

HARALD KIMPEL

“The Avant-Garde Gets Kassel’s Cash Registers Ringing”. On the Discovery of documenta as an Economic Factor*

Before, during, and after documenta 14 (2017), the outposting of the first half of this edition of the exhibition to Athens and the resulting deficit were the subject of fierce debate. In the following essay, Harald Kimpel demonstrates that such controversial local-political and media disputes around the exhibition series, founded in 1955 in Kassel, are nothing new, and that both deficits and rumors of its immanent relocation, or even prophecies that the latest exhibition may be the last, have been a part of the history of documenta since the very beginning.

In this excerpt from his dissertation *documenta. Mythos und Wirklichkeit* [documenta. Myth and Reality] which was published in 1997 and has since become a standard work within the field of German-speaking academic engagement with documenta, he describes how, after facing initial skepticism as a private initiative of Arnold Bode, documenta’s growing success meant that its financial dependence on the city’s funding was increasingly mirrored by Kassel’s own direct and indirect dependence on documenta’s influence on the city’s economy and image (for example in the form of additional tax income in the hotel, gastronomy, and retail sectors).

While today references to the role of biennales in processes of gentrification and urban development form an almost essential topos within exhibition studies,¹ in 1997, any investigation of the economic effects of large-scale exhibitions to still seemed largely a desideratum. Kimpel’s study, by devoting itself to the first nine editions of documenta (1955–1992), including their organizational structures, political implications, and forms of mediation, and by eschewing a personalizing explanation of the documenta myth in favor of a meticulous reconstruction of the specific economic and political conditions of postwar Kassel, represents an important early contribution to the formulation of “art history as exhibition history.”²

*This is a translation of the chapter 1.1.2. “‘Die Avantgarde läßt Kassels Kassen klingeln’: Zur Entdeckung eines Wirtschaftsfaktors,” published in: Harald Kimpel: *documenta. Mythos und Wirklichkeit* [documenta. Myth and Reality], Cologne 1997, pp. 112–123. Translated and published with kind permission of the author.

¹ See for example Elena Filipovic/Marieke van Hal/Solveig Øvstebø (eds.): *The Biennial Reader*, Ostfildern 2010.

² Harald Kimpel: *documenta. Mythos und Wirklichkeit*, Cologne 1997, p. 77. German: “Kunstgeschichte als Ausstellungsgeschichte.”

By republishing and translating into English the following chapter, we at documenta Studien/documenta Studies aim to make a contribution to the reception of this milestone of documenta research beyond the German-speaking world.^{III} This dual-language republication is the first of a series, edited by Nanne Buurman, that will issue translations of previously untranslated key texts from the history of documenta, with the aim of making the early editions of the exhibition and the academic discourses associated with them available for international documenta research. Our goal is to initiate a transnational revision of the historiography of documenta, in order that the history of documenta, until now written from Germany outward, can be envisioned anew from multiple standpoints across the world. In doing so, we hope to bring local knowledge from Kassel and viewpoints situated outside the documenta city or Germany at large into constructive dialogue with one another, and so to possibly also overcome the canonized division between “Western pre-1997” and “global post-1997” editions.

Editorial by Nanne Buurman

“The Avant-Garde Gets Kassel’s Cash Registers Ringing”. On the Discovery of documenta as an Economic Factor

“For us, documenta means a minimum 15 percent increase in turnover.”¹
Willy Benewitz, president of the association of local hotels and restaurants

On January 7, 1965, an announcement is published in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* that throws the organizing team behind d3, which has closed the previous year following sensational critical acclaim, back into commotion, and leaves the political authorities in *zugzwang*: Hessen’s attorney general, Fritz Bauer – instantly unmasked as a straw man for “representatives of the Deutscher Werkbund and Hessen’s state government” – is attempting to claim the upcoming d4 for the city of Frankfurt am Main. The arguments that the well-known “friend of modern art” and “leftist-socialist, anti-fascist wonder dog among all attorney generals in all federal states” (G. Zwerenz) puts forward in making his request are as uninformed as they are insubstantial: Frankfurt, so the jurist argues, location of the 1969 national garden show, lies in the middle of the Federal Republic (a position that can meet the requirements of an exhibition with documenta’s status and demands), can provide better grounds (a new 30,000 m2 exhibition hall was promised), the sphere of those interested in art is bigger within the Rhein-Main region, and anyway, documenta has “long outgrown Kassel.”²

This attempted annexation causes a flurry of reactions in both the exhibition city [Kassel] and the state capital [Wiesbaden]. And although the initial press release already carried the disclaimers of state premier [Georg-August] Zinn (“no happy undertaking”), education minister [Ernst] Schütte, and [documenta founder Arnold] Bode (“a hopeless exercise”), Lord Mayor of Kassel [Karl] Branner, as chairman of the board of the event’s organizers, feels compelled to ward off this outside attack on a local object of prestige with

^{III} On the need for a transdisciplinary and transnational revision of the canon of documenta research, see Nanne Buurman/Dorothee Richter: “documenta. Curating the History of the Present,” editorial, in: *OnCurating*, no. 33 (June 2017), pp. 2–8, esp. p. 5.

¹ Quoted in Peter Sager: “documenta 6,” in: *Zeit Magazin*, July 29, 1977.

