

“WHOSE CITY IS THIS?”

Subcultural Self-Determination and Berlin Communities’ Struggle for Opacity, Space, and Unidirectional Transparency against Technological Determinism

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Who determines Berlin’s Future?



DJ Boats on the Spree at an AfD Rally [1]

Berlin’s Technological Future

Berlin’s booming tech scene has moved into the same neighborhoods where Berlin’s subcultures are. Rather than viewing the central tension as being against technology itself, this research posits that the core conflict between Berlin and Big Tech centers on how that technological future is built and framed.

- To what extent do **tech companies threaten** Berlin communities’ **ability to determine their own cultural future?**
- How do Berlin’s communities **respond to the threats** they perceive through **artistic expression?**

Exploring Community Voices

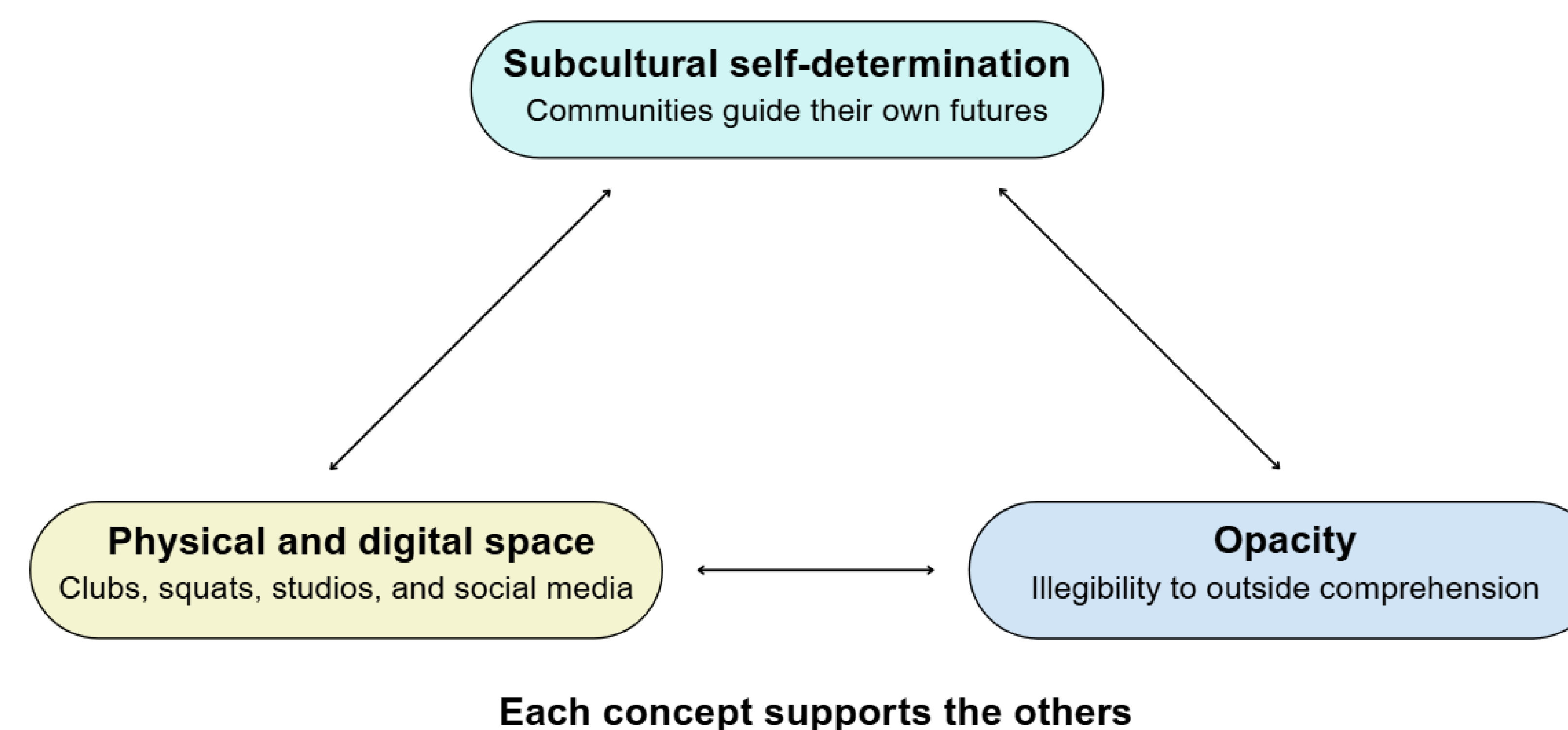
We conducted 18 interviews, both in-person and over Zoom, all in English. Interviewees were all based in Berlin and covered a large range of experience, including artists, musicians, professors, tech entrepreneurs, and hacktivists. We qualitatively analyzed transcripts for patterns and vital concepts.

Technological Determinism

- Berliners view the inflow of technological development as contributing to their culture “vanishing in front of our eyes every day” [2]. On the other hand, Berlin’s startup ecosystem is perceived differently, as they develop technologies in close communication with the community.
- Digital spaces, unlike physical spaces, increasingly enable the subversion of subcultural opacity, including “homogeneous online landscapes” representing techno and clubs [3], making physical space all the more important.



Statement Outside of Club Renate on Culture and Space



Art As a Tool for Resistance

- Art reveals centralized tech and political powers and disrupts singular narratives of speed and development.
- Art builds open-ended futures rather than prescribing a monolithic narrative, allowing a diversity of voices.
- Four art forms were focused on: techno, hacktivism, street art, and tactical media.

Berliners are “not against AI, but against Big Tech”[4]

Limitations and Future Directions

Berlin’s art scene is defined by opacity, so our interviews explored the most open edge of the scene. Similarly, our lack of fluency in German and reliance on publicly available art constrained the voices we could include.

Much of Berlin’s discourse around AI centered around ideological rather than physical consequences of data centers. Exploring why this might be as well as why some art forms do not gain traction in Berlin would be key questions to explore in the future.

Key Sources & Acknowledgements

Interviewees:

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Poster citations:

[1] Photo from <https://qz.com/1290682/afd-rally-in-berlin-25000-protesters-drowned-out-a-far-right-rally-with-techno-music>.

[2] Dr. Anita Jóri, interview by the research team

[3] Dr. Anita Jóri, interview by the research team

[4] Anonymous Berlin Artists, interview by the research team