

FTR SNS

COULD I GET A NEW ONE?

CHRISTOPH
MILER

Das «Migrant Journal» wurde beim «future-sense»-Symposium am 12. Juni 2019 an der Hochschule für Gestaltung und Kunst FHNW von Michaela Büsse (Mitherausgeberin Migrant Journal und Doktorandin an der HGK FHNW) und von Christoph Miler (Co-Designer Migrant Journal) präsentiert.

In sechs Ausgaben des «Migrant Journal» wurde über Hunderte von Objekten in Bewegung nachgedacht: von den Routen der Wanderarbeiterinnen und -arbeiter, die Migration von Rohstoffen und Alibaba-Produkten, Vögeln, Samen und Sprachen bis hin zu der Bewegung von Schiffscontainern, Nomadinnen und Nomaden.

Das «Migrant Journal» materialisiert dabei allerdings Fragen zu Ökologie, Ökonomie und Politik der Bewegung, bevor es in die Briefkästen der Lesenden gelangt. Das physische Objekt der Zeitschrift ist nämlich auf vielfältige Weise mit planetarischen Infrastrukturen der Produktion und Distribution verwoben: Das Papier besteht aus gefällten Bäumen, die Tinte benötigt Wasser, und für den Vertrieb ist das «Migrant Journal» auf Schiffe, Flugzeuge und Eisenbahnen angewiesen, die Kohlenstoff, Öl oder Elektrizität benötigen und CO₂ ausstossen.

In unserem Beitrag werden wir die ökologischen Auswirkungen des «Migrant Journal» untersuchen und eine provokative Frage aufwerfen: Legitimiert die Relevanz des Journals die negativen Folgen seiner Produktion? Wie können wir die Ethik der kulturellen Produktion in Zeiten knapper Ressourcen, ökologischer Katastrophen und zunehmender globaler Ungleichheit angehen?

Migrant Journal is obsessed with movements of all kinds. Across six issues we have dived into the kaleidoscopic entanglements of journeys and migrations, flows and exchanges, circulations and transits. No journey was too small or big, too mundane or freaky in our attempt to expand the conversation on migration. Every entity on the move became an object of study: from free riders on top of trains, climate refugees and modern slaves, to the flows of oil, electricity, gold bars, drones, and space shuttles. We even looked at the movements of coconuts, sea nomads, sand grains, and artificially generated shooting-stars (no joke), South African Maskandi music, Alibaba diamond paintings (don't ask, just google), reindeers, crabs, and an elementary particle called quark. Throughout 912 pages we have analysed and reflected on dozens of species, objects and thoughts on the move. Yet, in the process of doing so we forgot about one important object of migration: Migrant Journal itself.