² On the presentation of the proposal see “documenta ist kein Exportartikel,” in: *Hessische Allgemeine*, January 8, 1965; Hans Ludwig Schulte: “Ab nach Frankfurt/M.?,” in: *Hessische Allgemeine*, January 8, 1965; “Diskussion um die ‘documenta.’ Generalstaatsanwalt Fritz Bauer will die documenta an den Main holen,” in: *Frankfurter Rundschau*, January 8, 1965; “documenta nach Frankfurt?,” in: *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, January 8, 1965; “FDP: Dr. Bauers Vorschlag empörend,” in: *Hessische Allgemeine*, January 11, 1965.

the help of a hastily convened press conference held on that same day. But his reaction, too, while spontaneous and fierce, repeats the familiar: “documenta belongs to Kassel,” he says, “because nowhere else are the outer conditions so favorable, because of Kassel’s artistic tradition, and because artists and local politicians elsewhere wouldn’t have had the courage to bring documenta into being.”³

Although ultimately successful, these defensive gestures probably also seem somewhat unconvincing because they have already been called upon so many times in previous years. As early as 1962, board member Rolf Lucas, chairman of the CDU fraction in Kassel’s city parliament and consistent critic of Bode’s planning conduct, surmises that “forces are at work that are seeking ways in which documenta can be transferred, as a permanent arrangement and under the same name, to a different location.”⁴ And such suspicion appears to be grounded; it is after all Bode himself who is attempting to spur on the local administration with his threat that the staging of d2 will be taken over by Amsterdam, in the event that the city council isn’t able to meet the exhibition’s spatial and financial needs on an ongoing basis – a plan whose honest pursuance, however, it is to be severely doubted from a man so intent on bolstering the reputation of his hometown. The concrete background to the gambit is an offer made to Bode by Willem Sandberg during the 1959 Biennale: “If you don’t continue with ‘documenta,’ we will.”⁵

After the Frankfurt attorney general’s – ultimately unsuccessful – advance, those parties responsible for documenta within the municipal government are, however, once again left facing the predicament of how to demonstrate their resolve in order to maintain control over the Kassel success story, which they by now consider to be their own. Rumors grow that there are attempts being made to move documenta to Berlin; Hanover and Munich are also accused of harboring similar ambitions. And in the course of political controversies between individual members of the organizational team, Bode claims knowledge of plans by Hein Stünke (a central figure within the Cologne art trade and from d2 to d4 an influential member of the documenta board) and Herbert von Buttlar to relocate documenta to the Rheinland.

But the enemy within seems still to pose a threat too. The enthusiasm generated by d1 and d2 within the international media leads Bode to make a bold move toward expansion: without being officially charged with the responsibility of implementing a further version of the exhibition, he negotiates with the modern art museums of New York and Pittsburgh over the possibility of organizing the next documenta together, with the exhibition moving to the USA following its run in Kassel. During d4, the father of documenta is once again accused – this time along with Willi Bongard – of employing the same strategy. But what looks like a betrayal by Bode of his own project is in fact at most a reconfirmation of his farsightedness: since he foresees art from the USA as having a more determining role in his future exhibitions, he attempts to facilitate access to the artworks of major museums in that country by working with them directly.

The municipal representatives for the exhibition, however, react decisively against the proposal that the show be shared with other cities. Kassel is once more invoked as the birthplace of documenta and its only conceivable setting, with alternative locations

³ *Hessische Allgemeine*, January 8, 1965. How seriously the case is taken can be seen in the readiness to employ d3’s 600,000 DM deficit, previously judged exclusively as scandalous, as a positive argument: “A city like Frankfurt would, given its debts, have to consider of how much interest an event could be for them that closed with a high deficit.” “Gegen Verlegung der documenta,” in: *Die Welt*, January 9, 1965.

⁴ “OB: documenta III voraussichtlich 1964,” in: *Hessische Allgemeine*, July 7, 1962.

⁵ “Im nächsten Jahr ‘documenta II’ in Kassel,” in: *Hessische Nachrichten*, May 24, 1958.

categorically ruled out. Bode's subsequent attempt, in November 1973, to open up American sources of funding for Kassel is also unsuccessful, after William L. Rafsky, head of the organizing committee of the United States Bicentennial, expresses an interest in showing d6 for two months in Philadelphia.

While all of these irritating attempts at fulfilling the desire for transplantation are successfully fought off by documenta's organizers and claimed as evidence of the exhibition's quality and reputation when made public knowledge, they are able to serve documenta's historiography as proof of the way in which stereotypical slogans – which, as official positions, are able over time to obtain the status of truth – can in fact act to conceal the truly relevant relationships between place and object. Since what are hidden behind both the standardized reasoning of the defensive gestures and the attempt at access from the outside are not so much altruistic efforts to support a cultural event widely acknowledged in its importance, but, rather, non-artistic hard facts: the banal fact that large-scale art exhibitions, as documenta was from its beginning, bring with them wide-reaching economic consequences for their host cities. Significantly, documenta is being made the object of further attempts by other German federal states to annex it, at the very moment that the initial stage of its existence as an unsecured experiment and “intellectual adventure” of a handful of the “visually obsessed” (Haftmann) has developed into a regularly repeatable economic success for the venue of the “art Olympiad.” To put it broadly: the reason municipalities engage in the staging of spectacular, large-scale exhibitions and support them in their financing and organization lies in the fact that such events – alongside the benefits they bring for a city's image – also constitute an important economic factor for the exhibitions' locations.

