' changed their names as indicated on the leagues' Wikipedia sites. Although Wikipedia is not considered a reliable resource for academic purposes, league members referred me to their Wikipedia sites during the research process, since these sites contain information not available on their official websites. Moreover, Wikipedia sites follow the do-it-yourself (DIY) ethos of roller derby.

1.2 Motivation and relevance of the study

Unlike most of those who write about sport, I am not an athlete, nor have I ever been a huge sport fan and yet, as I grew older, I became more and more aware of the benefits, both physical and mental, of practicing sport. Beyond the individual gains, I realised that especially team sports (at least, at the amateur level) can transmit important values such fair play, respect and camaraderie among players, which are imperative for human coexistence in any society. That is how I became interested in the role of Sport for Development.

During my Master in Development Studies, I had the opportunity to work at streetfootballworld, a Sport for Development non-governmental organisation, in a project that fosters the participation of girls* in sport. This project aims to create a space for girls* on the pitch (by introducing gender-inclusive programmes in order to increase the number of girls* in sport) and in the organisations (by achieving a balance between women* and men leaders). While involved in the project, I realised that one of the main barriers that girls*/women* are confronted with is the male-dominated sport culture and that is why the project uses a feminist lens to deconstruct these gender relations of power.

However, these same Sport for Development projects are very often subject to other forms of power. For instance, to the external pressures linked to funding. Donors usually prescribe the direction of the project (e.g., by pre-selecting the countries or organisations that will take part in it) and funding is always tied to specific results or target goals that are set during the planification phase. Consequently, these projects have a relatively limited space of action. This, of course, does not mean that they cannot be successful, but for my master's thesis I was not so much interested in evaluating how or if an specific project met certain goals, rather I wanted to explore how bottom-up 'projects' develop.

While looking for a—still feminist in scope—but more bottom-up sport initiative, I was referred to roller derby. The sport was unknown to me until then (as it still is for many), but it was what I was looking for, an 'out-of-the-box-thinking' project, one that was not created with pre-established target goals (e.g. equal number of players on the field,

equal number of women* leaders, etc.), but which emerged out of the needs and wishes of its players.

As I would discover later, the sport was much more than about gender-inclusion, it was about creating a new understanding of the sport culture (or about reclaiming some of the values that sport, particularly team sport, were always meant to transmit). That is why, part of my motivation to write this thesis is to raise awareness of a sport that could inspire future Sport for Development interventions. This should be done taking the limitations of roller derby into consideration. Roller derby remains a white, middle-class sport that has become popular in the West because previous feminist waves had paved the way for the new generations to develop and implement new ideas. The success of roller derby is context-dependant, as is described in this study, and implementation of aspects of the sport into (non-Western) contexts may not have the same results.

The other main reason to write this thesis on roller derby is to explore how initially radical and out-of-the-box-thinking feminist initiatives succeed (or not) in resisting mainstream ideologies over time. This is particularly useful if, as mentioned above, (aspects of) roller derby are to be taken as an inspiration for future Sport for Development interventions.

1.3 Research questions

Taking these reflections as a starting point, this master's thesis asks what makes up the core of roller derby. The aim is two-fold: on the one hand, to understand what a feminist sport model looks like and how do women* conceive sport; on the other, to analyse if and how mainstream external pressures are affecting the sport. To find this out, this master's thesis is guided by the following questions:

- Which aspects of roller derby have remained in time and space?
- How are these aspects reproduced, maintained or 'lost' in the Austrian leagues?
- What do changes in the sport mean for its counterhegemonic potential?

1.4 Methods

To answer the research questions, this thesis relies on a qualitative data collection method, specifically on semi-structured expert interviews. Experts are defined as people with specialist knowledge, whether this is gained through training or through their involvement in activities in the field of research. This acquired knowledge "provides them with an in-depth understanding of a particular topic or field and enables them to provide clarification or resolve specific issues or problems" (Hitzler 1994 in Bogner, Littig and Menz 2009: 220). Following this definition, roller derby skaters as well as those in close contact with the derby world were attributed the expert tag for the purpose of this research.

Because experts can manipulate the conversation in order to provide information that shows them or their sport in a positive light, the alternative often used method when analysing sport subcultures is observation (e.g. Finley 2010; Pavlidis 2010; Breeze 2014). However, since one of the main questions addresses the development of roller derby in time and space, observation was dismissed in the early stages of the research due to the lack of direct access to the social field as well as the lack of time and financial resources available within the scope of this project. Interviews, on the other hand, allowed me to overcome my outsider position and shortened the time-consuming data gathering process which involved several actors spread geographically (Bogner, Littig and Menz 2009: 2).

1.4.1 Researcher's positionality

Since the researcher's interests are influenced, among others, by their personal stories, their socioeconomic background and their gender (Dannecker and Englert 2014), entering the research process demands reflecting the own positionality in order to avoid biases in the way the data is retrieved, and the findings interpreted and presented.

As a white middle-class female from the West, it is not surprising that roller derby and its initial radical feminist character caught my attention. In the context of my Master in Development Studies, I came across different feminist approaches and I realised that

radical approaches are the ones that resonate more with me. Hence, my interest in roller derby as a political instrument for social change.

The purpose of the study—presenting roller derby as a potential example that Sport for Development initiatives can learn from—certainly helped in finding willing interview partners, as it also did the fact that I am adding to literature on the sport in a European context, where roller derby is still largely unknown (as compared to other mainstream sports) and literature scarce.

Although at the beginning of this study I remained positive that the sport can spark change, I was also aware that it had its limitations. Consequently, its political character is constrained and analysing the sport from an intersectional perspective, for instance, (where the focus lies on different axes of discrimination such as race and socioeconomic status) may reveal aspects of the sport that need working on. This critical reflection comes also from the skaters, as is described in *4.3.2 From women to women**.

1.4.2 Sample and data collection

The research questions were used as guiding principle to establish who would be contacted for interviewing. Facing a dearth of literature on roller derby in Europe in the mid-2000s, I got in touch with the first two roller derby leagues that were established in Europe, *London Roller Derby* (in the United Kingdom) and *Stuttgart Valley Roller Derby* (in Germany) to gain an understanding of what roller derby looked like when it first arrived in the continent, what triggered the first roller skaters to join roller derby and how the sport and movement evolved regionally in those first years. The UK and Germany are not only the two European countries with the longest roller derby tradition in Europe, but together with France[5], the countries with the highest number of official roller derby leagues, which translates into a richer history.

To learn more about that history, I contacted those first two leagues via e-mail, I introduced myself and the purpose of my research and asked for a potential interview with the skaters who had founded the league or who had been active in those first years.

[5] The analysis of roller derby in France is beyond the scope of this study, as the sport arrived later in this country.

Three interviews were carried out as a result, with Marta Popowska (co-founder of *Stuttgart Valley Roller Derby*), Ellie Harrison (former skater of *Glasgow Roller Derby*—one of the earliest European leagues, founded in 2007—and founder of the National Museum of Roller Derby) and Kerry Irving (curator of the National Museum of Roller Derby). The questions for these interviews can be found in *Annex 3*.

The second research question (*How are these aspects [that make up roller derby] reproduced, maintained or 'lost' in the Austrian leagues?*) focused on roller derby in Austria. As already mentioned, the sport arrived in this country when the roller derby movement was undergoing important changes that would affect its future direction and it's all the more interesting to analyse how this changes affected (or not) the Austrian leagues. All five leagues (*Vienna Roller Derby, Steelcity Rollers, Fearless Bruisers, Dust City Rollers* and *SBG KNOCKouts*) were contacted for a potential interview with one (preferably long-time) skater. Long-time commitment meant that skaters had developed a broader perspective of the sport and, thus, their narratives put together would be able to present a more comprehensive picture of roller derby. The skaters interviewed were Pantybreaker (seven years in roller derby, currently active by *Vienna Roller Derby*), Dianamite (seven years active by *Steelcity Rollers*), Sandy Crush (six years active skater by *Fearless Bruisers*), Reckless Spice (six years in roller derby, currently active by *Dust City Rollers*) and Patti No Regretti (three years active by *SBG KNOCKouts*).

In total eight interviews were carried out between the 17th of May and the 30th of June. Four of the interviews took place online via videocall (Skype), the remaining four interviews were carried out face-to-face at the Austrian Championship of Roller Derby that took place on the 11th and 12th of June 2022 in Graz. The interviews were done in English, German or Spanish depending on the preferences of the interviewed partner. They lasted between 30 and 60 minutes and were recorded following consent by the interviewees. All interviews were transcribed and—if agreed with the interviewees—can be found on *Annex 4*[6].

[6] *Annex 4* contains five interviews with the roller derby skaters of the five Austrian leagues. Interviews with former roller derby skaters Marta Popowska and Ellie Harrison, as well as with curator of the NMRD, Kerry Irving, are not published in this study as consent was not explicitedly given by the interviewees.

1.4.3 Data analysis

The interviews were transcribed and analysed using the research platform Dovetail, which allows for the transcription of audio and video recordings in several languages, including those in which the interviews were conducted. Informal language and dialect traits were adapted into standard language. Following the content analysis by German sociologist Philipp Mayring (2015), the interviews were coded by broader topics—recurrent themes in the different interviews—and then by categories.

This coding and categorising process was guided by the research questions and the findings are presented in sections *4.3.2 From women to women** to *4.3.5 Overcoming marginalisation through professionalisation?* When quotes were used to support the main findings, they were translated into English. The original quote can be found in the footnotes.

1.5 Project outline

This master's thesis is organised as follows. Chapter 2 describes how feminism entered and shaped the realm of sport and how these developments relate to roller derby. It also presents the concept of counterhegemonic sports, which roller derby (in its earliest and latest versions) is an example of. Chapter 3 describes the evolution of roller derby in the USA; since its creation in the 1930s to its revival in the early 2000s, giving an overview of what makes up roller derby in the USA. Chapter 4 analyses how the sport evolved in time and space. Focusing first on the United Kingdom and Germany, which welcomed the sport first in Europe, and then on Austria, which adopted roller derby when the sport was at a turning point. This chapter outlines the main findings of the study. Finally, in Chapter 5, the findings are discussed in relation to existing literature and recommendations for future research are made.

2 Counterculture and feminism in sport

Since its re-emergence in the 2000s, academic literature has focused on the analysis of roller derby through a feminist lens, interpreting the sport as a product of third-wave feminism or through a cultural lens, whereby the essence of the sport is understood as being counterhegemonic. In fact, these perspectives are not mutually exclusive and having both frameworks work in tandem can provide a fuller understanding of the politics of roller derby.

This chapter describes both perspectives. First, I describe how second and third-wave feminism impacted the realm of sport and why these concepts are relevant to understand roller derby as a feminist political act aiming towards social change in, but also potentially outside of, the sport arena. Then, I introduce the concept of counterhegemonic sports and explain the characteristics that make up these sports. These theoretical frameworks are useful to better understand where roller derby comes from and what makes it different from other mainstream 'sport models'.

2.1 Feminism and sport

Feminist theory identifies gender as a core organising principle of social life, existing across time and space and leading to gendered difference among individuals. It aims to explain the sources of gender inequality setting particular emphasis on gender politics, power relations, and sexuality. Feminist theory has evolved since the 19th century and encompasses an ever-growing number of perspectives and paradigms. (Lorber 2010; Hattery 2010)

The study of feminism in the West has been divided in the three main waves. The first feminist wave, which occurred in the 19th and early 20th centuries, focused largely on women's legal rights, especially on women's suffrage. At the time, sport was not considered central to the lives of either men or women and was therefore ignored by first-wave feminists (Hattery 2010). The second wave originated in the 1950s and 1960s and the third in the 1990s. The impact of the second wave on sport (and in other areas of life) had a direct influence on third-wave feminism. This is explained in more detail below. A fourth wave would have started around 2012 with a focus on sexual

harassment and rape culture, among others. Although this new wave directly impacts the sport institution and it is very present[7], it is not discussed in this study because it denounces the abuse of power exerted by men over women—a topic that has, so far, not been as present in roller derby because women*[8] are the central actors in this sport (also occupying the positions of power).

2.1.1 Second wave achievements in sport

Second wave feminism emerged in the USA in the 1950s and 1960s and focused on reproductive rights (an achievement which has just recently been overturned in the USA[9]), economic freedom (i.e. Equal Pay Act of 1963), and equal rights (i.e. Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972) (Hattery 2010). Feminists of the second wave divided into two major groups according to their perspectives on women's equality: liberal and radical feminists.

Liberal feminism identified male-dominated institutions as the driving force of gendered inequality and demanded that women have equal access to and opportunity within those institutions, which spanned the economic, political, judicial, educational, and medical spheres (Scraton and Flintoff 2002; Hattery 2010). Liberal feminists sought to transform these institutions so that membership and power would be shared across gender lines (Hattery 2010). In the realm of sport, Title IX—a clear strategy for achieving equity[10]—is seen as one of the main achievements inspired by liberal feminism (Hattery 2010). From this perspective, other achievements include sharing practice facilities with men's teams and the creation of women's teams—which sometimes are modified versions of the male sports. For instance, women's ice hockey in the USA was adapted to reduce the amount of body checking. In North American professional ice hockey, the men's game is characterised by aggressive physicality,

[7] One of the latest scandals of sexual abuse in the sports world was revealed by USA Olympic gold medallist Simone Biles in 2018. (Lutz 2018)

[8] *Women** refers to any individual who self-identifies as such. When the term *women* is used, it refers exclusively to individuals whose sex at birth fits the common definitions of female.

[9] On 24 June 2022, the US Supreme Court overturned the right to legal abortion, almost 50 years after the legal ruling had been passed in 1973 after a court case popularly known as Roe v Wade. (BBC 2022)

[10] Title IX clause of the 1972 Federal Education Amendments stated that "no person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance." (Title IX of the Education Amendments Act of 1972). This also applied to athletic programmes in publicly funded educational institutions.

which often leads to fighting. Critics feared that "the inclusion body checking in the women's game would inevitably lead to an increase in other forms of unacceptable aggressions" (Theberge 2002: 294). Therefore, this aspect was removed from the women's game.

Despite having modified the sport for women in the name of safety and modesty, liberal feminists still considered the presence of women in hockey an important step in the direction towards equality. "Ultimately, the creation of women's version of a sport is better than the absence of sport at all." (Fleming 2016: 48) On the other hand, radical feminists criticised women's ice hockey as yet another example of patriarchal oppression, whereby aggression in sport was considered a masculine trait and it was, thus, inappropriate for women (Fleming 2016). "By this view, playing mainstream women's sports would require women to participate in their own oppression as they conform to a patriarchal view of women's abilities and place in sports culture." (Fleming 2016: 48-49) Following radical feminism, the creation of women's versions of sport in general would reproduce gendered power relations.

One of the earliest statements of the radical feminist philosophy, called the Redstockings Manifesto, was written in 1969 by a group of New York City women. Below are some of the segments that would later influence the roller derby ethos:

> I After centuries of individual and preliminary political struggle, women are uniting to achieve their final liberation from male supremacy. Redstockings is dedicated to building this unity and winning our freedom.
>
> […]
>
> VI We identify with all women. We define our best interest as that of the poorest, most brutally exploited woman.
>
> We repudiate all economic, racial, educational or status privileges that divide us from other women. We are determined to recognize and eliminate any prejudices we may hold against other women.
>
> We are committed to achieving internal democracy. We will do whatever is necessary to ensure that every woman in our movement has an equal chance to participate, assume responsibility, and develop her political potential.
>
> VII We call on all our sisters to unite with us in struggle.

> We call on all men to give up their male privilege and support women's liberation in the interest of our humanity and their own. (Redstockings 1969)

Radical feminism pointed at patriarchy and its underlying power relations as the main reason for gendered inequality (Scraton and Flintoff 2002). Patriarchy was redefined by radical feminists "as a worldwide system of subordination legitimated by medicine, religion, science, law and other social institutions. The values embedded in these major sectors of society favor men as group over women as group" (Lorber 2012: 122). Therefore, contrary to liberal feminism, radical feminism did not seek to transform power structures in existing institutions, rather it "assumes that the very structures themselves have been so poisoned by patriarchy that they cannot be transformed but must be completely eradicated and rebuilt from the ground up" (Hattery 2010: 100) and "claims that women's ways of thinking have to be brought to the forefront in education and culture" (Lorber 2012: 135). This thought would influence the emergence of the next wave and ultimately lay the foundations for the resurgence roller derby.

Radical feminism applied to sport would imply the reconstruction of the entire sport institution "holding gender equality at the center as its core organizing principle" (Fleming 2016: 43). It would mean creating "nonhierarchical, supportive, women-only spaces where women can think and act and create free of constant sexist put-downs, sexual harassment, and the threat of rape and violence" (Lorber 2012: 135). Thus, from the perspective of radical feminism, Title IX would not bring gender equality but "would only serve to further reinforce patriarchy in athletics, pacifying those who seek equality without making true efforts to achieve it" (Fleming 2016: 43-44).

Confronted with the second wave, the USA gave in to feminist demands by adopting the 'softer' of the two versions, liberal feminism, which culminated in the implementation of Title IX. The rest of European countries followed suit in subsequent years with different initiatives[11], often under the motto 'Sport for All'. Today, second wave liberal feminism in Western countries can be credited for bringing about gender equality in terms of access to sport. The implementation of different measures to increase the

[11] These initiatives are described in more detail in *4.1.1 Roller derby in the United Kingdom* and *4.1.2 Roller derby in Germany.*

number of girls and women participating in sport has proved to be successful[12]. However, gender proportionality did not translate into gendered power balance (as radical feminists had predicted). Men continue(d) to dominate the sport institution by upholding cultural beliefs about the ideal body type of the athlete, by portraying women's athletics as being 'less than' based on gendered differences and using this to justify disproportionate resource allocation and retain power, etc. (Costa 2003; Hattery 2010).

Therefore, although numbers revealed a reduced gap between male and female sport participation, the sport institution and its values were not being adapted to accommodate the needs and wants of new players entering the game (be it women, people of different cultural backgrounds, etc.). The next wave, which is influenced by radical feminism, attempted to tackle this issue.

2.1.2 Third-wave feminism

By the early 1990s, there had been a generational shift in the way women experienced feminism (Lorber 2012). This new generation did not need to claim the feminist badge as the previous generation had done, because they were allegedly born feminists (Henry 2004). Astrid Henry, American Professor of Gender, Women's and Sexuality Studies and third-wave feminist, explains:

> Handed to us at birth, feminism no longer requires the active identification that it once did. We often don't need to get to feminism through some means—whether consciousness-raising, activism or reevaluating our personal relationships—because feminism is already there for us. […] Because women of my generation often do not experience feminism as a process—that is, as something we actively choose or help to create—we have a much more ambivalent identification with it. (Henry 2004: 40)

[12] These early achievements must be taken with caution: first feminist analysis showed that the movement "had disproportionately benefitted the most privileged groups of women (white, economically advantaged, Western)" (Dworkin and Wachs 2009: 137-138)—hardly surprising considering that many of the women involved in the movement had such a background. This would also be true for lifestyle sporting cultures, which in the late 1990s and early 2000s saw a boom in (middle-class) women's and girls' participation (Wheaton 2013).

This self-perception as inborn feminists is one of the key factors that differentiate second and third wavers and one that strongly influenced the development of the movement.

Third-wave feminism[13] was first coined by American feminist activist and writer Rebecca Walker in 1992 and it represents both a continuation and a break with second-wave feminisms. Like radical feminism, third-wave feminism "valorizes women's agency and female sexuality as forms of power, but it rejects the politics of women as oppressed victims of patriarchy" (Lorber 2012: 283). Gender is no longer understood as the key aspect around which all oppression is organized. Instead, third wavers believe that different power relations along the lines of gender, but also race and class coexist and are interwoven creating what American sociologist Patricia Hill Collins (1990) calls "matrices of domination".

These matrices of domination affect different women *and* men in particular ways. This acknowledgment also implies a clear distancing from second wave feminism which was criticised by third wavers for its "purported lack of inclusiveness; [and] its white, middle-class bias" (Chananie-Hill, Waldron and Umsted 2012: 34). Second wave feminism (both liberal and radical) had been driven by the belief that *all* women are oppressed under a patriarchal system which can only be overcome by uniting forces under the "universal category of woman" (Dworkin and Wachs 2009: 138). However, "creating this category often meant […] obscuring differences among women" (Dworkin and Wachs 2009: 138). Consequently, third-wave feminism rejects "unitary notions of 'woman' and 'feminism'" (Heywood 2006: 257, emphasis in original).

This new movement recognises that the lived experiences of every woman may differ according to her race, ethnicity, religion, age and economic standing and "allows for identities that previously may have been seen to clash with feminism" (Heywood 2006: xx). Acknowledging that there is no one way to be a woman (or a feminist) means accepting that there are multiple 'female identities', which engage with gender and

[13] American Gender Studies Professor Jennifer Purvis has argued that 'generational thinking', that is thinking of feminism as a linear and chronological evolution (e.g. by using descriptive terms such as 'waves'), "prevents us from seeing feminist movement as multicausal and multidirectional" (Purvis: 2004: 110). Instead, she believes that "several approaches to feminism [can coexist] within the same historical moment" (Purvis 2004: 113).

sexuality, and that these can be contradictory and ambiguous (Heywood 2006), but still equally valid. As American Politics Professor R. Claire Snyder states "you can now be religiously devout or into sports or beauty culture, and still be a feminist" (Snyder 2008: 180)—an idea that contrasts with previous understandings of feminism.

This focus on the individual identities and experiences "alleviates the need for a shared identity upon which women can come together" and allows for the "understanding [of] individual acts as political in and of themselves" (Snyder 2008: 18). In third-wave feminism no one claims to speak for a like-minded group. As British sociologist Shelley Budgeon explains:

> The aim [of third-wave feminism] is not to develop a feminism which makes representational claims on behalf of women but to advance a politics based upon self-definition and the need for women to define their personal relationship to feminism in ways that make sense to them as individuals. (Budgeon 2011: 283)

Third-wavers inclusive and non-judgmental approach to feminism and their "refus[al] to police the boundaries of the feminist political" (Synder 2008: 176 f.) also means that the more or less rigid 'feminist agendas' that accompanied the first and second waves have now been replaced by a "dynamic and welcoming politics of coalition" (Snyder 2008). Third wavers' preference for this new multivocal and coalitional politics "reflects an awareness that any attempts to bring feminism to totalizing unity are prone to failure because they are annihilating and dishonest" (Purvis 2004: 98).

This alleged lack of unity has been one of the main criticisms to third-wave feminism. Sceptics consider "individualism as a shared ideology a political paradox, of course, since historically women's liberation movements, like other civil rights movements, have required some sense of collectivity to pursue political goals" (Lorber 2012: 286). However, this form of feminism expressed through individual voices and actions is precisely what appeals to many. This individualism implies that political and social issues can be tackled by introducing changes at the individual level, suggesting that there is little or no need for collective action or change (Lorber 2012).

Third wavers see individualism as empowering, encouraging women "to claim [their] individual voice rather than merging [their] voice in a collective identity" (Wolf 1993: 137). At the same time, the inclusion of multiple voices allows for a deeper understanding of "the different societal contexts and the particular challenges [women] face" (Snyder 2008: 178) and, consequently, for a broader vision of politics (as compared to previous waves). That is why third wave feminist "focus on more than just women's issues" (Snyder 2008: 181). For third wavers, "feminism and gender activism [i]s only one part of a much larger agenda for environmental, economic, and social justice" (Heywood 2006: xx). As a result of this broad spectrum of interests, it is not unusual to see third-wave feminists standing with men (as well as women) in activist politics. (Lorber 2012)

In fact, within third-wave feminism gender is understood as fluid and performative. Masculinity and femininity act as social constructs that categorise the population, but everyone possesses both masculine and feminine traits to a greater or lesser extent. "Therefore, the inclusion of men in the movement is seen to be necessary to its success" (Heywood 2008: 72). This also represents a shift in thinking from previous waves, where men were seen as oppressors but not as potential allies. This is an idea that roller derby has embraced as is described in more detail in *4.3 Roller derby in Austria*.

As mentioned above, third-wave feminism has not been exempted from criticism. First, critics state that, like second-wave feminism, and despite its attempts at inclusion, it continues to focus mostly on the concerns of white heterosexual, middle-class, Western women (Snyder 2008; Wheaton 2013). Second, and directly linked with the first point, despite its attempts at developing a more global feminism, it is firmly rooted in the Anglo-American feminist tradition (Budgeon 2011). Consequently, it "often prioritiz[es] issues that at best do not resonate internationally and at worst undermine the possibility of transnational coalitions" (Snyder 2008: 192). Third, the focus on individualism and self-expression—common of Western liberal culture—hinder the possibility of developing a larger analysis of the relationship between individual and collective experience (Lorber 2012). This lack of unified agenda has been strongly criticised for its "little concern or capacity for political effect" (Purvis 2004: 100; Lorber 2012). Snyder (2008) and American sociologist and Women's Studies Professor Judith Lorber (2012) have also criticised the ideology of individual empowerment for

its ‘anything goes’ attitude—“as long as it pays attention to gender issues and favors social justice” (Snyder 2008: 181). This ideology runs the risk of being easily packaged and commodified (Shugart 2001). Chananie-Hill, Waldron and Umsted (2012: 35) add that under third-wave feminism “resistance becomes an individual matter done in micro interactions, or a group decision to mock traditional gender stereotypes, rather than focus on criticizing or changing structural disparities between women and men”. These assumptions are discussed in the context of roller derby in *4.3.2 From women to women**.

2.1.3 Third- wave feminism and sport

Many third wavers grew up in a period (1980s and 1990s) in which the participation of girls and women in sport—including in extreme sports such as mountain climbing, snowboarding or surfing, which were initially male domains—was becoming more and more common. Therefore, they did not experience gender as a limiting factor to the extent that the previous generations had. For instance, third wavers “did not have to renounce to their femininity to prove themselves athletes” (Heywood 2008: 63). They could be both, feminine and athletic. However, this does not mean that gendered expectations in sport have been erased. They are still very much present.

Women’s increased participation in sport has become a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it is used by the media and sports brands to reinforce gender stereotypes (e.g. sexualised female athlete representation, reproduction of bodily ideals, etc.) and to pursue capitalist interests such as female consumerism (Dworkin and Wachs 2009; Bruce 2016; or Thorpe, Toffoletti and Bruce 2017). On the other hand, it challenges the traditionally masculinist idea of sport as an aggressive, competitive and consumerist terrain (Chananie-Hill, Waldron and Umsted 2012).

Several authors have attempted to understand different aspects of female involvement in sport through the third-wave feminism lens. For instance, American sociologists Shari L. Dworkin and Faye Linda Wachs (2009) describe how feminist activism in the realm of sport became commodified in the transition between the second and the third wave. The analysis of the magazine *Women’s Sports* (and its subsequent mutations) showed

that the focus on individualism typical of the third wave had allowed for the commodification of feminism.

Women's Sports had been founded in 1974 at the same time as the NGO Women's Sport Foundation by renowned tennis player and feminist advocate Billie Jean King. Product of second wave feminism, in its early days, the American magazine "retained a focus on collective action as fundamental to creating and preserving equal opportunity for women in the field of sport. The magazine operated as an advocate for change in gender relations at sport at three different levels (i.e. individual, cultural/symbolic, and institutional/structural)" (Dworkin and Wachs 2009: 145)—which had been identified by American sociologist Michael Messner (2002) as critical to challenging gender regimes and achieving equity.

In those early years, *Women's Sports* demanded institutional change by calling for the enforcement of Title IX, debating control over women's sporting leagues, discussing recruitment, etc. Through these actions it aimed to challenge the rules and hierarchies that made up the sport institution. The magazine also debated key issues in media coverage of female athletes, criticised sexist coverage and provided an alternative positive coverage of female athletes and their accomplishments. These efforts were intended to address the cultural beliefs prevalent at the time. At the individual level, the magazine "advocated participation in a host of events and sports", which was intended to "provide an alternative model to the traditional limitations on women's involvement in athletics" (Dworkin and Wachs 2009: 148).

Women's Sports shifted its focus away from sport to aesthetic fitness in 1986, only a few years before the first statement on third wave feminism appeared. In practical terms, this meant a new name, *Women's Sports and Fitness,* and the replacement of the institutional demands and cultural critiques with advice about individualized fitness (Dworkin and Wachs 2009). By the 1990s, sport and fitness participation was no longer a collective endeavour, but "a sign of the successful woman" (Dworkin and Wachs 2009: 133). "Energies are focused entirely on the project of the self and goals are limited to personal lifestyle goals" (Dworkin and Wachs 2009: 141). This focus on individualism was used by the editors to appropriate the concept of feminism to boost the magazine sales. *Women's Sports and Fitness* was rebranded as *Self* in 1999 and no

longer covered female athletes and their achievements. The idea of sport had almost disappeared and been replaced by work-outs and fitness and leisure/travel-activities. Moreover, the photos and poses of the women portrayed had shifted from active to passive (Dworkin and Wachs 2009).

The analysis of Dworkin and Wachs (2009) showed the perils of third-wave feminists' individualism, which can be easily repackaged as commodity feminism. As they state, "participation in sport and fitness in and of itself could be resistant, but by the same token, fitness can also be an implement of power" (Dworkin and Wachs 2009: 157). However, individualism alone may not be the only at fault and there may be an additional explanation as to why *Women's Sports* lost its potential as a feminist lobbying tool. The magazine went from being funded through non-profit resources (until the mid-1980s) to being run by corporations. Handing over that 'power'—media can be a powerful tool to lobby for feminist interests—undermined the efficacy and purpose of that tool (Dworkin and Wachs 2009).

Other scholars (Bruce 2016; Thorpe, Toffoletti and Bruce 2017) have analysed to which extent female athletes' use of social media to express their own individual selves can be interpreted through the third-wave feminist lens. According to New Zealand sociologist Toni Bruce, the influence of third-wave feminism on young (sports)women has made them wary of traditional media. Aware of "the pleasure and power of popular culture" (Bruce 2016: 368), these women have decided to create and disseminate their own content through Internet and social media to tell the stories that traditional media decides to ignore. Thus, although online spaces continue to be largely male-dominated and focused on men's sport, Internet openness and accessibility has allowed for 'pockets of disruption' (Bruce 2016: 369) where sportswomen, as well as women's sport organisations and fans can create their own discourses about women in sport.

Not only through storytelling, but also through imagery have sportswomen started to transform how they are represented. Especial emphasis has been set on the idea that the female athlete's body can be pretty and powerful—two traits that had been seen in contradiction in the past. In her analysis, Bruce found that men (in the USA) would have started to embrace third-wave feminism as well. By commenting on the beauty and strength of elite American female athletes, they demonstrated their support to shifting

images of (sports)women in popular culture (Bruce 2016). However, Burce (2012) admits that these new discourses coexist with traditional cultural discourses and criticises that this new form of self-representation is not open to all—but mostly to elite athletes—and that "the pretty and powerful rule reinforces and normalizes Whiteness, heterosexuality and an exceptionally narrow range of body types as representing 'ideal' femininity" (Bruce 2016: 372, emphasis in original).

The same conclusion was reached by Australian sociologists Holly Thorpe, Kim Toffoletti and (again) Toni Bruce (2017) in a study in which they analysed the social media self-representation of Hawaiian professional surfer Alana Blanchard. Their findings show that Blanchard's self-representation "could, at best, be conceptualized as a 'soft' third-wave approach, in which she (re)presents herself as an empowered individual who sees no limits to what is possible as a woman, and embraces physical skill alongside dominant signs of (White, heterosexual, middle-class) femininity as empowering rather than oppressive" (Thorpe, Toffoletti and Bruce 2017: 367, emphasis in original). However, her lack of visible political activism—"[she] rarely chooses to engage with structural issues of gender inequality and sexism. She does not initiate critiques of structural inequalities in women's surfing on her own social media sites but has acknowledged the media invisibility of women's surfing competitions" (Thorpe, Toffoletti and Bruce 2017: 367)—reveals that some forms of individualism harbour little transformative potential.

American English literature professor Leslie Heywood (2008) tries to shed some positive light on the power of individual stories in women's surfing as examples of third-wave feminism. Sport TV and media representation of American four-time World Champion surfer Lisa Andersen portrays her as being able to blend the men's approach to surfing—competitive, attacking the wave—and the female's approach—which "goes with the flow" (Heywood 2008: 73). Managing this balance between masculine and feminine traits while being praised for her beauty are characteristic of the third wave feminist 'achievements' in sport—especially in women's surf—and send young girls and women the message that this is what they can also aspire too (Heywood 2008). This contrasts strongly with second-wave views on emphasised beauty which serves to "enforce rigid gender roles and women's second-class status" (Heywood 2008: 75). However, in third-wave feminism "beauty is experienced as playful and pleasurable

rather than limiting *at the same time* as it is experienced as yet another requirement for the achievement of 'excellence'" (Heywood 2008: 75, emphasis in original).

Because third-wave feminism is allegedly not exclusively White, heterosexual and middle-class, Heywood (2008) also analyses the media representation of Peruvian 2004-World Champion surfer Sofia Mulánovich. Despite having had to break barriers of gender, race and class, her story solely focusses on individual achievement and this narrative is criticised, this time also by Heywood, for its little transformative potential beyond the individual and eventually cultural level. Seeing as individualism in third-wave is full of contradictions, Heywood (2008) decides to analyse a different aspect of third-wave feminism: female camaraderie among competing surfers. She argues that, although this could be seen "to reinforce older gender stereotypes regarding women as innately relationship-oriented and cooperative" (Heywood 2008: 76), the girls in the film *Blue Crush* (2002)—which serves as the basis for her analysis—are not portrayed as being in an either/or relation toward each other (either cooperative and nice or aggressive). Instead, "the two tendencies exist in complicated relation" (Heywood 2008: 77). Being complexities and contradictions the core of third-wave feminism, this particular contradiction can serve to break with cultural gendered stereotypes.

Although third-wave feminism has mostly been used to analyse the media (self- or external) representations of sportswomen, I believe that a combination of third-wave feminism and second wave feminism would be most suited to describe roller derby as a feminist endeavour. Purvis (2004) already suggested that "several approaches to feminism [can coexist] within the same historical moment" and American Social Sciences and Gender Professor Jayne Caudwell supports that idea:

> To claim that 'third wave' feminism is the only way to interrogate women's sport today […] forgets the past and the significant contribution of earlier sport feminist scholars. It also falls into a simple 'either-or' binary (e.g., either 'second wave' feminism or 'third wave' feminism)—ironically, embracing the very tenets "third wave" are said to profess. […] I suggest that feminist contributions from the past remain relevant to contemporary sport and that feminist ideas can be passed down and folded in to, recombined with, the present. (Caudwell 2011: 122, emphasis in original)

Similarly, Dworkin and Wachs stated that "combining second wave feminist attention to structural and institutional inequality, multiracial feminist understandings of intersectionality, and third wave critiques of consumer culture/commodity feminism can provide a means to address [inequalities in sport]" (Dworkin and Wachs 2009: 157-158). Therefore, this study uses a combination of second wave and third wave (as well as culture) theory to understand the power of roller derby in the sport context.

2.1.4 Second and third-wave feminist readings of roller derby

Since its re-emergence in the 2000s, roller derby has kept growing, especially in the Western world (now maybe with less force than in its first decade, from 2003 to ≈2012), but also in other parts of the world. Two traits set it out from other women's sports: (1) it did not evolve out of a men's game and (2) it was created for the players by the players ('for the skater, by the skater').

Liberal feminists would view roller derby as a failed attempt at equality. Concerned with the domination of sport institutions by men, liberal feminists seek to change these institutions from within. However, "by refusing to work for change within established institutions, women's roller derby maintains its separateness and does little to make active efforts at changing mainstream sport culture. The creation of and participation in women's roller derby does not address inequality in other women's athletics" (Fleming 2016: 48). In short, liberal feminists would say that the construction of a new sport institution may be easier than trying to repair an institution that is 'broken'. However, the creation of a new institution does not erase the fact that 'broken institutions' continue to exist and to discriminate women.

Radical feminists would argue that roller derby does advance the interests of women in sport by creating non-hierarchical, supportive, women-only spaces which allow for alternative femininities and gender expressions (Fleming 2016). These spaces represent how the world would be like from a radical feminism if existing institutions were erased and rebuilt as truly inclusive spaces for women. This perspective can by understood by applying the logic: over time, the creation of new institutions may lead to the discontinuation and replacement of 'broken' institutions with newer 'functioning' institutions.

Third-wave feminism does no longer enter this debate, accepting roller derby as a feminist project. Early studies of roller derby (e.g. Chananie-Hill, Waldron and Umsted 2012) identify it as an example of stealth feminism, characteristic of the third wave. Skaters generally do not explicitly identify as feminists, but their actions disclose them as such. For instance, in the earlier years of roller derby, skaters used to challenge gendered stereotypes through humour and dress. At the same time, the sport allows for the coexistence of alleged masculinist traits such as competitiveness and supposedly female traits such as sisterhood and female bonding. These contradictions are considered typical of third wave feminism. Moreover, roller derby includes calls for social justice which "can be considered to be feminist or queer in their focus" (Chananie-Hill, Waldron and Umsted 2012: 41), is open for players of different genders and sexualities and encourages individualism in the way each skater presents themselves. All these are characteristic of third-wave feminism and advance the interests of different intersecting groups of people in the sport arena. *3.2.3. Stealth feminism, individualism and third-wave contradictions* presents a deeper analysis of roller derby through the third-wave feminist lens.

Summing up *2.1. Feminism and sport*, feminist theory has been historically divided in three periods: the first wave (in the late 19th - early 20th century), the second wave (in the 1950s - 1960s) and the third wave (since the 1990s), each addressing different issues aimed at advancing the rights of women*. These waves and its subsequent ramifications have affected the realm of sport in various ways. While the liberal feminists of the second wave achieved an increase in numbers of female participation in sport, they did not manage to overthrow the discriminatory institutions that dominate the sports world. Influenced by second wave radical feminism, roller derby emerged as an alternative to those institutions and structures and has been taken on by third wavers who, using the sport as a tool for change, continue to advance feminist interests.

