

Moving to a world city liberates creative young people from demands in home countries

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The increasingly globalised world enables individuals to more easily move abroad to escape restricting lifestyle norms in their home countries. Yet doing so also makes boundaries more evident. This is found in a new doctoral thesis from the University of Gothenburg, Sweden, which explores the cosmopolitan context comprised by the creative scene in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, New York City.

The doctoral thesis is an ethnological study of individuals born in Japan in the 1970s and '80s who have moved to New York – or more exactly to Williamsburg in Brooklyn – to engage in creative activities and lifestyles far from the conventions and demands of their home country. In the 1990s, many creative young people from all over the world started moving to the Williamsburg district to work with for example fashion, music, art and photography.

As part of her thesis, Lisa Wiklund has studied the creative context in Williamsburg and how it gives the young individuals in the district an opportunity to distance themselves from conventional [middle class](#) lifestyles by adopting a partly alternative view of consumption and work.

Japanese adults born in the 1970s and 1980s belong to a unique generation as they are enjoying opportunities that simply were not available to their parents. These opportunities are largely the result of the major changes experienced in recent years, including of course the

considerable [globalisation](#).

'The persons I studied and interviewed are examples of how a globalised world can enable people to break away from national norms regarding for example middle class identity, [gender roles](#) and sexuality. There is obviously a powerful innate force in these opportunities,' says Wiklund.

However, the decision to move away and choose alternative paths in terms of career and family building also implies that a future return to the home country can be difficult since certain contexts and ties will at that point have been given up.

'One of the most important points made in my thesis is that our different experiences, formed for example by national circumstances, do not mean that we are solely products of our "cultures" - we are also sometimes able to make inconvenient and unexpected decisions.

The [young people](#) in Williamsburg are often called hipsters and are sometimes portrayed in media as lazy and inutile individualists. A global recession and a changed labour market is however affecting young peoples possibility to find jobs with decent income and job security"

'The Japanese in Williamsburg are a clear example of this global tendency as the collapse of Japan's bubble economy in the '90s had major consequences for their position in the labour market. The position of the middle class is not as solid as in the past and poor financial decisions can have serious consequences also for individuals from relatively "secure" backgrounds,' says Wiklund.

The study is based on ethnographical fieldwork conducted in New York and Japan 2008-2012. Sixteen young Japanese participated in the study. At the time of the study, they worked as photographers, designers, artists and musicians.

Provided by University of Gothenburg

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