There is one aspect, then, that should not be ignored in the analysis of the network of conditions under which documenta operates, although this has in fact often been exactly the case in previous institutional descriptions of the exhibition: its effect in boosting the economy. That economic consequences only sporadically make their way into the field of vision of reviewers, historians, or other critical engagements with the manifestations of the art world is primarily due to the difficulties faced in ascertaining reliable facts and in determining influences that, due to the long-term nature of their consequences, largely elude empirical verification. Alongside the increase in turnover directly induced by documenta across numerous branches of the tertiary sector and the associated increase in municipal tax income, the spectrum of consequences also entails the promotion of tourism and the barely substantiable aspect of municipalities' cultivation of their own images. When any direct view of the commercial detail is blocked in such a manner, then, it comes as no surprise when well-meaning commentators turn to those sources of information that are more accessible, and to the organization's more obvious event structures. This explains, among other things, why previous attempts to chronologize documenta's history have failed to produce anything more concrete than a succession of its spectacular highpoints.

It can be generally assumed that the impact of every relevant large-scale exhibition can be described in terms of four basic subcategories: 1. artist-related (in that the very fact

of participating in an exhibition alone influences an artist's value in the marketplace and position within the prestige hierarchy)⁶; 2. artwork-related (in that the manner in which an exhibition stages an artwork and serves to embed it within art-theoretical arguments helps to determine the work's future reception); 3. art market-related (in that it exerts an influence on the exhibition strategies and sales activities of the gallery scene); and 4. place-related (in that it has economic consequences for the event's location). The analytical negligence of this last element is however in no way limited to documenta: just as the history of the art exhibition as mediating authority since the end of the 18th century is yet to be written, what are also missing are studies that comprehend and analyze the economic effects of individual large-scale art events as an immediate component of their histories.

Within this problematic state of affairs, Robert Eikam's unpublished diploma thesis "On the Economic Significance of the Art Exhibition 'documenta' for the City of Kassel" (1977) is still of exemplary importance. In the framework of an empirical analysis that incorporates data material relating to d6, it examines, among other things, the economic consequences of documenta for various Kassel businesses across various sectors and the resultant effects on the municipal budget; the exhibition's significance for the image and promotion of the city; its influence on the frequency of conventions held in the self-named "City of Arts and Conferences"; and its visible effects within the tourism industry. In order to succeed in a more complete evaluation of that economic part of the spectrum of consequences, however, the results of Eikam's detailed work must be supplemented with material from those official statements, not taken into consideration by him, about the "promotional power of worldwide resonance" (A. Nemeček) for the city of Kassel: voices that, since the ending of d1, first sparsely and then remarkably often, make journalistic reappraisals of each edition of the exhibition and in doing so achieve a strategic value for the justification of its ongoing existence. For it is just this barely quantifiable long-term economic impact that allows those popular "blockbuster exhibitions" held on any cultural theme to exceed the threshold of the political authorities' bureaucratic disinterest and make it into the range of supportability.

An officially formulated indication that the financial support for documenta from public funds is motivated by more than just an interest in art is made when Bode brings himself to publicly play down his own initiative and responsibility for the continuation of the series in order to align himself with that version of events, laid out in the d2 catalogue, that claims this new and large-scale attempt at determining the artistic situation of the time as "resulting from the wishes of the city of Kassel."⁷ The casualness with which such a decisive shift in the organizational structure of the series is here implied is bound to attract attention. While in 1955 the experimental character of Bode's bold vision for the exhibition is still largely viewed with suspicion by the municipal authorities, who are only with some effort persuaded to offer it a subsidy and assume responsibility for its hosting, at the moment at which its success seems secured and repeatable, they take on the key organizational role in the body established to oversee its regular implementation. Further evidence that the city authorities are beginning to get a sense of the potential significance of a large-scale event's continual presence in Kassel for the city's image is given

⁶ As is to be expected, these "seal of quality" aspects are also lacking in any empirical data. What would be needed is an investigation that follows an artist previously below the threshold of the art market from their participation in the ritual of documenta all the way to the pinnacle of the art establishment, while tracing the growth in their importance in relation to their participation in documenta.

⁷ Bode, v. Buttlar, Lauritzen, Lemke in their joint introduction to the catalogue for *documenta II*, vol. 1, p. 9.

when, upon d2's closing, Bode is awarded the Bundesverdienstkreuz I. Klasse [Federal Cross of Merit 1st class] in the Museum Fridericianum's grand Pollock Saal. In the foreground of all the laudits offered for the candidate stands his role in bringing the city of Kassel into the international art conversation.⁸ And the same rationale applies in the honoring of documenta founding member [Heinz] Lemke, who in 1973 is awarded the "city medal" for his service to the community. The subject of this political appreciation, then, is once again the consequences of this meritorious behavior for the city – and not, for example, for art, its institutions, or its individuals.

And so 1959, the year of the first official recognition of Bode, is also the year in which voices, including those of the municipal trade associations, grow in calling for the documenta success story to be repeated on a regular basis. The council of the association of local hotels and restaurants reports that hotels are booked to 84–86 percent of their capacity (in contrast to an annual average of 52 percent in years without documenta) and argues for a "continual repetition of the exhibition" on the basis that it "keeps the wish to visit Kassel alive in the minds, too, of those with more than just modern art on their agenda. And then it is not the just exhibition, but also the city itself, this is part of the conversation. We hope that the exhibition – if its economic side may be addressed for a moment – is continued in its cycle. Kassel owes that to itself."⁹