In the following section the concept of counterhegemonic sports is described in order to better understand where roller derby comes from and what makes it different from mainstream sports.

2.2 Counterhegemony through sport

> Western culture suffers from hegemonizing tendencies. But hegemony is never complete. Pockets of resistance rupture the dominant culture as groups and individuals challenge the dominant values, ideologies and meanings. (Donnelly 1988: 121)

The idea of (counter)hegemony is drawn from Italian Marxist political thinker Antonio Gramsci (1971), whose work focused on understanding the struggles for power between dominant and subordinate groups. For Gramsci power—which he refers to as 'hegemony'—is maintained through the reproduction of the ideas, values and beliefs of the dominant society via cultural institutions (e.g. schools, media, religion, or the government). Individuals, who are born with these ideas, perceive them as natural and normal and, therefore, consent to their own domination without being aware of it or thinking that they cannot do anything about it. Those who do not wish to consent to hegemonic ideas can attempt to create counterhegemonic movements to transform the established cultural institutions.

Although Gramsci did not discuss sport in his work, sport has historically been an arena in which dominant cultural norms and values have been reproduced, thereby contributing to "reaffirming and reproducing inequitable social relations associated with capitalism, patriarchy and racism" (Beal 1995: 252). Later scholars (e.g. Beal 1995; Wheaton 2013; Gilchrist 2016) have used Gramsci's theories to analyse how the sport institution reproduces these dominant societal values, but also to understand how new sport models are contesting these values. These new sports, which started emerging or being reinvented in the 1960s, "challenge traditional ways of 'seeing', 'doing' and understanding sport" (Wheaton 2004: 3, emphasis in original). They have been referred to as 'lifestyle sports'—a term coined by British cultural sociologist Belinda Wheaton—, 'subcultural sports' (or simply 'sport subcultures') and less often 'countercultural sports' (or 'sport countercultures'). The differences between these concepts are presented below. However, in this study I use the wording 'counterhegemonic sports' as an umbrella term to refer to lifestyle sports, subcultures and countercultures.

2.2.1 Subculture vs. counterculture

According to British sociologists John Clarke, Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson and American sociologist Bryan Roberts, "culture refers to that level at which social groups develop distinct patterns of life and give expressive from to their social and material life-experiences" (Clarke et al. 1976: 10). These patterns of life are socially reproduced by groups of people, but they are not fixed; they are constantly subject to change. As British social scientist Paul Willis states:

> Culture is not […] static, or composed of a set of invariant categories which can be read off at the same level in any kind of society. The essence of cultural forms in our capitalist society is their contribution towards the creative, uncertain and tense social reproduction of distinctive kinds of relationships. Cultural reproduction in particular always carries with it the possibility of producing […] alternative outcomes. (Willis 1978: 172)

Within sociological theory, these 'alternative outcomes' can take the form of subcultures[14] or countercultures, which are counter- and anti-hegemonic 'movements' that oppose mainstream ideology, practice and beliefs. Both these concepts are linked to what could be described as alternative and marginal movements or lifestyles and forms of expression (e.g. punks, goths, hippies, etc.). According to British cultural sociologist Andy Bennett:

> […] counterculture, like subculture, emerges from a specific set of theoretical concerns embedded in sociology and cultural studies, which seek to render social conflict and struggle visible through mapping them on to contemporary cultural practices grounded in particular forms of leisure, consumption and lifestyle. (Benett 2014: 7)

Some scholars (including Wheaton 2013 and Bennett 2014) have claimed (and criticised) that both, subcultures and countercultures, are driven by and predominantly composed of middle-class, white and Western youth. However, other scholars—

[14] The Chicago School was the first institution to study subcultures in the early 20th century. Their studies focused on 'deviant' social activities, ethnic minority groups in the local population, and social control and moral order in the urban space. The concept and scope of subcultures was further developed by the University of Birmingham's Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) in the 1970s. The work of the CCCS was rooted in Marxist theory and focused on the analysis of subcultures developed after World War II in Britain, which were understood as rebellions against class oppression and focused generally on men. (Cohen 2005)

including British human geographer and historian Paul Gilchrist—have sought to expand the meaning and the agents of counterculture. These scholars understand counterculture "as an aggregate movement of progressive causes" (Gilchrist 2016: 391) lead by heterogeneous groups that can be formed of environmentalists, feminists, gay liberationists and other minority groups going against mainstream ideas. (Gilchrist 2016)

Few scholars make a clear distinction between subcultures and countercultures; among them: American sociologists Todd Crosset and Becky Beal (1997), as well as Bennett (2014) and Gilchrist (2016).

Based on American sociologist Milton J. Yinger (1960), Crosset and Beal argue that "what distinguishes a subculture from a counterculture is the degree of opposition. […] the shared values and norms of a subculture depart from those of the broader culture, they are not completely oppositional (revolutionary), or detached from larger society" (Crosset and Beal 1997: 75). Conversely, "a counterculture describes those groups in which the normative system contains as its primary element conflict with or rejection of a dominant culture" (Crosset and Beal 1997: 74-75). Bennett adds that counterculture can be interpreted "as a socio-cultural phenomenon with the potential to create a new cultural sphere, *beyond and ideologically separated* from the parent culture" (Bennett 2014: 3, emphasis added).

Further, subcultures tend to focus on style, leisure, and youth and to "represent small-scale, perhaps underground or quasi-devious solutions to social problems" (Bennett 2014: 9) (Haenfler 2013). Therefore, their impact on social, political, or economic structures is limited (Crosset and Beal 1997). On the other hand, countercultures are broader in scope, more like "a movement or series of movements directed towards and orientated to address large, globally dispersed socio-economic problems and issues" (Bennett 2014: 9; Gilchrist 2016).

Subculture's focus on small-scale issues may explain why they are able to simultaneously accommodate resistant and dominant values (Coates et al. 2010). For instance, sports like surfing, snowboarding or skateboarding have been considered subcultures, because they incorporate dominant values (such as commodification,

commercialisation and mainstreaming of the sport), "via institutionalisation into competitions such as the Olympic Games" (Wheaton 2007: 299), which has resulted into their initial oppositional character being eroded (Wheaton 2013). Perhaps this could explain why "counterculture has been dramatically overshadowed by the term 'subculture'" (Bennett 2014: 2, emphasis in original). Even if these activities had their roots in countercultural movements, sustained efforts by the dominant culture (e.g. mainstream sports bodies, sport brands, touristic resorts, etc.) to assimilate these sports have resulted in the incorporation of mainstream values (such as competition, elitism, regulation, consumerism, etc.) within these counterhegemonic sports.

In any case, "purely oppositional or counterculture groups that are in direct conflict with dominant society do not exist for long" (Crosset and Beal 1997: 75). Counterculture might then be understood as the forerunner of subculture. Countercultures would usually be the point of departure of these counterhegemonic activities and subcultures would be the 'next logical step' of countercultures, what they turn into if (or when) they cannot overcome mainstream forces. "The use of the term counter-cultures suggests a reversion to the time before subcultures when radicalism rather than resistance was seen as *the* possibility of youth" (Dworkin 1997 in Hughson 2008: 62, emphasis in original).

Understanding subculture as the subsequent less radical version of counterculture could explain why, despite the differences that some scholars see between the two terms, sport sociologists very often either use both terms interchangeably or only use the terms 'subculture' or 'lifestyle sports' and avoid the use of 'counterculture' altogether.

2.2.2 Lifestyle sports as sport subcultures

'Lifestyle sports' refers to those sports that "subvert or resist mainstream norms or discipline" (Wheaton 2007: 300) and could be used as a synonym for counterhegemonic sports. However, participants in these sports do not necessarily think of them as sites of resistance. The term 'lifestyle' rather reflects how the participants see the sports fitting into their daily lives and identities. For Wheaton— who has extensively researched on lifestyle sport cultures—and other sport sociologists, the long-term commitment of participants to these *initially* marginalised or non-commercialised sports is a "central component of one's self-identity in a culture where membership in 'everything else' is

otherwise transitory, crassly consumer-oriented and culturally banal" (Young and Atkinson 2008: 37, emphasis in original).

The name lifestyle sports is an umbrella term that encompasses what others have described as alternative and extreme or adventure sports (as opposed to mainstream sports). These sports usually share a series of characteristics:

First, they tend to be historically recent phenomena. Most of them originated in North America in the 1960s, only arriving later in Europe and other parts of the world, and have their roots in the countercultural social movements of the 1960s and 1970s. They were either new creations (e.g. kite-surfing, ultimate frisbee or snowboarding) or reemerged as adaptations of "older 'residual' cultural forms" (Wheaton 2013: 28, emphasis in original), as is the case of roller derby.

Second, they are often consumption-oriented sports. Their practice requires the use of new objects, such as boards, bikes, roller skates etc. (Wheaton 2013)

Third, for those who practice it, these activities are often perceived as much more than sports. Participants invest time and money in the sport to create a distinctive lifestyle and forms of collective expression based on their clothing styles, attitudes, etc.; thereby forging a particular social identity. At the same time, commitment to the sport does not only grant participants insider knowledge and recognition within the group, but also greater status within the subculture. (Wheaton 2000; Wheaton 2013)

Fourth, contrary to those playing mainstream sports, participants in lifestyle sports undertake these activities for their own pleasure and not in order to gain recognition from potential spectators or to prove themselves against competitors. They are rather interested in exploring the creative, aesthetic and performative side of these activities. (Wheaton 2013)

Fifth, although commercialisation and increased popularity have meant that most of these sports have lost their oppositional character to mainstream values (such as competition), some participants still disapprove of the sports being regulated and institutionalised. (Wheaton 2013)

Sixth, lifestyle sports are particularly associated with the middle-class, white and Western (male) 'youth'. However, the age range and gender of the participants in these sports is broader than in 'traditional' sports. Moreover, opposing mainstream values, these sports operate transnationally rather than being based around 'national' attachments. (Wheaton 2013)

Seventh, lifestyle sports tend to be individual sports where the participants focus on achieving personal goals and challenges. These sports do usually not entail body contact; the body is rather used in creative and performative ways. (Wheaton 2013)

Lastly, these sports are practised in new or re-appropriated urban and/or rural spaces. However, there are often no designated or fixed boundaries for its practice. (Wheaton 2013)

These are the main characteristics of lifestyle sports. However, these characteristics are neither fixed temporally nor spatially and "despite these shared characteristics, lifestyle sports take multiple and increasingly fragmented forms, drawing on a vast array of narratives that are saturated with ambiguities and contradictions" (Wheaton 2013: 30).

From the characteristics presented above, it is obvious that these sports do not follow values dominant in mainstream sports such as football, rugby or gymnastics, for instance, and can, therefore, be thought of as subcultures (Wheaton 2013). Moreover, just as subcultures, lifestyle sports are marginalised within the dominant culture.

Feminist critics of subcultural research such as Wheaton (2013) herself identified a gap in the analysis of sport subcultures, which had neglected the experiences of girls and women in sport. This was probably so because, as in mainstream sports, most sporting subcultures were, at least initially, male-dominated (e.g. surfing or skateboarding). In this respect, roller derby presents a shift in trend (as it is notably a female dominated space) and a great area of study to fill this research gap.

Yet applying theories based on Gramsci's work to the sport arena has not been without controversy. British political scientist and Sport Studies professor Alan Bairner stresses

the need for caution when adopting the hegemony approach in the sport context, because its use in this area of study is "inevitably based on inference and speculation" (Bairner 2009: 199). Despite these words of caution, several scholars—most notably Wheaton—have relied on Gramsci's theory to analyse numerous sports, including roller derby[15]. Nevertheless, most of these studies fail to take into account two of the most important thoughts in Gramsci's work (Bairner 2009): First, for Gramsci the fundamental actors in the struggle for power were social classes. Second, in Gramsci's work, the cultural struggle was only a part of a larger economic struggle. Therefore, 'counterhegemony' in Gramsci's sense encompasses more than *just* cultural resistance. Ultimately, "an analysis based directly on Gramsci's work […] must be primarily concerned with the economic exploitation of one social class by another and with the ways in which […] this exploitative relationship is successfully reproduced" (Bairner 2009: 208).

Bairner's first remark is backed and expanded by British cultural theorist Richard Johnson (2007) who argues that the application of the hegemony theory in the context of sport must analyse how hierarchies are constituted beyond the class divide, and must include other social and cultural components such as race, gender, sexuality, or globalisation. Indeed, contemporary research on counterhegemonic sports has focused on instead on the analysis of race and gender power relations—in particular, the reproduction and contestation of hegemonic masculinity (e.g. Pavlidis 2013; Pavlidis and Fullagar 2013)—and other capitalist values such as commercialisation of the sport, but has overlooked the class struggle.

This study analyses roller derby through the cultural lens taking the critique of Bairner (2009) and Johnson (2007) into close consideration. In order to provide a *truly* Gramscian analysis, a feminist perspective is integrated in the analysis, which offers a clearer link to political resistance and anti-capitalism. The combination of both perspectives provides a better understanding of why roller derby can be considered 'counterhegemonic' in Gramsci's sense. Nonetheless, this study also fails to analyse how the class variable fits into roller derby's counterhegemonic potential, since other

[15] Scholars referring to roller derby as subculture include Finley (2010), Pavlidis (2010, 2013), Beaver (2012), Liu, Bradley and Burk (2016), Klein (2016), Masberg and Eklund (2018) and Draft (2022). Only two papers refer to roller derby as counterculture, those from Arendt (2019) and Scullion and Bully (2022).

authors (e.g. Beaver 2012) have already stated that this sport continues to be played mostly by White, middle-class women*.

This chapter has described how the emergence of roller derby can be understood in relation to (second-wave) radical feminism, which believes that truly feminist intuitions can only be created from scratch, and to third-wave feminism, which defends each individual's expression as a valid form feminism. Moreover, the concepts countercultural and subcultural or lifestyle sports have been introduced. These sports are defined as sites of cultural resistance to dominant values and they can be applied to roller derby, as is discussed in *3.2 Resurgence (early 2000s)*. Whereas this chapter presented the theoretical framework surrounding roller derby, the next chapter gives an insight into the historical evolution of the sport and what these theories meant in practice.

3 Roller derby in the USA

This chapter outlines the history of roller derby from its origins as a co-ed skating marathon to its resurgence as a women*-led full-contact sport in order to understand which aspects made up the roller derby identity in the early and late 20th century. Soon approaching the century mark, roller derby may be one of the few sports that has undergone such substantial changes—from ruleset to reinterpreting the values of the sport—in such a short period.

The history of the sport can be broken down into two major periods, which are presented under sections *3.1 Early years (1935-1973)* and *3.2 Resurgence (early 2000s)*. The former outlines a 40-year period, starting in the mid-1930s—when the sport was first created—to 1973—when various circumstances led to the near extinction of roller derby. This section focuses on the aspects of the sport that identify it as a subculture. *3.2 Resurgence (early 2000s)* describes how the sport was revived by a group of female roller skaters in Austin (Texas, USA) in 2001 and introduces the new political dimension of the sport.

3.1 Early years (1935-1973): A subculture ahead of its time

The beginning of the 20th century had opened up some opportunities for American women to participate in physical activities, which the Great Depression of 1929 set back. Nonetheless, businessman Leo Seltzer (born in 1903 in Montana, deceased in 1978) would take advantage of those first advancements—which included allowing women to roller skate—to overcome the financial difficulties of the era and, at the same time, to create a form of entertainment that would counter traditional cultural beliefs.

3.1.1 The sport context in late 19th – early 20th century in the USA

By the late the 19th century, the Industrial Revolution had brought significant changes to the domestic sphere and social life in the USA. As a result of these changes, the middle-class was born and with it came the rise of leisure time. Competitive athletics and social activities, such as dancing, became common ways to fill in this spare time. However, women were generally discouraged from taking part in any form of athletics; an exception to this would be roller-skating. (Miller 2016)

Roller skating had taken off in the 1860s in the USA. At the time, it was considered a recreational activity rather than an athletic or competitive one and that is why women were allowed to take part in it. The first female roller skaters experienced it as liberating activity, which did not only provide them with an escape from the monotony of the household, but also with an opportunity to discover what their bodies were capable of. (Miller 2016)

In the early 1880s, roller skating experienced a boom after a major skate improvement was introduced. The new skates were "equipped with metal casters, which increased the durability of the skate and allowed skaters to go faster without the fear of wooden rollers cracking" (Marino 2021: 16). This improvement was followed by an increase in popularity of roller-skating races and skating marathons, but also brought the first controversies around the activity. In 1885, several participants involved in different roller-skating races across the USA lost their lives after participating in these events. "Besides the potential health risks of skating, detractors charged that the activity was leading America's youth to misbehave and intermingle in inappropriate and

unchaperoned facilities, preparing 'the way for long lives of wretchedness'" (Chicago Daily Tribune 1885 in Marino 2021: 17, emphasis in original).

As a result of the unfortunate events and the bad press, roller skating as well as roller-skating races and marathons gradually lost their popularity and their following until the 1930s, when roller-skating was picked up again by thousands of Americans (Menke: 731).

By the early 20th century, the general situation of women in sport in the USA had slightly changed: more middle and upper-class women had been allowed to take part in (some) sports. However, their participation was still very much surrounded by widespread cultural misconceptions about their physical inferiority (compared to men), the amount of physical activity that was acceptable for them and how sport affected the sexuality of the female athletes. (Goodman 2014)

Women were now allowed to participate in intercollegiate sport, but the opposition to women's competing in sport was still very strong. In the 1920s, a physical education programme was implemented in educational institutions guided by the "separate spheres" ideology, which "emphasized motherhood almost to the exclusion of any other concern, [and] dictated fundamentally different sport programs for male and female students" (Guttmann 1991: 136).

These developments only affected those women who went to college, which at the time represented a minority of the female population in the USA. Most women did not attend college, instead they went straight to work during or after high school, married young, had children, and then went back to work (Guttmann 1991). For these working-class women, there were two options available to participate in sport: the Amateur Athletic Union, which offered sport programmes for girls and women, and the industrial leagues, which were "a form of sports club sponsored by American corporations for their employees" (Goodmann 2014: 6). However, working-class women were often difficult to engage because of their lack of free time, which they preferred to spend in dance halls. (Guttmann 1991)

Moreover, the onset of the Great Depression in 1929 slowed down women's advancements in sport—as well as women's broader movement for equal rights. The general loss of jobs was used to reinforce the cultural believe that a "woman's place was in the home" (Bell 2008). It is in this context, that the American entertainment businessman and promoter Leo A. Seltzer created the Transcontinental Roller Derby in 1935, a sport which would counter some of those popular beliefs.

3.1.2 Roller derby in the 20th century

In 1935, Seltzer had become the main leaseholder of the Chicago Coliseum and was looking for profitable ways to fill the venue. Against the backdrop of the Great Depression, he needed a cheap form of entertainment that would offer the American middle and working classes some distraction from the hardships of their everyday lives. Dancing, bicycling or walking marathons seemed to be quite successful at the time, but spectators usually became disinterested after a while. Seltzer wanted something new that would attract long-term fans and found inspiration in an article which stated that "over 90 percent of Americans roller-skated at some point in their lives" (Marino 2021: 19). Aware of the renewed enthusiasm for skating, he was convinced some sort of sport on roller-skates would attract widespread interest. (Marino 2021)

Roller derby was first conceived by Seltzer as a roller-skating marathon on a flat track, where several teams of two (formed by a male and a female) would compete against each other. The races—later known as jams—were "segregated by gender, with each group taking turns on the track. Gameplay alternated between all male and all female jams" (Fleming 2016: 4). This very first version of roller derby was not an entirely new creation. Neither the term roller derby nor the idea of same-sex roller-skating races or marathons were new. They had both been around since the 1920s and had been first introduced by skating and sport clubs. However, within a year or two of the sport's debut, roller derby "[had] evolved to include team play, physical contact, and a unique rule set" (Marino 2021: 25). Each team now consisted of ten skaters—five pairs of male and female skaters—, a pass-for-points system had been introduced and the flat track had been replaced by a banked track to increase the speed of the game. (Marino 2021)

The new sport reproduced mainstream and capitalist values both in and outside the sport arena. For instance, it relied on intense competition, endurance, physical strength and spectacle, all typical features of mainstream sports (such as football or basketball). In fact, "Seltzer intentionally created a spectacle that combined sport and entertainment to ensure audiences of paying spectators" (Marino 2021: 26). Skaters who had the ability to entertain the public—whether this was by singing, dancing, juggling and/or joke-telling—were hired over those who could 'only' skate. On the one hand, this may have contributed to roller derby's success in its early years, as these characteristics were associated with spectacle, which is what attracted the public. On the other, it would also have a negative impact on the sport in the long-term, as mainstream sports were unwilling to consider roller derby a serious sport, partly because of the spectacle aspect of it. (Marino 2021)

Despite the general scepticism with which mainstream sports looked at roller derby, Seltzer believed in the potential of his newly founded sport, and he went on to copyright the term 'Roller Derby', thereby ensuring any revenue made under this name would remain his (Marino 2021)—a clearly capitalist thought. Yet the term *Roller Derby* on its own was only worth so much; what brought added value to the game was the fact that women were also involved in it.

Far from being a counterhegemonic act to promote gender equity, the incorporation of women in roller derby was a strategy to expand his audience (and revenue). Seltzer had realized that the women skaters attracted the most attention from fans—also from female fans, a demographic that had until then been ignored by mainstream sports (Marino 2021)—, "sportswriters (who noted their unusual aggressiveness), and possible vendors" (Draft 2019: 30). Therefore, he went to great lengths to ensure that he reached the female audience "by catering to average women's roles and routines: he sold tickets in places that women frequented, such as grocery stores, department stores, beauty salons, and fabric shops" (Marino 2021: 33).

Nonetheless, having women play roller derby on the same terms as men also seems to have pushed the sport to a marginalised position in its early days:

> Roller Derby would continually raise doubts in the mainstream sports world about the seriousness of the sport and the type of people who participated in it. In the eyes of some, the mere participation of women alongside men relegated the sport to a "sideshow novelty". (Marino 2021: 27, emphasis in original)

In his quest for increasing the roller derby fanbase, Seltzer may have called into question the legitimacy of the sport. This resistance came from mainstream sports and, mostly, from men. As Seltzer admitted in an interview in the 1960s: "the hardest thing to do was sell a new sport to men" (Seltzer n.d. in Marino 2021: 33). Men have historically set the parameters as to what is considered (a legitimate) sport. According to D. Margaret Costa (2003), an American History and Women's Studies researcher from Australia, male hegemony is maintained in sport through the reproduction of an ideology among the sporting masses which dictates how the sporting body of both men and women should look like, which sports are appropriate for which gender, which socio-economic classes are players expected to come from, how the players and sport in general should look for the non-players, etc. (Costa 2003). Roller derby did not meet those parameters[16]: the combination of spectacle (as opposed to display of athleticism) and women competing in a rough sport on a par with men relegated roller derby to a marginalised position.

However, by not giving up on roller derby and by normalising the presence of women in sport alongside that of men, Leo Seltzer also walked the first steps in the path to creating a counterhegemonic culture, thereby planting the seed for the future version of the sport.

These first steps included welcoming every*body* to roller derby (either as skaters or spectators) and giving women an opportunity to be 'equal' to men:

> The idea that everyone could relate to and live through Roller Derby was, in fact, a large part of the sport's appeal. […] Basically, Roller Derby offered a hero for every type of person—male, female, big, small, tall, or short. (Marino 2021: 33 f.)

[16] This early downgrading of the sport has repercussions until today. This is explained in more detail in *4.3.5 Overcoming marginalisation through professionalisation?*

This is still part of the philosophy of roller derby today, where ordinary women* and men* (in all shapes and forms) are invited to skate, and it still constitutes something quite unique of roller derby, which is not usually seen in mainstream sports[17]. In fact, one of the most revolutionary aspects of Seltzer's roller derby is that it represented a "generally unprecedented version of athletic equality" (Marino 2021: 32) with men and women playing in the same team, being paid the same and held to the same expectations in terms of performance. (Marino 2021)

Opening roller derby for all also meant giving working class people an opportunity to contemplate sport as a career path. Seltzer offered skaters a modest salary (in any case, better than what they could earn in other fields), housing, food, clothing and medical care. Costs of living were covered by roller derby and thus skating in roller derby was seen as their profession. Indeed, many of the early skaters joined roller derby for financial reasons. The Great Depression had left many individuals unemployed and many families facing financial hardships, and roller derby presented a viable means of earning a living (Marino 2021). This also applied to women (working class or otherwise). Becoming a professional athlete[18] became something achievable for ordinary women as well. This was quite unprecedented at the time. Even at present, almost 90 years later, only 16,4% professional athletes in the USA are female as opposed to 83,6% of male professional athletes[19] (Zippia 2022).

These intersectional advancements did not erase other gendered roles attached to female and male players outside of the track. For instance, female skaters would wash and mend both theirs and the males' uniforms and men would grind the women's skate wheels and set up and break down the roller derby track (Marino 2021). Nonetheless, roller derby came at a time of socioeconomic and cultural change in the USA. Just ten

[17] The newest version of roller derby has expanded the meaning of women to include any "individual who identifies as trans woman, intersex woman, and/or gender expansive" (WFTDA n.d.-b) and that of men to include individuals "who identify male and those who identify as a nonbinary gender (including but not limited to genderqueer, transmasculine, transfeminine, and agender)" (MRDA n.d.-b).

[18] Although mainstream sports and the media may not have considered roller derby skaters professional athletes, I refer to them as such for two main reasons. First, skaters earned their living with roller derby. Just as in any other professional sport, they invested their time and energy into the sport, they worked on improving their skills, they had a contract and a salary binding them to the sport for a certain period of time, etc. Second, despite the spectacle and the staged acrobatics, roller derby required a certain level of athleticism.

[19] These statistics do unfortunately not contemplate other gender identities beyond the binary.

years after the Great Depression, World War II broke out (1939-1945) and women started filling the holes in the workforce that men had left following the war. As a result, “women began to recognize their real potential, gaining enough self-esteem and empowerment during this period to rejuvenate the women’s suffrage movement in the coming decades” (Goodman 2014: 7) and roller derby was there as another space open for women to challenge those cultural ideas.

Leo Seltzer (and, from 1959, his son Jerry) made some visible efforts to break with the ‘weaker sex’ stereotype in sport and to present women as being equal to men, at least on the track. This represents a shift in thinking, “a countercultural practice to the ‘separate spheres’ ideology” (Goodman 2014: 7, emphasis in original).

Since female skaters were a magnet for fans, as part of the founders’ commitment to keep them in the game for as long as possible, it was decided that roller derby would break with the athlete vs. mother dichotomy, thereby “challenging dominant social norms that restricted women’s attempts to combine their roles as wife, mother, and athlete” (Marino 2021: 97). Leo Seltzer came up with an alternative sporting model that embraced *heterosexual, roller derby* families.

Because the skaters spent so much time together, roller derby was like a big family. Being a co-ed sport, it was also not unusual that romantic feelings arose between skaters. In the early days of roller derby (in the 1930s and 1940s), Seltzer was reluctant to accept this fact and made it difficult for the couples to be able to spend time together. For instance, they would be sent to skate in different parts of the country or made to sleep in separate (gendered) rooms during their trips with the team. By the 1950s, Seltzer had realised that he could not prevent romantic relationships from happening between the skaters and opted for cultivating a family atmosphere, which would not only provide a sustainable lifestyle for skaters with children, but also counter the stereotypical image of rough female skaters (versus the gentle and kind ‘traditional’ woman) and ultimately appeal to the roller derby (female) fanbase. (Marino 2021)

As all other American women, female professional athletes were also under pressure to meet the cultural gendered expectations of the time, which sold motherhood and homemaking as the ideal that every woman should look up to. When a woman in a paid

job became pregnant, she was expected to quit or was fired. American society's pressure on women to prioritise motherhood over career was such that women's labour was devalued and underpaid (Marino 2021). Thus, when women were faced with the impossible task of balancing the imposed societal expectations (children, husband and house chores) and their potential personal or professional interests (career and hobbies), they often felt forced to give up on the latter. In the sport arena, this meant either not even trying to pursue a professional career or giving up as soon as they became pregnant. This was also the expectation of the governing bodies of traditional female sports. (Marino 2021)

Nonetheless, Leo and Jerry Seltzer's reliance on women to keep the business afloat forced them to work around this problem. Female (and male) roller derby skaters and their families were accommodated in a variety of ways to allow them to continue skating. The skaters could choose between three options: (1) bringing their children along with them on their trips; (2) settling down in a place, quitting the travelling bit of derby, and joining the team only when games took place in their area; or (3) leaving the children behind with the spouse or close relatives and fully dedicating themselves to the sport. A combination of these options was also allowed and did often occur. Skaters favoured one option or the other depending on the age of their children and personal circumstances. (Marino 2021)

The flexibility provided to the skaters with regards to their 'family arrangements' was something unique of roller derby—no other sport offered such a range of choices to its players—and it was partially possible because of the team or 'family spirit' of the sport. This feeling of connectedness went beyond the track and so, when skaters went along with option (1), the roller derby team and management supported skater-parents in different ways. For instance, skaters in training would take care of the veteran skaters' younger children during a game (in return for money). If new skaters were not available, experienced male skaters would make sure to arrange the childcare with local babysitting agencies. For older children, roller derby paid for a tutor or private school tuition fees. (Marino 2021)

In addition, skaters' children were allowed and even encouraged to be part of the derby atmosphere. They were welcomed to watch their parents' trainings and assist with easy

tasks from a very young age (e.g. if a skater's helmet fell, they would pick it up and place it on the side of the track so that skater could later retrieve it). As young as age four, they would also entertain the masses by competing against each other in races known as 'Diaper Derbies', which took place at halftime during the games. When they were old enough, they could be trained to become professional roller derby skaters if they wished to. (Marino 2021)

These arrangements were a win-win situation for all parties involved. For skater-parents, roller derby served as pool of personal and financial resources that allowed them to pursue their athletic careers while being close to their families. For the management, having children involved meant keeping already established skaters in the game, potentially securing future generations of skilled skaters and offering something to the masses that sold well: "There were plenty of 'Mr. and Mrs.' fan clubs for married couples in the derby, and family fan clubs sprang up to support the kids of popular skaters" (Marino 2021: 121-122).

Leo and Jerry Seltzer's family model was forward-thinking in that it presented a new female image that pushed against the 'ideal' and went against well-established governing bodies of traditional female sports. Roller derby did not devalue those female athletes who became mothers, but learned to accept and celebrate them. This non-conventional approach caused a backlash from the media and, unfortunately, it was a pioneer effort that none of the mainstream sports seems to have followed still today.

Although roller derby only fostered the family culture at the professional level, this may have also had an indirect impact on amateur skaters' and their aspirations to become professional roller derby skaters. Considering that at the time—as it is still the case now—women were expected to become mothers at some point in their lives, for them to know that they would not have to choose between motherhood and sport in the future may have been a relief for those who were considering pursuing a career in roller derby. In a way, the sport presented a beam of hope for those who did not only want to be defined for their roles as mothers or (house)wives. However, the family model was not perfect. For instance, pregnant skaters did not receive any maternity pay if they took time off during or after pregnancy—unless they continued working as coaches—and, in

spite of the support available to them, skater-parents who decided to raise their children on the road still faced many challenges. (Marino 2021)

Moreover, despite the presumed positive impact that the family model would have had beyond the professional level, this model may have remained an aspiration for all those who did not become professional skaters (e.g. skaters in local clubs). They may not have profited from the benefits that the Seltzer family was giving to their skaters. Even if the Roller derby management was ahead of its time by offering athletes the possibility to combine their professional careers with their parental roles[20], they still promoted traditional values.

Roller Derby publications such as *Roller Derby News* and *RolleRage* emphasised the importance of marriage and family for both skating sexes. Special emphasis was put on female skaters, who were praised for their dedication to roller derby and, at the same time, for complying with the "conventional feminine wants and needs" (Marino 2021: 124), such as getting married and having children. This sort of coverage was intended to soften the negative comments that the sport received, particularly by those who questioned which 'kind of women' played such a(n aggressive) sport. For the same reason, these publications also often commented on the beauty of the female athletes. This was also done "to justify their athleticism and to appeal to the average woman and to middle-class notions of respectability" (Marino 2021: 44). This represents a different approach to the new version roller derby, as is explained in *3.2 Resurgence (early 2000s)*.

Men did not escape the traditional values of the time either. Articles on male skaters can be found containing information such as: "Chick[21] is 5'11", 155 pounds, has brown hair and eyes, *is single, and said his ambition is to get married*" (Craig 2002: 94, emphasis added). The publication of such content undoubtedly meets the heteronormative cultural expectations of the American society at the time and leaves no space for alternative understandings of family or for non-heterosexual forms of love. Roller derby may have

[20] This is something still unseen today, almost seven decades later. Most professional female athletes are still forced to choose between their careers and motherhood. The last much-talked about scandal came from the Olympic Games in Tokyo in summer 2021, where breastfeeding athletes encountered more obstacles than facilities to bringing their children to the Games with them (Stoller 2021).

[21] Edward "Chick" Chokota was an American roller derby skater in the 1950s.

had homosexual skaters among its players in its early days, but this information was neither made public nor openly supported in any way.

Roller derby was not perfect; *but* it did manage over time to create a culture "that embraced, valued, and promoted mother-athletes while highlighting the important parental role played by their male athletes. The athletes were not forced to choose between the competing identities of parent and athlete, and children of the skaters were included as part of the Roller Derby family" (Marino 2021: 98).

Because all of the mentioned above, Jerry Seltzer claimed that "[roller derby] was counterculture at a time when nobody knew what counterculture was" (Marino 2021: 41). Other researchers have agreed with this statement: "When placed into this historical context, the evidence demonstrates that early roller derby was countercultural and forward thinking when it started" (Goodman 2014: 3).

Indeed, when analysed in its cultural context, the early version of roller derby already presented several characteristics common to counterhegemonic sports. The most salient of these characteristics was its marginalisation by mainstream sports, which was a direct result of contesting the established cultural ideologies (e.g. sport is open to all classes, genders and bodies; females can become professional athletes under the same terms as men; parent-athletes can have both, a family and a sports career, etc.).

Although the main reason for the creation of roller derby as a co-ed sport and its flexibility to accommodate families was to generate revenue and its countercultural edge was rather an unintended 'side-effect' of its creation—not its raison d'être—, these counterhegemonic features are very likely to have influenced the later version of the sport (Goodman 2014), but also to have condemned the sport to an early halt.

Barely 40 years after its existence, Jerry Seltzer announced the closure of the roller derby business in 1973. Roller derby had always been in a precarious financial position (partly because of its lack of recognition as a legitimate sport), but in the early 1970s two key factors signalled its end. Salary differences between skaters shook the familial atmosphere that had existed in roller derby since its creation. At the same time, the OPEC oil embargo restricted skaters transportation due to high oil prices and limited the

leisure choices that the American population was able to afford. (Toews 2012; Draft 2019)

Summing up this section, in the America of the early 20th century, a women's place was still very much relegated to the home. Nonetheless, women, especially those in the upper- and middle-classes were also allowed to carry out what were considered 'light' physical activities—such as dancing or roller skating. In 1935 roller derby—a competitive team activity on roller skates—emerged as a new form of entertainment in which both men and women were welcomed to participate. This new form of entertainment countered widespread beliefs about gender and class by fostering gender equality among skaters and allowing for working class women's participation in physical activity. It also resisted ageism and body shaming in sport and the idea that athleticism and parenthood are incompatible. Because of its resistance to mainstream values, it was marginalised by other sports and attempted—without success—to buy its approval by emphasising the femininity and heterosexuality of its female skaters. This first version of roller derby never intended to spark social change, ultimately, its own existence and development was moved by profit, as were all other professional sports. That is why this first version of roller derby should be considered a subculture, rather than a counterculture.

The next section presents the new version of roller derby and serves to understand how the sport went from being a subculture ahead of its time to becoming a counterculture.

3.2 Resurgence (early 2000s): A feminist-inspired counterculture

By the beginning of the 21st century women had carved out a bigger space for themselves in society. They were pushing for equal rights in all spheres of life, from music to sport. This would have an influence on the resurgence of roller derby. This time as a decidedly feminist counterhegemonic movement. As mentioned above, this section further aims to answer the question 'which aspects of roller derby remained over time'.

3.2.1 The sport context in late 20th – early 21st century in the USA

The end of the 20th century was a period of change for the USA. Second wave feminism had led to some advancements in legislation and female sport participation—one of the most notable developments had been the introduction of Title IX amendment in 1972 (see *2.1.1 Second wave achievements in sport*)—, the punk subculture emerged and with it the feminist Riot Grrrl movement and several sports, including inline skating and extreme sports, experienced a boom in participation. These three factors would influence the resurgence of roller derby.

Title IX had been established to provide women with equal access to sport and showed very positive results in terms of participation. "Before Title IX was enacted, the mere inclusion of women in a sporting event was uncommon, and generally turned discourse around the sport into a focus on flashy entertainment" (Toews 2012: 34). This was the reality with which the earliest version of roller derby had been confronted with. In 1972, just one year before roller derby's disappearance, only 1 in 27 girls played sport (Guttmann 1991). However, by the end of the 1980s, Title IX had managed to almost triple the presence of women in intercollegiate sport (Guttmann 1991). In 2001, the year in which roller derby reemerged, the percentage of women taking part in intercollegiate sport had risen to 43% (compared to 1972) and in 2002-2003, high school girl's athletic participation had shown an increase of over 840% (in this case, compared to 1971) (Carpenter and Acosta 2005). Those are clear indicators that women's participation in sport was becoming more socially accepted and normalised.

