

The London Consortium
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An Architektur/ FFM

European Migration Geographies, Poland

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Aiming to initiate interdisciplinary intellectual debate about paradoxes of contemporary culture, Static presents contributions from an international team of academics, artists and cultural practitioners.

The materials, assembled for each issue around a theme, include analytical essays and articles, interviews, art projects, photographic images, etc. Static will welcome feedback, argument and commentary from scholars, artists, and other readers, and will be regularly updated in order to communicate the most recent and relevant ideas and interpretations on the chosen topic.

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On May 1 2005, in Warsaw, the new “Border Police Agency” of the European Union officially began work. It is supposed to coordinate the monitoring of 6,000 kilometers of land borders and 8,500 kilometers of sea borders. On two floors of the tallest building in the city, the Palace of Culture – a “gift” from Stalin, thirty employees with an annual budget of around 40 million euros supervise the airtight defense of the EU’s external borders and the Europe-wide deportation of immigrants to so-called safe third states.

The establishment of this authority is a logical continuation of the policies that, since the signing of the Schengen Treaty, have massively restructured the European monitoring of migration within countries and at their external borders. The internal flexibility for EU citizens and holders of a Schengen visa goes hand in hand with a rigorous sealing off from the outside and an expansion of intense inspection of people within the entire EU region. The Schengen Treaty and the Dublin Conventions form the legal basis for a “Fortress Europe” that is characterized by the harmonization of asylum regulations and visa requirements for just under 130 countries, by an effort to improve border security, and by requiring transportation companies to comply with the process of entry inspections. In the past ten years, according to the Amsterdam network UNITED and Pro Asyl, more than 5,000 refugees and migrants have died trying to cross Europe’s outer borders.

The image of a “Fortress Europe” conveys an idea of a homogeneous and hermetically sealed space whose separation is technically perfect. This point of view declares a fictitious state of affairs to be normal and focuses on migration as a danger. As a geographical conception, it follows the historically Eurocentric world map and cements the perspective of power as operating from a center toward these margins. It reinforces a rhetoric of threats and the defense of territory that has little to do with the reality of a globalized division of labor, of poverty, or of migration. The present issue is intended to criticize this description of space as well as the actual dramatic effects of state power on the everyday lives of people on their way to and through Europe.

For migration occurs despite it all – whether formalized, merely tolerated, or undocumented. It takes place in a space. It produces specific sites and is structured by them. A description and analysis of the geographical planes of migration – their administration, prevention, and inspection – records specifics of local situations and makes connections visible. The medium of cartography describes the concrete architecture of camps and borders, of rooms and fences, and it provides information on the socio-spatial dimension of migration. Because power, impotence, and resistance take place in space and assume specific forms within it, maps can lend a spatial perspective to the political analysis of migration.

Beginning with a detailed examination of the region of the Polish-Belarusian border, this issue examines the geographical composition of migration to and within Europe. The focus of the study is on specific sites where migration takes place or is regulated: the Kuznica border station and the Terespol-Brest border crossing, the Warsaw authority for immigration and asylum, the refugee accommodations and camps in Bialeystok, Czerwony Bór, and Debak, and – as prototypes on the German side – the central reception facility and deportation center in Eisenhüttenstadt.

On research trips in 2004 and 2005 we visited these places and spoke with administrations, organizations, activists, and refugees. Our questioning focused on how the intensified control of migration and the associated repression were related to an increased flexibility of the migration regime

that was equally evident. New high-tech security for sections of the border that maintain infrequent traffic stands alongside the creation and toleration of precarious living situations for many migrants, undocumented and unsanctioned by the state. Increasingly, refugee camps are becoming instruments of control, and yet they are of limited use as areas to rest. The function of borders alternates between barrier and filter. All these gray zones manifest a specific fact concerning the geography of migration: a permanent state of negotiation between unequal actors, the permanent displacement of migration to new, still accessible terrain.

Flexible mechanisms for inclusion and exclusion, toleration and deportation, supportive administration or detention and criminalization are all powerful instruments of a monitoring of migration aimed less at an ultimate hermetic seal than at strategic regulation and deprivation of rights, and that therefore respond to an extremely autonomous dynamic of migration.

The description of the spaces and architectures of migration can only provide a partial snapshot of a process of permanent change. It documents a temporary state in the migration regime in Poland since the EU enlargement. A comparison of the border fortifications, Europe-wide asylum practices, the geography and typology of the camp system, techniques of administration, and everyday practices reveals the complex dovetailing of border and camp on the EU's new territory.