

Cultural flows between countries: physical and language distances in the contemporary art world

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This research examines the globalization processes in the world of contemporary art. The study focuses on a comparative study of two theoretical models of cultural globalization - cultural imperialism and cultural flows/networks. Most scholarly work in the global area of contemporary art supports the cultural imperialism model, claiming that a handful of economically powerful countries dominates the art world and spreads their influence to other countries. However, several studies support the model of cultural flows/networks in the contemporary art world. According to this model, no significant center and periphery exists, and cultural influences flow in different directions, so that economically weaker nations distribute their cultural influence to stronger ones.

This research aims to examine the strength of the cultural ties between countries between 2000 and 2010. The study examines changes in the intensity of activities in the peripheral art galleries, which participate in fairs located in the center. The study applies novel methodology, measuring physical distances that art galleries pass in order to present their work in international art fairs. Furthermore, the intensity of galleries participation in fairs is measured according to the distance between the official language of the gallery country and the language of countries where the fairs take place.

The results of the study support the model of cultural flows/networks. The study demonstrates an increase in the physical distance travelled by peripheral galleries attending central fairs. Increase in the physical distance travelled by central galleries attending peripheral fairs measured too. Moreover, it finds a correlation between linguistic proximity of countries and the intensity of their cultural ties. The closer the linguistic proximity, the less physical distances between the galleries and the attended fairs, and the more galleries activity.