The importance of Title IX for the wider context of roller derby should not be underestimated. American Communications Professor Colleen Arendt (2019), who agrees that Title IX contributed to women's participation in sport after high school and college, has also stated that "modern roller derby could have had a following without this landmark legislation" (Arendt 2019: 77). The revival might not have taken place at all if women's fight for increased acceptance in sport had not been running in the background.

Around the same time as Title IX was being introduced, a new cultural movement was originating in the USA: punk or punk rock. Punk rock first emerged in England as a

musical genre during the 1970s and it represented the ideas and aspirations of the white, male working-class (Malott and Peña 2004). It had developed "as a reaction to the living conditions that existed after World War II and the breakdown of kinship patterns and community ties" (Malott and Peña 2004: 22) and acted as a "generational-specific symbolic system" (DeMott 1988: 42), one that "provided young men with a way of creating autonomy and difference from their parents and their culture" (Malott and Peña 2004: 22). However, in the USA the musical genre was "representative of the streets and underground" (Malott and Peña 2004: 22), rather than represent a generational divide.

Through their actions of protest, their music and style (e.g. spike bracelets and chockers, chains, leather jackets, etc.), "punks formed a subculture that fashioned itself as a community of resistance to early stages of neoliberalism" (de la Peza 2019: 439). They used music to deliver politically charged messages that exposed the economic social injustices that affected the male white population at the time. While it resisted class-based exploitation and oppression, punk promoted or reproduced other capitalist interests, such as sexism and racism (Malott and Peña 2004). This goes "against the potential for like-status individuals to mobilize politically" (Malott and Peña 2004: 29); punk encouraged the division of the working- and middle-class population (through gender and race) instead of promoting their unity and that is why it remained a subculture within mainstream culture.

As a reaction to the misogyny of the punk scene, in the 1980s women punks in the USA started forming their own bands and used their lyrics to spread political messages confronting the hypermasculinity existing in the punk scene and in the broader society. These bands, such as *Frightwig*, laid the groundwork for the rise of the Riot Grrrrl movement. (Ramirez 2009; de la Peza 2019)

Riot Grrrl originated in the 1990s in both Washington, D.C. and Olympia, Washington and later spread throughout the country. In its early years it was an underground movement led by white females influenced by second-wave feminism who wanted to reclaim their space in the punk scene; since until then most of them had only been involved in the scene through their boyfriends (Downes 2012; de la Peza 2019). The 'grrrl' in the movement's name—which resembles a growl—had been chosen to replace

the passivity that the term 'girl' generally conveyed and also served to display anger, an anger directed towards the sexism spread through mainstream and capitalist values—which equated girl to dumb, bad and weak (Bikini Kill 1991). (Rosenberg and Garofalo 1998)

Riot Grrrl soon became "a political movement [that] inspired girls and young women both nationally and internationally to express resistance against restrictive expectations of girlhood, femininity, and traditional gender roles both in the punk scene […] and in 'mainstream' society" (Schilt and Zobl 2008: 171, emphasis in original).

In 1991, the American female punk band Bikini Kill published the Riot Grrrl manifesto[22]. The statement described Riot Grrrl's philosophy as disruptive of the status quo. It was a call to break up with hierarchy and the concept of competition by replacing it with "non-hierarchical ways of being AND making" (Bikini Kill 1991, emphasis in original), a call against "racism, able-bodyism, ageism, speciesism, classism, thinism, sexism, antisemitism and [exclusive] heterosexism" (Bikini Kill 1991). Ultimately, a call to revolution through the creation of alternatives to the capitalist value system, which involved taking culture production into their own hands by creating music, books and zines[23] in which they could see themselves and feel understood. Especially zines would become an empowering tool for adolescent girls and women where they could "subvert standard patriarchal mainstream media by critiquing society and the media without being censored" (Rosenberg and Garofalo 1998: 811). (Schilt 2003)

Riot Grrrl was to be understood as a non-hierarchical and decentralised community or network of like-minded females who moved *simultaneously*, but *individually*. "The decentralisation allowed participants to actively direct the activities and meanings of their local chapter" (Schilt and Zobl 2008: 172). Girls were encouraged to start a revolution in their own lives and to decide for themselves who they were. The Riot Grrrl stated: "grrrl rock revolution seeks to save the physic and cultural lives of girls and women everywhere, according to their own terms, not ours" (Bikini Kill 1991).

[22] The complete manifesto can be found in *Annex 1*.

[23] Zine is the truncated form of *fanzine*, "short, self-published periodicals made by grrrls themselves that feature personal reflections of music, life, feminism, and the bands they admire" (Ramirez 2009: 523).

This was a clear call to self-empowerment, which expanded the reach of feminist activism—previously reserved to the academic class (Ramirez 2009). The Riot Grrrl movement and their feminist messages would have a strong influence on the new version of roller derby that would emerge a decade later (Finley 2010; Arendt 2019; Draft 2022).

Whereas Jerry Seltzer had announced the closure of the roller derby business in 1973, during the 1980s and 1990s there were several attempts—not yet related to the punk scene—to revive the sport with limited success. The most outstanding attempt was brought by the television show *RollerJam.* The inline skating and extreme sport boom of the 1990s, together with a sense of nostalgia for roller derby following the death of popular skater Joan Weston in 1997, had brought a renewed interest in roller derby. However, the athletic entertainers—rather than real skaters—in the show portrayed a staged version of the sport which focused on "spectacle, drama and the sex appeal of the skaters" (Toews 2012: 18) and the audience quickly lost interest. (Draft 2019)

It would not be long after *RollerJam* that Dan Policarpo, an American entrepreneur, would come up with the idea of an 'all-girl' roller derby. His vision resembled more a circus performance than a competitive event and in January 2001 he started looking for potential interested women in his local area (Austin, Texas). He intentionally looked for women with a certain look and approach to life, namely "with tattoos, Bettie Page haircuts and guts" (Brick 2008) and soon gathered a group of about fifty women from the local punk scene and formed four teams. The teams were given noteworthy names such as Putas del Fuego, Hellcats, Holy Rollers or Rhinestone Cowgirls and the women took on similarly striking monikers such as Electra Blu, Lunatic or Bettie Rage. (Barbee and Cohen 2010: 33)

In March 2001 a fundraising event was organised. The proceeds were to be used to start up this new version of roller derby, but Policarpo allegedly disappeared with the money raised soon after. Despite the setback, the women were determined to revive roller derby and the captains of the four teams that he had formed took the initial lead (Toews 2012; Breeze 2014; Draft 2019). Just as Leo Seltzer, the women wanted to treat roller derby as a business, only this time "it was to be women-owned and -operated" (Draft 2019: 32).

This new version of roller derby was created from scratch. The women learnt how to run a business by doing it, they attended free business seminars and consulted a business manager. To create the rules of the game, they relied on old books, the Internet and their own memories[24] (Barbee and Cohen 2010). Because they wanted the new version of the sport to be as close to the original as possible, they kept the quads skates even though inline skates had been around for the past fifteen years. In addition, quad skates allowed them to control their speed easier than the new inline skates. (Bette Noir 2012)

This early version of modern roller derby included sexy uniforms and the Penalty Wheel, which penalized skaters who broke the rules. Punishments would include arm wrestling matches, pillow fights between opposing team members, or being spanked by fans. (Toews 2012; Draft 2019)

By early 2003, disagreements around ownership and control between the four captains and the skaters caused the league to split. As a result, two versions of roller derby arose: banked track roller derby and flat-track roller derby. The first one was represented by Texas Roller Derby Lonestar Rollergirls (TXRD) and resembles the Seltzer's version of roller derby—"a business model and marketing strategy that emphasizes entertainment and sensationalism" (Toews 2012: 19). The later, represented by *Texas Rollergirls*, became the most widespread version of contemporary roller derby and is the focus of this study. This new version of roller derby was inspired both by second and third-wave feminism and can be largely described as being countercultural.

Currently, the flat track version of roller derby is played on a flat, oval track. Two teams of five players each (made up of four blockers and one jammer) compete against each other. The game is divided in two, 30-minutes halves. Each half is made up of multiple jams that last up to two minutes. Each jam starts with both jammers—recognisable by the large star in their helmet cover—situated behind the eight blockers (also known, as the pack). The jammers first need to pass through the blockers and complete a full lap in

[24] During those earlier years, and until the creation of the World Flat Track Association (WFTDA) in 2006, the rules of the game were not fixed. Leagues would have a basic idea of how the game was played in the past and they would play by their own rules.

order to start earning points. After the first lap is completed, the jammers earn a point for each opposing player they pass. In the meantime, the blockers attempt to block the opposing team's jammer while also trying to help their own jammer to break through the pack (Arendt 2019). The concrete game rules "are consistently being revised as a balance between safety, control and fan appreciation is negotiated" (Pavlidis and O'Brien 2017: 706).

3.2.2 Punk, girl power and DIY – second wave influence on roller derby

Influenced by second-wave feminism, *Texas Rollergirls* took a radical feminist approach to sport. The new version of roller derby was largely inspired by the punk Riot Grrrl movement, whose influence in the early years of the sport can be seen in its DIY ethos, the girl power rhetoric and the rock-punk style surrounding the sport. "[Radical feminists] did not seek entrance into male domains but reflected a subcultural, antiauthoritarian, anti-hierarchical consciousness, suspicious of pre-existing male dominated institutions" (Storms 2008: 80).

Texas Rollergirls decided to create their own alternative sport culture. This implied taking ownership of all aspects of the sport—'by the skater, for the skater' (Joulwan 2007). The first roller derby league followed a "corporate organizational chart, with elected managers in areas such as finance, marketing, merchandise, game production, and training" (Draft 2019: 34). The women were involved and had a say in all aspects of the sport. Creating this alternative culture was a self-conscious political act not only intended to show rejection to capitalism and its dominant passive consumer culture, but also to prove that things could be done differently, that another non-hierarchical and democratic way of running the sport institution was possible (Beaver 2012). The leagues that followed would continue to adopt this business-model, which exists until today.

Like punk, roller derby reclaimed the term 'girl' as a symbol of empowerment and to break with gender stereotypes associated with women's expected forms of dress and behaviour (Schilt and Zobl 2008). Most of the first leagues (until around 2012)

contained the word 'roller*girls*' (or synonyms[25]) in their names, both in the USA and in Europe[26], and the logos representing the leagues would often portray young sexy or strong and fearless women, sometimes both (see *Fig. 1-12* below for examples).

During the bouts, "cheers such as 'Get it Girl!' or 'Good job girl!' [were] commonly heard" (Whitlock 2012: 29). In this context, the word 'girl'—which is otherwise commonly used in mainstream sports to infantilise female athletes (Messner, Duncan and Cooky 2003)—was associated with ideas of (inner and outer) strength (Finley 2010; Whitlock 2012). Through unusual attire and aggressive attitude, the skaters were starting a revolution in their own lives—as the Riot Grrrl manifesto had called for—by contesting hegemonic gender ideologies (Storms 2008; Finely 2010; Pavlidis 2010)[27] and, ultimately, showing how powerful 'girls' can be beyond the acceptable limits that society had imposed on them.

[25] Synonyms include 'dames' (at the time of writing, in 2022, 16 out of 444 leagues are still using 'dames' in their name) or 'dolls' (currently, 7 leagues are still using 'dolls' in their name). (WFTDA-a n.d.)

[26] It is difficult to estimate how many leagues initially used the term 'rollergirls', as no records exist with this information.

[27] This is explained in more detail under *3.2.3 Sealth feminism, individualism and third-wave contradictions.*

Fig. 1-12. Examples of logos from roller derby leagues founded between 2003 and 2010 (WFTDA n.d.-a)[28]

Texas Rollergirls
Austin, TX, US

Fig. 1. Founded in 2003

Gotham Roller Derby
New York, NY, US

Fig. 2. Founded in 2003

Rat City Roller Derby
Seattle, WA, US

Fig. 3. Founded in 2004

London Rockin' Rollers
London, England, GB

Fig. 4. Founded in 2006

Rainy City Roller Dolls
Centralia, WA, US

Fig. 5. Founded in 2007

Red Stick Roller Derby
Baton Rouge, LA, US

Fig. 6. Founded in 2007

Convict City Rollers
Hobart, TAS, AU

Fig. 7. Founded in 2009

Copenhagen Roller Derby
Copenhagen, DK

Fig. 8. Founded in 2009

Cornfed Derby Dames
Muncie, IN, US

Fig. 9. Founded in 2010

Crime City Rollers
Malmö, SE

Fig. 10. Founded in 2010

Crossroads City Derby
Las Cruces, NM, US

Fig. 11. Founded in 2009

DC Rollergirls
Washington, DC, US

Fig. 12. Founded in 2006

[28] The names stated here are the leagues' current names. They may have been called differently in the past.

Their unusual attire was also influenced by the punk style. The first skaters were often connected to the punk scene, they frequented punk-rock bars and/or enjoyed this kind of music or the punk culture altogether (Popowska 2022)[29]. Especially in the USA, skaters, like punk band members and fans, used outfits reminiscent of schoolgirls (mini-)skirts, fishnet stockings, etc. (Pavlidis 2010; Finley 2010; Bette Noir 2012). These outfits, more commonly known as 'boutfits'[30], were another form to resist standardisation in style, typical of mainstream sports (Pavlidis 2010). However, the punk influence was not only made visible by the skaters' look, it could also be heard during bouts. In those first years, punk-rock music was often played during the roll out—when the teams come out onto the track—or during the breaks, when "punk-rock half shows were the norm" (Pavlidis 2010; Bette Noir 2012). The music played included songs from punk bands such as "Boys Wanna Be Her" (Peaches 2006) or "Sheena is a Punk Rocker" (The Ramones 1977). This music, with heavy guitars and loud drums, was meant to accentuate women's qualities of toughness and skilfulness and to encourage roller derby's characteristics of movement and force as opposed to the passivity typical of most so-called female sports (e.g. gymnastics, synchronised swimming, etc.). Thus, "allow[ing] the expression of emotions and styles that can in some ways challenge the normative construction of gender and femininity" (Pavlidis 2010: 173).

Roller derby welcomed every woman, regardless of their race, age and body shape—which is in line with the Riot Grrrl manifesto[31], but may also be, to a certain extent, a legacy of the Seltzer's version of roller derby (see *3.1 Early years (1935-1973)*). The skaters' heterogeneity could have been representative of a wide spectrum of female subjectivities. However, by privileging a certain kind of music, style and attitude, the first roller derby skaters created a collective identity that favoured a specific subjectivity, namely that of the tough and strong woman. This is described more in detail in the next section.

[29] Marta Popowska, founder of Stuttgart Valley Rollergirls, explains this in *4.2.2 Stuttgart Valley Rollergirls (SVRG).*

[30] Outfits worn on the track during a bout (a roller derby match). The term 'boutfit' is more commonly used to refer to the attire worn by the skaters in the first years following the resurgence of roller derby.

[31] "BECAUSE doing/reading/seeing/hearing cool things that validate and challenge us can help us gain the strength and sense of community that we need in order to figure out how bullshit like racism, able-bodyism, ageism, speciecism, classism, thinism, sexism, antisemitism and heterosexism figures in our own lives" (Bikini Kill 1991, emphasis in original)

Second wave feminism may explain how the new version of roller derby resisted sport mainstream values at the institutional and cultural levels through the implementation of the DIY ethos and the contestation of stereotypical ideas of femininity, respectively. However, second wave feminism alone is not enough to understand the complexity of roller derby as a feminist movement. In fact, its stealth feminism, its focus on the individual, its welcoming attitude towards men as allies and its contradictions are all characteristic of third-wave feminism.

3.2.3 Stealth feminism, individualism and third-wave contradictions

"The roller derby revival is not explicitly linked to feminist politics." (Beaver 2012: 31) In 2009, six years after the resurgence, out of eight USA top-ranked leagues, only one—*Texas Rollergirls*—admitted rather matter-of-factly being (third-wave) feminists on their website:

> Are we third-wave feminists? Sure. Are we going to beat you over the head with it? Nope! We're too busy training and competing and living our lives… We tip our helmets to the women who came before us: the old school skaters who first showed us how it could be done, and the women of the Second Wave who fought for Title IX so that little girls everywhere grow up knowing they can run track, compete on the swim team, play a team sport, or a start a roller derby revolution. (Texas Rollergirls 2010 in Chananie-Hill, Waldron and Umsted 2012: 39)

Despite this statement, many skaters in those first years were reluctant to label roller derby as feminist to avoid the "knee-jerk social stigmas attached to the word" (Heywood and Dworkin 2003: 51). Naming the sport as such could have hindered fan and financial support and relegated the sport to a (more) marginalised position (Beaver 2012). Nonetheless, there were some nods to feminism in the logos of the leagues (which often represented strong and decided women) and, at least in the USA, also in the monikers of the skaters, more commonly known as 'derby names'. For instance, skaters with names such as 'Suzie B. Catastrophe' or 'Rosie D. Ribsplitter' were

making clear references to first-wave feminists Susan B. Anthony[32] and 'Rosie the Riveter'[33] respectively (Whitlock 2012).

Third-wave feminism was (and still is) more about doing it and less about naming it. The doing was allowed by the DIY ethos, the anti-establishment mindset that had pushed the *Texas Rollergirls* to start their 'own sport institution' and the mindset that allowed them to 'create' a new version of themselves on the track. This new self was not only about choosing a derby name with which they'd be known as skaters in the derby world, it was also about creating a whole new persona that would accompany this name, from attitude to attire. The lack of uniforms meant that every skater was allowed to dress and, therefore, express her individuality as she wanted, and those earlier skaters often choose to do so by combining a sexy and camp (punk) style, allegedly representative of 'the feminine', with a tough, strong, competitive and aggressive (supposedly masculine) character, as represented by the overemphasis on injuries, bruises and pain (Pavlidis and Fullagar 2015).

In those early days it was not uncommon to see roller derby skaters with heavy make-up, "exposure of cleavage and clothes that mock conventional feminine modesty but that also serve as markers of femininity" (Finley 2010: 372). Several scholars (including Carlson 2010; Finley 2010; Pavlidis and Fullagar 2013; Giseler 2014; Beaver 2016) identified the use of overtly sexualised costumes as a tool to parody and resist hetero-normative gender relations and "oppressive conventions of sexual embodiment and expression" (Giseler 2014: 772).

Earlier skaters' attire often contrasted with their aggressive attitude, displayed during the bouts and in the bout posters. In fact, the term 'bout' is used in boxing and wrestling—both male-dominated sports known for their aggression— to indicate a match or fight. Therefore, it was not uncommon for bout posters from the early years (until ≈2012) to combine the sexy and the aggressive. For instance, by contrasting the image of a 'delicate' woman with a bout title such as 'Wuthering hits' or by using the

[32] Susan B. Anthony was an American activist and leader of the women's suffrage movement in the United States. (Encyclopaedia Britannica 2022)

[33] Rosie the Riveter is a "media icon associated with female defense workers during World War II. Since the 1940s Rosie the Riveter has stood as a symbol for women in the workforce and for women's independence." (Cokely n.d.)

image of women wearing small amounts of clothing engaging in 'tough' behaviour (such chocking or or going to combat) (see *Fig. 13-16* for examples)[34]. These contradictory representations as well as the controversies arisen regarding roller derby's feminist potential[35] are typical of third-wave feminism.

Fig. 13-16. Bout posters from British roller derby leagues (2006-2012).

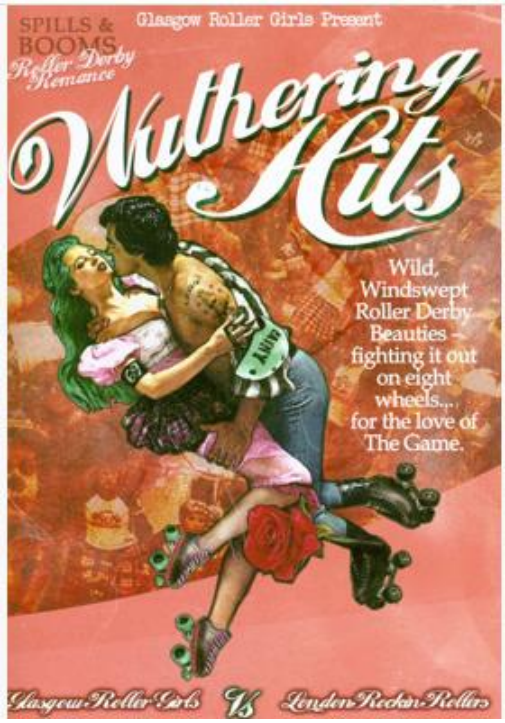

Fig. 13. Bout poster 'Wuthering Hits' by Glasgow Roller Girls, estimated date 2000s (GWL n.d.-a)

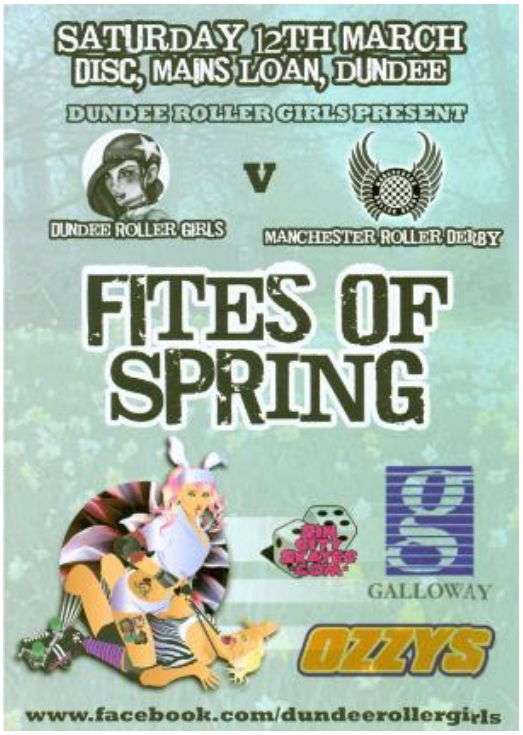

Fig. 14. Bout poster 'Fites of Spring' by Dundee Roller Girls, 2011 (GWL n.d.-b)

[34] Although most roller derby studies stem from the USA, the bout posters in *Annex 3* (from Britain) confirm that the sport was lived in a similar way in both regions.

[35] Second wave feminism had criticised revealing clothing as a form exploitation (whether self-chosen or imposed).

Fig. 15. Bout poster 'G.I. Jam' by Granite City Roller Girls, 2011 (GWL n.d.-c)

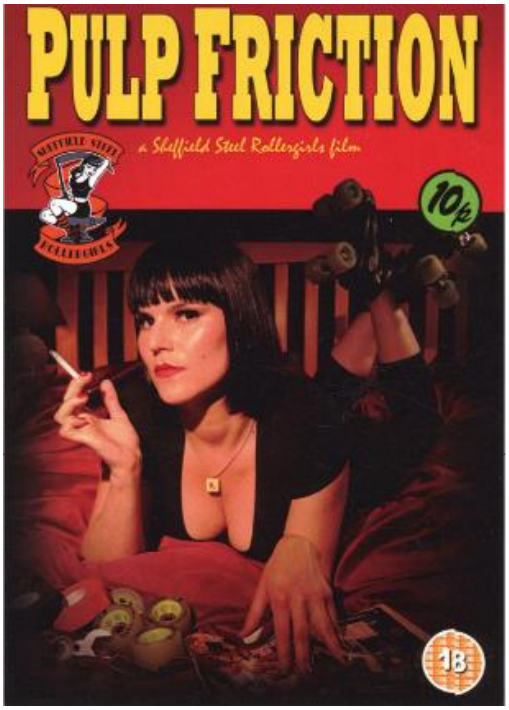

Fig. 16. Postcard 'Pulp Friction' from the 2012 calendar 'REEL GIRLS' by Sheffield Steel Rollergirls (GWL n.d.-d)

Early analysis of roller derby as a feminist project criticised that although the skaters' participation in roller derby could be seen as a way of exercising the skaters' own feminist identities, the sexual objectification of the skaters clearly lacked transgression (Whitlock 2012). This may be the reason why this 'sexy style' has been mostly lost in the derby world, although some skaters still reproduce aspects of those earlier self-representations. For instance, using make-up on the track. Yet the tough, strong, competitive and aggressive character does remain today (see *4.2.2 From women to women**).

The DIY ethos allowed for the expression of the skaters' individuality within a like-minded collective. In the early years, the participants were not so much focused on prescribing or setting rules of any kind[36], but rather on creating and keeping control of a social space where they could be themselves, free of judgement and free of pressures to conform to gender stereotypes (Beaver 2012).

[36] Roller derby had its first official set of rules in January 2006, three years after its revival (WFTDA 2022). Today, most of the rules refer to play and safety. References to clothing are still vaguely formulated, allowing freedom for the skaters to choose their preferred clothing on the track. Rules are revised yearly (see *Annex 2* for an example of the most current rules).

Beyond the empowering effects of this form of governance at the individual level, the DIY allowed for the creation of bonds between skaters. Through their participation in roller derby, the early skaters developed a sense of 'community' (Beaver 2012) or even 'sisterhood' (Toews 2012) within the sport. Roller derby seemed to attract women who had felt like 'outsiders' or 'misfits' before, whether in other sports or in society in general (Beaver 2012). This already set a common ground for many. Team members did not only support each other in and outside of the track, but interleague support and comradeship was also usual.

In the early years, the most common way to start a new league was to get in touch with other leagues and ask for advice, which could range from tips on training drills to legal information. This information was shared free of charge through internet forums and other online channels, as well as in person (Beaver 2012)[37]. This comradship was not reserved for new teams, it was part of the roller derby essence. In fact, for many skaters, roller derby was more about the community than about the sport (Beaver 2012). After-bout-parties were common, and skaters of competing leagues would drink and celebrate together in them. These parties were a place to bond with other women, leaving the aggression and competitiveness of the track behind. (Toews 2012)

Maintaining the DIY ethos required a lot of work. This is why also men were welcomed as helping hands. Nonetheless, they were exclusively appointed assisting roles such as officials (i.e. referees) or non-skating officials. Relegating men to positions of less power guaranteed that leadership and decision-making positions—from which women were typically excluded in most mainstream sports—be solely filled in by women, thus tackling a major problem that the liberal feminism approach of equality had been unable to solve. At the same time, although skaters did not give men's presence in roller derby a second thought and simply interpreted it as "bodies filling duties" (Fleming 2016: 86), by getting involved in roller derby men were directly or indirectly showing their support to the feminist movement.

[37] This is still done so today, as is explained in *4.3 Roller derby in Austria.*

The first skaters' welcoming attitude towards having men as allies was a distinctive third-wave feminism characteristic and, if the skaters' sexualised self-expressions had been criticised for lacking transgression, the inclusion of men could be praised for sparking change—albeit at the individual level, but change nonetheless. Some of the first men involved in roller derby admitted that their "patriarchal expectations bec[a]me contestable, and [they] either no longer hold those expectations or recognize they are in a space where they are unwelcome and thus they do not express them" (Fleming 2016: 88). Moreover, some had learned to appreciate other playstyles that were more focused on teamwork and less around showboating, as is typically the case in male playstyles (Fleming 2016).

One last important aspect that gave away this new version of roller derby as a third-wave feminism endeavour is that the sport was not only about contesting gender stereotypes, it also aimed to raise awareness on other issues. In the USA many leagues fundraised for feminist-centred[38] charities and some looked for ethic sponsorship (Chananie-Hill, Waldron and Umsted 2012; Whitlock 2012).

The combination of second and third-wave feminism reveals the countercultural roots of roller derby, what makes this sport different from other initiatives addressed at drawing women into sport. Following the argumentation presented in *2.2. Counterhegemony through sports*, this earliest version of roller derby can be interpreted as a counterhegemonic sport. However, although the sport initially resisted some mainstream values—reflected, for instance, in the antiauthoritarian and anti-hierarchical self-organisation of the leagues—, it also incorporated dominant values such as competition or the regulation of the sport. The creation of the Women's Flat Track Derby Association (WFTDA) would be the first official governing body of the sport, and thus the first and perhaps most important example of the assimilation of mainstream values by roller derby. The section below presents a brief historical of the WFTDA's evolution, which serves to better understand the most important institution regulating the sport today.

[38] Feminist-centered means "woman or humanist centered and in the best interest of humankind, and women alike" (Whitlock 2012: 54).

3.2.4 The Women's Flat Track Derby Association (WFTDA)

Within a few years, the enthusiasm for roller derby had spread all over the USA years and beyond. In their first year of existence, *Texas Rollergirls* had started supporting other women interested in starting their own leagues following the by the skater, for the skater ethos (Toews 2012; Draft 2019) and the network of knowledge gradually expanded through personal connections, internet chat groups and forums.

Just a year after its creation, in 2004, *Texas Rollergirls* got together with other US leagues and formed the United Leagues Coalition (ULC). The main goal of the ULC was to create a nationally recognized version of the sport—though the coalition was made up solely of flat track roller derby leagues and did not include any banked track leagues. (Barbee and Cohen 2010)

The next year, in 2005, a national meeting took place with members of 20 different leagues attending. Following that meeting, the ULC name was changed to Women's Flat Track Derby Association (WFTDA) and its mission was reformulated: "WFTDA's mission is to promote and foster the sport of women's flat track roller derby by facilitating the development of athletic ability, sportswomanship, and goodwill among member leagues". (WFTDA n.d.-c)

As self-proclaimed international governing body of the flat track version of the sport, the WFTDA opened its doors to new members in September 2006 and has welcomed over 400 leagues to date. Over 90 of those leagues are based in Europe (see *Table 1* in the Appendix). (WFTDA n.d.-a)

The association has been the leading force of the sport since its inception and it continues to embody the 'by the skater, for the skater' ethos. It has set the international standard for the sport in terms of ranking, rules and competition and continues to carry on its political goal of "revolutionali[sing] the role of women* and [now also] gender expansive participants in sports" (WFTDA 2021: 5). Since 2020 the association has also taken a stronger commitment to stand against racism in and outside of the sport (see WFTDA 2020 Impact Report (WFTDA 2021a)).

The WFTDA was created with the aim to lobby for roller derby as a legitimate sport without losing sight of its feminist interests. Without a governing body (a model copied from other sports), in its initial years the sport had no fixed rules of play and therefore was not even recognised as a sport. The creation of the WFTDA could be interpreted as a first step towards professionalisation and mainstreaming of the sport, as a need to be accepted among already established sports. Although roller derby shared characteristics of mainstream sports—such as competitiveness or aggression—ever since the Seltzer's creation, the foundation of the WFTDA along with the growing number of leagues and the increased skill-level of the skaters and its subsequent desire to be recognised as athletes has started to lead to internal secessions within the sport/movement.

In recent years, some skaters have started to see roller derby's NGO status and what the WFTDA stands for (beyond sport achievement) as an impediment to the sport being taken seriously (Fleming 2016). Catherine, a North Carolina roller derby skater, explains:

> That's the thing that doesn't make sense to me about the whole WFTDA platform, that I'm hoping that one day that will change, maybe this is just what it takes to be accepted as, you know, again a "real" sport, and then one day you can be a for profit… It's almost like a half-hearted, half-assed thing where we're doing nonprofit work because we have to, not because we want to. And that kind of defeats the purpose, because we're not invested in the work that we're doing, we're just saying "who should we give money to this month, ok, let's cut them a check" and that's truly the extent that we do.
>
> […] And it's hard to rally interest, because we do just want to play. We want to hit each other and play roller derby. End of story. We aren't fundraisers and non-profit organizers and not everyone knows what they're doing. It's hard. You know so to be internationally ranked, we also have to give back to the local animal shelter. Like how is that related? (Catherine, phone interview, 31/12/2015 in Fleming 2016: 106, emphasis in original).

Whether this is the opinion of a single skater or league or whether it represents a widespread trend in the USA or elsewhere has not been researched but could be an interesting topic for further analysis beyond this thesis. In *4.3.5 Overcoming marginalisation through professionalisation?* it is described how Austrian leagues stand in this respect.

To sum up this chapter, three main developments in the late 20th century favoured the revival of roller derby in the USA at the beginning of 2000: the introduction of Title IX amendment, the emergence of the Riot Grrrl punk movement and the inline skating boom of the 1990s as well as the nostalgia for the sport. As opposed to the family Seltzer's roller derby, the new (flat tracked) version of the sport was a conscious feminist counterhegemonic initiative. Its countercultural edge was the result of a combination of second and third-wave feminism made obvious in the theatrics of the sport—the earliest revival version of roller derby was more about having fun and less about rules and competition—, the punk influences of those early years, visible not only in the style of the skaters, but also in the names of the leagues—which usually contained the world '(roller)girl' as a symbol of empowerment—and the DIY ethos of the sport.

The DIY was key in opposing mainstream cultural values, as it meant keeping control of all aspect of the sport. Among others, the DIY allowed the skaters to express their individualism (through their derby names and 'boutfits')—which is a trait common in sport subcultures—and yet the sport was praised by early skaters for creating a sense of sisterhood among players. This sisterhood is what may have moved skaters to create the World Flat Track Derby Association (WFTDA) in 2005, the organisation that would lobby for the legitimisation of the sport.

4 Roller Derby in Europe

The growing interest in roller derby and the widespread use of new technologies allowed the sport to travel beyond the national and continental borders extremely fast. By 2006, only three years after the first leagues had been set up in the USA, roller derby arrived in Europe. This chapter describes how the sport arrived and later developed in this continent in order to understand which aspects of the roller derby identity remained in time and space. Special reference is made to the UK and Germany, as those were the first countries to set up roller derby leagues in Europe.

Concurrently and without knowing about each other's existence, *London Rollergirls* (since 2019, *London Roller Derby*) and *Stuttgart Valley Rollergirls* (now, *Stuttgart Valley Roller Derby*) were founded in the United Kingdom and Germany respectively. *4.1 Roller derby in the United Kingdom (2006-2012)* and *4.2 Roller derby in Germany (2006-2013)* describe how these leagues were created and which developments took place around roller derby in the first few years following its existence in these countries[39].

4.3 Roller derby in Austria closes this chapter with an analysis of the current situation of the sport in Austria through its five roller derby leagues. The analysis of roller derby in other European countries is beyond the scope of this study.

4.1 Roller derby in the United Kingdom (2006-2012)

Through the efforts of second wave feminists, the role of European women in sport in the early 21st century had improved when compared to earlier decades. The increased presence of women in (certain) sports was becoming normalised and their participation actively promoted by national, regional and local organisations alike. Whereas female sport participation in terms of numbers increased in all three countries presented in this study, this rise was usually not accompanied by real equality in the sport arena. Positions of power were often reserved for men, also in female-dominated sports, and

[39] Due to lack of literature on the history of roller derby in Europe and lack of available interview partners, the information provided in this section may be incomplete.

women even lost part of that power due to the new processes aimed at fostering gender equality.

These changes had the biggest impact on white middle-class girls and women, those who had the time and resources to invest in sport. Those from lower socio-economic backgrounds (which often include migrants) and other groups, such as those who do not conform to the gender norms (e.g. gender expansive, trans people, etc.), were more often left behind in these efforts to include girls and women in sport.

4.1.1 The role of women in sport in late 20th – early 21st century in the UK

This section describes the situation of women in sport in the UK in the late 20th and early 21st century to better understand the context in which roller derby arrived in Europe. The UK had a long tradition of sex-segregated physical education (PE). PE teachers were trained and taught separately in sex-segregated primary and secondary schools until the 1970s. Secondary school girls and boys used to attend PE classes separately and to follow a different programme. Although team sports made up for the largest part of the PE curriculum in both cases, the sports they practiced differed. The girls' curriculum consisted of hockey, netball, tennis and often also dance; the boys' of soccer, rugby and cricket. This model reproduced the "gender duality within the profession and practice of physical education" (White 2003: 37).

This situation and its impact on the broader society raised concerns among some women who were already involved in sport. Aware of the fact that women faced discrimination and inequalities as a result of a male-dominated sport culture, in 1985 they decided to set up the Women's Sport Foundation (WSF)—currently Women's Sport and Fitness Foundation (WSFF). Inspired by second wave feminism, the WSF was established as a lobbying and advocacy organisation which aimed to promote the interests of women in sport and to fight for equal opportunities. The foundation was soon recognised and financially supported by the Sports Council[40] and had its first impact on state policy development in 1993 when the Sports Council published the document Women in Sport: Policy and Frameworks for Action. (White 2003)

[40] The GB Sports Council "took the lead in all aspects of sport and physical recreation, which require administration, co-ordination and representation in Great Britain" (Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster 1997).

One of the key principles of the policy was sport equity, which was defined as follows:

> Sport Equity is about fairness in sport, equality of access, recognising inequalities and taking steps to redress them. It is about *changing the structure and culture of sport to ensure it becomes equally accessible to everyone in society* whatever their age, race, gender or level of ability. (Sport Council 1993: 3, emphasis added)

This policy later informed the drafting of the Brighton Declaration on Women and Sport in 1994, which is currently a worldwide recognised international statement of principles for women's sport development. (UK Sports Council 1998)

Through the efforts of the WSF, over the following twenty years, there was a shift towards mixed provision in the education system and the Sports Council undertook several grassroots sport development projects. Two major findings came out of those projects: (1) promoting activities through existing women's groups rather than traditional sport structures was a more effective way to engage women in sport and (2) women are a diverse group and it is important to listen to what they want (in and out of sport). The Sports Council used those lessons to further develop the sport arena and funded or partially funded initiatives in line with those learnings. (Sports Council 1991)

Some of these local initiatives included the formation of clubs, such as the Newham Women's Football Club and the Queens of the Castle netball club, both in London (Hargreaves 1994). Both clubs are run by and for women, the same approach taken by roller derby ('by the skater for the skater') and "a fairly popular way of challenging dominant male sporting ideology and practice" (White 2003: 47).