From this point on regular suggestions are made, within the reporting of those Kassel newspapers whose coverage of documenta may be termed semi-official, that just as the exhibition's location is increasingly important to the show, so too is the exhibition itself of increasing importance for the city. Such claims may at first glance seem to stand in opposition to the often comprehensive deficits of individual editions, as exploited with great public visibility for organizational strategic and party political ends, but in fact it is exactly this discrepancy between performance and gains that indicates that the effect in boosting the economy is of a more indirect nature than any potential profit generated by the exhibiting body itself. Even immediately after the conclusion of d1 – at a point in time, that is, when an evaluation of the exhibition's effects on the art market is still impossible – that organ of the Kassel Chamber of Industry and Trade ("Kurbessische Wirtschaft") feels able to state as evident that the work of Bode and his circle of friends has had economic consequences for the city: "Above all, they have done the city of Kassel, and not least its economy, a material service that is not to be underestimated, since the show attracted visitors from across the world and often led them to stay for several days."¹⁰

It is only decades later, however, that an awareness grows that this "material service" constitutes the most penetrating argument for the noteworthy event's institutionalization. In 1986, Alfred Nemeczek makes an amendment to the established success story through the addition of a decisive element: "That documenta became an institution is thanks above all to the hotel and gastronomy industry. Its business leaders took [...] stock after the exhibition had closed and compared the takings within the local gastronomy sector with the profits achieved by the concurrent [...] national garden show. The astonishing result: Although that first documenta had only managed to attract 130,000 visitors in its two-month run, these had a more positive effect for local proprietors than the nearly

⁸ "Verdiente Ehrung für Arnold Bode," in: *Hessische Allgemeine*, September 26, 1959.

⁹ "documenta II machte Kassel zum Treffpunkt für die Welt," in: *Hessische Allgemeine*, October 3, 1959.

¹⁰ "Der große Erfolg der 'documenta,'" in: *Kurbessische Wirtschaft*, vol. 10, no. 19 (1955), p. 315.

three million visitors to the garden show. While the flower fans quickly boarded buses and trains home, the art lovers filled restaurants and bedrooms. For the first time, an ambitious art show had proven itself to be an economic factor also. And this insight was a stronger trump card in the hands of documenta's organizers than was any indication of the cultural-political need for a repeat of the exhibition.”¹¹

Eikam's investigations, sporadic press announcements, and statements from various branches of industry, too, all name the local gastronomy and hotel sectors as being at the forefront of those business profiting directly from an increase in turnover thanks to the cultural attraction. Given the context of the national garden show, it is not possible to determine the exact percentage of the approximately 310,000 overnight stays (by approximately 170,000 visitors) in 1955 that can be attributed solely to the art exhibition. With each subsequent edition, however, it is evident that the “tourism blockbuster” (Hessische/Niedersächsische Allgemeine) is breaking statistical records within the “border zone city”^A and achieving record numbers with each edition of the exhibition: “The Kassel hotel and gastronomy sector,” the industry argues in 1977, “is not, in comparison with other cities, blessed with exhibitions and festivals. The economic factor of documenta can therefore be put to good use. 10 to 20 percent more overnight stays, particularly on weekends, are being announced by Kassel hoteliers, and restaurants within the city center have also been able to record increases in turnover exceeding 20 percent at times.”¹²

In addition, the inner-city retail sector in particular also experiences a revenue boost in meeting the needs of the regular upswing in the number of art tourists to the city, contributing in turn to the “wonderful cyclical feeding of the business tax coffers” (M. Schneckenburger): according to Eikam's investigations, during d4, for example, the city made approximately 300,000–500,000 DM [German Marks] in extra tax revenues; that's equivalent to 0.4–0.6 percent of the entire tax yield for 1968 (82,921,316 DM).¹³ This increase, while modest, means that the municipal contribution to the budget of an edition of documenta (in the case of d4 approximately 500,000 DM) is covered by the increase in tax revenue alone, the simple fact of which is enough to refute populist accusations of the mishandling of public money.

It takes another decade, however, for the political authorities to view their investment in the major international exhibition as not a praiseworthy act of patronage and support, but rather one of the direct promotion of economic development, and to openly acknowledge the convergence of interests in the city's policies regarding municipal tourism and contemporary art mediation. And so, in 1997, a French journalist is eventually able to report: “‘The art doesn't cost us much,’ the young mayor of Kassel, Hans Eichel, told us, ‘these outlays are in fact very profitable, since the state gains from the increase in tourism through the creation of work, an inflow of foreign currencies, and an increase in tax revenue [...]’”¹⁴

The end account offered by this same mayor five years later, prior to the closing of d7, is justified in similar terms: forced, in the face of a municipal deficit in the millions, to publicly defend its support of a controversial cultural event, he proclaims the profitability

¹¹ Alfred Nemecek: “Wie Renoir in Boston 30 Millionen Dollar machte,” in: *Art*, no. 8/1986, pp. 6–7, here p. 7.

^A Translator's note: Kassel was located just 30 km from the East German border.

¹² “Ab nach Kassel,” in: *Allgemeine Hotel- und Gaststättenzeitung*, August 20, 1977. For individual data see also: “Weniger Gäste schliefen mehr,” in: *Hessische/Niedersächsische Allgemeine*, December 6, 1972; “documenta 6 füllte Kassels Betten,” in: *Hessische/Niedersächsische Allgemeine*, February 15, 1978; “Die documenta – ein Wirtschaftsfaktor,” in: *Kurhessische Wirtschaft*, vol. 39, no. 1 (1978), p. 10; “documenta 6 belebte den Handel,” in: *Hessische/Niedersächsische Allgemeine*, December 13, 1977; “Kassels Fremdenverkehrs-Knüller: documenta 6 brach alle Rekorde,” in: *Hessische/Niedersächsische Allgemeine*, March 7, 1978.