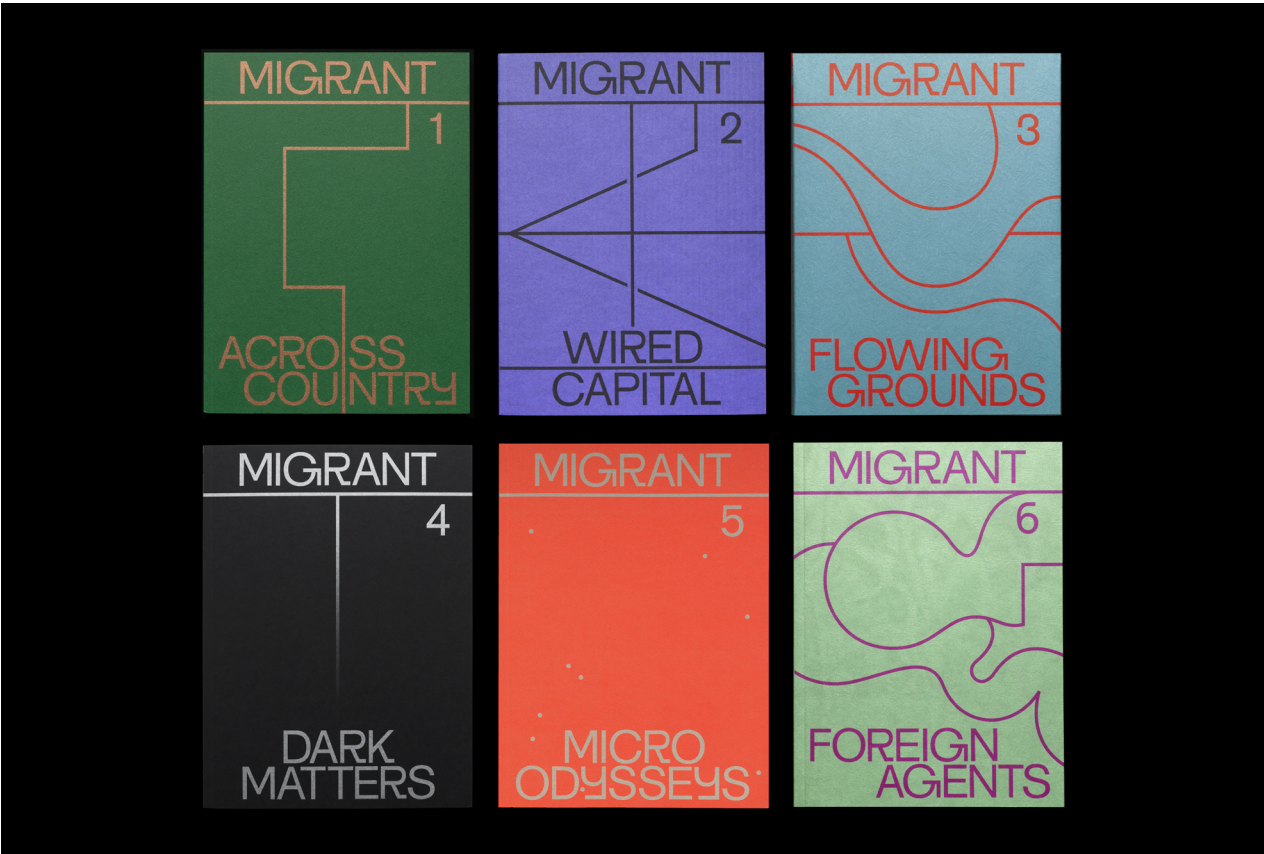
The wake-up call came via email. A reader sent us an image of his copy taken right after arrival. It was accompanied by the words: “Could I get a new one?” and displayed something that was clearly not a readable magazine. It rather looked like the lifeless cadaver of a stack of paper, delivered by post. We had never seen a copy of Migrant Journal in such a devastating state: There was a long, deep and painful rupture running through the object, almost separating it into two halves. The mutilation of Migrant Journal was so severe, that it inevitably reminded us of something we too easily forget about: its physical reality. This publication is not only a cultural object made of immaterial stories, theories and ideas but it is a very real thing whose physicality is shaped – and sometimes even threatened – by the forces of global infrastructures.

As anthropologist Susan Starr observed in 1999, infrastructures become clearly visible once they break down. And this is exactly what happened here.¹ The rapid streams of logistics destroyed a copy of Migrant Journal and made us think about the infrastructures that get it moving. We wondered: How does it travel? What kind of fears and pains must it endure on its way to the reader?

So, let's assume you are ordering a copy of Migrant Journal by clicking the buy-button on our website. Issue four is sold out, so you take a copy of issue three. What story of migration unfolds from here on?

In a very simplified version of this journey, at first your online purchase will be translated into transferable signals – pulses of light – that are sent from your computer to the servers of our Shopify website in Canada and from there to our distributor Newsstand in the UK. The physical media for this transmission is a massive highway of optical fibre cables that are thousands of kilometres long and run underground and at the bottom of the sea. Thanks to them, your pulses of light should arrive at Joseph Wilson Industrial Park, Whitstable CT5 3PS, UK, where our distributor Newsstand will identify your order, look for a copy of issue number three and prepare it for delivery.

Next, your parcel will be picked up by the Royal Mail Service. One of its 162,000 employees will take it to



Top: Covers of Migrant Journal, issues 1–6. Image: Migrant Journal; bottom: detail of Migrant Journal 2, Wired Capital. Image: Migrant Journal

one of thirty-seven mail centres in Great Britain. There, the mail is automatically scanned for prohibited goods like alcoholic liquids, drugs, or human remains.² Afterwards, it gets automatically sorted by a machine known as “The Segragator Drum”. Caps are very well deserved here because the drum is a monster. It is several metres long and has a diameter of one and a half metres. It looks like an otherworldly mixture of a gigantic washing machine and an airplane turbine. You would probably like to avoid being inside of it while it’s running.