The Newham Women's Football Club explicitly "wrote into its constitution that women should run the club and have absolute control over its affairs" (White 2003: 46). In practical terms, this meant negotiating the lease for their own pitch (instead of sharing a pitch with the men's teams, as is usually done in mainstream sports); supporting women to grow as referees, coaches or leaders and adapting the game to allow for a more positive style of play (as opposed to the competitive and showboating male styles). For their part, Queens of the Castle netball club drove the inclusion of working-class

women by creating their "own netball culture" (Hargreaves 1994: 250), which consisted of a non-conformist and flamboyant playing kit (as opposed to the conventional netball uniforms) and a philosophy which promoted respect and tolerance towards any sexual orientation (players were neither forced to deny their sexuality nor required to make it implicit). (Hargreaves 1994)

At the national level, efforts were also made towards equality within sport institutions throughout the 1990s, but results would be much less favourable to women. While numerous men's and women's sports national governing bodies merged with the intention to unite forces—with the exception of netball (which had historically been female dominated)—, most of these amalgamations came at a price for the female athletes. Women often sacrificed autonomy and control over the sport in exchange for access to facilities and funds. This was the result of a "clash of cultures and differences in management philosophies between men's and women's associations" (White 2003: 37) which ultimately led to the prevalence of one governing model—the male's—over the other—the female's. Within these associations, women lost part of their influence in the boardroom and their presence as top-level coaches decreased. However, they managed to retain their involvement at public policy levels in the Sports Council. (White 2003)

By the early 2000s female-led grassroots initiatives continued to emerge. One such initiative was Running Sisters, a project which aimed to network women of all ages and abilities in the same area to go for a run or jogging together. The initiative was thought to offer social support and security to women and in 2003 the network had 5000 members nationwide. Although the idea was relatively successful, it was much less ideologically motivated than Newham Women's Football Club and Queens of the Castle netball club. (White 2003)

At the time, clearly feminist and politically motivated initiatives such as the Newham's and Queens of the Castle's— which presented some parallelisms with roller derby (e.g. run by women for women, openness towards any sexual orientation, etc.)—remained local and national initiatives such as the amalgamation of sport governing bodies had relegated women in sport to the position of second best (as it is still largely the case today worldwide).

Despite local and national efforts, "women's involvement in sport [was] strongly mediated by socioeconomic status and ethnicity[41]. Just as a clear gender order is apparent in sport as a whole, based crudely on a gender duality in which sport is valued as a masculine activity, when one examines women's sport one [found] a predominantly white, middle-class sporting culture" (White 2003: 43).

It is in this context that roller derby first arrived in London in 2006. Roller derby was the living proof of the lessons learned by the grassroots sport development projects implemented by the Sports Council. Although women[42] in roller derby were attracted to the sport per se, what united them was being part of a feminist alternative scene; and despite the racial and socioeconomic relative homogeneity within the sport players, women playing roller derby were (and continue to be) a diverse group in terms of age, body size, gender identification and sexual orientation. This may be one of the reasons why it spread so rapidly throughout the UK, today the European region with (28) the highest number of (WFTDA-registered) leagues (see *Table 1* in the Appendix for a full list of European roller derby leagues).

The next section introduces the first roller derby league in Europe and how it resemebled and differed from the 'original' sport that had emerged in the USA. This is important, as *London Rollergirls* became one of the main points of reference in Europe for the first leagues established in the continent.

4.1.2 London Rollergirls (LRG)[43]

Courtney Welch, more commonly known as Bette Noir in the derby scene, was living and working in Los Angeles (United States) in the early 2000s, when roller derby remerged. She first discovered the sport through a video of *Gotham Girls Roller Derby*[44], the New York City league. Soon after, she had found a league in her local area

[41] This statement does not entirely escape roller derby. Although the reality in the USA may be different, at least in terms of racial diversity, as mentioned in the WFTDA's 2020 Impact Report (WFTDA 2021a), racism is still a fact in a sport that continues to be dominated by white skaters.

[42] Please note the reference is made to women (instead of women*), because in the early years the sport was played by those who are defined as women according to their sex of birth.

[43] *London Rollergirls* changed their name to *London Roller Derby* in 2019. (Wikipedia 2022d)

[44] *Gotham Girls Roller Derby* changed their name to *Gotham Roller Derby* in 2021. (Wikipedia 2022b)

and had started skating. A few years later, she moved to the UK and set up her own league, *London Rollergirls*, with two other American expats in April of 2006. (Bette Noir 2012; Peters 2013)

Those two London-based American expats (Cyclone Bea and Sugrr Cain) had posted a call in an online skating forum looking for women interested in setting up a roller derby league. That first post attracted a group of about fifteen women. Most of them didn't really know what roller derby exactly was, but they were enthusiastic to learn more about it.[45] (WFTDA 2011, Peters 2013)

In those first years, the USA leagues were the only point of reference for *London Rollergirls*. As the *Rollergirls* stated in an interview:

> We were literally alone in a sea of no derby knowledge. YouTube and emails helped us learn the basics, with the occasional guest skater from the States adding skills to the mix. When Bette Noir moved over, we had a guest skater from Detroit visit around the same time. The mix of two experienced derby girls bringing some first-hand knowledge to the raw talent of LRG made things really take off. (London Rollergirls in WFTDA 2011).

The sport in the UK mirrored the North American roller derby. However, the *London Rollergirls* experienced some social and cultural hurdles that the first leagues in the USA had not encountered—or at least not to the same extent. Reflecting on their early days, the *Rollergirls* state: "we had to teach everyone to skate and how to be aggressive! There aren't a lot of women's sports in the UK, and certainly not many full contact sports. All the Americans remarked on how quiet the UK skaters were—can you imagine polite rollergirls?" (London Rollergirls in WFTDA 2011). Although British people are generally known for their politeness, this comment is rather intended to convey the idea that in the early 2000s, sports were still a male-dominated arena and that aggression was not considered a female trait. Both were common gendered misconceptions in the Europe of the early 21st century. This hurdle was closely linked to two other challenges: finding venues and getting audience.

[45] Unfortunately, the reasons behind their interest in roller derby are unknown to the author of this study, as no contacts could be established with the first *London Rollergirls* skaters and this information cannot be inferred from online sources. Moreover, the *London Rollergirls* website was under construction at the time of writing.

Roller derby was competing for venues with other already established and recognised sports for women, such as netball or badminton. Because roller derby in the UK was not known at the time nor supported or acknowledged by other mainstream sports, finding a place to practice (as well as an audience who would follow them) was challenging. However, this did not deter them from pursuing their goal of wanting to "be part of the top competitive landscape" (WFTDA 2011).

While other derby leagues, such as the German *Stuttgart Valley Rollergirls*, had been initially founded with no specific goal in mind, simply for fun and because roller derby gave them the opportunity to do things in a different way (see *4.2.2 Stuttgart Valley Rollergirls (SVRG)*), *London Rollergirls* took roller derby as sport very seriously from the beginning. The desire for competition was very strong among its founding members, who looked up to the North American leagues in terms of derby skills and strategy (WFTDA 2011). This could be explained because one of its founding members (Bette Noir) had been part of the American roller derby landscape, she knew which direction the sport was taking there and may have influenced the direction of the *London Rollergirls*.

In the three years since its revival, roller derby skaters in North America had become more skilled, which led to some changes within the sport. This new level of skill would slowly bring the skaters closer to feeling and being seen as athletes, an important step towards professionalization and the recognition of roller derby as a sport by mainstream sports. At the same time, the Women's Flat Track Derby Association (WFTDA), the first representative body of roller derby to the (sports) world, was established. This was in September of 2006, only five months after *London Rollergirls* was founded—although the background work for the creation of the WFTDA had already been going on earlier. *London Rollergirls* was the first European league to join the WFTDA in 2010 (Wikipedia n.d.).

Marta Popowska, founding member of *Stuttgart Valley Rollergirls*, describes that American and English ambition of the early days as follows:

> I think that, because of their resources, the Americans became faster much better, much more professional. Here [in Europe] most of [the leagues] couldn't keep up. We also had a lot of difficulties finding enough members, that is, skaters [...] I think the people [here] were not as ambitious. [...] in the big cities the potential was greater. For instance, Berlin developed quite a lot at some point. Of course, London, the English-speaking world, the French … although, in my opinion, they have a different sport mentality. They were much more ambitious. I think that in Europe, at least at that time, things didn't progress as quickly in many countries. You could see that at the Championships. Hardly any European teams made it to the WFTDA Championships. London was always there. [...] they were very, very, very focused on success. They were extremely competitive. (Popowska, online interview, 02/06/2022) [46]

In its early years, *London Rollergirls* gave this piece of advice to newly founded leagues or to skaters willing to establish a league: "Think fairly and democratically and *professionally, and think about how you present yourself to the audience of the future*. Make policies that last for five years, not five months" (WFTDA 2011, emphasis added). From this statement, it is obvious that *London Rollergirls* wanted two main things out of roller derby: (1) for it to retain the DIY ethos, and at the same time (2) for it to be acknowledged as sport; hence the need for professionalization, which allegedly implied presenting themselves in a certain way.[47]

Despite their focus on competition and professionalisation, the DIY ethos of the sport, was also very much part of *London Rollergirls*'s spirit (as it is clear from the statement above) and in its early days they helped the UK roller derby landscape to grow by offering advice and support. This lead to the foundation of two new leagues in the same year, the *Birmingham Blitz Dames* and the *London Rockin' Rollers*. Shortly after, in

[46] Original citation in German: "ich glaube, die Amerikaner durch ihre Ressourcen sind schneller, viel besser geworden, viel professioneller. Da konnten die meisten [in Europa] nicht mithalten. Wir hatten auch viele Schwierigkeiten, genug Mitglieder, also Spielerinnen auch immer zu finden […] Die Leute waren ja auch nicht so ambitioniert, finde ich. […] in den großen Städten … da war das Potenzial größer. Also Berlin hat sich irgendwann mal krass entwickelt. Klar, London, englischsprachiger Raum, die Franzosen, wobei, da ist meiner Meinung nach, eine andere Mentalität sportlich. Die waren viel ambitionierter. Und ich finde, in Europa war das zumindest damals so, dass in vielen Ländern das nicht so schnell voran ging. Das hat man ja dann auch bei den Championships gesehen. Die haben ja auch kaum europäische Teams es zu den WFTDA Championships geschafft. Da war London, immer. […] die waren sehr, sehr, sehr auf Erfolg aus. Die waren richtig krass kompetitiv." (Popowska, online interview, 02/06/2022)

[47] This is discussed in more detail in *4.3.5 Overcoming marginalisation through professionalisation?*

2007, *Glasgow Rollergirls*[48], *Middlesbrough Milk Rollers*, *Central City Rollergirls*[49] (also in Birmingham), *Royal Windsor Rollergirls*[50] (in Berkshire), and *Leeds Roller Dolls*[51] were established. In 2008, another five leagues were set up: *Sheffield Steel Rollergirls*[52], *Auld Reekie Roller Girls*[53] (in Edinburgh), *Romsey Town Rollerbillies* (in Cambridge), *Lincolnshire Bombers Rollergirls*[54] and *Rebellion Rollergirls*[55] (in Milton Keynes). (UKRDA n.d.)

In the space of two years, there were thirteen roller derby leagues spread throughout the UK which, considering the lack of historical tradition of roller skating in the UK (as compared to the USA) and the fact that the sport had been totally unknown to the British until then, it is not an insignificant number. Several factors could explain this fast growth. One of those factors, which has been referred to by numerous skaters across different leagues and regions, is the 'freedom' that the sport allowed its players, which is a direct produce of the DIY ethos.

As Ellie Harrison, founder of the National Museum of Roller Derby and former skater of *Glasgow Roller Derby*, explains:

> It's an American sport, but it's really been totally embraced by the different cities in the UK that play it and really embedded, really localised and all the names as well. There's so much freedom in it. Yes, the rules are complicated, but you can call yourself whatever you like. (Harrison, online interview, 18/05/2022)

[48] *Glasgow Rollergirls* changed their name to *Glasgow Roller Derby* in 2012. (Wikipedia 2022a)

[49] *Central City Rollergirls* changed their name to *Central City Roller Derby*. The date of this change is unknown to the author.

[50] *Royal Windsor Rollergirls* changed their name to *Royal Windsor Roller Derby* in 2018. (Wikipedia 2021c)

[51] "In December 2016, *Leeds Roller Dolls* and *Hot Wheel Roller Derby* merged as one league, continuing under the name *Leeds Roller Derby*". (Wikipedia 2022c)

[52] *Sheffield Steel Rollergirls* changed their name to *Sheffield Steel Roller Derby* in 2019 "as a move to reflect the inclusive nature of the league and the sport as a whole". (Wikipedia 2022e)

[53] *Auld Reekie Roller Girls* changed their name to *Auld Reekie Roller Derby* in 2018 "to better acknowledge the diversity of its membership". (Wikipedia 2021a)

[54] *Lincolnshire Bombers Rollergirls* changed their name to *Lincolnshire Bombers Roller Derby*. The date of this change is unknown to the author.

[55] *Rebellion Rollergirls* changed their name to *Rebellion Roller Derby*. The date of this change is unknown to the author.

Harrison refers to the (league and derby) names as an example of the ways in which this freedom is visible and in which the sport can be 'customised' by every league and every player. By pointing to this fact, she lets it be understood that this is not the case in other (mainstream) sports, where the names of the clubs are not chosen democratically nor are players encouraged to express their individuality through a chosen name that they will use on the playing field. This freedom was, especially at the beginning, also seen in the clothing of the skaters, in the bout posters, in the decision-making processes, etc. Maybe this freedom is part of what British (and other) women look(ed) for in sport and that is why roller derby took off so quickly: roller derby was offering women what they couldn't find in other sports. Indeed, had it been popular in the 1990s, roller derby could have perfectly been an initiative funded by the Sports Council ("listen to what women want"), as it follows very similar principles to other initiatives at the time such as that of the Newham Women's Football Club.

The other main reason why roller derby may have become so popular in the UK is because of its sense of individuality, common in British and American societies. Kerry Irving, curator at the National Museum of Roller Derby, explains:

> Roller derby itself is quite an individualistic sport. Because of all those boutfits and the political issues and social issues that you can attach yourselves to, with either badges that you wear, artwork that you put on, stickers that you have and all that kind of stuff, it's all very individualistic. And I feel like the UK is a very individualistic society. It's not really a community-driven society; the same as the US. […] perhaps that's why it caught on here a lot more. I think that Roller Derby as a sport celebrates individuality, but in a I kind of team-family cohesive way. And when I say individualistic, I don't mean that there's no sort of team unity or anything like that. It's just that I feel that people within a team can be so different and have a link to different things and identify as different things that it's a lot more about celebrating individuals in a kind of cohesive group community team way. It's good at blending those two kinds of things, being individuals and being a team. (Irving, online interview, 17/05/2022)

This statement again overlaps with the findings of the Sports Council (women are a diverse group and it's important to listen to what they want). Roller derby gives everyone involved the space to be who they are, to be their own individual selves, but at the same time to be part of a group. And so, the freedom that the sport offered the

women to be themselves and to take their own decisions may have been one of the main reasons why roller derby succeeded in the UK (but probably also in other countries).

The next section briefly describes how roller derby started becoming institutionalised and what impact did that have on the sport.

4.1.3 The United Kingdom Roller Derby Association (UKRDA)

By word of mouth and social media, UK leagues and skaters interested in setting up new leagues started hearing about and supporting each other. Over the first few years, the communication between leagues took place through an informal Yahoo group. This changed in 2008, when they decided to formalise their collaboration by creating the United Kingdom Roller Derby Association (UKRDA). (UKRDA n.d.)

The UKRDA is made up of skaters of the different UK roller derby leagues and "exists to lobby for and promote the sport of roller derby in the UK" (UKRDA n.d.). The two main goals of the association are (1) to support and encourage its members "to develop and grow individually into strong, *athletic* leagues" (UKRDA n.d., emphasis added) and (2) to help drive the *recognition* of the sport.

The terms *athleticism* and *recognition* have become increasingly important as roller derby continues to grow and expand and they are closely connected[56]. As proof of what this statement means in practice and how these goals are achieved, the UKRDA proudly states on its website that they "are recognised by the British Roller Sports Federation as the National Association for roller derby in the UK" (UKRDA n.d.) and that they "have established formal links with British Roller Skating Foundation (BRSF)" (UKRDA n.d.), besides their obvious links with the Women's Flat Track Derby Association (WFTDA). Moreover, the association "is currently developing a UK rankings system" (UKRDA n.d.).

[56] This topic is discussed in more detail in *4.3.5 Overcoming marginalisation through professionalisation?* As a brief introduction, 'recognition' is often understood as being taken seriously or being acknowledged by the mainstream sports world, which in turn is related, among others, to increased levels of athleticism. (Breeze 2014)

Just as the creation of the WFTDA in 2006 had been one in a series of important steps towards the professionalisation of roller derby—being its main goal to lobby for the recognition of the sport—so was the creation of the UKRDA an attempt to do the same at the national level.

Another important step in lobbying for the recognition of the sport was the creation of the National Museum of Roller Derby. The next section explains how this idea came up and what this museum represents for the sport.

4.1.4 The National Museum of Roller Derby (NMRD)

In 2012, there were around 90 leagues all over the UK (UKRDA n.d.). As this number was growing, Ellie Harrison, who besides being a skater with Glasgow Rollergirls at the time is also an artist and activist, decided to start a new project with the Glasgow Women's Library (GWL) with the aim to raise awareness and preserve the memory of a new sport that was rapidly expanding throughout the country (and all over Europe). (Harrison 2012).

Her project, launched in June 2012, was the creation of the first National Museum of Roller Derby (NMRD) in the UK (and to the author's knowledge also in Europe). The fact that this initiative was (and continues to be) hosted at a women's library is not a coincidence. On the one hand, this setting was chosen because Harrison understood roller derby as a political feminist enterprise advancing the rights of women* and therefore it belonged there, where the role of women* in society was valued. On the other hand, because roller derby was so new and largely marginalised by mainstream sports, it had no space in other sports collections or museums. Thus, in line with the DIY ethos of roller derby, Harrison decided to create that space.

Harrison saw several parallelisms—including the same energy, attitude and grassroots organisational structure—between the Women's Flat Track Roller Derby and the Women's Liberation Movement of the 1970s, which emerged out of the radical branch of second wave feminism and "without which, young women today would still not have equal access to education, opportunity, equal pay or free access to contraception" (Harrison 2012).

When establishing the NMRD, she aimed to draw attention to the link between and the importance of these two political movements which, in different ways and in different periods of history, were advancing women's rights (Harrison 2012). Aware of the still precarious situation of women in (and beyond) sport in 2012, Harrison stated:

> At a time when the UK's women are being disproportionately affected by so-called 'austerity measures', which may eventually risk reversing the important gains made in the 1970s, it is now, more than ever, vital that we remind ourselves of our successes in the past and work out how we can best work together in the present. (Harrison n.d., emphasis in original)

Thus, the creation of the NMRD itself was a political act aimed at showing, especially to new generations, that women can make things happen by believing in them and by working together (Harrison 2012).

As mentioned above, although by 2012 thousands of skaters had already joined roller derby across several continents, it was still marginalised as a sport and had therefore no space with other mainstream sports. As Kerry Irving explains:

> […] other sports do have collections. They're usually held either in general museums for history of particular activities and hobbies and sports. For example, football and rugby stadiums will have their own collections. There's not really a place for that or for things to be stored for roller derby, because they've not really got a home. They've not really got that kind of base where things like that could be stored or displayed themselves. (Irving, online interview, 17/05/2022)

Rather than waiting for other sports or institutions to open a space for roller derby, Harrison put the DIY ethos of the sport into practice once more by creating that space herself. Today, the NMRD is run 'by the skaters for the skaters', which is not only part of the philosophy of the sport, but also in tune with GWL's ethos of collective ownership (Lead Jammer Magazine 2012). Accommodating the NMRD within other sport collections or museums would have made little sense, as this key characteristic of the sport would have been lost.

Since 2012, the NMRD collection has been growing, with donations accepted from throughout the UK (although leagues outside the UK have also sent materials). There's

a wide range of material in the collection[57], from bout programmes, posters, postcards, stickers and other ephemera to badges, boutfits, vests and T-shirts, protective gear and miscellaneous merchandise. These objects represent roller derby teams and leagues across the UK as well as some international connections.

To sum up this chapter, the lobby actions of the Women's Sports Foundation (WSF) in the late 1990s and early 2000s had triggered a gender mainstreaming approach in sport which was led by the Sports Council and supported with more or less willingness by sport institutions throughout the UK. While studies had shown that women are a diverse group who wants to be listened to in sport matters, commitments in terms of sport leadership had been detrimental to the role of women in sport, which continued to be a male dominated affair.

Roller derby arrived in this time of change as a potential answer to the needs of women* that mainstream sports wouldn't cover. The freedom offered by the DIY ethos of the sport as well as the ability of the players to be their own individual selves while still being part of a team could explain the rapid growth of the sport in the UK. The need for cohesion and mutual support among UK leagues led to the creation of the United Kingdom Roller Derby Association (UKRDA) in 2008. This institution would represent the interests of the sport in the UK and lobby for its recognition. A few years later, in 2012, the National Museum of Roller Derby (NMRD) would be created to highlight the achievements of this new sport, which resembled those of the Women's Liberation Movement of the 1970s. By establishing institutions such as the UKRDA and the NMRD, its founders created a presence for roller derby in the mainstream sport landscape forcing mainstream sports to acknowledge its existence.

[57] The collection is partially digitised and can be viewed online here: https://ehive.com/objects?accountId=8664&query=NMRD&facet=account_name_facet%3AGlasgow+Women%27s+Library (GLW)

4.2 Roller derby in Germany (2006-2013)

As already mentioned earlier, the perception of women in sport had changed by the early 21st century. The following section focuses on women's sport developments in Germany as compared to the United Kingdom before moving on to Austria in *4.3 Roller derby in Austria (2011-today)*, which is the focus of this study.

4.2.1 The role of women in sport in late 20th – early 21st century in Germany

Contrary to the UK, German sport organisations had been sexually integrated since the early 20th century. Women's sections of men's gymnastics and some sports clubs exclusively for women were created at the time. Nonetheless, there had been limits to the physical activities that women could participate in at the time according to health, beauty and moral concerns and women's sections or sport clubs usually remained under men's supervision. (Hartmann-Tews and Luetkens 2003)

In the years previous and during the Second World War (WWII) (from 1939-1945), physical education in Germany had been used to reinforce the gendered ideals of the 19th century. PE became a tool to reproduce the ideology of physical superiority promoted by the National Socialist German Workers' Party. Men were being prepared for their "'predetermined biological role' as fighters […] which led to an extreme cult of masculinity" (Hartmann-Tews and Luetkens 2003: 54) and women for their role as mothers, which allowed them to practice only certain "so-called healthy and 'appropriate' exercises" (Hartmann-Tews and Luetkens 2003: 54, emphasis in original).

In 1945, the German Sports Confederation (Deutscher Sportbund, DSB) was established. One of its main goals was to move away from the exclusive sport policy that had reigned in the previous years towards an inclusive policy. By adopting a Sport for All approach, it aimed to attract those who had previously not taken part in sport (mostly, adults, women and senior citizens) to become physically active. As part of this 'rebranding' of sport, the DSB adopted an explicit approach to gender equality by establishing the Women's Sport department in 1970. "In addition, a resolution was passed that all member federations should establish committees of women's sport and foster the inclusion of women in leadership positions" (Hartmann-Tews and Luetkens 2003: 65). In 1990 the Women's Sport department had been renamed Women in Sport,

mainly to avoid reproducing gender stereotypes as to what were considered physical activities for boys/men and for girls/women. Moreover, in 1995 a resolution was passed that the number of women in committees should be proportional to the female membership numbers (Hartmann-Tews and Luetkens 2003)

By the very early 2000s, these initiatives together with "the new body and youth ideals prevalent in the middle-class lifestyles of modern German society" (Hartmann-Tews and Luetkens 2003: 58) had led to an increase in the number of girls and women who participated in sports (outside of the education system) and in the variety and number of sports they were actively involved in all over the country (Hartmann-Tews and Luetkens 2003). Survey data from the early 2000s confirmed that the proportion of girls and women who participated regularly in sport had grown faster than that of boys over the past 50 years (Breuer and Rittner 2002). For instance, the female membership in non-governmental sport organisations, one of the three main central sectors within the sport system[58], had been increasing uninterruptedly since 1950, going from 10% to 39,1% in 2001 (DSB 2001).

Despite the increase in female participation in sport, the decision-making as well as the coaching positions in sports remained largely male-dominated. In addition to the under-representation of women in leadership positions (on average, 20%), when they were allowed in such positions it was to lead female teams (100%) or youth teams (40%) only. They were rarely in such positions at the professional and competitive level and they were usually not trusted with finance or funding, for instance. (Hartmann-Tews and Crombink 2001, Hartmann-Tews and Luetkens 2003)

In spite of the female increase in non-governmental sport organisations, in a population survey carried out in 2001 slightly more than half of the regularly active sportswomen (about 54%) stated that they practiced sport in a non-organised form, that is, outside of any kind of institution (Breuer and Rittner 2002). This may be one of the reasons why roller derby had such a warm welcome in Stuttgart when it first arrived in 2006. As Marta Popowska (founder and former skater of Stuttgart Valley Roller Derby) explains,

[58] The three main central sectors within the sport system in German are: the public (lead by the Ministry of Interior and other Ministries), the private (lead by various national associations) and the voluntary (lead at the time by the German Sports Confederation (Deutscher Sportbund, DSB)). (Hartmann-Tews and Luetkens 2003)

one of the main reasons why she and other skaters were attracted to roller derby in its early days was its non-formal character: "Of course, none of us were interested in classic club structures, which is why, I think, other women were primarily attracted to it"[59] (Popowska, online interview, 02/06/2022). Moreover, roller derby, as an all-female* sport would offer them the possibility to become their own leaders without having to fight for it (as it had happened until then and continues to happen in most mainstream sports).

4.2.2 Stuttgart Valley Rollergirls (SVRG)[60]

The story of *Stuttgart Valley Rollergirls* begins in a very similar way to that of *London Rollergirls*. Despite not knowing about each other, they were founded almost simultaneously, both in April 2006. However, at least in their first years, they seem to have taken a very different approach to roller derby.

Former skater and founder of *Stuttgart Valley Rollergirls*, Marta Popowska, later known by the derby name Polly Purgatory, explains that she first became interested in roller derby after seeing one of the posters that hung in different rock'n'roll and punk rock bars and pubs around Stuttgart. These posters belonged to an American expat who had come up with the idea of setting up a roller derby league in the city and was calling other interested women to a get together. Curious about the idea, Popowska and a few friends decided to join the meeting. About ten women took part in that first meeting, none of them knowing much about roller derby or how to roller skate—this would become the norm in those early days and it still quite common that women* who join roller derby today don't know much about one or the other.

Popowska describes those first women as being part of the 'alternative scene' and the sport itself as being more 'renegade' than the WFTDA would be:

> […] There were maybe ten women. All a bit from the alternative scene, I would say. At that time, [roller derby] was very much influenced by this punk rock, rock'n'roll thought, because there was no WFTDA, so there

[59] Original German citation: "Wir hatten natürlich alle kein Interesse an klassischen Vereinsstrukturen, deswegen hat es, glaube ich, einfach andere Frauen in erster Linie da hingezogen." (Popowska, online interview, 02/06/2022).

[60] Stuttgart Valley Rollergirls changed its name to Stuttgart Valley Roller Derby around 2018. The exact of that change is unknown to the author.

> were no real rules, it was a bit more renegade than the WFTDA. (Popowska, online interview, 02/06/2022) [61]

This rock'n'roll thought and the 'wilderness' that came with it, was also reflected in the way they dressed and in what they made out of roller derby:

> We wore fishnet stockings and miniskirts, and everything was a bit wilder than normal. It was actually the antithesis of normal organised sport and there was more and more partying and every bout was an event. We tried to have bands play and to introduce little games [intended to entertain the audience] and to have an after-show party afterwards. And that, I think, was a kind of community for many. (Popowska, online interview, 02/06/2022) [62]

In its early days, *Stuttgart Valley Rollergirls* seem to have taken roller derby more as fun than as a real sport. Contrary, to the *London Rollergirls*, they did not see themselves as athletes:

> In 2007, we organised the first European bout in the disco Zapata[63]. About 500 people came and they all thought we were crazy. Nobody really took us seriously. But we didn't take ourselves too seriously either, because we were not sportswomen. (Popowska, online interview, 02/06/2022) [64]

This was not the only difference between *London Rollergirls* and *Stuttgart Valley Rollergirls;* there are three other main factors that set them apart. First, whereas *London Rollergirls* received the support of a relatively experienced skater who had played flat track roller derby in the USA and knew first-hand what was going on there, that initial

[61] Original citation in German: „[…] da waren vielleicht so zehn Frauen. Alle so ein bisschen aus der Alternativszene, würde ich sagen. Damals war das sehr stark von diesem Punkrock, Rock'n'Roll Gedanken getragen, weil es gab in dem Sinne noch keine WFTDA, also es gab keine richtigen Regeln, es war ein bisschen mehr *renegade* als die WFTDA." (Popowska, online interview, 02/06/2022)

[62] Original citation in German: „Wir haben ja dann noch Netzstrümpfe getragen und Miniröcke und es war alles ein bisschen wilder als normal. Es war eigentlich ein Gegenpol zum normalen Vereinssport und es gab dann immer mehr Party und jeder Bout war ja ein Event. Wir haben noch versucht, immer noch Bands spielen zu lassen und irgendwelche Spielchen zu machen und danach noch eine After Show Party zu machen. Und das war so eine Gemeinschaft, glaube ich, für viele." (Popowska, online interview, 02/06/2022)

[63] A video of that first bout where *Stuttgart Valley Rollergirlz* (SVRG) played against *London Rockin' Rollers* (LRR) can be found here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=giMJ2vnD0XQ. (SVRollergirlz 2007)

[64] Original citation in German: „In 2007 haben wir in die Disco Zapata das erste Europäische bout veranstaltet: „zu dem 500 Leute kamen dann und die dachten alle wir spinnen. Also wirklich ernst genommen hat uns dann niemand. Aber wir haben uns auch nicht so ernst genommen, weil wir wollten ja nicht. Wir waren ja keine Sportlerinnen" (Popowska, online interview, 02/06/2022)

group of women in Stuttgart had been introduced to roller derby through the American reality TV show *Rollergirls* launched in 2006, which followed the lives of the Texas Roller Derby skaters (Popowska 2022). Texas Roller Derby played the banked track version of the sport, which, as mentioned above, "emphasizes entertainment and sensationalism" (Toews 2012: 19).

Although the show followed the lives of real skaters and showed real (as opposed to staged) roller derby, the series may have purposefully focused on the fun, extravagant and dramatic side of roller derby in order to attract and keep the audience engaged (just as the Seltzer family had done in the 1930s). Therefore, that first impression that the Stuttgart skaters had gotten from roller derby was based on reality, but the roller derby version that they would end up playing (flat track) had already slowly started to take another turn in the USA towards a more serious or professionalised sport. Although as Popowska (2022) explains, it took a while for the sport to become professional. However, this does not mean that the *London Rollergirls* did not have fun playing the sport, nor that they did not integrate some of these fun aspects in their game.

Second, just as the *London Rollergirls*, Stuttgart also had its challenges finding venues. However, in Germany the reasons were different:

> We didn't get any sports halls because roller-skating is not supported here. The first few years were really difficult, especially since we weren't an organisation at the beginning. That's quite difficult in Germany. You can't get to a sports hall [if you are not an organisation]. So, in the beginning we met outside to learn in car parks, and later in a disco that made its room available to us. (Popowska, online interview, 02/06/2022) [65]

This quote reflects marginalisation from the German sport system in two ways. Firstly, (roller)skating sports are not considered worth funding potentially because they are linked to alternative or even disruptive sport styles (e.g. skateboarding). Secondly, which is directly related to the first statement, because (roller)skating sports tend to be understood as alternative lifestyle movements by those who practice them, they are

[65] Original citation in German: „wir hatten keine Sporthallen bekommen, weil Rollschuhsport hier nicht gefördert wird. Es waren die ersten Jahre, was wirklich sehr schwer [war] und zumal wir am Anfang ja auch kein Verein waren. Das ist in Deutschland ziemlich schwer. Da kommst du nicht an Halle. Also haben wir uns am Anfang draußen getroffen, um zu lernen in, in Parkhäusern, in einer Disco, die uns ihren Raum zur Verfügung gestellt hat." (Popowska, online interview, 02/06/2022)

usually not organised. From the moment they become organised sports, they lose part of their alternative or rather counterhegemonic essence. Popowska expresses this idea in the following statement:

> It was not perceived as a real sport, because it wasn't at the beginning. We didn't really want it to be perceived as such, because it was a counter-movement to classic organised sports or to these classic sports. (Popowska, online interview, 02/06/2022) [66]

By having their first bout in a disco, a space usually associated to nightlife and a different kind of fun to that sport offers, the idea of roller derby being taken seriously as a sport was (intentionally or unintentionally) gone. For everyone knows that (mainstream) sports have a designated space (usually a pitch) where they are played. These alternative spaces (i.e. disco) for the practice of roller derby may have further pushed it to a marginalised status by mainstream sports and at the same time prevented the skaters from being perceived as athletes. Nonetheless, despite having grown its presence all over Europe in the past 16 years, roller derby still struggles to be granted that space. Today most leagues all over Europe share the community sport halls with other mainstream sports. However, the roller derby track lines often have to be manually sticked to the floor before every practice or bout.

Third, identifying themselves as a countermovement probably led to some of the biggest hurdles (as seen above), but also shaped their character as a league, a character that differed from the beginning from that of the *London Rollergirls*. The Londoners had always been very sport-oriented, relegating the political to the background as this statement by Bette Noir shows:

> I don't think [roller derby] started to make a statement about feminism—maybe it is the ultimate embodiment because it's not trying. We'd be loath to be a poster child of feminism, because the sport means different things to so many different people, but at the same time we are about empowering women, so I don't think there is anything wrong with claiming that badge and saying "Hell, yeah, we're feminists". (Peters 2013: 31)

[66] Original citation in German: „Es wurde nicht als echter Sport wahrgenommen, weil es war es am Anfang auch nicht. Also wir wollten es ja auch nicht wirklich so wahrgenommen wissen, weil es war ja eben so eine Gegenbewegung zu klassischen Vereinssport oder diesen klassischen Sportarten." (Popowska, online interview, 02/06/2022)

Stuttgart Valley Rollergirls were quite the opposite. In their initial years, the focus was much more on the political (although Popowska did not explicitly equate the countermovement to a feminist movement in her interview) than about the sport as argued above. The German league was much more focused on creating this space where like-minded women would come together to have fun in their own terms (not constrained by rules on how to play, what to wear, etc.). However, this again does not mean that the English league did not create a fun and welcoming space for its players while also focusing on sport performance. This is, ultimately, what third-wave feminism is all about: doing it without having to state it. In any case, over time the German league would also lean more towards sport performance (Popowska 2022). When asked why they joined the WFTDA in 2013, Popowska replied:

> […] We didn't have a goal. At some point, you needed something and that was the only organisation or the only association. And then of course there was a ranking, you had some kind of guidance and then you had to have so and so many [points] and then you were accepted. [...] It somehow had a goal in addition to all the friendly matches. Because the friendly matches were just for fun, but had otherwise no sporting significance. (Popowska, online interview, 02/06/2022) [67]

Despite the differences between leagues, both followed the original American DIY ethos and organisational structure with committees run by the skaters and, just as *London Rollergirls* had done, *Stuttgart Valley Rollergirls* also assisted other German-speaking leagues in their early days, particularly *Bear City Roller Derby* (in Berlin), and the first league in Switzerland, the *Zurich City RollergirlZ*.[68]

4.2.3 Roller Derby Deutschland (RRD), the Bundesliga

Roller derby in Germany developed at a much slower pace than in the UK. A year after *Stuttgart Valley Rollergirls* was founded only one more league, *Barokcity Rollerderby*

[67] Original citation in German: „Man hatte kein Ziel. Irgendwann war es so, du hast irgendwas gebraucht und das war die einzige Organisation oder der einzige Verbund. Und dann klar da gibt es ein Ranking, da kannst du dich an irgendwas orientieren und dann musste man so und so viele [Punkte haben] und dann wurde man aufgenommen. […] Das hatte irgendwie ein Ziel noch zu diesen ganzen Freundschaftsspielen, die man sonst hatte. Dadurch, dass die Freundschaftsspiele ja auch nur Spaß waren, also sportlich ansonsten keine Bedeutung hatten." (Popowska, online interview, 02/06/2022)

[68] *Zurich City RollergirlZ* changed its name to *Zürich City Roller Derby* in 2018. (ZCRD n.d.)

(in Ludwigsburg), had been established in the country. *Bear City Roller Derby* (BCRD) and *Meatgrinders* (in Bremen) would follow in 2008, and then *Ruhrpott Roller Girls* (Essen) and *Graveyard Queens* (Cologne) in 2009, and *Munich Rolling Rebels* and *Bembel Town Roller Derby* (in Frankfurt) in 2011. Others would follow in the subsequent years. (Wikipedia 2021a-c)

The slow evolution of the sport may be in part related to the need for sport organisations to be legally registered in order to have access to sport facilities, as explained by Popowska (2022). These legal procedures may have slowed down the appearance of new leagues and are one of the main reasons why many leagues started training in car parks as mentioned above.

Despite the initial challenges, by 2013 members of the existing leagues in the country had decided to form Roller Derby Deutschland (RDD), also known among the skaters as the Bundesliga (or the roller derby federal league). Similar to the UKRDA, the RDD is made up of skaters of the different German leagues and aims to represent the interests of roller derby community within the German Roller Sports and Inline Association (DRIV, Deutscher Rollsport und Inline-Verband e.V.).