¹³ Robert Eikam: *Zur ökonomischen Bedeutung der Kunstausstellung “documenta” für die Stadt Kassel*, unpublished diploma thesis, Organizational Unit for Social and Educational Sciences, Gesamthochschule Kassel 1977, pp. 49–50.

¹⁴ Jaques Michel: “Manifestation der Widersprüche,” in: *Kunstjahrbuch 1977/78*, pp. 115–19, here p. 116.

of this application of resources. Under the headline “What are the benefits of d7 for Kassel?” he characteristically compares the 1.2 DM municipal investment in the exhibition with the resultant revenues achieved by local businesses, a figure twelve to fifteen times as high. His conclusion: “There is barely any other outlay by the city that brings so much additional money to Kassel as our engagement with documenta.”¹⁵

It also doesn't go unmentioned within such fiscal legitimization strategies that during d6 construction projects were awarded with a total value of approximately 700,000 DM, and that documenta also played a role as an employer (with approximately one million DM in personnel costs for d6). Additionally, it is argued, large-scale projects realized in part independently of the documenta budget (for example Richard Serra's “Terminal” or Walter de Maria's “Vertical Earth Kilometer”) have also drawn further millions into the region.¹⁶

As this “non-artistic” dimension is made public – on a greater scale and with more concrete figures following d6 – astonishing changes can be observed in the exhibition's future prospects: with the closing of d7, the organizers are for the first time free from those prophecies, obligatory until now, that the latest edition of the exhibition will (whether on the basis of the scandal or irresponsible deficit it generated or some other pretense) surely be the last. Just as it had within the municipal trade associations previously, consensus now spreads through all town hall parties that documenta should be permanently bound to Kassel. Immediately after d7's closing, for example, the local FDP [Liberal Democratic Party] demands that preparations for d8 be begun immediately, arguing that the exhibition is “a good source of income for the Kassel business world and the city. While the city provided *documenta 7* with around 1.3 million DM in funding over five years, additional revenue from business tax and other sources is estimated at over three million DM.”¹⁷

Estimations of d8, then, are much more euphoric in their predictions. As early as July 1987, the exhibition's management enthuses about a “profitable organization” and says the public can expect it to bring (not least since the overwhelming majority of its budget is spent locally) “an additional 45–50 million DM into Kassel.”¹⁸ But while the organization's managing director, Klaus Angermann, has every reason for positivity when telling the city's public of the profits generated by the exhibition, already at this point a deficit is beginning to emerge that will eventually, with 910,000 DM, go on to hold the record within the financial history of the institution. Much humbler, in comparison, are the estimates of the business community, who expect to make approximately 20 million DM in extra revenue.¹⁹ When attempts are made to use scientific instruments to trace the regional economic effects of the exhibition, the results are even more conservative. Significantly, it is not until 1992 – a point of time, that is, when the commercialization of the exhibition's politics and the influence of sponsors have radically affected the image of documenta – that the art event is made the subject of a substantial academic analysis. An “Evaluation of the Impact of documenta IX” undertaken by the Gesamthochschule Kassel [now the University of Kassel] produces results (on the basis of, among other things, a

¹⁵ Hans Eichel: “Was bringt die d7 für Kassel?,” in: *Extra Tipp*, July 18/22/29, 1982. In detail, Eichel's accounting is as follows: 500,000 additional overnight stays = 6 million DM revenue from hotels and restaurants; 100,000–300,000 day guests = 8–12 DM million from gastronomy and inner-city retail.

¹⁶ Cf. Rolf Lucas: “Wirtschaftsförderung durch ‘documenta,’” in: *Kommunalpolitische Blätter*, vol. 29, no 10 (1977), p. 915.

¹⁷ “documenta – eine gute Einnahmequelle,” in: *Hessische/Niedersächsische Allgemeine*, October 20, 1982.

¹⁸ Klaus Angermann/Monika Junker-John: “documenta 8: Millionen, die sich lohnen,” in: *Kurbessische Wirtschaft*, no. 6/1987, pp. 320–22; “Die documenta – auch ein wichtiger Wirtschaftsfaktor. Ein Gespräch mit documenta-Geschäftsführer Klaus Angermann,” in: *documenta press*, no. 3/1987, p. 2. See also Heinz Hartmann: “Die ‘documenta’ füllt Kassels Kassen,” in: *Fuldaer Zeitung*, July 2, 1987; and Petra Wettlaufer: “Wo bleiben die Millionen?!,” in: *Hessische/Niedersächsische Allgemeine*, July 18, 1987.

