

MARIEKE VAN DER VELDEN

Connecting
Worlds

Das Paradies, 2015
Photographs
Courtesy l'artista

With her project *Das Paradies*, Dutch documentary photographer Marieke van der Velden explores the phenomenon of Middle Eastern tourism in the small town of Zell am See, Austria.

Each summer, around 70,000 tourists from the Gulf States travel to this district capital in Salzburgerland. When temperatures in their homeland can easily reach 50°C, Zell am See becomes a favourite destination for a 'refreshing' holiday at the foot of the Schmitzenhöhe mountain.

It's a picturesque town, described as 'heavenly', where wealthy travellers can experience much better climatic conditions and a wide range of opportunities for outdoor sports and entertainment.

The artist's trip to Zell am See, with Dutch journalist Saskia Adriaens, was also an opportunity to investigate how these people, their customs and traditions, are perceived by the locals.

Das Paradies prompts a series of broader reflections and brings up at least three relevant themes. The first is the migration of populations as a present and future phenomenon, caused by global warming; the second has to do with economic status as a discriminating factor in the dynamics of adaptation to the climatic crisis; the third is a suggestion that the mountain will be a favourable habitat for life on Earth in the future.

The rich also migrate.

Climate change and the new attractiveness of the Alps

Talking about climate migrations in relation to ski resorts and renowned Alpine tourism spots may seem out of place: at least if we think of migrations essentially as large-scale movements of poor people from the global South to the global North, fleeing wars, famine, desertification and extreme events. Yet, as the data of the MICLIMI project (www.miclimi.it) suggest, climate change is also becoming an important factor influencing the wide range of shapes and trajectories of residential mobility in Europe – permanent, circular or temporary – which primarily involves individuals with far greater economic resources and socio-cultural capital than the international migrants and refugees who are now in the media spotlight.

Focusing on the link between need and actual opportunity to move, this research questioned whether even the wealthy are forced to migrate to the mountains as a form of adaptation to climate change.

The worsening of global climatic conditions – especially in large urban areas, both in Europe and elsewhere – appears to be an increasingly stronger *push factor*: the analysis of cases such as that of Crans-Montana, in Switzerland, shows how the wealthiest people in the world are beginning to consider moving to the

'high lands' a necessity rather than a luxury, especially during the long and torrid summers. Consequently, the mountains – especially when they are well equipped, renowned, accessible and rich in infrastructures like the Alpine resorts – are increasingly becoming attractive not only as a place for leisure and skiing, but also as a refuge from heat waves, a *buen retiro* for *smart working*, a 'second home' for the whole family, in which to transfer the urban way of life and the networks of relations of the *middle-upper class*, at least for those summer months that are becoming unliveable in the city. However, climate change, together with the abandonment of traditional agricultural practices, is making the Alpine ecosystem more fragile. So, what environmental impact will these new forms of residential mobility have on places designed and built decades ago for ski tourism? To what extent will 'vertical climatic migrations' contribute to the isolation of certain social groups and residential areas, to the point of creating actual *gated communities*?

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PARCO FLUVIALE
GESSO E STURA:
ESPERIENZA
DI NATURA

Article 4 of the law establishing the Parco fluviale Gesso e Stura reads:

"1. *The aims of the institution of the Parco fluviale Gesso e Stura are the following:*

a) to return to the city of Cuneo an area that can contribute significantly to improving the quality of life of citizens [...]"

Nestled between mountains and plains, with its 5,500 hectares of land, the Parco fluviale Gesso e Stura is an ideal natural spot for sports, leisure, educational and cultural activities, as well as wellness.

"The park with the city inside" is the motto that well represents the embrace between the rivers

and the city of Cuneo. It's an easily accessible green space that citizens can enjoy all year round, and that, in the past, represented for many a space for leisure activities, possibly even a holiday.

Numerous animal and plant species, many with significant conservation value, inhabit the diverse river and peri-fluvial environments. Nevertheless, the Park aims to integrate preserving the natural habitats with fostering sustainable progress, by advocating for a leisurely, eco-friendly, and climate change-resilient tourism.