The RDD is responsible, among others, for the organisation of the German roller derby championships (which from 2015 onwards have no longer been played following the tournament system, but the national league system), the supervision and nomination of the national teams, the training and certification of coaches and referees, and the creation of the Roller Derby sport regulations. (RDD n.d.)

That initial countermovement (the lack of interest in classic sport organisations) started by *Stuttgart Valley Rollergirls* had been very early shaken by the legal requirements of the German sport system, but the creation of the RDD was another step further away from that countermovement and this time it came from within the roller derby community. Only ten years after its resurgence, roller derby started to resemble other sports. The pressures exerted by the mainstream sports system and the increasing need among skaters to be taken seriously as athletes led to some—to a certain extent inevitable—compromises. The purest forms of norm breaking (e.g. non-association, no typical sports uniforms, etc.) were being slowly swapped for recognition in the sport

arena and that recognition came at the price of imitating other sport models (for instance, through the implementation of national leagues). Of course, the national league system makes sense regionally, especially for bigger regions/countries such as the UK or Germany, which will be able to improve their level of skill at national level, but this form of organisation has an impact on smaller countries (which end up losing opportunities to improve) and once more gives a hint of how the sport priorities are shifting towards professionalisation and competitiveness. Nonetheless, the sport still retains a very important part of its initial spirit and over time it has also evolved to expand and rework on its core values (inclusiveness, non-racism, etc.) This is explained in more detailed in sections *4.3.2 From women to women** to *4.3.4 DIY and the power of self-determination*.

Summarising *4.2 Roller derby in Germany,* by the mid-20th century, Germany had adopted a Sport for All approach in an attempt to move away from the exclusionary sport policies of the Nacionalist regime. Women in sport was one of the foci of this new approach. Consequently, a Women in Sport department as well as several federal committees of women's sport were established all over the country, and resolutions were passed to promote the participation of women in sport. All these measures did have an impact on female sport membership, which experienced close to a 30% increase in fifty years. However, as it had happened in the UK, women in leadership positions continued to be underrepresented.

A population survey carried out in 2001 had found out that about 54% of the German women preferred to practice sport in a non-organised form, that is, outside of any kind of institution. This could be an indicator that women felt misrepresented in those structures. As a women-led initiative, roller derby offered them an alternative to the classical organisation structures, where they could be their own leaders in every step of the way without having to give up on the benefits of practicing sport with others.

The roller derby fever spread throughout Germany (albeit at a slower pace than in the UK) through the mid and late 2000s culminating in the creation of the RDD in 2013, which opened up a space for the sport within the mainstream sports world (just as the

UKRDA had done). However, the creation of these institutions came at the expense of some of the most radical aspects of roller derby.

The next subchapter explains how the sport has evolved in Austria, a country that culturally presents more similarities with Germany than the UK, and analyses which are the main aspects of the sport and how are these reproduced, maintained or lost within the Austrian leagues.

4.3 Roller derby in Austria (2011 – today)

Like the UK and Germany, Austria entered the second decade of the 21st century with an increased number of physically active women, but with a disproportionately low number of women* in leadership positions in sport organisations. This mismatch may have been one of the reasons why by 2007 women had admitted to feeling more comfortable organising their own sport practice with a partner, friend or acquaintance or on their own rather than joining a team in a sports club or organisation (Bässler 2007).

These section aims to explain how roller derby fits into that scenario, how the sport in Austria today resembles or differs from the movement that first started in the USA and what do those changes in the sport mean for its counterhegemonic potential. Austria makes an interesting case study, because the sport first arrived in the country in 2011—almost ten years after the USA's revival, when the sport was at a turning point—and some of its teams were only set up recently (the latest, *SBG KNOCKouts* in 2018) which means the sport is quite new in the country.

4.3.1 The role of women in sport in late 20th – early 21st century in Austria

The role of women in sport in Austria followed a similar path to that in Germany. In the 1970s the number of women in sport had raised as compared to previous years and by the late 1980s the first initiatives aimed at further increasing women's sport participation had emerged. One such initiative was the Austrian Women's Run (Österreichischer Frauenlauf), a run exclusively for girls and women of any age and sporting level, which took place for the first time in 1988 and continues to engage

thousands of women every year (Österreichischer Frauenlauf n.d.). Despite these efforts, in a survey carried out by Austrian sociologist and sport scientist Ronald Bässler in 1989 only 25% of women stated that they practiced sport 'often' or 'very often' as compared to 38% of men (Bässler 1989: 38).

Although the number of physically active women was on the rise (Eder 1994), some sports, particularly those that had traditionally been male-dominated, were only very slowly opening to female participation. For instance, in the early 1990s the Austrian football federation had around 270.000 members, but only 2000 to 3000 of them were women. This represents 1% of the total membership. Moreover, just as it had happened in Germany and the UK, the increase of female membership in sport organisations did not translate into an increase of females in leadership positions. (Eder 1994; Hollweger 2001)

In fact, the subject 'women in sport' did not become a focus of interest for the Austrian Federal Sports Organisation (Österreichischer Bundes-Sportorganisation, BSO), the equivalent of the DSB, until the start of the 20th century—even though the organisation had been founded about 30 years before, in 1969 (Adam 2011). However, around 2005 Austria had given in to the international pressures to pursue gender equality in sport. Between 2004 and 2006, Austria held the presidency of the working group European Women and Sport (EWS), a network that aimed to promote equality in terms of sport participation and management at national level and to tailor the sport offer to suit the interests of girls and women. (Bässler 2007; Euractiv 2012)

In 2007, a national analysis of girls and women in sport revealed that most Austrian women preferred to practice sport with their partners, friends or acquaintances (76%) or on their own (59%). Only 14% of the women surveyed at the time were part of a sport club (Bässler 2007). This illustrated a sharp decline in sport club membership and a change towards new forms of organisation that favoured individuality. Bässler (2007) interpreted these results as a clear indicator of Austrian women's need to experience individuality. Whether this need for individuality was a 'women's thing' or a social trait of the broader Austrian (and other European countries' population as Kerry Irving suggested in *4.1 Roller Derby in the United Kingdom*) remains unclear, but might

support Irving's assumption on why roller derby is becoming popular in some European countries.

At the same time, besides developing a comprehensive concept to introduce gender mainstreaming in Austrian sport funding (a task that was still going on in 2018), the BSO tried to raise awareness and encourage the participation of girls and women in sport by recognising the efforts of existing sport organisations. For instance, in 2011 three sport organisations received the 'most girl- and women-friendly [organisation] award' (Adam 2011: 62). The criteria for this award took into consideration the number and percentage of female members in the organisation, of women in leadership positions and in other functions on the organisations' board of directors, of (licensed) female trainers and coaches as well as the measures in place to motivate and attract girls and women in the club or the existence of women-friendly sport facilities, dressing rooms, wet rooms. (Sport Austria n.d.)

Roller derby arrived in Austria in this fissured context where, on the one side, women had started favouring solo sport practice and, on the other, organisations were trying to increase, retain or regain female membership. Roller derby may have offered an alternative that combined both trends.

As mentioned above, the sport took off later in Austria than in other European countries. There are currently (2022) five active leagues. The first league was *Vienna Roller Derby*—at the time, *Vienna Rollergils*—, founded in 2011. It took four years for the next league, *Steelcity Rollers*, to be set up in Linz. They were followed by *Fearless Bruisers* (in Innsbruck) and *Dust City Rollers* (in Graz) in 2016. The last active league to be established was *SBG KNOCKouts* (in Salzburg). In 2019, *Flat Lake Roller Derby* (in Eisenstadt) was set up. However, the league does not seem to be currently active.

Through the interviews carried out with the five leagues, the following sections aim to answer the research questions. The first question (*Which aspects of roller derby have remained in time and space?*) will be answered comparing the sport then (since its emergence in the USA in the early 2000s) and now (roller derby in Austria today). Because this question is closely linked to the second and third questions (*How are these aspects reproduced, maintained or 'lost' in the Austrian leagues?*) and *What do*

changes in the sport mean for its counterhegemonic potential?) each of the following sections answers two or all three of these questions.

4.3.2 From women to women: self-reflection and the politics of roller derby*

As described in *3.1.2 Roller derby in the 20th century,* Leo Seltzer had opened the sport to ordinary women—regardless of class, body shape and age—and treated them as equal on the track, which in the 1930-40s, was a novelty and quite an unpopular thing to do. It is important to notice that Seltzer came up with the idea of bringing women to the game after analysing what was missing from mainstream sports. This act of reflection would become an essential aspect of the new version of roller derby, a trigger that keeps the sport in constant development.

In the 2000s, roller derby had turned into an all-women's space for a similar reason as to why Seltzer had invited them to the game: there were few sports where the female version was the default, and when it was, it was often influenced by gendered stereotypes about what the athletic female body was capable of and how should it look like (i.e. slim). The focus on women as creators, leaders and only players of the sport influenced the decision of all of the skaters interviewed in this study to join roller derby. Reckless Spice comments how important this aspect was for her:

> That was definitely important to me when I first joined. I thought it was so cool that roller derby was 'roller derby' and not 'women's roller derby'. That was the starting point. It was incredibly appealing to me. I have an image in my head and it's not about men first, like when you say women's football. That was incredibly important to me. I think that was somehow a central aspect for me. (Reckless Spice, online interview, 30/06/2022, Annex 4.5) [69]

Roller derby skaters were proud of being an all-female sport and used any possible chance to make it known, for instance, in their league names. Just as *London Rollergirls* and *Stuttgart Valley Rollergirls* had done, the first Austrian team also opted for including the word 'girls' in their league's name. Thus, the *Vienna Rollergirls* (founded

[69] Original citation in German: „Das war auf jeden Fall ganz am Anfang wichtig für mich. Ich habe so cool gefunden, dass das Roller Derby, Roller Derby ist und nicht Frauen Roller Derby. Dass das der Ausgangspunkt ist. Das hat mir unglaublich getaugt. Da habe ich ein Bild im Kopf und da sind nicht zuerst die Männer, wie z.B., wenn man Frauenfußball sagt. Das war mir unglaublich wichtig. Und ich glaube, das war für mich irgendwie zentral." (Reckless Spice, online interview, 30/06/2022, Annex 4.5)

in 2011) maintained that punk influence of the 'girl' as a symbol of empowerment. The league would change its name to *Vienna Roller Derby* shortly after[70], but the feminist ideals of the strong female would remain in their logo and self-representation. This is also the case by *Steelcity Rollers* and *Fearless Bruisers* (the next two leagues to be founded in 2015 and 2016, respectively).

For the creation of their logo, the Viennese league drew inspiration from a sportswoman who already fought against gendered stereotypes in the late 19th century. Her name was Laverie 'Charmion' Cooper and she was an American trapeze and striptease artist. Not only was she one of the first women at the time doing physical activity, but she also opposed the strict clothing trends imposed by late Victorian fashion through her stripteases[71]. Indeed, "the striptease was a satire of the layers of clothes on women's bodies, and the removal of clothing was thus integral to the storyline of the stage show itself since it made it possible for the heroine to do the great acrobatic feats taking place later in the show" (Voll 2021).

The logo choice couldn't have been more in accordance with the ideas of the first roller derby skaters in the early 2000s, who also used sexy clothing to reclaim body autonomy and draw attention to their strength and skills as physically active women. More recently, Vienna's logo has been updated to include the rainbow flag (representing the LGBTQIA+ community). For a comparison, see *Fig. 17-19* below.

[70] The date of this change could not be identified by the author.

[71] Charmion's was left in what at the time was considered underwear, which consisted of several layers of clothing. (Voll 2021).

Fig. 17. Laverie 'Charmion' Cooper (photographed by Frederick Whitman Glasier in 1904, Wikimedia Commons)

Fig. 18. Earliest VRD logo (2011), inspired by Charmiron's picture on the left. (VRD n.d.)

Fig. 19. Most recent VRD logo, including rainbow in the background. (VRD n.d.)

Steelcity Rollers also aimed to convey the message that women are strong, but they were inspired by a male strong figure for lack of such sort of female representation (see *Fig. 20* and *Fig. 21* below). During the interview, Dianamite explained:

> The idea of the logo was inspired by Batman. It has nothing to do with us, but the position was such a strong position for us and, of course, we didn't want a male character, we wanted to see a woman* skater. (Dianamite, personal interview, 11/06/2022, Annex 4.3) [72]

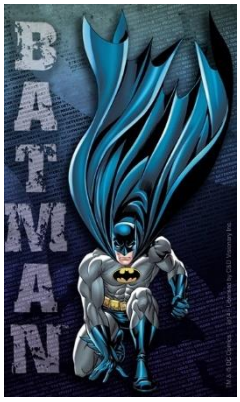

Fig. 20. Batman kneeling down (Tm & Dc Comics n.d.)

Fig. 21. *Steelcity Rollers* logo, inspired by Batman's picture on the left. (Steelcity Rollers n.d.)

[72] Original citation in German: „zustande gekommen ist das Logo durch Batman. Es hat nichts mit uns zu tun, aber die Position war für uns so eine starke Position und wir wollten aber eben keine männliche Figur natürlich, sondern wir wollten eine Skater*in sehen." (Dianamite, personal interview, 11/06/2022, Annex 4.3)

Lastly, *Fearless Bruisers* choose an alternative name to the often-used regional names, which also delivers a powerful message: the Innsbruck skaters are not afraid of being hurt. The idea of the bruises comes from the fact that, being a contact sport, one of the most common forms of injury in roller derby are bruises. Their logo, a female with two war stripes on each cheek and a hand up with the fist closed (see *Fig. 6* below), clearly aims to represent female strength. Sandy Crush discussed the meaning of the logo as follows:

> There are a lot of clubs that use the word 'Inn', i.e. Innsbruck, and we didn't want it to be so local that Innsbruck [was] so dominant, but [we wanted] rather something of our own. [...] For me, it [*Fearless Bruisers*] meant those who take blows easily or those who even if they take blows, always remain strong [...] But fearless definitely fits quite well. (Sandy Crush, personal interview, 11/06/2022, Annex 4.2) [73]

Fig. 22. *Fearless Bruisers* logo (Fearless Bruisers n.d.)

Whereas the first leagues continued to rely on images of women, by the early to mid-2010s changes in the skaters' composition had already started to take place both in the USA and in Europe. The idea that any woman could join a league was extended to the idea that any person who identified as woman could join a league. The skaters in this research attribute this shift to the alternative character of the sport and they claim that inclusiveness is one of the things that they appreciate most about roller derby.

Marta Popowska explains that period of change as follows:

> And also in our league, more and more queer people joined as skaters. And that was actually a movement worldwide, a development. [...] Then this inclusive idea developed in many other leagues, to open up, because not everyone identifies as woman. In this scene… I would say that roller derby has been ahead of other sports for a long time, that trans people, queer people, non-binary people ... are simply included in the sport and also in the club. And then at some point many people wanted to communicate to the outside world that we are open to all genders. And then at some point it was

[73] Original citation in German: „Es gibt total viele Vereine, die sich mit ‚In', also mit Innsbruck, verbauen und wir wollten das jetzt nicht so lokal, dass die Innsbruck so dominant [war], sondern irgendwie was eigenes. […] Es war für mich so die, die Schläge leicht kassieren oder halt so, auch wenn sie Schläge kassieren, immer strong bleiben […] Aber *fearless* passt auf jeden Fall ganz gut." (Sandy Crush, personal interview, 11/06/2022, Annex 4.2)

> agreed and [our league was] renamed. (Popowska, online interview, 02/06/2022) [74]

The shift towards inclusivity was a movement within roller derby. Most of the leagues founded prior to 2012 changed their names from 'rollergirls' to 'roller derby' (which *Vienna Roller Derby* is an example of) and some of the new leagues adapted non-gendered terms (e.g. bruisers). Not only did the term 'girls' disappear from most of the league names[75], but the new leagues used non- or less gendered images for their logos (e.g. animals). In fact, the last Austrian leagues to be founded *Dust City Rollers* (2016) and *SBG KNOCKouts* (2019) followed this new trend, by choosing an animal for their logos, as a statement towards gender inclusivity (see *Fig. 23*and *Fig. 24* below). Reckless Spice, from *Dust City Rollers*, states:

> […] we decided quite quickly that it should be an animal and not a person, precisely because all the women [in the logos] are always so clearly female. So it's just so obviously read as female, the body, in all the logos and we didn't want to do that on purpose. We wanted to keep it a bit neutral because it just can't be portrayed as feminine here. (Reckless Spice, online interview, 30/06/2022, Annex 4.5) [76]

When asked why the specific animal, Patti No Regretti, from *SBG KNOCKouts*, explains that they were looking for an animal that represented force and strength, a dangerous animal (see *Fig. 24*). This proves that roller derby skaters wish to continue being seen as strong. This idea is still very present in the sport.

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[74] Original citation in German: „Und auch bei uns, bei den Spieler*innen kamen immer mehr queere Menschen dazu. Und das war ja eigentlich eine Bewegung weltweit, eine Entwicklung. […] Dann war das so ein inklusiver Gedanke, der ja bei vielen anderen Ligen auch sich entwickelt hat, sich da zu öffnen, weil sich ja eben auch nicht alle als Frauen identifizieren. Es ist ja in dieser Szene, sage ich mal, Roller Derby war ja anderen Sportarten schon lange voraus, dass man Transmenschen, Queer Menschen, non-binäre Menschen …da einfach auch inkludiert einfach also in den Sport und auch in den Verein. Und dann war dann irgendwann mal der Wunsch bei vielen da, dass eben auch nach außen hin so zu kommunizieren, dass wir offen sind für *all genders* einfach. Und dann wurde das irgendwann abgestimmt und umbenannt." (Popowska, online interview, 02/06/2022)

[75] According to Draft (2021: 266), "the shift from rollergirls to roller derby is also about reflecting the sport's authenticity and professionalism" This is discussed in more detail in *4.3.5. Overcoming marginalisation through professionalisation?*

[76] Original citation in German: „[…] wir haben das recht schnell gesagt, dass es ein Tier sein soll und keine Person, eben weil die immer so klar weiblich sind die ganzen Frauen auf [den Logos]. Also das ist einfach so offensichtlich weiblich gelesen, der Körper, in den ganzen Logos und das wollten wir absichtlich nicht machen. Wir wollten es ein bisschen neutral halten, weil es hier halt einfach nicht so feminin dargestellt werden kann." (Reckless Spice, online interview, 30/06/2022, Annex 4.5)

Fig. 23. *Dust City Rollers* logo
(Dust City Rollers/Carina Lex n.d.)

Fig. 24. *SBG KNOCKouts* logo
(SBG KNOCKouts n.d.)

Beyond the logo designs, in recent years the openness to gender diversity has also been seen in the roosters of the bouts, where skaters indicate their pronouns.

Indeed, roller derby has never been a rigid institution. Changes in the sport are common since the Seltzers' times. The Seltzers mostly made adaptations to the rules of the game so that roller derby would keep appealing to the broader audience. However, they did also adjust the sport as a whole to accommodate the needs of the skaters. For instance, by making it easier for skaters to combine their roles as parents and athletes (see *3.1 Early years (1935-1973)*). Similarly, the new version of roller derby continues to be adapted to the needs and demands of the skaters. This has led to changes in the ruleset, which is regularly adapted for safety reasons, but more importantly in the way the sport as an institution is conceived. As described above by Popowska, the acceptance of queer skaters as well as the change in the leagues' names and the trend (at least, in Austria) towards non-gendered logos took place after a process of reflection within the organisations. Self-reflection seems to be an ongoing and open-ended process inherent in roller derby.

On the one hand, this process is done individually, as Dianamite points out:

> You need to keep informing yourself. Always, always educate yourself. You cannot stop at one stand and the whole gender issue continues to evolve. You just have to keep learning and trying to improve yourself, as far as the

> language is concerned, as far as the handling is concerned ... (Dianamite, personal interview, 11/06/2022, Annex 4.3) [77]

On the other hand, reflection is also a team effort, whether at the league level or at the level of the sport as whole. As Sandy Crush explains:

> And we need to talk about things and agree on how to deal with things. [For instance,] about opening [roller derby] for all genders ... or can cis men join or not? How do we deal with showers and such? Why are there more male refs than female refs? It's a process. We didn't have she/her or they/them on the roster from the beginning either. [...] And of course we still have to look at where we can get people with different origins or different genders. How can we really open that up? These are the points that have to be discussed again and again and also because now internationally or in other teams, where racism in roller derby is a big topic, how can we bring even more awareness into the community? (Sandy Crush, personal interview, 11/06/2022, Annex 4.2) [78]

These examples show that (self-)reflection is a key trigger for the development of the sport and necessary to keep fighting against the values that most other sports reproduce.

Although gender inclusivity has been the main topic of discussion since the revival of the sport, other themes (such as racism, as mentioned by Sandy Crush in the quote above) are slowly starting to arise within the roller derby community. Indeed, skaters are aware that reflections should expand in scope because these reflections and discussions ultimately serve to thematise the political aspects of the sport and bring about change.

As Pantybreaker stated:

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[77] Original citation in German: „Man muss sich selbst immer wieder einlesen. Immer, immer fortzubilden. Du kannst nicht irgendwann bei einem Stand stehenbleiben und das ganze Gender Thema entwickelt sich weiter. Du musst einfach immer mitlernen und versuchen dich selbst zu verbessern. Was die Sprache betrifft, was den Umgang betrifft …" (Dianamite, personal interview, 11/06/2022, Annex 4.3)

[78] Original citation in German: „Und wir müssen über Dinge reden und uns einigen, wie wir mit Dingen umgehen. Mit Öffnung für alle Geschlechter … oder können Cis-Männer mitmachen oder nicht? Wie gehen wir mit Duschen um und so? Warum gibt es mehr männliche Refs als weibliche Refs? Das ist ein Prozess. Wir haben auch nicht von Anfang an she/her oder they/them auf den Rooster stehen gehabt. […] Und natürlich müssen wir trotzdem schauen, wo kriegen wir denn dann die Menschen mit unterschiedlicher Herkunft oder unterschiedliche Geschlechter. Wie können wir wirklich das öffnen? Dass sind die Punkte, die immer wieder weiter diskutiert werden müssen und auch weil jetzt schon international oder halt in anderen Teams, wo das viel Thema war, Rassismus im Roller Derby, wie kann man in der Community da awareness noch stärker einbringen." (Sandy Crush, personal interview, 11/06/2022, Annex 4.2)

> More than thinking of it [roller derby] as inclusive, I like to think of it as political, because first, I don't want to think that I am including someone, and second, sometimes it seems to me that it [inclusion] becomes a double-edged sword because we talk about being inclusive, but in the end, there are a lot of things that we leave behind. We are also learning, but, for instance, it [roller derby] is extremely white, it is a sport with very little racial diversity. And also class... I mean, almost all the people are middle class. We are trying to find solutions. For instance, in Vienna if you can't afford it, if you can't pay the fee, you don't have to. If you can't afford the equipment, they give it to you, they help you, they give you money. There is also a kind of borrowed gear fund. In other words, we do look for tools, but obviously we continue moving in a bubble and that's our biggest problem. Sometimes it's very difficult for us to step out of our bubble of white, middle-class people. (Pantybreaker, personal interview, 11/06/2022, Annex 4.4) [79]

That "bubble of white, middle-class people" is one of the main criticisms that second wave feminism (which Riot Girrrl and ultimately roller derby emerged from) has received (Draft 2022). Nonetheless, the sport is trying to overcome these limitations by thematising and working on them.

By 2022, the sport is no longer about contesting gender stereotypes at the individual level, but rather about resisting (any form of) discrimination at the collective level. Draft (2021) summarises this idea as follows:

> Derby's social resistance looks less like pink skulls in bows and more like striving for diversity and inclusion within the [roller derby] community and sport more broadly. With calls for action against harassment, bullying, racism, colonialism, transphobia, and ableism, this is a new direction for a sport that has been critiqued as emphasizing individual empowerment over systemic change. (Draft 2022: 272)

[79] Original citation in Spanish: "A mí lo que me gusta más que pensar que es inclusivo, me gusta pensar que es político, porque yo primero, no quiero pensar que incluya a nadie, y segundo, a veces me parece que se nos vuelve un arma de doble filo porque nos llenamos la boca de ser inclusives, pero al final hay muchísimas cosas que nos dejamos atrás. También estamos aprendiendo, pero, por ejemplo, es extremadamente blanco, o sea, es un deporte con muy poca diversidad racial. Y también la clase. O sea, casi toda la gente es de clase media. Intentamos poner soluciones. Por ejemplo, en Viena si no te puedes pagar, no puedes pagar la cuota, no tienes que pagarla. Si no te puedes permitir la equipación, se te da, se te ayuda, se te da dinero. Hay como fondo también de cosas de prestar. O sea, sí que buscamos herramientas, pero obviamente no dejamos de movernos en una burbuja y ese es el mayor problema que tenemos, que nos cuesta mucho a veces salir de nuestra burbuja de gente blanca, de clase media." (Pantybreaker, personal interview, 11/06/2022, Annex 4.4)

Therefore, the sport has gone from focusing on individual representation to favouring collective action, while also allowing for individual forms of self-expressions (for instance, through the derby names).

4.3.3 An alternative corner: it's not about winning, it's about the community

The idea of roller derby as an inclusive space had already been present in the Seltzer's times. In the mid-1950s, roller derby was considered like a big family for the skaters (see *3.1.2 Roller derby in the 20th century* for a more detailed description).

Later, in the 2000s, the first roller derby skaters after the revival no longer talked about family but instead referred to roller derby as a community, which shares with family the idea of belonging and togetherness. In those early years, the community feeling was crucial for the skaters. In fact, it was more important than sport achievement.

In *4.2.2. Stuttgart Valley Rollergirls (SVRG)*, Popowska already explained how the skaters did not see themselves as real athletes, because they were interested in other aspects of the sport, including the community. While in Seltzer's times that familial feeling aroused as a result of the skaters spending a lot of time together and also due to the fact that there were actual families in roller derby, the new sense of community of the 2000s was prompted by the 'being together', but more so by the 'doing together'. Popowska recalls what attracted her to the sport in 2006:

> […] in the beginning, it was still really this punk rock idea, so there is no one who sets the rules. We were a community. Everything was very democratic; it was simply very feminist. Back then, it was made by women for women and I think that definitely played a big part in it. (Popowska, online interview, 02/06/2022) [80]

In the interviews with the Austrian leagues, the sense of community also kept coming up as one of the main reasons why skaters are attracted to this sport. As indicated by Popowska in the quote above, the skaters in Austria also believe that this community

80 Original citation in German: „[…] am Anfang war es eben wirklich noch dieser Punkrock Gedanke, so dass da niemand ist, der die Regeln aufstellt. wir waren eine Gemeinschaft. Alles war sehr demokratisch, es war sehr feministisch einfach. Es war von Frauen für Frauen damals gemacht und ich glaube, das hat auf jeden Fall dabei eine große Rolle gespielt." (Popowska, online interview, 02/06/2022)

feeling emerged because the sport comes from an alternative corner and, ultimately, because roller derby is more than a sport:

> It's a sport for people who don't really like sports. So most of them [the skaters] don't come because they're into other competitive sports ... well, there are also some who come from other sports; but many aren't [there] because they have great sporting aspirations, but because they're simply interested in the community and everything surrounding the sport. People come from a different corner. (Sandy Crush, personal interview, 11/06/2022, Annex 4.2) [81]

Similarly, Pantybreaker comments:

> I think it has a bit of an outsider feeling to it. I believe that people who don't feel integrated in other places, maybe do feel integrated in derby. [...] I think that there are certain things that are taken for granted in derby, such as the care, and it also has to do with the more political side of the sport, obviously. A lot of people who maybe feel excluded in other sports, I guess this is especially for trans, non-binary people... In derby it's kind of taken for granted, or it's attempted that everyone feels welcome and I think that has something to do with the more punk and DIY origins [of the sport]. (Pantybreaker, personal interview, 11/06/2022, Annex 4.4) [82]

The statements above show that the alternative and outsider edge of roller derby is a key enabler for this sense of community. The fact that roller derby does not set pre-defined rules on what the sport (as an institution) or those playing it should be like, gives space for this community feeling to emerge.

On the one hand, roller derby allows any woman* to play, which is a first step into making everyone feel welcome as they are and feeling that they can belong somewhere.

[81] Original citation in German: „Das ist so ein Sport für Menschen, die eigentlich keinen Sport mögen. Also die meisten kommen nicht, weil sie in anderen Leistungssport … also es gibt schon auch welche, die aus anderen Sportarten kommen; aber viele sind nicht [da], weil sie große sportlichen Anspruch haben, sondern weil sie sich einfach für die Community und für das ganze Drumherum interessieren. Da kommen die Leute aus einer anderen Ecke". (Sandy Crush, personal interview, 11/06/2022, Annex 4.2)

[82] Original citation in Spanish: "creo que tiene como algo… un poco de outsider. Siento que igual gente que no se siente integrada en otros sitios, a lo mejor sí se siente en derby. […] Siento que hay ciertas bases de cosas que están dadas por hecho en el derby, como son un poco los cuidados, también tiene que ver también obviamente con la parte más política. Mucha gente que a lo mejor se siente excluida en otros deportes. Supongo que especialmente esto es para las personas trans, no binarias. Pues que en el derby como que está dado por hecho, o se intenta hacer, que todo el mundo tiene que ser bienvenido y yo creo que eso tiene algo que ver con los orígenes, así un poco más punk y DIY" (Pantybreaker, personal interview, 11/06/2022, Annex 4.4)

This is closely linked to creating an inclusive non-discriminatory space as has been described in *4.3.2 From women to women**. On the other hand, relegating sport achievement to the background or emphasizing less on values such as performance and competition allows the skaters to feel comfortable in and enjoy other aspects of the sport, such having fun with each other. Patti No Regretti's answer as to why she decided to play roller derby instead of another sport sums up these ideas:

> Because it's actually with the community. I knew a few people in roller derby and I thought it's very cool and I feel like it's not extremely about drills. It's more like everyone is very harmonious with each other. It's really great... Yeah, because often I've had the problem that I don't like it when men are around. Then maybe sometimes I feel uncomfortable. I just think it's better [in roller derby], you are accepted as you are, no matter how you are. That's just the culture. [...] For example, volleyball or most of them [other sports] are focused on drills, you have to win and that's not really the case in roller derby. Of course we want to win, but it's not the extreme drill behind it. It's more about having fun... And I like it more. (Patti No Regretti, personal interview, 11/06/2022, Annex 4.1) [83]

This culture of acceptance and respect for each other turns into the 'care' (or caring for each other) that Pantybreaker mentioned above and the idea that everyone counts, that the team (rather than the individual) is what matters. This is made visible in the following statements form Dianamite and Reckless Spice, respectively:

> [...] you keep at it, because somehow you have the feeling that it would be noticed if you weren't there. So that also motivates you, that others are there and you don't do sport alone, and that was actually very motivating for me. (Dianamite, personal interview, 11/06/2022, Annex 4.3) [84]

[83] Original citation in German: „Weil es eigentlich mit der Community ist. Ich habe ein paar Leute gekannt im Roller Derby und ich habe mir gedacht, es ist sehr cool und ich habe das Gefühl so, es ist nicht extrem auf Drillen. Es ist eher so, dass alle sehr harmonisch miteinander sein. Es ist wirklich super… Ja, weil oft habe ich das Problem gehabt, ich mag es nicht, wenn Männer dabei sind. Dann fühle ich mich vielleicht manchmal unwohl. Ich finde es einfach besser [beim Roller Derby], man passt so wie man ist, egal wie man ist. Das ist einfach die *culture*. […] Zum Beispiel, Volleyball oder die meisten sind auf drillen [fokussiert], man muss unbedingt gewinnen und das ist so in Roller Derby eigentlich nicht. Also, schon natürlich, dass wir gewinnen wollen, aber es ist nicht so der extreme Drill dahinter. Es ist eher mehr Spaß haben… Und mir gefällt es eher.*"* (Patti No Regretti, personal interview, 11/06/2022, Annex 4.1)

[84] Original quotation in German: „[…] man dranbleibt, weil man irgendwie auch das Gefühl hat, man würde merken, wenn man nicht da ist. Also, dass auch motiviert, dass andere da sind und du nicht alleine Sport machst und das war für mich eigentlich sehr motivierend." (Dianamite, personal interview, 11/06/2022, Annex 4.3)

> […] what is also simply motivating: on the one hand, I have fixed appointments and I just go to the appointments, because I let someone down so to speak, if I don't go. When I sit on the sofa and tell myself: "I'd like to watch another episode instead of going there [to training]", but someone else is missing… In the yoga studio it doesn't really matter. So that motivates me even more, that it makes sense for the team if the whole team comes, when everyone is there. That's simply what helps a team sport. You don't always have to think only of yourself, but also of everyone else. And when everyone does that, it works really well and it's really cool. (Reckless Spice, online interview, 30/06/2022, Annex 4.5) [85]

Although this team feeling is not (or should not be) specific to roller derby, but to team sports in general, roller derby's acceptance of each individual and the working together, resulting from the DIY ethos, allows for this sense of connectedness and community. Indeed, Sandy Crush explained how when she first joined roller derby, she thought she would be quitting soon, only to change her mind and continue playing for seven years (and counting) after the first game and it was all due to this empowering community feeling:

> Yes, it was this community. We have done this together. We have developed something, something that means something and without our efforts over a year and a half, something that simply would not exist. (Sandy Crush, personal interview, 11/06/2022, Annex 4.2) [86]

The satisfaction derived from the community feeling and the thinking of others (as mentioned above by Dianamite and Reckless Spice) translates into comradeship or sisterhood also at interleague level. Just as the focus within a league is not about a single skater, it's about the whole team; the focus within roller derby is not about a single league, it's about the whole sport. Roller derby follows the motto: 'help each other so that we can all do well/better'. This is an aspect that can already be seen during

[85] Original citation in German: „[…] was halt auch schon einfach Motivierendes ist: einerseits ich habe fixe Termine und ich geh einfach zu den Terminen, weil jede andere Person quasi …ich gehe jemand ab, wenn ich nicht hingehe. Wenn ich Sofa sitze und sage: „ich würde mich gern noch eine Folge anschauen und statt dort hinzugehen". Es fehlt aber jemand anderen. Im Yoga Studio ist es ziemlich wurscht. Also das motiviert dann halt noch zusätzlich, dass es dann doch fürs Team Sinn macht, wenn das ganze Team kommt, wenn alle da sind. Also, also das ist einfach was ein Teamsport hilft. Man muss nicht immer nur an sich selber denken, sondern auch noch an alle. Und wenn das alle machen, dann funktioniert es voll gut und dann ist es richtig cool." (Reckless Spice, online interview, 30/06/2022, Annex 4.5)

[86] Original quotation in German: „Ja, [es war] diese Community. Wir haben das gemeinsam geschafft. Wir haben da was entwickelt, etwas das was ist und ohne unsere Anstrengung über eineinhalb Jahre, was es einfach nicht geben würde." (Sandy Crush, personal interview, 11/06/2022, Annex 4.2)

the Seltzer's times at the league level (where skaters worked as a team, e.g. women mending the uniforms of the team and men setting up and breaking down the track (see *3.1 Early years (1935-1973)*), and which during the revival extended to the interleague level. In the 2000s, potential leagues would contact already established leagues looking for advice, because little information was available online. Almost 20 years and more than 400 leagues later, there is plenty of information online, but leagues in Austria continue to help each other and other regionally close leagues.

During the interview, Reckless Spice described how *Vienna Roller Derby* supported the creation of *Dust City Rollers* in 2016 by organising training sessions and bringing training gear from Vienna to Graz so that those interested could try without having to buy the equipment first, by promoting *Dust City Rollers* on their Facebook site, etc. (Reckless Spice, Annex 4.5). Similarly, Sandy Crush explained how *Alp'n Rockets RollerDerby Bolzano* supported *Fearless Bruisers* at the beginning of their roller derby journey and how they continue to occasionally train together or borrow skaters from each other's leagues so that they can take part in matches against other leagues (Sandy Crush, Annex 4.2). This is again quite a unique trait of roller derby and one that is only possible because competition is not at the centre of the sport.

The rejection of these mainstream values prevalent in most sports may now be less and less common or rather becoming characteristic of newly found leagues or of small-country leagues only. Studies in the USA and UK have revealed that long-standing leagues tend to become more performance-oriented over time (e.g. Breeze 2014) and, in general, the focus on sport achievement has also increased in the past few years.[87] However, most research would be needed on this, as the citations above have proved that the sense of community is enabled by the rejection of those mainstream values, thereby allowing for individuals to be themselves without judgement, as well as by the DIY-ethos, which brings people together in doing or achieving something, thereby enabling this feeling of sisterhood. Both these values (individualism and doing-it-yourself), rooted in the Riot Grrrl movement, seem more important to the Austrian skaters than sport achievement.

[87] This new focus on sport achievement and professionalisation is discussed in more detail in *4.3.5 Overcoming marginalisation through professionalisation?*

4.3.4 DIY and the power of self-determination

As the first female skaters in the Seltzer's era already had felt, almost a century later skaters continue to feel empowered through roller derby. On the one hand, this is done through the sport itself. On the other, the new version of roller derby has provided for another source of empowerment: the DIY.