¹⁹ “Die documenta als Wirtschaftsfaktor,” in: *Deutsche Handwerker Zeitung*, June 19, 1987; “documenta füllte Cafés, Restaurants und Hotels,” in: *Allgemeine Hotel- und Gaststätten-Zeitung*, October 17, 1987.

visitor survey) that serve to provoke further skepticism with regard to the regular self-interested accounts brought forth by the organizers.²⁰

All of those effects mentioned so far, however, more or less exactly defined in numerical terms, take second place in their significance to the possibilities presented by documenta as a means for municipal image building. In the sense that the exhibition series alone helped bring its location to international prominence, it is also the factor that lends substance to the city's decades-long styling of itself as the "city of the arts." For the recurring flood of journalistic engagements with documenta across the media also ensures a long-term promotional effect in that it sees the exhibition's setting not just named, but also described and commented upon, its further cultural offerings pointed out (in particular the state-owned art museums), the situation of the exhibition buildings and areas within its topography outlined, and its touristic qualities discussed: in short, an engagement, diverse in its nature, with not just the main event but also its urban context, resulting in a massive amount of indirect and cost-free advertising for the city. "We once calculated what all of the minutes of TV coverage the city had received during 'documenta' would have cost if it had been bought as advertising time," d6's managing director acknowledged, "and we ended up with a figure of three quarters of a billion!"²¹

The extent to which this function of documenta as an "invaluable promotional factor" (K. Angermann) in fact becomes a key motivation for the continuation of the exhibition cycle can be seen, too, in the marketing strategy consistently employed by the event's management and the municipal authorities, whereby they state their intention to connect Kassel with the main routes of international cultural tourism. While Bode, in 1963, is still able to counter objections that the d2 is too comprehensive to be taken in in one viewing with the argument that the exhibition is "not made to meet the needs of the average tourist" but instead directed at "the specialist and the visually educated layman,"²² just a short time later, such an elitist self-image has given way to efforts to channel the broadest possible flow of tourists through the bottleneck of the Museum Fridericianum. During d5, then, it becomes unmistakably clear that the organizers intend, in this Olympic year of 1972, to establish Kassel as a cultural whistle stop on the axis between the two host cities of Munich and Kiel, in order to complete the nation's image of itself through a combination of sporting and artistic prowess and provide a solid background for the notion of the exhibition, long put forward in its advertising, as an "art Olympiad" – whereupon the federal contribution to its budget is raised by 200,000 DM on the basis that "Kassel, as a cultural stop-off point between the two Olympic cities [...] will be especially attractive to German and international visitors."²³

And so, full of commercial expectations, documenta increasingly becomes a key element of a leisure industry in which tourism and culture are integrated and mutually dependent on one another in their development: participation in the blessing of cultural tourism becomes a driver for providing cultural services, while art simultaneously serves as an occasion for touristic activities.

²⁰ Cf. Gerd-Michael Hellstern: "Die documenta: Ihre Ausstrahlung und regionalökonomische Wirkungen," in: Hartmut Häußermann/Walter Siebel (eds.): *Festivalisierung der Stadtpolitik. Stadtentwicklung durch große Projekte*, Opladen 1993, pp. 305–24.

²¹ Quoted in Lucas: "Wirtschaftsförderung durch 'documenta,'" 1977.

²² Minutes of the 4th meeting of the Committee for Communal Issues of the IHK Kassel, March 11, 1963. On this occasion Bode compares the d2 with a library, since here, too, one would not harbor "the ambition to read all of its volumes or even approve of their contents."

²³ Leading the exhibition's director [Harald] Szeemann to make the ironic suggestion to advertise d5 as: "Holiday in Germany as in ancient Greece, three weeks cultural and three weeks athletic games in summer 1972."

The more documenta establishes itself as the clear product of a leisure industry aimed at mass mobilization, then, the more obvious the need to reference its economic impact becomes in forming its legitimation strategy. While early on it is stated in apologetic and almost guilty tones that it is only due to documenta's cultural significance that one dares to consider the banal aspect of its commerciality, such timid formulations soon give way to the self-confident assertion that it is in fact only the exhibition's effects on the economy of its location that make it acceptable or even desirable to those in Kassel who would otherwise ideally like to see such a "conglomeration of megalomania, nonsense, phrasemongering, and art"²⁴ banned on the spot ("... as a long-time resident of Kassel I demand, in the name of thousands of like-minded others: get documenta out of Kassel!"²⁵). To argue on the basis of figures, then (beyond superficial boasts about visitor numbers), becomes increasingly important as documenta's ability to legitimize itself simply by meeting established cultural-political demands – as was still the case in 1955 – is diminished, and it is forced to repeatedly justify its right to exist by making reference, also retrospectively, to its wealth of economic consequences. Even to this day it has not been possible to eliminate the impression that a majority of Kassel's population essentially views with suspicion the artistic spectacle that periodically overtakes their city and leaves it overrun with cultural activity: the assumption that the city's ongoing involvement with documenta means that its citizens, more than those of any other city, are able to maintain a flexible and tolerant conception of art repeatedly proves itself to be a fallacy. Which may lead one to the heretical conclusion that "the city was only chosen as a location since its population is at least risk of being infected by the artistic experiment."²⁶ documenta in Kassel, then: still the familiar foreign object.²⁷

This lack of rootedness in the domestic cultural consciousness (particularly well-articulated in the healthy's tireless opposition of the sick within the correspondence columns of the local press) is, however, less a result of what is sometimes described as the "unfortunate local character of North Hesse"²⁸ (K. Kaiser) than of the exhibition's level of aspiration. At no point in documenta's history, in fact, is the city's public seen as constituting its target audience; efforts to promote the exhibition internationally are always aimed primarily at the worldwide cognoscenti, global art tourism, and competitors within the exhibition business. Their reactions alone are relevant to the organizers, and so the local response becomes a matter of indifference for them. At no stage – and here lies the fundamental and enduring mistake behind a still-rampant local patriotic narrowing of perspectives – does the parade of the Western world's cultural heroes serve to entertain the city's residents. At most, the local population and urban context serve as extras and scenery for the international cultural survey. While d1 can still be publicized as a "joint effort by the local community" whose exigency for the local public good is beyond question, over time the organization's focus gravitates away from addressing an immediate need directly arising from the cultural potential of the city, and increasingly toward the staging of an imported art show by a line-up of experts hired especially for the occasion. No attempt is made to convince Kassel's public of the ongoing need for documenta in the city on the basis of its content. To describe documenta as a "mockery of the citizens of Kassel and Hesse"²⁹ is then a misinterpretation only insofar as the exhibition is no longer really produced by the city's community, but merely hosted there.

