About the 2008 Study Trip to Germany

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Since the foundation of the Spaces of International Economy and Management (SIEM) research group at the Association of Japanese Geographers (AIJ) in March 2007, it has been my ambition to investigate managerial challenges in the context of particular business locations. During the study trip to Germany in summer of 2008, which was sponsored by the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), I carried out such an investigation together with seminar students from Ritsumeikan University. We investigated managerial competencies and the quality of business locations. The students were ambitious to learn about successful practices of Japanese managers in Germany.

The 2008 Study Trip to Germany was supervised by me and Dr. Edgar Franz. Dr. Franz was lecturing at Ritsumeikan University (BKC) from 2006 to 2009. The idea to conduct a joint seminar with an excursion to Germany came up during a meeting sometime during the winter term 2006/7. After I proposed the study trip to Ritsumeikan University in 2007, it was recognized as a regular seminar within the 2008 curriculum. I applied for a German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) grant. In 2008, Ritsumeikan was the only Japanese university that applied successfully for the DAAD study trip grant. With the governmental grant of 5600 Euro, we could cover the entire cost of train travel, hostel and entrance fees for 15 students and two lectures. Ritsumeikan University added a grant for each student that reduced the flight cost as well. It was the purpose of the study trip to learn about the cultural competence of Japanese managers in their particular German working environments. We followed the idea that management is influenced by locational characteristics. Thus, our aim was to evaluate management and location. Based on our empirical findings, we sought to deepen our understanding about the context of management and location. Therefore, we chose three very different business locations for our investigation: 1) Düsseldorf, with the highest concentration of Japanese managers, 2) Wolfsburg, an industrial castle town of the German multinational Volkswagen AG, and 3) Berlin the German capital and Weltstadt that is working to recover from divisions resulting from the cold war period.

From August 25th to September 3rd 2008, we traveled in Germany with 15 students studying International Management at Ritsumeikan University (BKC). It was our aim of the survey was to deepen the understanding of the
relationship between individuals’ adaptability and their environment. Therefore, an interview survey at these locations was conducted. Based on an integrated management appraisal incorporating acculturation and vocational preferences, our students interviewed several managers of leading Japanese companies in Düsseldorf, Wolfsburg and Berlin.

In the selection phase, we chose the best 15 students based on a written test, and a group interview for the study trip out of 30 applicants. The students got their assignments to prepare for interviews with Japanese managers in Germany. The workshop was then conducted in the preparation phase during a weekend at the campus hotel Ritsumei Epoch 21. The topics of the workshop included the following topics covering such issues as locations and markets, the management of particular Japanese and German multinational corporations, and of course academic theories and methodologies to investigate cultural competency.

Work places & market places
• Germany & European market
• Japanese in Düsseldorf
• Volkswagen/Wolfsburg
• Is Berlin a world metropolis?

Management
• Mitsubishi Electric
• Hitachi
• Toshiba
• Sony
• Denso
• Toyota
• Volkswagen

Research methodology
• Culture Shock Theory
• Intercultural competence
• Locational preferences
• Evaluation tool - designed by our students

During the workshop, students were assigned to design a tool for manager evaluation and location evaluation. They focused their evaluation on three aspects 1) communication, 2) personal culture, and 3) corporate culture. For the business environment evaluation, the students chose to survey the Japanese
managers about their view of the 1) local business culture, and 2) local labor market or HRM issues that their companies experienced and 3rd about the social infrastructure for Japanese business people. This evaluation tool was completed by the middle of July 2008. In advance we sent out an open questionnaire to the Japanese managers who had indicated their willingness to participate.

In the preparation phase, I invited the vice-president of Volkswagen Group Japan, Gero Fröhlich, to give a presentation to all our faculty students entitled “Volkswagen Group Japan – Strategic Orientation and Targets”. This was to deepen the understanding of the corporations marketing strategy, their leader’s intercultural competence, and to prepare for our visit to the Volkswagen headquarters in Wolfsburg.

We started our trip in Düsseldorf. Using the comfortable Intercity Express (ICE) of the Deutsche Bundesbahn (DB), we went from Düsseldorf to Wolfsburg, and from Wolfsburg to Berlin by Gruppe & Spar 60, keeping the travel cost to a minimum.