Opening the sport to all women in the 1930s and again during the revival in the 2000s meant that women* who had not had the chance to play (organised) sports before or who had chosen not to—either because at the time they were not allowed in sports or because they did not identify as athletes—now felt empowered through roller derby[88]. At present, most of the skaters interviewed in the Austrian leagues enjoy roller derby despite previously not having been sporty. Roller derby has allowed them to establish a connection with their body and to realise that they are capable of more than they thought. For instance, Pantybreaker explains:

> […] I had no connection at all with my body; beyond the typical party dancing, nothing. And in derby especially, you have to know very well where your weight is, where you balance, which leg you are using the most strength with, which wheels... And, in fact, being so small, so thin, I need a lot of control so that I don't get overtaken, and for me that has been a very big learning experience. Suddenly seeing that I can do things with my body. For me that also has a lot to do with this empowerment [...] at the beginning when I started [roller] derby I was like: "Wow! I can do sport" (Pantybreaker, personal interview, 11/06/2022, Annex 4.4) [89]

At the same time, the DIY ethos of roller derby—which in the previous section *4.3.3 An alternative corner* has been described as an enabler for the sense of community—also ensures that skaters retain control of all aspects of the sport which directly leads to a

[88] It must be noted that since the revival, the DIY ethos of the sport has always "required a degree of sacrifice and privilege to play, particularly when leagues are small or building infrastructure" (Draft 2022: 272). Therefore, those who do not have the time or money will continue to be unaware of these benefits.

[89] Original citation in Spanish: "[…] mi conexión con mi cuerpo era nula más allá de bailar de fiesta, nada. Y el derby especialmente, tienes que saber muy bien dónde está el peso, donde pones el equilibrio, con qué pierna estás haciendo más fuerza, en qué ruedas… Y, de hecho, yo especialmente que soy tan pequeña, que soy tan delgada, me pasa que tengo que tener mucho control para que no me rebasen y para mí eso ha sido como un aprendizaje muy grande. De repente ver que puedo hacer cosas con mi cuerpo, eso para mí también tiene mucho que ver con este empoderamiento […] al principio cuando entré en el [roller] derby era como: "¡Wow! Es que puedo hacer deporte". (Pantybreaker, personal interview, 11/06/2022, Annex 4.4)

sense of freedom, of not having to follow pre-defined rules, of being and doing as you want to and, ultimately, of empowerment.

This starts with little things, such as the self-chosen derby names—a tradition that started in the 2000s and that all skaters in the Austrian leagues maintain[90]. When asked why she choose a derby name and what her means to her, Sandy Crush replied:

> So it wasn't a question at all. I really wanted to have one. I think it's cool when you can choose your own name or someone [within the same league] gives you a name and you can be someone else. And I think it's really nice when I'm addressed as Sandy Crush. It's a really cool name that you give yourself and then use. (Sandy Crush, personal interview, 11/06/2022, Annex 4.2) [91]

Later, she added:

> When I'm skating through [the track] and then I hear "Sandy Crush", I'm like "yeah!". Now, when I hear Sandra [surname][92], I'm like, "yeah, wow!" [irony]. It actually feels somehow more powerful and the same game [roller derby] just gives you the possibility to be someone else. [...] Sandy Crush can do something that maybe Sandra can't. (Sandy Crush, personal interview, 11/06/2022, Annex 4.2) [93]

Many skaters choose derby names that are meant to feel powerful or convey the idea of strength (e.g. Crush Hour, Wipe Out or Scarrasaurus from *Dust City Rollers*; Arsch-tritt, Dianamite or Frightening Fany from *Steelcity Roller*s; Cruella de Wild, Kickass Karolina or Frida K.O. from *Fearless Bruisers*; The Crushinger or Rufftimes from *Vienna Roller Derby*). Although not all skaters opt for such names, these names are

[90] Recent studies on roller derby have indicated that "while pun-filled names are still the norm in derby, skaters buy in less to the idea of derby personas, and more skaters are choosing to skate under their government name, doing so with the rationale that their sport and they as athletes would be taken more seriously by outsiders if they did not rely on derby names" (Draft 2022: 266). This trend cannot be seen in Austrian roller derby leagues. All skaters in all five leagues use derby names and those interviewed indicated that they very much enjoy being able to have a derby name.

[91] Original citation in German: „Also es war gar keine Frage. Wollte ich unbedingt. Ich finde es cool, wenn man so seinen eigenen Namen aussuchen kann oder jemand einem einen Namen gibt und man da jemand anders auch sein kann. Und ich finde es voll nett, wenn mich man dann Sandy Crush nennt. Volle cool selbstgegebener Name, der dann auch verwendet wird." (Sandy Crush, personal interview, 11/06/2022, Annex 4.2)

[92] The surname of the skater hasn't been disclosed for privacy reasons.

[93] Original citation in German: „Also, wenn ich da durchfahre und dann höre ich „Sandy Crush", dann ist es „yeah!·, wenn ich jetzt Sandra [Nachname] höre, dann denke ich mir: „ja, wow!" [ironisch gemeint]. Es ist tatsächlich so, es fühlt sich irgendwie kraftvoller an und es hat auch von dem Spiel, einfach die Möglichkeit auch wer anders sein zu können. […] Die Sandy Crush kann was und das kann dann vielleicht die Sandra nicht." (Sandy Crush, personal interview, 11/06/2022, Annex 4.2)

supposed to help skaters feel powerful on the track, but also to convey the idea that women* can be strong, aggressive and all the other qualities typically attributed to men. In sum, in terms of representation towards the general public, they serve a similar purpose to the logos.

More important than the names, is the actual leading of the leagues. Skaters enjoy being able to decide how things are going to be done. For Reckless Spice, this is a very important aspect of the sport:

> And it is self-organised. So, we decide. There is no old story. "that's how it is done by us". We make decisions. And it is important to us that basically those who are there are allowed to decide. So there is a board, because we are a registered association, but whoever is there decides. Whoever has good arguments will probably be able to get the rest on their side. And it's not just top down: "this is how the game is played", "this is how it's done", "this is how it goes on", but it's just so that you can get involved and then negotiate. (Reckless Spice, online interview, 30/06/2022, Annex 4.5) [94]

This statement shows that taking their own decisions rather than following pre-established ideas about how the sport should be run is the countercultural trait that the skaters in this study most value of roller derby, because it affects every aspect of the sport, from representation (e.g. logo) to how the time spent together is organised. For instance, Dianamite explained how *Steelcity Rollers* choose to do their own logo despite having originally found a professional to do it, because they felt misunderstood and didn't identify with the product the graphic designer was offering them (Dianamite, Annex 4.3). This shows that keeping control is important to avoid others driving the sport or certain aspects of it in an unwanted direction. At the same time, the DIY is a way to ensure that inclusive spaces are possible, which in turn contributes the community feeling as described in the previous section and as stated by Sandy Crush:

> I personally think it's cool when a sport is so DIY and self-organised and we can have a say in how we want every aspect of it to be. When we do an event, we can put a lot of thought into how we want to set it up and how we

[94] Original quotation in German: „Und es ist selbstorganisiert. Also, wir entscheiden. Es gibt keine alte Geschichte: „so ist es aber bei uns". Wir machen Entscheidungen. Und es ist uns wichtig, dass grundsätzlich so die, die da sind, dürfen entscheiden. Also es gibt zwar ein Vorstand, weil wir ein eingetragener Verein sind, aber wer da ist, entscheidet. Wer gute Argumente hat, wird vermutlich die restlichen auf seine Seite ziehen können oder so genau. Und es ist nicht eben top down: „So läuft das Spiel", „das macht man", „so geht es weiter", sondern es ist halt so, man kann sich einbringen und dann ausverhandeln." (Reckless Spice, online interview, 30/06/2022, Annex 4.5)

> want to make it feel as safe and good as possible for everyone. And yes, these events are also somehow "community building" events. (Sandy Crush, personal interview, 11/06/2022, Annex 4.2) [95]

Patti No Regretti (Annex 4.1) admits that the DIY democratic character means that decisions may take longer to be taken, but the number of new ideas and possibilities brought by the DIY philosophy is what enriches the sport, what allows the sport to feel empowering and inclusive.

4.3.5 Overcoming marginalisation through professionalisation?

Since the Seltzer's times, roller derby has been marginalised by mainstream sports. In the 1935s, the presence of women in the sport lead to its marginalisation, which the Seltzers tried to overcome by emphasising on the importance of marriage and family among its skaters. This has been described in more detail in *3.1.2 Roller derby in the 20th century.*

In the early years of the revival, roller derby continued to be marginalised and not taken seriously as a sport (as mentioned by Popowska in 4.2.2 *Stuttgart Valley Rollergirls (SVRG)).* In those first years, the participants were not so much focused on prescribing or setting rules of any kind[96] (as is common of mainstream sports), but rather on creating and keeping control of a social space where they could be themselves, free of judgement and free of pressures to conform to gender stereotypes (Beaver 2012). However, in 2004 the United Leagues Coalition (ULC)—later known as Women's Flat Track Derby Association (WFTDA)—was set up with the aim to lobby for the recognition of roller derby as a sport. Over time other regional institutions emerged with a similar goal, such as the United Kingdom Roller Derby Association (UKRDA) or the Bundesliga (in Germany). Institutionalization is being used as a tool to achieve greater

[95] Original citation in German: „Ich persönlich finde es cool, wenn eine Sportart ist, wenn es so DIY ist und selber organisiert und wir in allen Teilen bestimmen können, wie wir das haben wollen. Wenn wir eine Veranstaltung machen, können wir uns sehr viel selber Gedanken dazu machen, wie wir das aufbauen wollen und wie wir das gestalten wollen, dass sich alle möglichst *safe* und gut fühlen. Und ja, diese Veranstaltungen sind auch irgendwie *‚community building'*-mäßig." (Sandy Crush, personal interview, 11/06/2022, Annex 4.2)

[96] Roller derby had its first official set of rules in January 2006, three years after its revival (WFTDA 2022). Today, most of the rules refer to play and safety. References to clothing are still vaguely formulated, allowing freedom for the skaters to choose their preferred clothing on the track. Rules are revised yearly.

legitimacy (within the already established sport system), but at the same time it has pushed roller derby to "fall in line with dominant sport values" (Draft 2022: 260).

As has been mentioned in *4.3.3 An alternative corner*, there has been a shift towards professionalisation within the sport. This can be seen in changes towards a more uniformed style, increased levels of athleticism and the claims of the skaters that roller derby is a serious sport. For instance, while the first skaters used to wear the so-called boutfits, the newest WFTDA regulation requires teams to "have a jersey of the same base color, such that uniform colors of the two teams playing are of high contrast" (WFTDA 2020: 2). Although this is not a strong rule, most if not all leagues, currently wear uniformed sport T-shirts during the games, as well as sport leggings. Moreover, former skaters interviewed in this study, Ellie Harrison and Marta Popowska, also spoke about increased levels of athleticism within the sport and Draft (2022) explains that in the USA, where the level of athleticism is generally higher, skaters may practice up to "5 times per week, 2–3 hours each time, with tracked attendance. Online spreadsheets/apps and physical posters in practice spaces track off-skates workouts" (Draft 2022: 258).

The level of athleticism depends on every league, and there may be different teams within a league with different levels of athleticism, so that everyone can play in accordance to their level of commitment and fitness. This shows that the sport is starting to adopt values common to mainstream sports, potentially at the expense of other values that were originally at the centre of roller derby (e.g. inclusivity). Finally, recognition of the sport has always been important for those involved; even the Seltzers wanted roller derby to become a 'real' sport. However, they never considered that in order for it to be 'real', the sport should drop its entertaining components, which is what has been slowly happening.

Despite adhering to certain 'professionalising' trends (e.g. uniformed T-shirts), in Austria roller derby is still relatively unknown and the skaters struggle for recognition and acceptance within mainstream sports and sport governing bodies. Conversely, they are often accepted as a cultural organisation:

> We are somehow also a cultural association and not just a sports association [...] so we had to argue why a team sport gets cultural funding. And that was also the topic of feminism. And that it is a sport that ... it was founded, at that time, more by women, now rather women* or that it is run by women*. We were able to argue that it also has cultural added value. (Sandy Crush, personal interview, 11/06/2022, Annex 4.2) [97]

On the one hand, cultural organisations' acknowledgement of roller derby as a feminist project recognises the value of roller derby as more than a sport and allows the leagues to secure some funding. On the other, the fact that roller derby is accepted as a culture may prevent sport organisations from considering it a sport, since it has already been categorised as culture. To move away from the idea that roller derby is a 'culture' (an idea influenced by the origins of the sport), leagues may opt to adapt their language to conform to the terminology of the sports world, as explained by Reckless Spice below:

> We have this constantly that we are not perceived as an athletic sport. Just months ago we were asked again if we could do a show, if we could do a performance or something, because we always say we are a sports team, we are not an artistic performance, we are a sport and we play games. We had nothing to lose at a concert either; we lost something if we didn't take part in a sporting event. What is always difficult is that the sports section of the media is interested in us. We were always immediately in the women's section or the culture section. However, it is rather difficult for the sports section to take an interest in us. [...] We are perceived more as a cultural phenomenon. It is true that [roller derby] developed from this wrestling with a show character, with the fishnet tights, with skirts, with non-sporty outfits, but with funny outfits... It developed a bit differently, you can't deny that now. And that's why, for example, we no longer call our games 'bout', but 'games,' to play games, and games in English and German, because this bout also refers more to a play than to a sporting event, to a sporting competition. (Reckless Spice, online interview, 30/06/2022, Annex 4.5) [98]

[97] Original citation in German: „Also wir sind irgendwie auch Kulturverein und nicht nur Sportverein […] also wir haben argumentieren müssen, warum ein Sports Team, eine Kulturförderung bekommt. Und das war auch eben das Thema Feminismus. Und dass es ein Sport ist, dass … damals war es mehr Frauen jetzt eher FLINTA gegründet worden oder wird hauptsächlich von FLINTA ausgeführt. Über das haben wir das argumentieren können, dass es auch einen kulturellen Mehrwert hat." (Sandy Crush, personal interview, 11/06/2022, Annex 4.2)

[98] Original citation in German: „Wir haben das durchgehend, dass wir nicht als athletische Sport wahrgenommen werden. Wir sind ja vor Monaten erst wieder gefragt worden, ob wir eine Show machen können, ob wir eine Performance oder so machen können, weil wir immer sagen, wir sind ein Sportsteam, wir sind keine künstlerische Darstellung, wir sind ein Sport und wir spielen Spiele. Wir haben auch beim Konzert nichts verloren; bei einer Sportveranstaltung haben wir was verloren. Was immer wieder schwierig ist, dass sich die Medien, dass sich die Sportabteilung für uns interessiert, ist nicht so leicht. Dass wir im Frauenteil, im Kulturteil waren wir immer sofort drinnen. Dass sich der Sport dann für uns

Despite the leagues efforts to raise awareness about the sport and their attempts at conforming to mainstream sport terminology, sport regulations continue to be an obstacle for the acceptance of roller derby as a legitimate sport. For instance, Sandy Crush (personal interview, Annex 4.2) explained that there need to be three teams in Tirol, where her league is based, for roller derby to be acknowledged as a sport. At the same time, the fact that roller derby is not considered a sport makes it difficult for the skaters to find sport halls where they can train regularly and under any weather condition (Patti No Regretti, Annex 4.1). To ovecome marginalisation, the Austrian leagues try to create links with inline skating associations (Pantybreaker, Annex 4.4). However, they are aware that these concessions could compromise the politics of the sport and are unwilling to see that happen. When asked how she would like to see the future of roller derby, Pantybreaker replied:

> […] The most important thing is that it keeps its political essence. Because in fact there are also a lot of people who come into derby and are like: "no, I only come for the sport" and I'm like: "no, I'm sorry. You just can't divide it. For me, roller derby is the sport and what comes with the sport, which is the political part, the community... For me, that would be the most important thing [...] And that we don't look for the validation of traditional sport, because we are trying to fight against that. So, rather than wanting validation, we should extend more what we are doing. (Pantybreaker, personal interview, 11/06/2022, Annex 4.4) [99]

This statement could open up a whole new debate within the derby community. Earlier studies (e.g. Pavlidis 2010) already pointed to the potential of cession of the sport due to external pressures and the will to be taken seriously within the established sport system.

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interessiert, eher schwierig. […] Wir werden schon eher so als kulturelles Phänomen wahrgenommen. Und was dann auch ist, generell es [Roller Derby] ist ja entstanden aus diesem Wrestling mit Show Charakter, mit dem Netzstrumpfhosen, mit Röcken, mit nicht sportlichen Outfits, sondern halt mit lustigen Outfits… Es ist ein bisschen anders entstanden, das kann man jetzt nicht leugnen. Und deswegen was wir zum Beispiel machen, wir nennen unsere Spiele halt nicht mehr *bout*, sondern *Games* zu spielen und *Games* auf Englisch und Deutsch, weil eben auch diese dieser *bout* halt eher auf ein Schauspiel hinweist als auf einer Sportveranstaltung, auf einen sportlichen Wettbewerb" (Reckless Spice, online interview, 30/06/2022, Annex 4.5)

[99] Original citation in Spanish: "Lo más importante que mantuviera su esencia política. Sí, porque de hecho también hay mucha gente que entra en el derby y es como: "no, yo solo entro por el deporte" y es como: "no, lo siento. Es que no se puede separar". Para mi roller derby es el deporte y lo que viene con el deporte, que es la parte política, la comunidad… Para mi eso sería lo más importante […] Y que no queramos, como la validación de lo que es el deporte tradicional, porque justamente estamos un poco intentando luchar contra eso. Entonces, más que querer la validación, que extendamos más lo que estamos hacienda." (Pantybreaker, personal interview, 11/06/2022, Annex 4.4)

Currently, roller derby is divided between those who "just want to play" (see *4.1.4 The Women's Flat Track Derby Association (WFTDA)*) and see competitiveness as a positive aspect that will lead towards the legitimacy of the sport, those who "may claim that competitiveness is inauthentic to the 'true' meaning of the subculture (i.e., 'that's not what it's about'), and a third (usually the majority) adopts ambivalence, happy that their sport is recognized as legitimate but concerned that it will dilute cherished subcultural values" (Draft 2022: 261).

The skaters from the Austrian leagues that participated in this study did not actively oppose competition, but clearly showed that their focus lies elsewhere, mostly in keeping the community feeling alive.

Internal secessions within the sport could tear the WFTDA apart. As the sport continues to grow, pressures for legitimacy could push the interests that the WFTDA is now trying to balance (sport legitimacy and feminist interests) in the mainstreaming direction. Further (comparative) research would be needed to analyse where this balance weights heavier within the roller derby community.

5 Conclusion

This master's thesis analysed what makes up the core of roller derby in order to understand what a feminist sport model looks like and how these sports resist external pressures from mainstream sports. Because roller derby is a geographically widespread sport, this research focused on Europe, in particular, on the Austrian roller derby leagues; although the USA, as well as the UK and Germany were taken as background and important reference for comparison—being these the countries where the sport was first played.

Three main questions were posed at the beginning of this study (*Which aspects of roller derby have remained in time and space?; How are these aspects reproduced, maintained or 'lost' in the Austrian leagues?* and *What do changes in the sport mean for its counterhegemonic potential?*). Two former (British and German) roller derby skaters and five currently active roller derby skaters from each of the Austrian leagues (*Vienna Roller Derby, Steelcity Rollers, Fearless Bruisers, Dust City Rollers* and *SBG KNOCKouts*) gave an insight into the sport, which helped answer the main research questions.

This study has found that since its inception, roller derby has always opposed mainstream values in one way or the other. When it first emerged in the USA in the early 20th century, the businessmen Leo and Jerry Seltzer broke with the gender stereotypes of the time by allowing women in the game and by opening a space for the skaters to be athletes and parents at the same time, without having to choose one over the other.

The new version of roller derby that resurged in the USA in the 2000s was strongly influenced by second wave radical feminism, which aims to advance the interests of women in sport by creating non-hierarchical, supportive, women-only spaces. The first American roller derby skaters aimed to create a new sport institution from scratch in which all women* would feel welcome. While the first years (2000 - ≈2006) of the sport have been described as wild and rather anarchic, roller derby's absolute resistance to mainstream values did not last long. The rules and the first institutions representing

and lobbying for the sport came only a few years after its revival (e.g. the the United Leagues Coalition (ULC), later known as Women's Flat Track Derby Association (WFTDA), was created in 2004). In its 20 years of history, roller derby may have lost its showy character and the sexy boutfits as forms of resistance to gendered stereotypes, but it has maintained its (self-)reflective character, which is key to ensure that the sport remains an inclusive space. Similarly, the DIY ethos of the sport has allowed, on the one hand, for the skaters to feel empowered by retaining control of and deciding on all aspects of the sport and, on the other, by enabling the sense of community. It is the being and doing together that skaters value so much of the sport. What remains since the Seltzers times is the rejection by mainstream sports of roller derby as a legitimate sport. To overcome this marginalisation, in recent years, leagues have started to become more professional by changing their clothing towards a more uniformed style, by increasing their levels of athleticism and by making other changes in the terminology of the sport. Although the skaters in the Austrian leagues oppose the trade-off of their political values for the recognition of the sport, it remains unclear whether roller derby as an institution will eventually give up or soften its political character.

Roller derby makes for an interesting case of study as an initiative that rethinks the sport institution. As other sports (such as surfing, snowboarding, etc.) have done before, it is trying to break the 'norm' in sport. However, its potential for social change is limited. First, because as long as the sport remains a hobby for adults, it only will only involve a small part of the society. This limitation could be solved by opening up the sport for younger generations (as some skaters mentioned and some leagues are already doing). Second, and most importantly, because on its own it will most likely not change the way in which sport is understood (particularly taking into account that despite its growth, it remains a niche sport). Nontheless, the existence of many countercultural sports could present the first step needed to start rethinking the way in which we understand sport. For this new understanding of sport to settle, these countercultural sports should keep their political character and avoid being absorbed by mainstream values (e.g. competitiveness). If roller derby were to follow the path of subcultures such as surfing, its potential for social change will cease to exist.

5.1 Recommendations for future research

This study has presented the reality of a small European country in a sea of roller derby leagues. It would be interesting to compare how the sport has evolved between different leagues and between countries, since findings in this study already showed some differences between the first British and German leagues. Moreover, as the sport was created and is more widespread in the Global North and is mostly played by white women*, the voices gathered in research belong to these women, other voices (e.g. from trans women, black women*, women of the Global South, etc.) are often missing in research (for an exception, see Gillian 2018). Including them in research, where possible, may lead to new perspectives on how the sport could widen its reach.

Future studies could also focus on racism (an actual topic of debate within the roller derby community) or body positivity in the sport, as literature on these topics is scarce or non-existent to the author's knowledge.

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6.2 Table of figures

Appendix

Table 1. WFTDA affiliated European roller derby leagues, by country (WFTDA n.d.-a)

TOTAL: 92	Country	League Name
1	Austria	Vienna Roller Derby
4	Belgium	Antwerp Roller Derby
		Brussels Derby Pixies
		GO-GO Gent Roller Derby
		Namur Roller Girls
2	Czech Republic	Hard Breaking Dolls
		Prague City Roller Derby
2	Denmark	Aalborg Roller Derby
		Copenhagen Roller Derby
5	Finland	Helsinki Roller Derby
		Dirty River Roller Derby
		Oulu Roller Derby
		Tampere Roller Derby
		Kallio Rolling Rainbow
14	France	B.M.O. Roller Derby Girls
		Paris Roller Derby
		Nantes Derby Girls
		Lutèce Destoyeuses
		Lomme Roller Girls
		Les Quads de Paris
		The Roller Derby Panthers
		The Cannibal Marmots
		Nice Roller Derby
		Roller Derby Toulouse
		Roller Derby Rennes
		Roller Derby Metz Club
		Roller Derby Caen
		Roller Derby Bordeaux
11	Germany	Munich Rolling Rebels
		Kaiserslautern Roller Derby
		Cologne Roller Derby
		Bear City Roller Derby
		Barockcity Roller Derby
		Rhein-Neckar Delta Quads
		Stuttgart Valley Rollergirls
		St. Pauli Roller Derby
		Ruhrpott Roller Girls
		Roller Derby Karlsruhe
		Roller Derby Dresden
1	Iceland	Roller Derby Iceland
2	Ireland	Dublin Roller Derby
		Limerick Roller Derby
3	Italy	Harpies Roller Derby Milano
		Bloody Wheels Roller Derby Torino

		The Anguanas-Vicenza Roller Derby
3	Norway	Oslo Roller Derby
		Nidaros Roller Derby
		Bergen Roller Derby
1	Poland	Warsaw Hellcats Roller Girls
3	Spain	As Brigantias Roller Derby
		Roller Derby Madrid
		Barcelona Roller Derby
6	Sweden	Crime City Rollers
		Gothenburg Roller Derby
		Dock City Rollers
		Norrköping Roller Derby
		The Royal Swedish Roller Derby
		Stockholm Roller Derby
1	Switzerland	Zürich City Roller Derby
5	The Netherlands	Eindhoven Rockcity Rollers
		Dom City Roller Derby
		Amsterdam Roller Derby
		Rotterdam Roller Derby
		Parliament of Pain
28	United Kingdom	Kent Roller Girls
		Leeds Roller Derby
		Lincolnshire Bombers Roller Derby
		Liverpool Roller Birds
		London Roller Derby
		London Rockin' Rollers
		Manchester Roller Derby
		New Castle Roller Derby
		Middlesbrough Roller Derby
		Hull Angels Roller Derby
		Dolly Rockit Rollers
		Brighton Rockers Roller Derby
		Birmigham Blizt Dames
		Wiltshire Roller Derby
		Sheffield Steel Roller Derby
		Royal Windsor Roller Derby
		Rebellion Roller Derby
		Rainy City Roller Derby
		Portsmouth Roller Wenches
		Nottingham Hellfire Harlots
		Oxford Roller Derby
		Norfolk Roller Derby
	(1) Northern Ireland	Belfast Roller Derby
	(3) Scotland	Dundee Roller Derby
		Auld Reekie Roller Derby
		Glasgow Roller Derby
	(2) Wales	Tiger Bay Brawlers
		Swansea City Roller Derby

Annex 1. Riot Grrrl manifesto (Bikini Kill 1991 in Rosenberg and Garofalo 1998: 812-813).

A declaration by the band Bikini Kill outlines Riot Grrrl philosophy:

BECAUSE us girls crave records and books and fanzines that speak to US that WE feel included in and can understand in our own ways.

BECAUSE we wanna make it easier for girls to see/hear each other's work so that we can share strategies and criticize-applaud each other.

BECAUSE we must take over the means of production in order to create our own moanings.

BECAUSE viewing our work as being connected to our girlfriends-politics-real lives is essential if we are gonna figure out how [what] we are doing impacts, reflects, perpetuates, or DISRUPTS the status quo.

BECAUSE we recognize fantasies of Instant Macho Gun Revolution as impractical lies meant to keep us simply dreaming instead of becoming our dreams AND THUS seek to create revolution in our own lives every single day by envisioning and creating alternatives to the bullshit christian capitalist way of doing things.

BECAUSE we want and need to encourage and be encouraged in the face of all our own insecurities, in the face of beergutboyrock that tells us we can't play our instruments, in the face of "authorities" who say our bands/zines/etc. are the worst in the U.S. and

BECAUSE we don't wanna assimilate to someone else's (boy) standards of what is or isn't.

BECAUSE we are unwilling to falter under claims that we are reactionary "reverse sexists" AND NOT THE TRUEPUNKROCK-SOULCRUSADERS THAT WE KNOW we really are.

BECAUSE we know that life is much more than physical survival and are patently aware that the punk rock "you can do anything" idea is crucial to the coming angry grrrl rock revolution that seeks to save the psychic and cultural lives of girls and women everywhere, according to their own terms, not ours.

BECAUSE we are interested in creating non-hierarchical ways of being AND making music, friends, and scenes based on communication + understanding, instead of competition + good/bad categorizations.

BECAUSE doing/reading/seeing/hearing cool things that validate and challenge us can help us gain the strength and sense of community that we need in order to figure out how bullshit like racism, able-bodyism, ageism, speciesism, classism, thinism, sexism, anti-semitism and heterosexism figures in our own lives.

BECAUSE we see fostering and supporting girl scenes and girl artists of all kinds as integral to this process.

BECAUSE we hate capitalism in all its forms and see our main goal as sharing information and staying alive, instead of making profits or being cool according to traditional standards.

BECAUSE we are angry at a society that tells us Girl=Dumb, Girl=Bad, Girl=Weak.

BECAUSE we are unwilling to let our real and valid anger be diffused and/or turned against us via the internalization of sexism as witnessed in girl/girl jealousism and self-defeating girltype behaviors.

BECAUSE I believe with my wholeheartmindbody that girls constitute a revolutionary soul force that can, and will, change the world for real.[5]

Annex 2. Summary of roller derby rules

The game of Flat Track Roller Derby is played on a flat, oval track. Play is broken up into two 30-minute periods, and within those periods, into units of play called "Jams," which last up to two minutes. There are 30 seconds between each Jam.

During a Jam, each team fields up to five Skaters. Four of these Skaters are called "Blockers" (together, the Blockers are called the "Pack"), and one is called a "Jammer." The Jammer wears a helmet cover with a star on it.

The two Jammers start each Jam behind the Pack, and score a point for every opposing Blocker they lap, each lap. Because they start behind the Pack, they must get through the Pack, then all the way around the track to be eligible to score points on opposing Blockers.

Roller derby is a full-contact sport; however, Skaters cannot use their heads, elbows, forearms, hands, knees, lower legs, or feet to make contact to opponents. Skaters cannot make contact to opponents' heads, backs, knees, lower legs, or feet.

Play that is unsafe or illegal may result in a Skater being assessed a penalty, which is served by sitting in the Penalty Box for 30 seconds of Jam time.

The team with the most points at the end of the game wins.

A common Jam might go like this:

1. Blockers line up behind the Pivot Line and in front of the Jammer Line.
2. Jammers line up behind the Jammer Line.
3. At the Jam-Starting Whistle, the Blockers skate forward and compete for superior position. The Jammers skate forward and try to get through the Pack. Each Blocker simultaneously tries to prevent the opposing Jammer from getting past, and to help their own Jammer get through.
4. One Jammer exits the Pack and is declared Lead Jammer, earning the right to end the Jam when they decide. This Jammer races around the track to get into scoring position.
5. The same Jammer begins to work their way through the Pack for the second time, and the opposing Jammer makes their way out of the Pack for the first time.
6. As the second Jammer to escape the Pack comes around into scoring position, the first Jammer calls off the Jam.
7. The first Jammer has scored points (up to four), and held their opponent at zero points. Meanwhile, the opposing Jammer (by getting into scoring position) held the first Jammer at only those points, as they could have scored more points on subsequent passes.

(WFTDA n.d.-d)

Annex 3. Interview questions

3.1. Interview questions about the history of roller derby in Europe[100]

1. Can you tell me a bit about yourself and how you discovered the sport?

2. If you were one of the founding members of your league, can you explain how was it founded? What was your motivation to establish a new league?

3. What can you tell me about the sport at the time?

- Who were the new skaters joining?
- How did they hear about roller derby?
- How was the organisation run in its beginnings (sponsorships, trainings, bouts…)?

4. Looking back, what did it mean for you to be one of the first leagues in the EU?

- Did you encounter any particular challenges being a new sport in the UK/Germany?

5. Was your league, especially at the beginning, in contact with other leagues either in the USA or in Europe? (e.g. supporting the emergence of new leagues, following the USA in terms of regulations and other trends, etc.)

6. When and why did your league decide to be part of the WFTDA? Why was membership in the WFTDA important to your league?

7. Over time, I have observed that many leagues change their names, usually from "roller girls" to "roller derby". When and why did your league decide to change names?

8. [For UK only]: UK is by far the country with the highest number of roller derby leagues in Europe, what do you think could explain this?

3.2. Interview questions about the NMRD[101]

1. How did the idea of founding the museum start?

2. Why was it important/necessary to have this museum?

3. What do you keep in the museum?

4. If the donations that you keep in the museum could tell a story about the sport, what would they say?

5. Does the museum also document the history of men's roller derby? Why/why not?

6. Do you know of similar museums elsewhere in Europe or the USA?

7. Are there any plans to expand the project beyond the national boundaries? (e.g. by including donations from other countries)

[100] These questions were answered by Ellie Harrison in an online interview on 18/05/2022 and again by Marta Popowska in another online interview on 02/06/2022. The publication of the transcripts was not explicitly agreed to.

[101] This online interview was conducted with Kerry Irving on 17/05/2022. The publication of the transcript was not explicitly agreed to.

Annex 4. Semi structured-interviews with current roller derby skaters of the five Austrian leagues

4.1 Personal interview with Patti No Regretti from *SBG KNOCKouts* (Salzburg) on 11/06/2022

CA: Wie wurde eure League gegründet? Wie habt ihr im Voraus von Roller Derby gehört?

PN: Die Gründungsmitglieder haben sich den Film *Whip it!* angesehen. Das hat ihnen mega gut gefallen. Dann haben sie nachgeforscht, ob es in Österreich schon Teams gibt und ja, es gab doch schon einige… Und dann wollten sie auch ein Team gründen.

CA: Wie sind euer Name und Logo entstanden? Oder wie habt ihr euch dafür entschieden und was bedeuten sie?

PN: SBG weil die ersten von uns am Sparparkplatz trainiert haben. Da gibt es SBG und deswegen war es klar, dass [es] SBG [sein sollte] und da steht auch die Abkürzung für Salzburg. Wir hatten uns überlegt, dass wir uns von Spar sponsern lassen, aber die waren natürlich nicht so begeistert. Und „Knockouts", eigentlich gibt es keine spezielle Geschichte dazu. Es klingt einfach cool.

CA: Und das Logo? Wofür steht es?

PN: Für Kraft, Stärke … Was lustig ist, ist, wir wollten dann einen Kampfschrei haben und dann sind wir darauf gekommen, dass das Rhino total kreischt. Das ist eigentlich gar nicht so sehr [makes a strong noise] sondern sehr [makes a high-pitched noise].

Also, ursprünglich war die Idee von einem gefährlichen Tier und die Rhinos, die schreien ja so… sie machen einen bestimmten Ruf, ja, lustig und es ist ein bisschen verwechselt worden mit den Hippos. Eigentlich das gefährlichste Tier, aber das ist der Rhino geblieben.

CA: Warum hast du dich entschieden, Roller Derby zu spielen (im Vergleich zu anderen Sportarten)?

PN: Ja, weil ich früher viel auf Inlineskaten war, privat. Dann war ich am Klettern, aber beim Klettern brauchst du immer einen Partner und das ist halt dann oftmals ziemlich schwierig, dass sie dann immer Zeit haben. Und dann habe ich gesehen, dass es ein Roller-Derby-Team gibt und ich habe mir gedacht: „Okay, ich kann auf Rollen stehen. Warum nicht?"

CA: Aber es gibt andere Sportarten, die du alleine hättest machen können oder andere Teamsportarten. Wieso unbedingt Roller Derby?

PN: Weil es eigentlich mit der Community ist. Ich habe ein paar Leute gekannt im Roller Derby… weil einfach, wenn man fortgeht und so trifft man sie … und ich habe mir gedacht, es ist sehr cool, und ich habe das Gefühl so, es ist nicht extrem auf Drillen. Es ist eher so, dass alle sehr harmonisch miteinander sind. Es ist wirklich super… Ja, weil oft habe ich das Problem gehabt, ich mag es nicht, wenn Männer dabei sind. Dann fühle ich mich vielleicht manchmal unwohl. Ich finde es einfach besser [beim Roller Derby], man passt, so wie man ist, egal wie man ist. Das ist einfach die „culture". Genau. Und ich habe vorher noch nie einen Teamsport gemacht oder generell, dass ich irgendwo dabei war, wenn schon, Klettern dann, aber das war es eigentlich schon. Und was man nebenbei macht, Schwimmen gehen oder Radfahren, aber so richtig einen Teamsport habe ich nie … Es hat mich einfach nicht interessiert. Zum Beispiel, Volleyball oder die meisten sind auf Drillen [fokussiert], man muss unbedingt gewinnen und das ist so in Roller Derby eigentlich nicht. Also, schon natürlich, dass wir gewinnen wollen, aber es ist nicht so der extreme Drill dahinter. Es ist eher mehr Spaß haben… Und mir gefällt es eher. Also, ich muss sagen, dass ich in Roller Derby viele Sachen gelernt habe, [inaudible]. Zum Beispiel, früher bin ich sehr oft mit dem Auto gefahren. Seitdem ich Roller Derby mache, gehe ich mehr zu Fuß.

CA: Du hast gemeint, in anderen Sportarten ist das Ziel, zu gewinnen, aber im Roller Derby geht es mehr darum, Spaß zu haben. Was sind andere Ziele im Roller Derby oder gibt es andere Ziele im Roller Derby?

PN: Natürlich kommt darauf an, was für eine League man da spielt. Also, in Deutschland ist es sicher wesentlich mehr auf [inaudible – Wettbewerb?]. Sie haben eine erste Liga und bei uns ist das einfach nur nicht so. Wir haben nicht einmal in jedem Bundesland ein Team.

CA: Jetzt springe ich zurück zu dir: Dein Name ist „Patti No Regretti". Was bedeutet dieser Name für dich und warum hast du einen Derby-Namen gewählt?

PN: Es ist einfach so, dass einige Leute nicht unbedingt den Klarnamen hergeben wollen und deswegen ist das eh gut, dass man einen Derby-Namen hat, weil wir uns teilweise eher mit dem Derby-Namen ansprechen. Das ist ja inzwischen normal.

Vorher habe ich „Patti Pain" geheißen. Am Anfang fand ich, das passt ganz gut. Danach habe ich mir gedacht, das ist mit Schmerz assoziiert und es hat mir nicht gefallen. Deshalb habe ich einen besseren gefunden, deshalb keine *regrets*, wenn ich was mache. Weil man macht sich manchmal zu viele Gedanken, wie man dann ist und deshalb habe ich es besser gefunden, dass ich keine *regrets* habe, wenn ich was machen will.

CA: Ich habe gelesen, dass Roller Derby dieser „DIY"-Philosophie folgt. Was bedeutet das für euch?