²⁴ Reader's letter from Paul Beckenbach about d6 in: *Hessische/Niedersächsische Allgemeine*, July 16, 1977.

²⁵ Reader's letter from Fritz Resow: "Einer für viele," in: *Hessische/Niedersächsische Allgemeine*, March 19, 1977. On the embarrassing extent of this dissent see also: Heike Waldmann/Susanne Röder: "Was sagt die Kasseler Bevölkerung zur documenta," in: Horst Wackerbart (ed): *Kunst und Medien. Materialien zur documenta 6*, Kassel 1977, pp. 239–40.

²⁶ Anatol Goswin: *Deutsche Städte*, series 11: Kassel, in: *Bauwelt*, no. 20/1983, p. 77.

²⁷ Statistics that seem to indicate an astonishingly high acceptance of documenta by the population of Kassel are therefore deceptive. The available surveys only make statements about the frequency of visits, but not about the degree of acceptance for what is on offer. Thus the Infas survey of 1964 also gives rise to false interpretations in this respect: the Institute for Applied Social Sciences comes to the benevolent conclusion that more than a third of local residents visited d1 and d2 (34% visited, 63% not visited, 3% no data) and comments: "This is an astonishingly high turnout – so high as to be barely achievable for any other local event." Cf. Infas Report: *Special Report Kassel*, Bad Godesberg 1964, p. 58.

²⁸ Konrad Kaiser, former director of the New Gallery Kassel, in conversation with the author, 1984.

²⁹ Readers' letter from Heinrich Kaletka and Ferdinand Müller in: *Hessische/Niedersächsische Allgemeine*, April 29, 1977.

With the political and artistic authorities' focus on international acclaim, Kassel's population develops an attitude toward the exhibition that, at best, can only be turned around for the better by stressing its advantageous economic aspects. References to the organization's economic significance replace efforts to legitimize its content. Economic data – even when so speculatively compiled – is judged to be only promising means for winning the commitment of a population whose belief in the need for documenta seems to be largely disappearing. And so economic effects are meticulously recorded, extrapolated, and put aside for future use in emergencies, in order to escape any impudent accusations of the irresponsible handling of public funds.

In spite of the special position occupied by documenta in many respects, in this particular regard it is not unique. The legitimizing behavior practiced by the organizers in their dealings with the funding authorities is an essential gesture for cultural events in general, particularly during periods of scarce resources. No one who works in the cultural sector and is dependent to any significant degree on municipal or state funding can avoid giving an account to their sponsors of the likely impact their undertaking (theater, exhibition, etc.) will have on the economy: "A boost in municipal consumption [and] the stimulation of municipal investment activities,"³⁰ by offering proof of success, are by now essential conditions for the toleration and support of cultural activities.

documenta – always far less established in its organizational form than other institutions (for example the Staatstheater Kassel) and burdened with the ongoing historical controversy around its reason for existence – initially responds to the pressure to prove its legitimacy by addressing the issue of how each version's content is to be determined: responsibility for the theoretical direction of each exhibition is to fall to its individual respective artistic director. However, where this is deemed to be invalid by the local public (as with d6), is not able to be mediated in a suitable form (as with d5), or is indeed entirely absent (as with d7), the institution is forced to employ the legitimacy emergency brakes and fall back on direct evidence – that of supposedly objective economic consequences. And so the goal of the regular references made to documenta's role in supporting the economy is initially to win over public opinion – the "great headwater of legitimation" (M. Walser) of every cultural-political action – or, failing this, to at least neutralize those crude aversions to it that are based on a lack of understanding. Very quickly, however, the economic argument is transformed from an occasional means for silencing uncomfortable criticism to a perpetual and indispensable justification for the presence of documenta in a city whose proportion of uncomprehending citizens, it is believed, can be fobbed off with a single fact, reduced with great efficacy by the press to the headline: "The Avant-Garde Gets Kassel's Cash Registers Ringing."³¹

The way in which economic aspects come to push aside and even to dominate aesthetic ones can be seen when, during the planning stages of d10, local business representatives demand that conceptual considerations for the 1997 exhibition prioritize the interests of local gastronomy, trade, and tourism ahead of the show's artistic quality. With such a perversion of criteria, however, the character of the economic argument is reversed entirely.³² While for many years the discovery of the cultural gamble's economic factor

³⁰ Manfred Beilharz, director of the Staatstheater Kassel during his speech at the German Association of Cities in Frankfurt/M., June 14, 1983: "'Kultur in unseren Städten unverzichtbar' – wozu brauchen wir Theater?," part 2, in: *Informationen*, no. 11/1983, pp. 6–8, here p. 6..

³¹ *Die Welt*, March 30, 1981.

³² For a critique of the proceedings see Dirk Schwarze: "documenta-Träume," in: *Hessische/Niedersächsische Allgemeine*, September 6, 1995.

has contributed toward securing its existence, it now poses an acute threat for its international artistic reputation.