Within Düsseldorf, we visited the Japanese Chamber of Commerce and Industry (JIHK). The head of the Chamber, Mr. Fuji, and also the head of the German-Japanese Economic Council (DJW), Dr. Rubrecht Vondran, and Mr. Iwazaki from JETRO, gave presentations about Japanese-German relations and the locality of Düsseldorf. Additionally, we conducted interviews with the representatives of four Japanese firms located in the Düsseldorf area.

Our Japanese interview partners at the workshop were, Mr. Mori from Hitachi Europe GmbH, Mr. Mizutani and Mr. Miyashita from Toyota Deutschland GmbH, Mr. Himi from Mitsubishi Electric Europe B.V., and Mr. Ando from Toshiba Electronics Europe GmbH.

Mr. Jansen gave a presentation about his work at NRW Invest and the State of North-Rhine Westfalia. It was mentioned that NRW is one of the best German locations for international corporations and that many successful Japanese companies locate in Düsseldorf. Thanks to Professor Glebe, our students received frontier research knowledge about the Japanese enclave, the so-called “Little Tokyo” in Düsseldorf. He stated that many Japanese residents show a strong trend toward self-segregation, but also indicated where exceptions exist. The General Consul gave us a presentation about the Japanese inhabitants and suggested that they are ambitious to improve the quality of Japanese-German cultural, technologic and scientific exchange. At the EKO-Haus we held a seminar where Mr. Tatsuo Kamino gave a very informative presentation about
the local business environment. Prof. Glebe gave a presentation with unpublished results from his survey on the segregation processes of Japanese inhabitants in Düsseldorf. Dr. Plattner from Trier University showed by analysis of the manga character Shima Kosaku how the network of Japanese international business community has changed over three decades.

Wolfsburg  
We booked a City Tour with Wolfsburg-Marketing with the purpose of showing our students the industrial estates in the outskirt of the city. Other settlement areas for workers and management were also visited, documenting the high living standard of the citizens Wolfsburg-Marketing, and we were also shown a recreational area. Michael Sothmann, a director of the City Hall, gave a welcome and all students received a book about Wolfsburg in the English language. The new Volkswagen Arena, where the successful soccer team of VfL Wolfsburg recently recruited two Japanese athletes, Makoto Hasebe and Yoshito Okubo, was also on our itinerary. Thanks to Volkswagen, there was always a connection to Japan, but nowadays also three Japanese automotive part suppliers located in Wolfsburg. We could win an interview with Mr. Akiyama from DENSO. He was one of the managers with very detailed knowledge and deep understanding of German management. Thus, he gave, not only personal experiences, but explained to our students how the quality management differs in both cultures. Our students have been very much impressed by his expertise. On the second day, we got a Special Factory Tour from Volkswagen AG. Mr. Hermann Tiemann from Global Assignment, Volkswagen AG, gave an interesting presentation featuring HR Future Strategies building international human capital. He has been working in HRM for ten years and also was expatriated to China for three years. Especially, our two Chinese students addressed many questions to him. The Japanese students then interviewed two Japanese managers, who were expatriated from Volkswagen Group Japan to the headquarters for up to three years, about their cultural experiences. Finally, we visited the theme park of Volkswagen, the Autostadt, to learn about Volkswagen and its affiliated companies.

Berlin  
Excursions  
Ms. Silke Matzeit, a researcher of the department of geography at the Free University Berlin, led an excursion entitled “Capital City Berlin”. The excursion started at Friedrichstraße, featuring the symbolic and political importance of the Reichstag for Germany and was completed with discussion of the economic aspects of the new/old German capital at the Potsdamer Platz, where, nowadays,
high-rise buildings host international hotels, office space and the Sony Center.

At Ludwig Erhard Haus, Sven Harpering from Berlin Partner GmbH organized a Workshop in collaboration with JETRO Berlin about the business environment in Berlin. Delegates from Hitachi Software Development, Toyota Berlin and Chisso GmbH participated in the meeting and gave interviews to our well-prepared students.

Dr. Lech Suwala, a doctorate at the department of geography at Humboldt University Berlin, led an excursion entitled “Berlin: a Global City!” featuring the industrial politics and acquisition of media industry in a critical way.

At the 2008 IFA Berlin, a Consumer electronics fair that is one of the oldest industrial exhibitions in Germany, we interviewed Mr. Takayuki Asami, a Japanese manager of SONY Berlin and a German female manager of Sharp.