PN: Es ist sehr viel, dass wir uns selbst organisieren. D.h. wir haben nicht einen Trainer, der uns alles organisiert, sondern das machen wir untereinander aus. Wir haben flache Hierarchien, d.h. jede hat ein Stimmrecht. Wir haben nur rein rechtlich welche, die da mehr zu sagen hätten, aber es ist immer eine Konsensentscheidung und ... Ja, du musst dir dann die Sachen selbst beibringen. Mit Training, es gibt jetzt nicht so diese Riesen[inaudible], wie mache ich dies; sondern es ist sehr sehr kreativ: Wie mache ich das Training, wie blockiere ich am besten … Ich denke, es ist anders als in einer Sportart wie Fußball, wo einfach diese Struktur da ist, zumindest da in Europa.

Es ist schon manchmal ein Aufwand, weil es müssen alle miteinverstanden sein. Es macht es nicht unbedingt immer einfacher, aber man ist vielfältiger und hat andere Ideen und hat da einfach vielleicht auch mehr Möglichkeiten, auch wenn es manchmal einfach länger dauert.

CA: Dieses DIY wurde von einer Gruppe von Frauen eingebracht und ist von einer feministischen Ideologie geprägt. Würdest du sagen, Roller Derby ist feministisch?

PN: Schon sehr. Es sind sehr viele Feminist*innen dabei [inaudible] und ich denke einfach, das ist einfach eine coole Gemeinschaft. Sicher haben wir einen feministischen [inaudible], weil sonst oft die Männer immer im Vordergrund stehen und da sind nur wirklich die Frauen im Vordergrund. Und das Team läuft so gut, dass wir jetzt miteinander auf Urlaub fahren würden, weil wir so Team-Tage haben, ohne dass sich irgendwer anzickt. Da schaut jeder auf den anderen und das ist vielleicht woanders nicht so. Und wir schauen, z.B., dass wenn möglich am 8. März wir alle auf die Demo gehen.

CA: Dass ihr solche Events zusammen besucht, ist neu für mich. Habt ihr irgendwie eine feministische politische Agenda mit Themen, die euch beschäftigen, oder geht es mehr um Sport?

PN: Es ist so, dass wir eine feministische Message haben. Unser Board ist feministisch aktiv. Eine von unserem Derby-Team machen bei unserem FLINTAstische Disko-Kollektiv mit, z.B, wo man Partys veranstaltet.

CA: Aber ist das auch Teil von Roller Derby?

PN: Nein, aber es entstehen natürlich Freundschaften und ich denke, dadurch, dass man sich so nah ist … Ich denke, dass man nie so dran an einer Person ist, außer wenn man in einer Beziehung ist. Man hat viel Vertrauen.

CA: Und wusstest du am Anfang, als du mit dem Sport angefangen hast, dass er feministisch war? Hat dich das irgendwie beeinflusst, an dieser Sportart teilzunehmen?

PN: Jain. Also, ich denke, dass die Frauen im Vordergrund stehen und was zu sagen haben und das ausbauen, das ist immer gut. Aber richtig beeinflusst hat es die Entscheidung nicht. Ich habe mir nur gedacht: „Oh! Das ist cool."

CA: Und nun meine letzte Frage: Wie wünschst du dir die Zukunft von Roller Derby?

PN: Ich wünsche mir mehr Sichtbarkeit. Dass Leute Roller Derby als Sport ernstnehmen. Wir haben oft Probleme, überhaupt Hallen zu bekommen. Das ist ein ziemliches Problem, zumindest in Salzburg. Und es wäre schön, wenn es wieder mehr Spiele/Events geben würde. Aber ich glaube, je bekannter der Sport wird, desto mehr Leute kommen auch zuschauen oder sponsern uns. Ich wünsche mir auch, dass es weiterhin eine Sportart bleibt, wo man sich als FLINTA wohlfühlen kann.

4.2 Personal interview with Sandy Crush from *Fearless Bruisers* (Innsbruck) on 11/06/2022

CA: Wie wurde eure League gegründet?

SC: Wir haben uns 2016 gegründet über eine Kulturförderung. Das war ein Projekt, „Tiroler Kultur, Kunst, Kulturinitiativen“, heißt es. Es gibt jedes Jahr eine Ausschreibung für Projekte und da war das Thema Feminismus… Und dann haben wir uns überlegt, in einer Gruppe, wir würden gern Roller Derby nach Innsbruck bringen und wir wussten alle nicht so genau, wie Roller Derby funktioniert. Aber wir waren interessiert und fanden das gut, so was zu machen. Und dann haben wir diese Förderung bekommen, was ganz cool war. Also wir sind irgendwie auch Kulturverein und nicht nur Sportverein. Dann haben wir auch einen Verein gegründet und im Frühjahr 2017, glaube ich, hatten wir das erste Spiel gegen Graz. Und da haben wir dann zum ersten Mal verstanden, wie das Spiel wirklich funktioniert.

CA: Was meinst du damit, dass ihr auch ein Kulturverein seid?

SC: Ja, also wir haben argumentieren müssen, warum ein Sportteam, eine Kulturförderung bekommt. Und das war auch eben das Thema Feminismus. Und dass es ein Sport ist, dass von… damals waren es mehr Frauen, jetzt eher FLINTA, gegründet worden ist oder wird hauptsächlich von FLINTA ausgeführt. Über das haben wir das argumentieren können, dass es auch einen kulturellen Mehrwert hat.

CA: Wie sind euer Name und Logo entstanden? Oder wie habt ihr euch dafür entschieden und was bedeuten sie?

SC: Das ist ja echt eine Weile her, aber ich weiß, dass wir so Online-Abstimmungen über unsere Namen hatten. Da waren mehrere Angebote, dann so reingeworfen mal in den Pott und dann haben wir das versucht, demokratisch in dem Sinne abzustimmen. Also Mehrheitsentscheid war das dann. Basisdemokratisch. Die Leute schmeißen mal rein und wissen, was ihnen gefallen wird. Und dann stimmen wir gemeinsam ab. Wir haben immer Generalversammlungen und Plena. Jeden Monat haben wir Plenum, wo alle was einbringen können. Wir sind in Untergruppen organisiert, die viel selber entscheiden können. Aber größere Entscheidungen müssen im Plenum abgestimmt werden oder in der Generalversammlung des Vereins selbst. Also der Vorstand ist jetzt nicht in einzelne Tätigkeiten aufgesplittert.

Und ich kann es nur für mich sagen: Ich fand es [den Namen] schon cool. Es gibt total viele Vereine, die sich mit “Inn”, also mit Innsbruck, verbauen und wir wollten das jetzt nicht so lokal, dass die Innsbruck so dominant [ist], sondern irgendwie was Eigenes. Ich kann das nur von mir so sagen, weil ich mich nicht mehr erinnern kann, ob ich es angekreuzt habe. Es war für mich so die, die auch Schläge leicht kassieren oder halt so, auch wenn sie Schläge kassieren, immer strong bleiben. Und ich habe dann mal in so einer Zeitung, wo über uns berichtet wurde, da wurde viel mit furchtlosen Schlägereien übersetzt und ich dachte, das klingt aber hart, und ich glaube, ich habe es einfach softer verstanden, als es vielleicht auf Englisch klingt. Aber „fearless“ passt auf jeden Fall ganz gut.

CA: Und das Logo?

SC: Das hat eine vom Team, die ist grafisch total fit und hat es dann gezeichnet und wir fanden das cool. Ja, klar steht im Raum, dass es wohl eher als she/her definiert werden könnte, [wir] haben das aber nicht weiter diskutiert, zumal zum jetzigen Zeitpunkt, ob wir da was verändern wollen oder nicht, um noch mal inklusiver auszusehen. Aber ja, da hängt dann doch viel dran, die ganzen Shirts. Es war ein langer Prozess, dass wir uns entschieden

haben für die Teamfarben, für die Shirts, wie die ausschauen sollen, für die Designs und alles.

CA: Und jetzt gehe ich ein bisschen in das Konkrete und werde dir eher Fragen über dich stellen. Meine erste Frage ist: Warum hast du dich entschieden, Roller Derby zu spielen (im Vergleich zu anderen Sportarten)?

SC: Ich war nie in einem Verein, außer in der Schulzeit, aber auch jetzt nicht so intensiv und auch wahrscheinlich nie mit so viel Herz dabei und so viel Leidenschaft. Also für mich ist es auf jeden Fall aus der Community heraus entstanden, aus diesem Freundinnenkreis, der da so sehr das eingebracht hat. Und ganz am Anfang, ich habe nicht ganz verstanden, wie das Spiel funktioniert und das war für mich auch zu viel. Und ich habe mir gedacht: "Ich mach halt das erste Spiel noch und dann muss ich mich langsam eher raus[ziehen], weil das ist zu viel. Passt jetzt nicht zu meinen ganzen anderen Sachen". Und nach dem ersten Spiel war ich: „Wow! Jetzt weiß ich, um was es geht". Ich will das unbedingt. Und dann waren zweimal die Woche Trainings kein Problem mehr. Am Anfang war einmal die Woche schon so bei Training…

CA: Was hat sich nach diesem Spiel für dich geändert?

SC: Ja, diese Community. Wir haben das gemeinsam geschafft. Wir haben da was entwickelt, etwas, das was ist und das es ohne unsere Anstrengung über eineinhalb Jahre einfach nicht geben würde und auch vom Spiel her mal gegen ein anderes Team dann zu spielen und zu merken, wie das Spiel so läuft. Es hat auch eine sportliche Komponente oder eben auch für mich selber zu merken, ich kann auch kraftvoll sein und ich kann ja da was bewirken, sage ich mal. Sport, aber ja, es ist natürlich sehr [inaudible], dass man da was verändern kann.

CA: Und in den Jahren, seitdem du spielst, hat sich für dich was geändert?

SC: Also, das Coole ist wirklich, dass wir uns ja mindestens zweimal die Woche beim Training [sehen] und wir sind um die 40 Spieler*innen mittlerweile, und wir sind schon sehr… also, plötzlich hast du 40 Freund*innen, die da sind. Wir machen Ausflüge. Wir waren jetzt in Island zwei Wochen gemeinsam und es ist so toll, zu merken, wie wir als Community… plötzlich so viel mehr hat, über das, was man teilt, gemeinsam und dass auch auf dem Track bei Trainings im Spiel, aber auch in der Freizeit, wenn wir was anderes gemeinsam machen, total wertvoll und bestärkend und …ja, einfach tolle Menschen, die plötzlich in deinem Leben sind.

Ich hab's jetzt schon auf Innsbruck bezogen, weil wir uns dann regelmäßig sehen und so viele Spiele haben wir ja leider nicht. Und dann sind es meistens verschiedene Teams und, klar, die zähle ich schon irgendwie dazu auf einer anderen Ebene. Das ist toll, wenn wir uns wiedersehen. Bei so einer Veranstaltung siehst du die Leute wieder, mit denen du schon öfters zusammen gespielt hast, und dann ist es voll nett, zusammenzukommen. Das ist wertvoll. Ja. Aber klar ist es noch mal was anderes als als konkret jede Woche gemeinsam zusammen zu wachsen. Aber wir haben auch ein Team in Bozen. Bozen ist uns ziemlich nahe, und die haben uns auch beim Start total viel geholfen und mit denen haben wir eigentlich auch viel Austausch. Und nächste Woche ist ein Spiel in Zürich und wir helfen da aus bei Bozen. Das ist nicht so weit von Innsbruck und deswegen, da sind mal gemeinsame Trainings, manchmal bei ihnen oder bei uns oder wir spielen gegeneinander und wir helfen uns auch gegenseitig aus. Wenn wir zu wenige Spielerinnen haben, dann

fragen wir sie. Oder sie fragen uns, wenn sie zu wenige haben. Das ist schon auch bei den anderen Teams ja genauso. Es ist… die sportliche Rolle ist wichtig, aber Hauptsache wir können spielen. Also klar es ist Vollgas geben auf dem Track und dann aber auf dem Track ist sofort etwas anderes. Klar kann man enttäuscht werden, aber das ist das Spiel. That's part of it. Aber das ist nicht gegen die anderen, sondern das ist einfach alles Geben und wenn man sieht, vielleicht hätten wir es geschafft, da ist klar, da darf man enttäuscht sein. Aber das ist genauso wichtig, oder? Diese Emotions, die da einfach da sind, die sind legitim und haben ihren Platz.

CA: Ich habe bemerkt, dass alle Spieler*innen einen Derby-Namen haben. Deiner ist „Sandy Crush". Was bedeutet dieser Name für dich und warum hast du einen Derby-Namen gewählt?

SC: Also es war gar keine Frage. Wollte ich unbedingt. Ich finde es cool, wenn man so seinen eigenen Namen aussuchen kann oder jemand einem einen Namen gibt und man da jemand anderes auch sein kann. Und ich finde es voll nett, wenn man mich dann Sandy Crush nennt. Voll cool selbstgegebener Name, der dann auch verwendet wird.

Also „crush" ist halt so, ich verstehe ihn schon als hart und Sandy ist mein Ambivalentname. Ich bin als Kind immer so genannt worden bei meinen Eltern. Im Grunde ist Sandy geblieben, auch im Alltag. Die Leute nennen mich so. Mittlerweile mag ich es sehr, sehr gern und da der Namen im Derby etwas ist, dass wir so richtig ownen können.

CA: Wieso findest du es cool, dass die anderen dich im Spiel so nennen? Und gibt es was von „Sandy Crush" außerhalb des Spiels?

SC: Also, wenn ich da durchfahre und dann höre ich „Sandy Crush", dann ist es „Yeah!". Wenn ich jetzt Sandra [Nachname] höre, dann denke ich mir: „Ja, wow!" [ironisch gemeint]. Es ist tatsächlich so, es fühlt sich irgendwie kraftvoller an und es hat auch etwas von dem Spiel, einfach die Möglichkeit, auch wer anderes sein zu können. Klar nehme ich das in den Alltag. Es hat mich schon bewegt oder verändert, dass ich das jetzt länger halt mache. Das habe ich dir schon erzählt, dass das halt schon was mit mir macht. Also so eine Community zum einen zu haben, wo ich weiß, da bin ich Teil davon. Und andererseits auch, weiß ich, dass ich da was machen kann oder bewegen kann oder einfach was kann. Die Sandy Crush kann was und das kann dann vielleicht die Sandra nicht.

CA: Was du jetzt erzählst über den Derby-Namen als „Kraftnamen" und dieses Community-Gefühl und das Selbst-machen… Das hat eher eine feministische Komponente würde ich sagen, oder? Wie siehst du das?

SC: Ja, ja, auf jeden Fall.

CA: Warst du dir bewusst, dass der Sport diese feministische Komponente hatte? Und hat das irgendwie deine Entscheidung beeinflusst, am Sport teilzunehmen?

SC: Also ich war schon davor Feministin, ich habe Pädagogik studiert und auch viel im feministischen Bereich dort gemacht und es war mir ein wichtiges Thema, schon seit Studienzeiten. Und ich habe auch bei diesem Projektantrag die Geschichte übernommen, den Teil über die Geschichte von Roller Derby, wo das herkommt, dass man das schon Ende des 19. Jahrhunderts schon, dass das Rollschuhfahren so etwas war, wo Frauen sich treffen konnten im öffentlichen Raum und dann, in den 70er Jahren und so diese Wrestling-Komponente dabei [war] und es war immer schon eher von Frauen gemacht. Also das war

mir schon bewusst. Was es dann aber in der Praxis bedeutet hat, war sicher eine Entwicklung. Also, wie sich das alles gestaltet und die Diskussionen. Wir müssen uns mit Dingen auseinandersetzen. Das ist nicht eindeutig „Alle denken das Gleiche und wollen das Gleiche“, sondern wir sind verschieden. Auch wenn wir generell einen ähnlichen Zugang haben, würde ich meinen, müssen wir doch auch immer wieder genau hinschauen und auch [der Sport] entwickelt sich sehr, sehr im Feminismus.... Aber das ist halt auch eine Möglichkeit, im Diskurs zu bleiben. Und wir müssen über Dinge reden und uns einigen, wie wir mit Dingen umgehen. Mit Öffnung für alle Geschlechter … oder können Cis-Männer mitmachen oder nicht? Wie gehen wir mit dem Duschen um und so? Warum gibt es mehr männliche Refs als weibliche Refs? Das ist ein Prozess. Wir haben auch nicht von Anfang an *she/her* oder *they/them* auf dem Rooster stehen gehabt. Also das Paket steht da schon mal sehr dominant geschrieben, das unterschreiben sie alle, wenn sie Teil des Vereins sind. Und natürlich müssen wir trotzdem schauen, wo kriegen wir denn dann die Menschen mit unterschiedlicher Herkunft oder unterschiedlichen Geschlechtern her. Wie können wir das wirklich öffnen? Das sind die Punkte, die immer wieder weiter diskutiert werden müssen und auch weil jetzt schon international oder halt in anderen Teams, “Rassismus im Roller Derby” häufig ein Thema war: Wie kann man in der Community da *awareness* noch stärker reinbringen.

CA: Und weil du jetzt über solche Themen sprichst, was siehst du als Ziele von Roller Derby im weiteren Sinne? Also, als Sport ist das Ziel, zu gewinnen; aber was ist sonst noch für Roller Derby als Sport wichtig?

SC: Ich persönlich finde es cool, wenn eine Sportart ist, die so DIY ist und selber organisiert und wir in allen Teilen bestimmen können, wie wir das haben wollen. Wenn wir eine Veranstaltung machen, können wir uns sehr viel selber Gedanken dazu machen, wie wir das aufbauen wollen und wie wir das gestalten wollen, dass sich alle möglichst *safe* und gut fühlen. Und ja, diese Veranstaltungen sind auch irgendwie *„community building“*-mäßig. Es kommen auch viele Leute oder identifizieren sich auch mit Roller Derby, die jetzt gar nicht spielen. Also wir haben die Tierleader, so wie die Fearleader in Wien, die sich selber organisieren, die daraus entstanden sind und die ihr eigenes Ding machen und das da Platz hat und aber auch dazugehört zu den Veranstaltungen. Wir haben einen Chor gegründet, da singen wir Roller-Derby-Songs und das ist auch etwas sehr Community-Stärkendes. Wir machen Soli-Feste und schauen, dass wir das auch so in die Stadt irgendwie tragen und dass mehr und mehr davon erfahren. Und also ich fand es mal ganz cool von einer Doku über Suzy Hotrod, das war so eine der ersten Spielerinnen in den USA, dann in den 2000ern, wann es entstanden ist und die hat auch Kinder-Trainings gemacht und die Girls, die haben es so toll erzählt, was das mit ihnen macht und wie sie sich stark fühlen. Sie haben nicht geglaubt, dass sie so stark sind und das fand ich cool. Auch, dass das auch Mädchen lernen können, dass sie sich bewegen können und körperlich auch kraftvoll sein können und da so was Positives mitnehmen können. Mädchen ist natürlich wieder sehr einschränkend. Das ist auch für andere Kids, die jetzt nicht ins System finden.

CA: Und nun meine letzte Frage: Wie siehst du … oder wie möchtest du die Zukunft von Roller Derby sehen?

SC: Das fände ich cool, dass dann vielleicht … Wir sind das einzige Team in Tirol. Da sind wir auch keine anerkannte Sportart. Es bräuchte drei Teams in Tirol, dass wir anerkannt

sind als Sportart. Es wäre dann cool, wenn es dann mehrere Teams in Tirol gäbe, wo wir dann einfach öfter gegeneinander spielen können. Also so was wäre cool.

CA: Was heißt das genau, dass ihr keine anerkannte Sportart seid?

SC: Wir können keine Förderungen kriegen, keine Sportförderung vom Bund, wir sind keine Sportart. Von daher sind sie nicht zuständig für uns. Deswegen ist es mit Förderungen schwierig. Da müssen wir immer schauen, wo wir reinpassen oder so. Also, Anerkennung der Sportart wäre cool und dann Nachwuchs wäre cool. Also, dass es auch eine Möglichkeit gäbe für Kids, mitzumachen oder Spiele zu spielen.

CA: Aber habt ihr den Eindruck, dass ihr von der breiteren Gesellschaft wahrgenommen werdet?

SC: Wir haben schon viele Leute, die kommen zu unserem Spiel, da ist schon voll und es folgen uns auch einige auf Social Media. Aber wenn ich jetzt jemandem sage: „Ich spiele Roller Derby", dann sagen die: „Aha! Und was macht ihr da?" Also die meisten haben keine Ahnung, was ich tue und dann erzähle ich halt und erkläre und dann: „Interessant! Dann komme ich mal ein Spiel schauen". Also es ist jetzt kein Fußball, es ist kein Baseball …

CA: Aber warum, glaubst du, kennen die Leute es nicht? Es existiert ja schon seit einer Weile. Also, ja, 20 Jahre sind nicht wie 100 Jahre Fußball oder so, aber …

SP: Ja, das ist die Herkunft des Sports. Das ist so ein Sport für Menschen, die eigentlich keinen Sport mögen. Also die meisten kommen nicht, weil sie in einem anderen Leistungssport … also es gibt schon auch welche, die aus anderen Sportarten kommen; aber viele sind nicht [da], weil sie große sportliche Ansprüche haben, sondern weil sie sich einfach für die Community und für das ganze Drumherum interessieren. Da kommen die Leute aus einer anderen Ecke. Und wenn das jetzt nicht Thema ist in der Jugend, dass diese Möglichkeit überhaupt ist, den Sport auszuüben. Also es braucht doch auch einiges dafür. Du brauchst die Halle, riesige Halle, Dreifach-Halle und dann [einen] Track und es halt … alles muss man aufbauen, sehr viel Energie und Zeit reinstecken und dafür ist es dann doch eine relativ kurze Zeit und wir haben einfach auch alle andere Jobs nebenbei. Das ist ja alles auf Freiwilligkeit und das kostet dann schon mehr Energie, als wenn ich einfach, wenn mein Trainer, ich sage jetzt Fußball klassisch, mir ein Spiel ausmacht und sagt: „Da, da sind die Spiele und da sind die Trainings" und dann sagt er: „So jetzt auf den Platz und dann [mach?] es". Du muss alles halt selber irgendwie organisieren, von eben Flyer und Merch und Organisation von den Spielen, Hallen, Miete, Einladungen von anderen Teams, Förderungen, Gelder von der Stadt und vom Land. Das Drumherum ist alles, alles selber zu machen und dann brauchst du halt länger. Es kostet Energie.

4.3 Personal interview with Dianamite from *Steelcity Rollers* (Linz) on 11/06/2022

CA: Wie wurde eure League gegründet?

DM: Seit 2015 haben wir uns zum ersten Mal getroffen und gesagt, dass wir einen Verein gründen wollen. Da war ich auch schon dabei beim ersten Meeting. Und ja, es sind beim Verein derzeit nur Personen, die sich als Frauen identifizieren, dabei.

CA: Woher kanntet ihr Roller Derby? Wie seid ihr dazu gekommen?

DM: Von meinem ehemaligen Schulkollegen, die Schwester spielte damals im Auslandssemester, ich glaube in Holland. Ich bin mir nicht ganz sicher, ein skandinavisches Land, und ich habe das über Facebook gesehen. Ich habe mich dann durch die Nora, die in Wien gespielt hat, über Roller Derby informiert und fand es ziemlich schade, dass es das bei uns nicht gibt bzw. wusste ich nicht, dass es in Wien doch ein Team gibt und habe es dann herausgefunden. Als sie dann zurückgekommen ist und in Wien angefangen hat zu spielen und bei dem ersten Meeting in Linz war auch eine Kanadierin dabei, die zu der Zeit im Mühlviertel in Oberösterreich gelebt hat, die selbst vor Jahren damals Roller Derby gespielt hat und die hat so die ersten Steine, also den ersten Weg geebnet. Sie hat uns Grundlegendes erklärt, wobei sich dann dazwischen natürlich viel geändert hat, seit sie gespielt hat und dann hat sie das entwickelt. Dann hat man irgendwelche Freund*innen mitgenommen und genau so ist dann der Verein irgendwann zustande gekommen.

CA: Wie ist euer Name entstanden? Oder wie habt ihr euch dafür entschieden und was bedeutet er?

DM: Wir haben ganz lange überlegt, womit verbindet man Linz? Vor allem, dass man es auch versteht. Und Linz ist die Stahlstadt, weil die Firma, also die Fabrik, die Voest, dort ist, und bei uns heißt Linz „Stahlstadt“. Also, *SteelCity*.

CA: Aber wieso habt ihr euch für einen lokalen Namen entschieden? Weil ich habe gerade mit z.B. mit *Fearless Bruisers* gesprochen und sie haben keinen regionalen Namen.

DM: Es gab nur Vienna Roller Derby. Also für uns war es *Vienna Roller Derby* und dann … [keine anderen Referenzen]. Wir hatten natürlich, dass man irgendwas mit Linz in Verbindung bringt. Aber jetzt haben wir eben irgendwann auf *SteelCity Roller*.

CA: Wie ist euer Logo zustande gekommen und was bedeutet es?

DM: Zustande gekommen ist das Logo durch Batman. Es hat nichts mit uns zu tun, aber die Position war für uns so eine starke Position und wir wollten aber eben keine männliche Figur natürlich, sondern wir wollten eine Skater*in sehen. Und es war dann auch so, dass man das von einem Foto dann digital übernommen hat. Eine Mitspielerin damals hat sich in die Position gebracht, die wir dann haben wollten.

CA: Und seid ihr bei der WFTDA?

DM: Wir haben uns nicht angemeldet. Das ist sehr lange in der Aufnahmephhase sich befindet und dann gewisse Spielanzahlen leisten muss. Es ist einfach so, dass die Anforderung für uns noch nicht passend war. Wir sind nicht aktiv dagegen. Wir können einfach die Anforderungen noch nicht erfüllen. Und das ist jetzt für uns keine Priorität, weil wir trotzdem nach den Regeln der WFTDA spielen. Genau. Und für uns wäre es eben nur, dass wir uns als Team von der WFTDA betiteln dürfen. Und es ist jetzt nicht in unserer Prioritätenliste sehr weit oben.

CA: Und weil du ja gerade gesagt hast, dass Teil der WFTDA zu sein nicht unter euren Prioritäten ist: Was sind die Prioritäten von Steelcity Rollers oder von Roller Derby allgemein?

DM: Ohne Kommunikation funktioniert Roller Derby nicht, weil es kein Sport ist, der einen alleine weiterbringt. Weil hinter dir, neben dir, vor dir ist immer jemand. Genau, mit denen muss man sprechen. Teambuilding allgemein. Vertrauen. Offenheit. Recht allgemein, weil es an Offenheit, was Gender betrifft, was *body positivity* [betrifft]. Allgemein ist es so, dass sich jede Person wohlfühlen kann im Team.

CA: Und wie schafft ihr das?

DM: Man muss sich selbst immer wieder einlesen. Immer, immer fortbilden. Du kannst nicht irgendwann bei einem Stand stehenbleiben und das ganze Gender-Thema entwickelt sich weiter. Du musst einfach immer mitlernen und versuchen, dich selbst zu verbessern. Was die Sprache betrifft, was den Umgang betrifft …

CA: Jetzt springe ich ein bisschen vom Allgemeinem ins Konkrete oder eher fokussiere ich mich auf dich: Warum hast du dich entschieden, Roller Derby zu spielen (im Vergleich zu anderen Sportarten)?

DM: Ich habe vorher noch nie Sport gemacht. Wirklich nichts. Und das war dann so, man hat sich mit den Personen, die man da eben zum ersten Mal getroffen hat, das waren Freunde und Freundinnen dabei. Man hat sich gut verstanden. Man hat gesehen, da sind ähnliche Interessen und man trifft sich, um zusätzlich eben Sport zu machen. Und der Sport ist einfach … Es war sehr beeindruckend zuzusehen …und endlich einmal diese Kraft benutzen zu können, die man hat, wenn man nicht unbedingt die Sportlerin ist, die jetzt laufen geht oder Leichtathletik oder sonst irgendwas macht. Und irgendwann gewöhnt man sich an diese Treffen, an dieses Regelmäßige und es war ein großer Fortschritt am Anfang, vor allem die ersten Trainings, so große Fortschritte [für mich selbst] zu machen. Und das im Team.

Und eben auch, dass man dranbleibt, weil man irgendwie auch das Gefühl hat, man würde merken, wenn man nicht da ist. Also, dass auch motiviert, dass andere da sind und du nicht alleine Sport machst und das war für mich eigentlich sehr motivierend.

CA: Du hast über Offenheit und *body positivity* gesprochen. Das sind feministische Themen, würde ich sagen… War es dir schon bewusst, als du angefangen hast zu spielen, dass Roller Derby so war? Und hat es für dich eine Rolle gespielt, dich für diesen Sport zu entscheiden?

DM: Ja, ich wusste es vorher und es war ein Grund, warum ich damit angefangen habe. Es war irgendwie der Impuls, dass man was aktiv…dieses aktive feministische Handeln. Im Team, dass alle ähnlich denken und dass man das gemeinsam macht, dass man nicht alleine dasteht. Wobei meine Freunde und Freundinnen sind auch sehr feministisch, aber es war halt schön, auch andere kennenzulernen, die ähnlich denken. Es war ein bisschen aus diesem Wohlfühlkreis, den man aufgebaut hatte, ein bisschen rauskommen.

CA: Dieses Feministische heißt auch, dass ihr alles macht. Was bedeutet dieses „by the skater for the skater“ oder dieses DIY?

DM: Wirklich von null anfangen. Wirklich. Wir haben das Logo selbst gemacht. Wir hätten zwar jemanden gehabt, der das gemacht hätte, dann hat der aber uns nicht verstanden, was wir wollten. Und hat so ein bisschen seine eigenen Sachen gemacht. Und wir haben gesagt: Stopp! Dann machen wir es selbst. Bei uns sind sehr viele kreative Köpfe im Team, die das

auch beruflich machen. Und so haben wir eben das Logo selbst kreiert. Alles wird selbst hergestellt. Wir lassen es dann eben nur mehr drucken. Wir organisieren uns die Trainings selbst. Die Trainer*innen bei uns überlegen sich eigene Sachen. Wir bestellen die Kleidung und wir schauen, dass wir eben diese Sachen so bestellen, dass wir uns im Schnitt wohlfühlen. Für alle geht es leider nicht immer, aber man schaut, dass man sich einigt. Wir versuchen, dass wir eben nicht nur die Trainings, sondern auch unseren Verein grundsätzlich selbst organisieren bzw. uns passende Unterstützung suchen. Wir schauen, dass wir eher regional… dann zum Beispiel die T-Shirts drucken lassen. Wir wenden uns dann eher weniger an die Großunternehmen, wobei, wenn wir nichts Passendes finden für uns, natürlich muss man ...

CA: Wieso ist das für euch wichtig, dass es regional bleibt?

DM: Weil wir kleine Unternehmen mitunterstützen wollen, wenn wir schon neu anschaffen müssen. Für die Ausrüstung natürlich schaut man, wenn neue Skater*innen anfangen, dass man dann über die Roller-Derby-Marke, also irgendwo über Flohmarkt-Seiten und so was bestellt und nicht immer gleich das Neue. Aber wenn man dann ebenso wie neue T-Shirts brauchen, dann schauen wir, dass wir wenigstens die regional auch herstellen lassen können und somit die kleinen Unternehmen unterstützen.

CA: Und bevor ich meine letzte Frage stelle, gibt es eine Frage, die ich eigentlich früher gestellt haben sollte: dein Derby-Name. Was bedeutet er? Wieso hast du dich dafür entschieden, überhaupt einen Derby-Namen zu benutzen?

DM: Also, ich wollte meinen eigenen Namen im Roller Derby haben. Also, dass das jetzt komplett irgendwas anderes ist, wäre für mich nicht in Frage gekommen. Meine erste Roller Derby Namen, den ich gerne gehabt hätte, wäre „Lady Di“, aber in Hamburg war schon eine „Lady Di“ und Hamburg ist jetzt nicht so weit weg wie Philadelphia. Ich lass es bleiben. Und dann habe ich mich nach englischen Wörtern umgeschaut. Für mich war Roller Derby dieses Englische, Amerikanische und irgendwie wollte ich mich dann trotzdem anpassen an das Ganze. Und im Deutschen gibt es ja keine schönen Wörter mit „Dia…“. Diamant, aber das bin nicht ich. Ja, und es sollte doch ein bisschen abschreckend wirken. Und „Dianamite“ war dann so… okay, wenn man schlampig ausspricht, *dynamite*.

CA: Und wenn du den Track verlässt, lässt du Dianamite hinter dir oder trägst du sie mit?

DM: Nein, es ist wirklich eine Rolle. Das ist ein bisschen eine Rolle, die man bei Roller Derby, glaube ich, also ich spreche jetzt für mich, einfach annehmen kann. Also, es ist etwas verbunden mit dem Sport.

CA: Und nun meine letzte Frage: Wie wünschst du dir die Zukunft von Roller Derby?

DM: Ich wünsche mir, dass es noch mehr Menschen anspricht, dass sich mehr Menschen bereiterklären, es auszuprobieren. Da liegt da eine Überwindung, dass man dort hingeht und was anschaut. Was ich auch gerne möchte, ist, dass es keine Randsportart mehr ist. Dass es einfach populärer wird, aber den Wert nicht verliert. Und das ist, glaube ich, schwierig, weil es immer, wenn etwas mehr zur Verfügung steht, nicht so geschätzt wird, wie wenn es eine Rarität ist. Und dass es eben von mehr Personen gesehen würde. Ich wünsche mir, dass das in Österreich nicht den Charme verliert, den Spirit.

CA: Und was ist dieser Spirit?

DM: Du kommst her und bist willkommen.

CA: Nur eine Nachfrage: Du hast gesagt, dass es keine Randsportart mehr sein soll. Geht es da nur darum, dass mehr Menschen spielen?

DM: Dass mehr Menschen spielen oder es zugänglicher gemacht wird. Vielleicht auch, dass es Kinder, Jugendliche gibt. Dass er populärer wird. Die meisten Menschen kennen ihn wohl nicht, weil sie keinen kennen, der den Sport macht. Und wenn du niemanden kennst, der das aktiv ausübt, dann beschäftigst du dich wahrscheinlich auch nicht so damit. Wir versuchen, das immer nach außen zu tragen. Wir reden sehr viel darüber, auch wenn es für manche schon nervig ist. Aber es ist ein Teil unseres Lebens und wir versuchen, immer mehr Menschen davon zu begeistern, weil wir so begeistert sind davon. Ich hätte vermutlich nie so viel Sport gemacht, hätte ich nicht solche Sachen erlebt; hätte nie jetzt die Leute kennengelernt, mit denen wir jetzt spielen.

CA: Und was braucht der Sport dafür? Glaubst du, indem man davon redet, wird der Sport von selbst wachsen?

DM: Er wird wahrscheinlich wachsen, weil es Hallenprobleme gibt. Du bekommst keine Halle, weil die Menschen glauben, du machst den Boden kaputt mit deinen Rollen. Es sind einfach solche Sachen. Die Menschen beschäftigen sich nicht damit, sondern schieben es gleich ab, weil sie es nicht kennen. Das Unbekannte wird weggeschoben.

4.4 Personal interview with Pantybreaker from *Vienna Roller Derby* on 11/06/2022

CA: ¿Me puedes explicar un poco de dónde sale el logo de Vienna Roller Derby y qué representa?

PB: Es esta persona que se llama Charmion [shows me a picture]. Tomaron a esta persona de modelo y era una esculturista, artista de trapecio. Es la imagen de una persona muy fuerte y luego también intentaron que fuera como la imagen de Rossie The Riveter, como esa pose con la silueta de esta persona.

CA: ¿Qué te llevó a elegir roller derby como deporte (en oposición a otros deportes)?

PB: Yo no hacía deportes antes. Bueno, de pequeña, muy pequeña. Pero cuando empecé a hacer roller derby, llevaba mucho tiempo sin hacer deporte. Simplemente creo que vi un post del equipo de Salamanca en Tuenti o Facebook, o vi la película de Whip It! No sé qué fue antes, pero no sé qué me llamó la atención y realmente la cosa es que en Salamanca había tan pocas personas en el equipo que en cuanto saben que hay alguien que está medio interesada te convencen porque necesitan a gente siempre. Entonces una amiga de una amiga estaba en el equipo y cuando yo le dije a mi amiga que igual me lo estaba pensando, pues me fueron a convencerme y me convencieron.

CA: Pero … ¿qué te llamo la atención del deporte? ¿Qué fue donde dijiste: “eso sería para mí”?

PB: No sé, creo que tiene como algo… un poco de outsider. Siento que igual gente que no se siente integrada en otros sitios, a lo mejor sí se siente en derby. Como que hay una cosa así de outsider y… A ver, luego también es muy espectacular, claro. Entonces. Pues igual, si no estás tan pensando en el deporte, si no te gusta el deporte en sí, pues tiene algo como

más vistoso. Y luego también sí, yo sí que desde que empecé pues había escuchado un poco sobre el posicionamiento político del derby y también me parece interesante, como la buena conexión con el feminismo.

CA: ¿Qué hace os sintáis integradas?

PB: Siento que hay ciertas bases de cosas que están dadas por hecho en el derby, como son un poco los cuidados, también pues mucha gente … tiene que ver también obviamente con la parte más política, mucha gente que a lo mejor se siente excluida en otros deportes. Supongo que especialmente esto es para las personas trans, no binarias. Pues que en el derby como que está dado por hecho, o se intenta hacer, que todo el mundo tiene que ser bienvenido y yo creo que eso tiene algo que ver con los orígenes, así un poco más punk y DIY, porque eso empezó siendo algo como de gente rara, que pues eso se disfrazaba y estaba muy loca. Bueno, es que al principio era además mucho más espectacular, pero sí, yo creo que también tiene un poco que ver con eso. Como va mucha gente que se siente así, outsider. Supongo que todavía queda algo de ese espíritu así más punky.

