

Interview

Wolfgang Scheppe

The Escalation of the Globalized City.

Meike Gatermann, Director of Public Relations at Hatje Cantz, discusses the project Migropolis with Wolfgang Scheppe.

What's behind the title Migropolis?

Of course, it's a combination of the Greek root for "city" and the word "migration." We're investigating the mobility of people, goods, and images around the world, using Venice as our example. The title also sounds somewhat like Monopoly, the board game. There's a reason for that: the playing board represents the only way that society has learned to visually associate space and economics. It's a very basic map of a globalized city.

How did the project get started?

I teach philosophy and visual theory at the IUAV University in Venice. As a whole, the city has turned into an image—a firmly established, iconic preconception—which tourists carry around in their luggage. But it's also an image that has become separated from the city itself, the way a copy from a copy machine is different from the original. It's the kind of image that is applicable to the theme parks of Las Vegas and Macau, as well as to any ice cream shop in Germany that's decorated with pictures of the Rialto and gondolas. We wanted to reproduce—in all of its facets—images of this city, which has become an image. During the course of our undertakings, we had to realize, over and over, that Venice and the escalation occurring there are exemplary, in terms of the conditions caused by globalization. And that's why the project has grown to such a great extent.

One controversial detail is the black market for pirated copies of designer handbags.

What have you found out about this?

When a city is doing big business, drawing more than twenty million tourists a year, the globalized world requires that a so-called parallel economy be created. A black market economy, which exists in the bright light of day on the Venetian sidewalks. That's why this phenomenon is so visible in Venice and leads to conflicts with the powerful representatives of the real business. The main players in this black market are the manufacturers—many of whom also produce the real brands. And then there are those who take the risks: so-called illegal immigrants, who undertook a long journey to find work, but who are not allowed to work or even live in modern Europe, with its secured borders. This means they are forced to participate in informal markets. Their poverty follows the trajectory of the diminished incomes of many package tourists, who can no longer afford even a fake, plastic Gucci bag as a souvenir. Under the current government, Venice has been militarized, and one consequence of this is that the subsistence economy that once characterized this city has been almost entirely demolished recently.

After reading the book, will we have to look at Venice differently?

In the present-day reality, the city's unique history is a mere sales pitch for local tourism. Its laws, however, which affect the daily lives of everyone who still lives in Venice, are entirely determined by the mechanisms of globalization. Even though traces and signs of this are omnipresent, it is kept out of sight of the tourist. That's why this work is both a visual education, as well as a map, for today's *flaneur*.

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