

The network of Berlin-based Japanese visual artists: Their use of languages to form connections to formal institutions

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Introduction

- Artists moving around the world create artworks in relationships with other artists (Bain 2005, Hirvi 2015).
- However, it is difficult for immigrant artists to develop local networks (Tremblay and Dehesa 2016).
- Immigrant artists need to choose which language they use in their new city.

Purpose

- Describe the varieties and characteristics of artists' networks in different languages.
- → Explain the relationship between languages and formal institutions or informal networks.

Research Method

- Ethnographic approach from 2017 to 2020, mainly using interviews.
- Interviews with 13 Japanese visual artists living in Berlin.
 - 20s-40s.
 - 6 males, 7 females.
 - 3 graduated from a local art school.
 - 5 joined German residency programmes.
- Berlin
 - Welcoming and supportive for artists and creatives.
 - Lower rents and living cost.
 - Easier to get a visa than other European cities.
- Some previous research about artists in Berlin (Forkert 2013; Hirvi 2015; McRobbie 2016; Hautala & Nordström 2019 etc.)



Analysis 1 Vital Languages

- Berlin is an international city which attracts people from all over the world, so **English** is the most vital language.
 - If artists want to be famous around the world, the connections created in **English** may lead them to higher stages of their careers.

No. 11 (design and illustration)
"I had planned to go back to Japan for only one year. In the first year, I tried to improve my English. It was risky for me to spend time learning German if I didn't stay longer".

- Their first language, **Japanese**, keeps them connected to information from Japan and allows them to help each other through difficulties in Berlin.

No. 5 (photo and video):
"There are some Japanese artists' groups in Berlin: people who graduated from local art schools, came after finishing art school in Japan and lived off their grants. They tend to get together by each college or university".

- The local language, **German**, allows them to take part in the local community and to exhibit their works in Germany.

No.3 (photo):
"German people speak German. But they can also speak English, and many people live only with English. However, German people might more trust foreigners who speak German. So I decided to improve my German to get a job from German people and companies".

Analysis 2 Formal institutions and Informal Networks

Formal institutions: art schools, language schools, scholarships/public foundation, grants (e.g. DAAD), residency programmes, etc..

- Artists may be able to receive public subsidies or to participate in residency programmes through the mediators or curators who give the artists **appropriate advice**.

No. 6 (performance and video):
"Even though I had many friends, it is difficult to come to Berlin without any public support. That's why I applied to a local residency programmes, which helps me to achieve my artistic research and project".

Informal networks: flatmates, friends of friends, etc.

- Artists who have few or no relationships with any institution must experience a hard time to earn money by selling their work and skills.

No.1 (Paint and design):
"My flatmate was introduced older people who are interested in cultural activities. This is the first step to do my artistic job in Berlin".

- These informal connections can be a **safety net**, but they are **more vulnerable** than institutional relationships.

References

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Conclusion

The network of Japanese artists in Berlin appears to be international using English, but two local connections (Japanese and German) are also important.

- Those local connections provide them with formal support to ensure a longer, more stable stay in Berlin.
- Not only great artworks but also formal institutions help them to overcome the language barriers.
 - If an artist is not good at German (local language), **formal institutions will help them**.
 - There is much essential information provided only in German.
- It also **depends on their visa status**.
 - A working holiday visa is useful for young artists but less stable (Fujita 2009).
- The situation will change if they have a **family**.
- To keep their artistic creativity outside their home country, **the language they use assigns their community**.

discussion

- Do you know other artists' cases which divide networks by their language?