Humboldt Univ. Berlin (HUB)
On the last day of our visit, the students presented their preliminary research results to the students of the Center of Japanese Language and Culture at Humboldt University Berlin (HUB). The presentations were held in English, but, since the HUB students showed a very good command in Japanese, the discussion was mainly conducted in the Japanese language. Our students got very good feedback from Dr. Michael Kinski and his students. This helped our students avoid stereotyping and better understand German perspectives on work related issues. With the purpose of deepening the individual exchange of the students, we had a common lunch at the refectory of the university. Finally, we all ate lunch together at the Mori Ogai Memorial Hall to teach our students about traditional Japanese-German relations in science and arts.

After our return the group was split up into three groups with the aim of exploiting the material we got from the excursion and the interviews. In September, we met at university and the students presented their interview results by location. Finally, all 15 students who participated in the study trip personally presented their work at a workshop entitled “Inter-culture as synergy” at the OAG Center in Kobe. After an introduction by Prof. Schlunze and video presentation by Dr. Edgar Franz about the study trip, the results and case studies were presented by our students in three pieces:

1. Managing in Düsseldorf
2. Managing in Wolfsburg
3. Managing in Berlin

Here, I will give only a brief overview of the main research results extracted from our students’ presentations sorted by six categories of the investigation.
1. For successful international communication most important is finding a common language, bridging the cultural distances, and adjusting to the local system of meanings, leading by listening, getting involved, and sharing information and purposes by building trusting relations.

2. The successful manager’s personal culture centers on balancing honesty and respect with modesty. The manager is eager to learn from the local and other expatriate managers; he/she enables the local staff to get involved with decision-making, and bridges cultural differences through tolerance, he/she reconciles individualist and collectivist ways, and is good in balancing individual responsibility and team work. Also, the working style reflects trying other, new ways, and getting joy from global assignments, but also making a serious effort to get to know cultural roots.

3. The knowledge about the Japanese corporate culture also contributes to intercultural competence. Especially, flexible comprehension of company culture is appreciated by the local coworkers. Japanese executive managers need to take their ambassador role seriously. They need to address differences, but also find similarities.

4. The business culture at the three locations varied a lot.
   ① Managing in Düsseldorf is encouraged by the traditional dynamic industrial trading town at the river Rhine. However, the high concentration of Japanese people does not always challenge individuals to adjust much to the German business environment.
   ② Managing in Wolfsburg, on the other hand, means that Japanese need to work in a German workplace. This challenges the individual manager to adjust to local management style.
   ③ Managing in Berlin, the multi-cultural workplace experienced by our Japanese interview partners challenges their inter-cultural management skills.

5. Japanese managers had also different experiences on the particular labor markets that demanded different strategies in International Human Resource Management (IHRM). The availability of workers with intercultural experience and language skills supports the management process. Managers based in Düsseldorf could rely on the support of German staff with good command of Japanese and an understanding of the different culture. The lack of such staff in other locations has also its implications for motivating local staff members. Here is more need to adjusting to local salary and promotion systems. Nevertheless, working for better life, as a common concept, can bridge culture.

6. The Japan-specific infrastructure was seen as important for Japanese management abroad. Flight connections were seen as crucial for attracting investors from Japan. However, none of the three cities had this to offer.
Information services, provided by the Japanese Chamber of Commerce in Düsseldorf (JIHK), JETRO, Japanese General Consulate and the German-Japanese Economic Circle (DJW), where evaluated as important sources in the external business environment. In Düsseldorf, there is a lack of Japanese media industry. This industry concentrates in Berlin and is mostly concerned with observation of German politics. The support services, such as economic information services, Japanese/international schooling, and shopping facilities with Japanese language speakers, and Japanese restaurants in Düsseldorf cannot be beaten by the other locations.

Finally, we discussed with an interested audience, among them invited international managers, the question “What is needed to create synergy in the intercultural workplace?” Three student-participants, Mr. Shimpei, Mr. Sawamura and Mr. Fukunaga, presented the research results of the study trip to Germany in a seminar rally at Ritsumeikan BKC and succeeded to get into the finale competition. They did a marvelous job that pleased and impressed our teachers as many other participants and many observers along their way.