CA: ¿Y en el sentido de "muy espectacular" porqué lo dices? ¿Que qué es espectacular y para quién? ¿Para el público o para vosotras como jugadoras?

PB: Yo creo que desde fuera. Bueno, a ver. Y sobre todo antes, o sea, ahora cada vez es más un deporte más serio, pero antes pues. La gente no llevaba prácticamente ropa de deporte real. Era medias de rejilla, pantalones vaqueros rotos, cortos. Los cinturones también. De hecho, muy incómodo. Pero era también el espectáculo. Y… ahora. A ver, yo también sigo creyendo que queda algo de eso. O sea, se ha vuelto mucho más profesional. Pero … la gente sigue queriendo dar espectáculo y … Sí que hay como una energía en los partidos muy especial, yo siento. O sea, también sigue habiendo un poco así como de esa cosa de la purpurina, de los maquillajes y los derby names. O sea, así que quedan algunas cosas de que no son tan comunes en otros deportes, que es como que tienes como una persona derby y… también yo sí creo que hay algo que es especial, o sea que es como más concreto del deporte en sí. Pues el contacto, los saltos, el apex jam (cuando saltan en la curva). Si sabes saltar en la curva es muy espectacular o bueno, cuando hay un bloqueo y barres a la persona con las caídas sí que tiene algo como impactante. Yo estudio visualmente el deporte, pero o sea, eso, pues claro, cuando cada vez que se ha ido pensando más en la seguridad de les jugadores, pues igual, la espectacularidad ha decrecido un poco. Pero bueno, yo creo que sí que queda algo.

CA: Y bueno, ya que estás hablando de las cosas que han cambiado… Has mencionado que el deporte se ha vuelto más profesional. ¿Me quieres explicar un poco que se entiende por "profesional"? ¿Es simplemente el tema de la ropa, por ejemplo, o hay otros aspectos?

PB: No, hay otros aspectos. Se han creado asociaciones. Incluso las federaciones de patinaje a veces también intentan. Bueno, es mutuo. A veces, ambas partes buscan su beneficio. Pero sí que hay cierta colaboración, más con las instituciones también, porque es que es muy difícil sobrevivir. O sea, siendo totalmente DIY. ¿En qué más? Sí, sea, la organización. No sé si has escuchado sobre la WFTDA. Cada vez es más grande, más seria. Más seria en el sentido de que, por ejemplo, cuando yo empecé no había materiales para la gente que era nueva. Era un poco como llamas a una persona de otro equipo que venga a enseñarte y ahora tú entras en la página de la WFTDA, están todos los materiales ahí, han traducido las

reglas a un montón de idiomas, o sea, como que al hacerse más grande también hay más recursos, sí. A ver, a mí hay algo que sí me parece como un poco peligroso, que igual se pierda la esencia más política por querer que no se nos tome más en serio. Por querer ser vistes como más…. como que la gente que no, que no está dentro … Como buscar la validación de que sí es un deporte en serio. Pues sí es un deporte en serio, pero tiene cosas que son diferentes y a mí me parece que deberían mantenerse.

CA: Y volviendo un paso atrás ¿cómo sucedió que también aquí [en Austria] decidiste seguir con el roller derby?

PB: Lo primero que hice cuando supe que iba a venir aquí fue mirar si había equipo. Yo lo he agradecido mucho porque creo que venir a una ciudad cuando no conoces a nadie y tener como una comunidad que te acoge tan fácilmente es muy importante. Es que, de hecho, siempre lo hablamos, que cuando eres adulta es más difícil hacer amigues. Y en roller derby, pues a mucha gente creo que le ha abierto como un montón de lazos de conocer a mucha gente.

CA: Por lo que me cuentas, roller derby es inclusivo no solo en el sentido de género, como ya has mencionado. Si no, en general, en el sentido, de que cualquiera que quiera jugar es bienvenido. Y estoy pensando, por ejemplo, cuando llegaste no hablabas alemán. ¿En ese sentido son los trainings también inclusivos?

PB: Sí. De hecho, el idioma oficial de Viena es el inglés y, a ver, se intenta ser lo más inclusive posible, pero obviamente hay muchas cosas que se nos escapan. Y de hecho, últimamente he estado hablando con una compañera que en realidad la gente de clase baja de Austria no habla inglés. Ahí también estamos excluyendo a la gente, por otro lado. Entonces es difícil. Pero, sí, según salen los temas, vamos intentando mejorar y siempre ser lo más inclusives posible.

Es un tema complicado. De hecho, hemos hablado bastante de ello, porque también en Viena tenemos un comité que trata estos temas, porque la WFTDA recomendó que los equipos tuvieran un comité de esto y lo que la WFTDA recomienda es que se llame ‘Diversity and Inclusion’ y, de hecho, estuvimos hablando mucho de ello, porque de hecho inclusividad es una palabra tricky, porque significa que hay un grupo, no? Y que estás incluyendo a la gente y tú eres como el gate keeper. Entonces, pues sí, es complicado. A mí lo que me gusta más que pensar que es inclusivo, me gusta pensar que es político, porque yo primero, no quiero pensar que incluya a nadie, y segundo, a veces me parece que se nos vuelve un arma de doble filo porque nos llenamos la boca de ser inclusives, pero al final hay muchísimas cosas que nos dejamos atrás. También estamos aprendiendo, pero, por ejemplo, es extremadamente blanco, o sea, es un deporte con muy poca diversidad racial. Y también la clase. O sea, casi toda la gente es de clase media. Intentamos poner soluciones. Por ejemplo, en Viena si no te puedes pagar, no puedes pagar la cuota, no tienes que pagarla. Si no te puedes permitir la equipación, se te da, se te ayuda, se te da dinero. Hay como fondo también de cosas de prestar. O sea, sí que hay como buscamos herramientas, pero obviamente no dejamos de movernos en una burbuja y ese es como el mayor problema que tenemos, que nos cuesta mucho a veces salir de nuestra burbuja de gente blanca, de clase media. De hecho con lo de la inclusividad, eso es otra cosa que es peligrosa, porque creo que en el derby al principio sientes que es muy especial, ¿no? Y como que todo está mejor que en otros lugares, ¿no? Pero luego te das cuenta de que al final seguimos

reproduciendo un montón de violencias. Seguimos siendo parte del sistema y hay muchas cosas que seguimos teniendo que repensarnos. Me parece importante decirlo porque creo que, al principio, todo el mundo pasa como por una fase de luna de miel y luego dices: "Bueno, es que al final también tenemos incluso conflictos".

CA: Bueno, antes de pasar a la última pregunta, te quería hacer una pregunta que hago a todas las skaters: ¿cómo se te ocurrió el nombre Pantybreaker y qué significa para ti?

PB: Pues a ver el nombre del vino a mí. De hecho, yo al principio quería tener otro nombre de Derby, pero me pasó que yo cuando empecé en el derby yo no sabía patinar. Y en Salamanca, al principio sobre todo, teníamos muy pocos recursos y entrenábamos en la calle en una pista de cemento. Entonces yo me caía todo el rato y un día llegué a casa y debajo de los leggins me había rasgado las bragas. Entonces se lo conté a mis compañeras y desde entonces acabé con el nombe "Rompebragas" y de hecho no me quería llamar así, pero es que no me dejaron de llamar así. Entonces al final fue como bueno, pues es mi nombre. Es simplemente gracioso. Tampoco es que diga ahora soy "Rompebragas" y soy diferente, pero hay muchas cosas del derby que he llevado fuera a mi vida, más allá del nombre. Por ejemplo, mi conexión con mi cuerpo era nula más allá de bailar de fiesta, nada. Y el derby especialmente, tienes que saber muy bien dónde está el peso, donde pones el equilibrio, con qué pierna estás haciendo más fuerza, en qué ruedas… Y, de hecho, yo especialmente que soy tan pequeña, que soy tan delgada, me pasa que tengo que tener mucho control para que no me rebasen y para mí eso ha sido como un aprendizaje muy grande. De repente ver que puedo hacer cosas con mi cuerpo. Eso para mí también tiene mucho que ver con este empoderamiento, que es una palabra que está un poco ya demasiado usada, pero al principio cuando entré en el derby era como: "¡Wow! Es que puedo, puedo hacer deporte, ¿sabes?"

CA: Y ya, para terminar, ¿cómo te gustaría ver el futuro de roller derby?

PB: Lo más importante que mantuviera su esencia política. Sí, porque de hecho también hay mucha gente que entra en el derby y es como: "no, yo solo entro por el deporte" y es como: "no, lo siento. Es que no se puede separar". Para mi roller derby es el deporte y lo que viene con el deporte, que es la parte política, la comunidad… Para mi eso sería lo más importante y que ... Claro, yo he estado en diferentes ligas y tengo como diferentes perspectivas y, pues, algunas ligas deberían repensarse todo lo que hablan de "somos inclusive, somos feministas", porque a veces se queda mucho en la palabra. Y por ejemplo, roller derby en la Viena, igual nos falta un poco de acción. Eso es algo que me gustaría ver más. O sea, más compromiso con lo que decimos que somos. Eso es lo que me gustaría. Y que no se perdiera la parte pues divertida, diferente, espectacular. Y que no queremos, como la validación de lo que es el deporte tradicional, porque justamente estamos un poco intentando luchar contra eso. Entonces, más que querer la validación, que extendamos más lo que estamos haciendo.

4.5 Online interview with Reckless Spice from *Dust City Rollers* (Graz) on 30/06/2022

CA: Wie wurde eure League gegründet? Wie habt ihr von Roller Derby gehört?

RS: Also es war so, dass mein Partner eine Freundin in London hat, die hat jetzt mittlerweile aufgehört, aber sie hat damals schon seit Jahren Roller Derby gespielt. Und vor allem über Facebook hat man viele Fotos gesehen und sie hat mir immer wieder gezeigt, sie

macht das und ich fand, das ist so mega cool. Und die Fotos … ich fand das irgendwie spannend, irgendwie interessant. Und ich glaube, was mir halt auch gefallen hat, war dann irgendwann, dass ich sie halt so cool finde, diese politische, feministische Person, dass ich irgendwie davon ausgehe, wenn die was macht, dass das cool ist.

Im Frühling 2015 war ein Spiel *Vienna Roller Derby* gegen *London Roller Derby* in Wien. Und da kurz davor hatte ich mich entschieden, dass ich ein Auslandssemester in Berlin mache. Und irgendwie gedacht: „Wenn ich in Berlin bin, dort gibt es ein Team, da kann ich das probieren, dann kann ich das abhaken. Da kann ich mitmachen, dann kann ich das quasi erleben und weiß dann, wie das ist". Und bevor ich mich entschieden habe, war ich so: „Jetzt schaue ich mir noch das Spiel in Wien an". Dann habe ich es mir angeschaut und, ich glaube, ziemlich gleich an das Berliner Team geschrieben, ob ich irgendwie dort mittrainieren kann. Ob ich das machen kann in der Zeit, wo ich in Berlin bin. Und dann haben die einerseits gesagt: „Ja, du kommst zu spät für die Anfänger*innen-Klasse, aber wenn du einfach zu Hause schon skatest, wenn du schon ein bisschen übst, kannst du dann einfach ein bisschen verspätet einsteigen". Und gleichzeitig hat die Person, mit der ich das geschrieben hab, die ist aus Graz, zufällig, deren Schwester ist in Graz und will das auch machen und sie war dann: *„Connecte* dich mit der Person, weil dann könnt ihr das ja auch in Graz machen". Und dann parallel dazu, das war einfach Zufall, dass das zeitgleich war, haben Vienna Roller Derby, die es schon ein paar Jahre länger gibt als alle anderen Teams, einfach viel Energie, viel Zeit, voll viel Arbeit reingesteckt, irgendwie zu unterstützen, dass es in mehr Städten in Österreich Roller Derby gibt. Und die haben eine Facebookseite gemacht für Graz. Und dann haben wiederum diese, zufällig über Berlin, Bekannte und ich dort [an Vienna Roller Derby] hingeschrieben. Das war wirklich einfach zur gleichen Zeit. Und noch eine dritte, die war auch aus Wien. Die dritte, die hat eine Freundin, die in Wien im Team war, die ist nach Graz gezogen und hat sich dann auch dort gemeldet. Und die waren dann: „Okay, ihr seid jetzt drei Leute, die das in Graz machen wollen. Wir geben euch gegenseitig den Kontakt und dann macht ihr das einfach". Und dann habe ich mich mit der einen im Sommer manchmal zum Skaten getroffen in Graz auf der Straße. Die war einmal schon in Berlin beim Training, hat das also gewusst. Dann war ich in Berlin und dann bin ich zurückgekommen. Und dann war es so: „Okay, passt, jetzt machen wir es". Und wir drei haben dann eben so übers Internet hauptsächlich geschrieben, wir haben uns nie getroffen. Wir haben dann einen Flyer gemacht, dass wir in den Café Erde kommen sollen an dem Tag und dann setzen wir uns zusammen und dann planen wir das. Und das war im Dezember 2015. Es sind 10-15 Leute gekommen. Über den Flyer haben sich die Leute dann gemeldet. Im Jänner haben dann wir quasi mit den Wienerinnen, mit Leuten aus dem Wiener Team, ein Probetraining in Graz gemacht. Sie haben unglaublich viel Ausrüstung in ihre Rucksäcke gepackt, für alle Leute. Sie sind mit denen nach Graz kommen, haben immer mit uns trainiert. Danach haben sich dann einige entschieden, anzufangen, machen wir das gemeinsam. Ein paar waren: „Ist nicht für mich, aber irgendwie cool". Und ich glaube, im Februar haben wir dann angefangen zu trainieren. Und mit 1. April 2016 den Verein gegründet.

CA: Und woher kommt der Name *Dust City Rollers*? Hat es für euch irgendeine Bedeutung? Wieso habt ihr euch für einen Namen entschieden, der ein regionales Merkmal(?) hervorhebt (im Vergleich zu anderen Namen, die ein persönliches(?) Merkmal ansprechen, z.B. *Fearless Bruisers*)?

RS: Das war auch so, wir haben ein paar Teams gekannt… Also, Vienna Roller Derby mit der Facebookseite haben einen ganz gleichen Namen, Graz Roller Derby, vorgeschlagen, damals so indirekt. Sie wollten das nie weisen oder vorgeben, aber das war halt für die wiederum naheliegend. Und wiederum ich glaube, gerade wenn man sich erst überhaupt etablieren will, macht es Sinn, wenn das ganz klar ist, wo das her ist, wo das ist, weil ja, man muss ja aus der Region sein, sonst kann man nicht teilnehmen. Und wir haben alle ein paar Teams gekannt, deren Name sich auf deren Städte bezog, aber ohne den Städtenamen zu haben. Also, zum Beispiel, auch den Gotham City Derby in New York oder Bear City Roller Derby in Berlin.

Wir haben uns überlegt, dass wir so was wollen. Und dann haben wir überlegt, was könnte es sein für Graz? Und haben dann auch so in Richtung *Valley City* oder so was überlegt gehabt, was eben ein Becken ist. Und haben eben einfach … [uns gefragt]: Was steht für Graz? Oder Alien? (das Kunsthaus). Irgendwie was quasi kann man so… was ist Graz? Aber nicht das Wort „Graz". Und dann schlussendlich … es waren auch schlussendlich nicht alle einverstanden, aber eben es geht um die schlechte Feinstaub-Politik von Graz, weil die Luft schlecht ist und nur wenig passiert.

CA: Was ist nochmal das Problem?

RS: Der Feinstaub, wofür Graz wiederum bekannt ist, dass die Luft so extrem schlecht ist und es eine so hohe Feinstaubbelastung in Graz gibt. Was uns nicht ganz zu 100 % bewusst war: Es gibt zum Beispiel auch diese City-of-the-Dust-Sticker. Die sind ziemlich gleich alt oder ein bisschen älter. City of the Dust sowie City of Design, das ist auch im ganz gleichen Design. Also womit Grass Werbung macht, City of Design und die haben einfach das gleiche Design gemacht und die kleben auch überall in der Stadt, wo City of Design schon seit… Also, *City of Dust* eben. Keine Ahnung, was das für die Gruppe ist, aber ich glaube, das ist auf jeden Fall eine kritische Aktion.

CA: Und wieso euer Logo? Bzw. was repräsentiert euer Logo? Wieso habt ihr ein Tier gewählt?

RS: Unser Logo ist ein Fuchs. Und welches Tier war nicht... Ja, wir haben das recht schnell gesagt, dass es ein Tier sein soll und keine Person, eben weil die immer so klar weiblich sind, die ganzen Frauen auf [den Logos]. Also das ist einfach so offensichtlich weiblich gelesen, der Körper, in den ganzen Logos und das wollten wir absichtlich nicht machen. Wir wollten es ein bisschen neutral halten, weil es hier halt einfach nicht so feminin dargestellt werden kann. Oder ich würde sagen, in unserem Fall gar nicht. Also es gibt Tiere, die immer quasi „die" sind. Es ist der Fuchs, aber es ist nicht so stark gegendert wie andere Bilder, die es vielleicht hätten sein können.

CA: Und ich habe gelesen, ihr seid nicht bei der WFTDA? Habt ihr das vor? Oder wieso nicht?

RS: Wir fühlen uns … und das machen ja viele Teams: Wir machen alles, was sie sagen, nur eben nicht offiziell. Wenn man Mitglied ist, dann ist man quasi dazu gezwungen. Dann muss man sich an Regeln halten. Wir wollen das. Wir stehen hinter der Idee. Wir wollen auch genauso unser Spiel leben. Das ist auch, wie wir mit anderen Teams kommunizieren, weil man ja einfach wissen muss: Welches Regelwerk gilt? Was erwartet man, wenn man gegen ein Team spielt oder auch, wenn man Mitglied werden will? Ehrlich gesagt, am

Anfang haben wir einfach gehört und gelernt, dass es unglaublich viel Arbeit ist, das ganze Antragsprozedere, da reinzukommen. Also, in die Mitgliedschaft zu kommen, reinzukommen, dass das viel Arbeit ist, weswegen wir auch immer gesagt haben: „Da müssen wir einfach unglaublich viel wachsen“. Wir sind auch ein wirklich sehr kleines Team, wir grenzen immer gerade so die Grenze, dass man es überhaupt schafft, Spiele zu spielen, weil wir einfach zu wenig Leute sind. Genau deswegen ist es für uns nie so relevant, weil wir es einfach nicht schaffen würden, weil es Arbeit bedeuten würde. Und eben das heißt, wenn man Mitglied ist, muss man eine gewisse Anzahl an Spielen jedes Jahr spielen und dann quasi dazu verpflichten, dass wir so und so viele Spiele spielen, das könnte man auch mal schaffen.

CA: Aber wieso ist dann wichtig für euch, wenn es so viel Arbeit bedeutet, Teil davon zu sein?

RS: Einerseits ist es irgendwie wichtig, uns anzuerkennen und zu sagen: Wir gehören dazu, wir wollen diese Regeln…. Ich glaube, das kann man dann nicht immer sagen, aber im Großen und Ganzen stimmen wir mit diesen politischen Normen, die da einfach vorgeschlagen werden, überein. Das wäre sicher in der Vergangenheit, seit es die gibt, seit 2004, nicht immer so gewesen. Ich glaube, mit jeder Entscheidung hätten wir sicher nicht übereingestimmt, aber wiederum wir entwickeln unsere Entscheidungen eh weiter. Aber generell ist uns das schon wichtig. Wir haben auf keinen Fall was mit dem Roller Derby der World Skate, das ist ein anderer Weltverband, der vom Olympischen Komitee anerkannte Weltverband. Mit Olympisch geht auch immer gewisse Professionalisierung einher, was im Roller Derby aber nicht der Fall ist. Das ist auch bewusst nicht der Fall, dass die Spieler*innen fürs Spielen bezahlt werden. Wir wollen auf keinen Fall was mit deren Idee zu tun haben. Die sind noch trans-exkludierend, was einfach so der ganz große *turning point* ist, aber auch das Spiel funktioniert dort anders. Die wollen aber quasi gern beanspruchen, das sei das einzige Roller Derby haben. Es sind aber dann andere Regeln, es hat sich später entwickelt. Das ist nicht das Politische, das wir uns vorstellen, was wir machen wollen… Aber was auch ein wichtiger Punkt ist: Wenn man Mitglied ist, entscheidet man mit. Also das funktioniert sehr demokratisch, die WFTDA. Die Regeländerungen zum Beispiel. Es gibt immer wieder Ideen: Was könnte man ändern? Dann machen die Vorschläge, dann können Teams sagen: Wir setzen das mal um im Training und wir evaluieren das. Dann kann jedes Teammitglied danach Rückmeldung geben. Das wiederum kommt an das Organisationsteam von der Association.

CA: Jetzt habe ich viel über *Dust City Rollers* und Roller Derby allgemein gehört und ich wollte ein bisschen mehr nach dir und deiner Motivation, Roller Derby zu spielen, fragen: Also, wieso hast du dich entschieden, Roller Derby zu spielen (im Vergleich zu anderen Sportarten)?

RS: Ich persönlich habe in der Unterstufe mit 12 oder 13 angefangen zu tanzen. Was auch als Teamsport funktioniert hat dort. Dort, wo ich war, war es immer ein Teamsport. Das habe ich einfach jahrelang gemacht. Das war für mir immer die einzige Art von Sport, die ich gemacht habe. Also ich habe nie wirklich einen anderen Sport… Dann habe ich über USI auch manche solche Sachen gemacht, um überhaupt einfach dabeizubleiben und Sport zu machen. Aber ich habe einfach nie daran gedacht, dass ich eine andere Sportart machen kann. Also das Tanzen habe ich gekannt und das habe ich einfach immer weitergemacht, bis

es mir irgendwann keine Freude mehr gemacht hat. Und dann war einfach diese Faszination für ganz konkret diesen einen Sport da. Also ich war einfach darauf fixiert. Ich glaube nicht, dass das meine Motivation war: „Ich muss einen Sport machen, ich brauche einen Ausgleich, ich brauch das und das am besten". Es ist wirklich: „Ich will ganz genau dieses Projekt gerne verfolgen".

CA: Wieso?

RS: Weil ich die Person in London cool gefunden habe, weil das interessant gewirkt hat. Unter anderem, weil ich einfach diesen feministischen Aspekt sehr wichtig und interessant gefunden habe. Es war, glaube ich, in der Zeit davor, dass sie immer wieder in so feministischen Gesprächsgruppen war, dass wir immer wieder probiert haben, so Diskurse regelmäßig zu gestalten und sich auch einfach selber zu fordern, und mehr zu lernen diesbezüglich. Das ist genau, das war einfach so zur ähnlichen Zeit, das hat sie vorher angefangen und …okay, das ist was anderes Feministisches und mit einem anderen Zugang, der mich einfach eben so fasziniert hat, was cool ausschaut, interessant ausschaut, weil die Stimmung extrem gut war. Aber ich glaube, das, was ich wirklich extrem liebe am Roller Derby, das, glaube ich, habe ich mit der Zeit auf der Hand, wofür es alles steht, was es für Vorteile bringt. Wieso Teamsport um einiges cooler ist, wenn man der Typ ist dafür, als eigentlich Sport als Individualsport. Es ist feministisch. Man geht dorthin. Man weiß, dass das andere Team … dass die Politik zumindest im Grund, nicht immer mit jeder Feinheit stimmt man überein, aber so die Grundzüge, die Voraussetzungen, die Basis, die einfach gegeben sind. Dass es generell eine queere Community ist, ist mega cool. Dass verschiedene Körper dort einfach selbstverständlich sind, was in ganz vielen anderen Sportarten nicht der Fall ist. Also das Einzige, was ich gelernt habe, ist Volleyball und dort finde ich, dass es nicht der Fall ist, dass es normal ist, dass man übergewichtig ist und halt Sport machen kann. Das sind so Dinge…und man ist einfach grundsätzlich freundlich zu Spielern. Dann fängt das Spiel an, dann ist man kompetitiv und dann ist das Spiel vorbei. Und dann ist das Kompetitive wieder großteils weg. Was mir extrem taugt, ist, dass es schon ernst ist. Wir wollen alle unbedingt gewinnen. Alle, die da hingehen, wollen gewinnen. Aber in dem Moment, wo du glaubst, du hast jetzt gerade wem wirklich wehgetan, hältst du eine Sekunde inne und schaust, ob es okay ist. Wenn die sagt, okay, die Person, machst du weiter. Es gibt immer so auch im Spiel, auch wo es kompetitiv ist, diese Grenze, wo man sagt: „Okay, aber das ist jetzt wichtiger, wie es der Person geht als das Spiel". Das ist zumindest, auf dem Level wo wir spielen, einfach selbstverständlich, dass die Runde jetzt nicht so wichtig ist, wie es jetzt diese Person ist. Es kann sogar regelkonform sein und mir wird es trotzdem extrem blöd wehtun und trotzdem extrem leidtun. Also, so diese Stimmung ist extrem cool und was halt auch schon einfach motivierend ist: Einerseits habe ich fixe Termine und ich geh einfach zu den Terminen, weil jede andere Person quasi ich gehe jemand ab, wenn ich nicht hingehe. Wenn ich auf dem Sofa sitze und sage: „Ich würde mir gern noch eine Folge anschauen statt dort hinzugehen", dann fehlt dort jemand. Im Yoga-Studio ist es ziemlich wurscht. Also das motiviert dann halt noch zusätzlich, dass es dann doch fürs Team Sinn macht, wenn das ganze Team kommt. Wenn alle da sind. Also, also das ist einfach was einem Teamsport hilft. Man muss nicht immer nur an sich selber denken, sondern auch noch an alle. Und wenn das alle machen, dann funktioniert es voll gut und dann ist es richtig cool. Was eh extrem, extrem cool ist, ist, dass ich dort Freundinnen gefunden habe, denen ich sonst nicht begegnet wäre.

Oder mit denen ich einfach nie so viel Zeit verbringen habe können, weil ich sie eben nur beim Fortgehen getroffen habe, aber dann nicht so viele Stunden und dann gemeinsam an einem Projekt arbeitet, sich so gut kennenlernt, dann halt auch in Grenzsituationen ist wie direkt vor dem Spiel. Oder wenn man nur vom Training, wenn man gerade sehr low ist, weil einfach nichts weitergeht. Und während dem Spiel ist es einfach cool, dass du nicht nur mit dir selber da bist und: „Ich muss jetzt gewinnen", sondern einfach, dass wir das Gefühl haben, dass das richtig cool ist. Man arbeitet mit allen gemeinsam, dann ist man da, man wird gemeinsam belohnt, man kann nachher gemeinsam feiern. Es ist nicht: Ich habe gewonnen. Das ist was, das mir ganz, ganz schwerfällt. Das ist ja: Ich freue mich zwar extrem, aber ich versuche auch, den anderen zu sagen: „Ah! Aber du hast es voll gut [gemacht]. Wir alle haben das, es ist unser aller Erfolg. Genau. Und uns unterstützt es halt im Spiel. Wenn eine die Nerven verliert, gibt es eine andere Person, die jetzt kurz mit der Person durchatmen und sagen kann: „Hey, wird schon, das und das läuft voll gut." Und dann ist es wieder mal umgekehrt. Das wechselt sich ab und wenn alle irgendwann einmal Support brauchen, kriegt man den Support halt auch und gibt ihn, was einfach richtig cool ist, das gemeinsam zu machen. … Und es ist selbstorganisiert. Also, wir entscheiden. Es gibt keine alte Geschichte: „So ist es aber bei uns." Wir machen Entscheidungen. Und es ist uns wichtig, dass grundsätzlich wir entscheiden dürfen. Also es gibt zwar einen Vorstand, weil wir ein eingetragener Verein sind, aber wer da ist, entscheidet. Wer gute Argumente hat, wird vermutlich die restlichen auf seine Seite ziehen können oder so, genau. Und es ist nicht eben top down: „So läuft das Spiel", „das macht man", „so geht es weiter", sondern es ist halt so, man kann sich einbringen und dann ausverhandeln.

CA: Dir war es von Anfang an bewusst, dass diese Sportart feministisch ist. Ist das allen, die mit dem Sport anfangen, so klar? Und wie geht ihr damit um?

RS: Also was bisher dem zugrunde liegt, es behaupten ja ganz viele: „Sport ist nicht politisch" und „Sport ist nur Sport" und „da lassen wir die Politik draußen". Dem widerspreche ich sehr stark. Da gibt es auch sehr viel dazu, aber eben vor allem in den USA. Im Basketball, im Fußball, da gibt es einfach extrem viel. Da ist die Politik überall. Ihr wollt es trotzdem nur unterdrücken, indem ihr sagt: „Es gibt keine Politik". Also das gibt es eh in Österreich, das ist alles höchst, höchst politisch. Also, wir sagen es zumindest: „Die Basis ist das. Wenn du damit nicht einhergehst…" also wir würden schon mit der Person das Gespräch suchen. Aber es ist auf jeden Fall die Möglichkeit, dass Leute ausgeschlossen werden, weil die sich ja diskriminierend verhalten, was wiederum ja insgesamt auch eher bekannt ist, bei verschiedensten Sportarten ist und sportliches Verhalten oder *No racism, no borders*. Das ist vielen Sportarten irgendwie bekannt, dass ich glaube, so die Politik, die ist ja überall, das wollen sie natürlich nicht so anerkennen. Wir haben das am Anfang lange nicht so stark, so klar kommunizier, vielleicht in Graz beim Mitglieder*innen-Werben. Wir haben am Anfang Diskussionen gehabt, wo einige gesagt haben: „Also Feminismus, na. Also, sicher bin ich dafür, dass ich Recht habe und bin dafür, dass alle fair behandelt werden. Aber quasi so mit dem Konzept kann ich nicht." Das war niemals der Grund gewesen, jemanden auszuschließen, weil wir eh inhaltlich immer gut zurechtkommen sind. Mittlerweile wissen die meisten Bescheid… Ich glaube eher, so 90-95 % der Leute, mit denen wir zu tun gehabt haben, haben ein bisschen gewusst, worauf sie sich einlassen oder sie sind gekommen und haben dann gesagt: „Das ist ein super Umfeld, das ist cool".

CA: Und weil du über Diskutieren gesprochen hast und Grundbasis. Der Sport folgt diesem DIY-Ethos. Wie funktioniert das? Also, wie stellt ihr sicher, dass es funktioniert?

RS: Wir haben es immer wieder anders probiert und es hat nicht so wirklich gut funktioniert. Aber grundsätzlich zwingen wir niemanden dazu, weil es einfach keinen Sinn macht. Das hilft nichts, wenn die Person nicht macht oder wenn sie es auf gar keinen Fall will, hat halt niemand was davon. Wir hätten gern, dass alle Personen zu den monatlichen Organisationsplenumssitzungen kommen. Machen eh nicht alle. Wir haben versucht, verschiedene Modelle, wo man immer wieder etwas aufschreibt, wenn man sonst nicht zu Wort kommt. Rednerliste, einfach so, einfach mehr drauf schauen, dass mehr Leute sprechen können, nicht nur die Lautesten. Oder die, die sich dann regelmäßig beim Fortgehen, beim Pizzaessen, mit anderen Teammitgliedern treffen, befreundet sind, dann reden sie über Themen, dann entwickeln sie eine Idee, dann schlagen sie die vor, dann ist die schon gut durchdacht. Wer was macht, ergibt sich eben auch durch die Skills. Das ergibt sich dann.

CA: Ich habe in einem Podcast von einer anderen League hier in Österreich eine kontroverse Meinung bzgl. Männer-Roller-Derby gehört. Wie steht DCR dazu?

RS: Das war auf jeden Fall ganz am Anfang wichtig für mich. Ich habe so cool gefunden, dass das Roller Derby Roller Derby ist und nicht Frauen-Roller-Derby. Dass das der Ausgangspunkt ist. Das hat mir unglaublich getaugt. Da habe ich ein Bild im Kopf und da sind nicht zuerst die Männer, wie z.B. wenn man Frauenfußball oder so sagt. Das war mir unglaublich wichtig. Und ich glaube, das war für mich irgendwie zentral.

Wir haben mal gesagt, dass wir als Team keine Spiele gegen All-gender-Teams spielen wollen, dass wir eben in dieser WFTDA, mit diesen Vorgaben, das wollen wir machen. Es gibt für uns keinen Grund jetzt aktiv zu sagen: „So, Männer, Männer kommt jetzt noch“ oder „alle, die gerne Männer-Roller-Derby spielen würden“. Das entscheiden wir dann wiederum. Die ordnen sich ja dann auch selber zu. Am Anfang war es einfach so: Interessiert uns nicht. Dann war es eher so: Es tut uns nicht weh, wenn sie das machen. Aber wir haben ja keine Lust und keine Ressourcen, dass wir das aktiv fördern, dass das passiert. Es ist halt insgesamt cool, dass das Women’s Roller Derby so stark definiert ist, dass auch irgendwie in absehbarer oder auch weit entfernter Zukunft sich das nicht shiften wird. Es ist so weit davon entfernt. Auch wenn sich jetzt in Graz und in Wien und in Salzburg Men’s Roller Derby gründet, sind wir immer noch so weit davon entfernt, dass dieser Frauenfokus irgendwie gefährdet wäre, dass man immer „Roller Derby“ sagt, weil diese Art des Roller Derby immer automatisch ist, ohne es konkret benennen zu müssen.

CA: Und eine Frage, die ein bisschen kontrovers ist, weil einige Skater*innen, mit denen ich gesprochen habe, haben gemeint, dass der Sport nicht ernstgenommen wird. Hattet ihr auch diesen Eindruck? Und was heißt es, nicht ernstgenommen zu werden?

RS: Wir haben das durchgehend, dass wir nicht als athletischen Sport wahrgenommen werden. Wir sind ja vor Monaten erst wieder gefragt worden, ob wir eine Show machen können, ob wir eine Performance oder so machen können, weil wir immer sagen, wir sind ein Sportsteam, wir sind keine künstlerische Darstellung. Wir sind ein Sport und wir spielen Spiele. Wir haben auch beim Konzert nichts verloren; bei einer Sportveranstaltung haben wir was verloren. Was immer wieder schwierig ist, dass sich die Medien, dass sich die

Sportabteilung für uns interessiert, ist nicht so leicht. Dass wir im Frauenteil, im Kulturteil waren wir immer sofort drinnen. Dass sich der Sport dann für uns interessiert, eher schwierig. Das war extrem cool, weil ORF Steiermark hat uns einen Beitrag für Sport Bild gemacht bei den Championships. Also, ORF Steiermark, auch die Sport Bild, wo wir uns gesagt haben: „So cool, dieser Sportreporter, und er kommt zu uns". Aber es ist nicht etwas, was wir gewohnt sind. Wir werden schon eher so als kulturelles Phänomen wahrgenommen. Und was dann auch ist, generell, es [der Sport] ist ja entstanden aus diesem Wrestling mit Show-Charakter, mit den Netzstrumpfhosen, mit Röcken, mit nicht-sportlichen Outfits, sondern halt mit lustigen Outfits… Es ist ein bisschen anders entstanden, das kann man jetzt nicht leugnen. Und deswegen, was wir zum Beispiel machen, wir nennen unsere Spiele halt nicht mehr *bout*, sondern *Games* zu spielen und *Games* auf Englisch und Deutsch, weil eben auch dieser *bout* halt eher auf ein Schauspiel hinweist als auf einer Sportveranstaltung, auf einen sportlichen Wettbewerb. Wir haben das auf jeden Fall und versuchen darin aktiv, uns mehr als Sportlerinnen zu positionieren.

CA: Und nun meine letzte Frage: Wie wünschst du dir die Zukunft von Roller Derby?

RS: Ich würde gern in Zukunft sehen, dass ich noch zehn Jahre nach meinem Auftritt am Sonntag zum Spielen in den Sportverein oder in eine andere Halle im Sportpark z.B. dort hingehen kann und einfach anschauen, dass das einfach dableibt. Ich mache aktuell viel Arbeit, arbeite extrem viel dran. Und mein riesengroßer Wunsch ist es, dass wenn ich es einmal nicht mehr mache, weil sich meine Prioritäten verändern, weil es genug ist, da wünsche ich mir halt extrem, dass es einfach immer wieder motivierte Leute gibt, die das weiterhin machen. Ich wünsche mir das, dass der politische Diskurs aufrecht bleibt, dass das dableibt, dass man sich immer wieder damit auseinandersetzt und immer wieder neu denkt. Dass man auch offen bleibt dafür, dass man sich nicht getäuscht hat in manchen Entscheidungen und dann bessere Entscheidungen treffen kann. Sicher wäre es fein, wenn es größer wird, weil einfach jedes Training ein bisschen einfacher wäre, weil alle ein bisschen weniger Aufgaben vielleicht haben könnten... Das Wichtigste für mich wäre, dass es da genau so weiterläuft. Es wäre natürlich auch cool, wenn es in kleineren Orten auch sein kann, dass wir nicht zu jedem nächsten Team drei Stunden mit dem Auto oder Bus fahren müssen. Das wäre natürlich cool, aber ich finde, es wäre schon super, wenn es so bleibt und sich inhaltlich auf jeden Fall und personell weiterentwickelt. Ich habe zwei Freunde, die sind in den USA aufgewachsen. Da kennen das alle und das wäre natürlich cool, wenn jemand dich fragt: „Ah! Wirklich? In was für einem Sportverein bist du?" und du sagst: „Roller Derby" und dann ist es: „Ah! Ok, cool" und nicht so: „He? Oh my God! Crazy!", so Konnotationen sofort: „Ihr macht da was ganz Schräges" und du: „Nein, ich habe mich halt für den Sport entschieden. Ich hätte genauso gut Landhockey spielen können, aber mir hat das getaugt". Genau. Das wäre cool.