HARALD KIMPEL born 1950 in Kassel, studied art pedagogy, art history, European ethnology, and classical archeology in Kassel and Marburg, completing his doctorate thesis on the history of documenta in 1996. From 1981 to 2015 he was an associate researcher at the city of Kassel's department for culture, working among other things as the director of its exhibition department, in the management of the documenta archiv, and in the department of cultural promotion and consulting. Since 2018 he is a voluntary academic associate of the documenta archiv. In addition, he has also worked as a freelance curator and author specializing in the history of documenta, contemporary art, and the history of culture and the everyday. As an author and editor he has been responsible for numerous publications, including *documenta. Die Übersicht* (2002), *documenta emotional. Erinnerungen an die Weltkunstausstellungen* (2012), *UTOPIEdocumenta. Unrealized Projects from the History of the World Art Exhibition* (2015), the series *Fotografische Rekonstruktionen d1-d4* (1993–2007), co-edited with Karin Stengel, and *documenta. Pictorial History* (2017), co-edited with Helmut Plate.

documenta studies #02
October 2018

HARALD KIMPEL:
"The Avant-Garde Gets
Kassel's Cash Registers
Ringing". On the
Discovery of documenta
as an Economic Factor

PUBLISHERS:
Nora Sternfeld
Nanne Buurman
Ina Wudtke
Carina Herring

EDITING:
Nanne Buurman
Nora Sternfeld

TRANSLATION:
Ben Caton

GRAPHIC DESIGN:
Bogislav Ziemer

documenta and
Exhibition studies

KUNSTHOCHSCHULE
KASSEL



Fig. 1:
A much-deserved reward for the city's successful marketers: Arnold Bode and Werner Haftmann are awarded the Goethe Plaque of Hesse's Ministry of Science and Art by culture minister and documenta board member Ernst Schütte on September 26, 1964. Photo: © documenta archiv/Carl Eberth

Fig. 2:
documenta – the successful institution: visitors queuing in front of the Museum Fridericianum during d10 (1997). Photo: © documenta archiv/Ryszard Kasiewicz

Fig. 3:
“Wenn Kassels Kassen klingeln” [When Kassel's Cash Registers Ring], *Welt am Sonntag* article from June 10, 2007 by Jürgen Mundt, reproduced with kind permission of the *Welt am Sonntag*.

Wenn Kassels Kassen klingeln

Die „documenta“ ist ein wichtiger Wirtschaftsfaktor für Stadt und Region

Von Jürgen Mundt

ALLE FÜNF JAHRE erlebt Kassel einen Tourismusschub. Die „documenta“ lockt an den 100 Veranstaltungstagen mehr als 650.000 Besucher in die nordhessische Metropole. „Die Stadt definiert sich nach außen über die „documenta“, sagt Knut Seidel, Geschäftsführer der Kassel Tourismus GmbH. Das wachsende Interesse an zeitgenössischer Kunst lässt auch die Kassen der Geschäftsleute klingeln: Die Ausstellung ist zu einem nicht unerheblichen Wirtschaftsfaktor geworden. Statistisch übernachtet jeder Besucher mindestens einmal, 70 Prozent der Gäste finden in Kassel Unterkunft. Ein Drittel bucht ein Hotel, ein weiteres Drittel übernachtet bei Freunden oder Verwandten. Jugendherbergen, Campingplätze und Pensionen profitieren ebenfalls von der Ausstellung.

Den zusätzlichen Umsatz während der 100 Tage beziffern Experten auf mindestens 20 Millionen Euro. Untersuchungen der Uni Kassel und Statistiken der Stadtverwaltung belegen die Langzeitwirkung der Kunstschau. Nach jeder „documenta“ sinken die Besucherzahlen zwar ab, liegen aber immer noch höher als in den Jahren davor. 73 Prozent der „documenta“-Besucher kommen aus Deutschland, überproportional vertreten sind neben den Hessen die Berliner, Hamburger, Bremer und Niedersachsen. Im Ausland findet die

Ausstellung den größten Zuspruch bei den Holländern (23,5 Prozent). Mit 13,5 Prozent der ausländischen Besucher liegen die Franzosen auf dem zweiten Platz, gefolgt von Belgiern (9,2 Prozent).

Für einen weiteren Anstieg des Tourismus ist auch privates Engagement gefragt. Der Verein documenta forum bringt mit einer Spendenaktion den Laser – ein Projekt von Horst H. Baumann zur „documenta 6“ aus dem Jahr 1977 – wieder zum Strahlen. Ein eigenes Laserprojekt plant auch Volker A. Deigendesch als Pächter des in unmittelbarer Nähe des Bergparks gelegenen Schlosshotels. Eine neu gestaltete Lounge bietet eine fantasti-

sche Aussicht auf die Stadt. „Per Laser werden wir von hier aus die „documenta“-Standorte anstrahlen“, so der Hotel-Chef.

Insgesamt werden durch den Tourismus in Kassel jährlich fast 500 Millionen Euro umgesetzt. „Damit hängen wir manchen Wirtschaftszweig ab“, so Seidel.

Eine Erkenntnis, die auch die Wirtschaftsförderer erreicht hat. „Wir arbeiten eng mit dem Tourismus zusammen“, sagt der Geschäftsführer der Wirtschaftsförderung Region Kassel GmbH, Thilo von Troitz zu Solz. Die „documenta“ sei für Kassel ein „Alleinstellungsmerkmal“, das für das Standortmarketing genutzt werde.



Die Stadt Kassel rechnet in diesem Jahr mit mehr als 730.000 Übernachtungsgästen, die für 500 Millionen Euro Umsatz sorgen