International mail surviving this procedure is automatically forwarded to the Heathrow Worldwide Distribution Centre (HWDC) which handles all airmail leaving and arriving in the UK. The site of HWDC – also called GBLALA in the cryptic language of mail tracking systems – covers 100,000 square metres, runs ten miles of conveyor belts and sorts the insane number of 460,000 packages an hour. It was glamourised by the Daily Mail as “more advanced than a space shuttle”.³ At the operating heart of the centre is an ingenious software that scans destination addresses automatically through cameras and optical character recognition, translates them into fluorescent orange barcode stickers (which feature a pattern with the soulless name of RM4SCC), sorts packages accordingly into geographical groups, and loads them onto airplane loading vehicles that look like monumental forklifts. Because all of this is controlled and mostly executed by the clean accuracy of computer programmes, the HWDC is a prototypical example of a coded space – a term coined by British researcher and artist James Bridle, describing a spatial synthesis of automated machines, architectural elements, and the all-controlling forces of algorithms.⁴ Human beings are not welcome here. They are too slow, inaccurate and dirty in order to send Migrant Journal to your non-UK address.

And by the way, it could have been somewhere here – between the ruthless kinetic flows of all these vehicles, containers, robotic arms and segregator drums – that one copy of Migrant Journal went to the dogs.

But hopefully your copy of issue three is still alive and travels the thousands of kilometres by truck, ship or plane from HWDC to your home country before push-trolleys, bikes, vans, or drones will take over for the final home delivery.

Yet, the crack in Migrant Journal reveals more than a narrative about its logistical migration – it forces us to acknowledge its physical structure. Through this crack we can see the journal’s material layers like a geologist sees the layers of earth: strata of different papers, interlayers of ink, and sediments of glue and thread. If we zoom in a bit more, we notice that each of these basic components is made of a heterogenous mixture of other, smaller components. And if we zoom in even more, we might realize at some point that Migrant Journal is not a solid, self-contained object at all, but much more an assemblage of very different raw materials whose flows had to be triggered, directed, and merged. Some might call it the miracle of the invisible hand. We prefer to see it as a product of a global economy with its furious transnational supply chains – a network that channels its

material flows with precision even into the most faraway places, including Pliezhausen – the remote German village where Migrant Journal is printed.

To catch a glimpse of these tightly interwoven material flows, let’s look at the paper of Migrant Journal’s cover. It is called Colorplan, distributed by the British company G.F Smith and produced by James Cropper, a market-listed company with factories in Great Britain, the United States, and China.⁵ Colorplan consists of roughly 95% cellulose, which is extracted from wood. To achieve the specific material qualities that make Colorplan unique, eight different types of wood are required. Namely, spruce, pine, birch, aspen, and four species of eucalyptus (Globulus, Grandis, Dunnii, Maidenii).⁶ The respective trees are cut in the far-away forests of Sweden, Finland, Spain, Portugal, Uruguay, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Belarus, Russia, Poland, and Denmark.⁷ Right after cutting they are loaded on transporters and brought to the local wood chipper who removes their bark and chops them into neat sub-rectangular woodchips with a typical length of five to fifty millimetres. Next, the highly coveted material is transported with trucks, cargo-trains or epic woodchip carriers⁸ from the twelve afore-mentioned countries to one of the pulp mills James Cropper is collaborating with, for example to Lappeenranta in Finland or to Mönsterås in Sweden.⁹ In these small Scandinavian villages, we find huge chemical factories that are specialized in the extraction of cellulose fibres from wood, a technique called Kraft process. There, our eclectic mélange of international woodchips undergoes a complicated chemical procedure involving head spinning high chimneys, massive chemical bathtubs, and totally incomprehensible process charts. Apparently, some of these things happen there: washing, soaking, scanning, chipping and re-chipping, steaming, pulping, cooking, pressuring, and bleaching. Also, the woodchips have to spend several hours in a thing called digester. We haven’t heard anything about the involved chemicals before (sodium hydroxide, sodium sulphide, ammonium sulphite, potassium, etc.) but after analysing their production chains we can report that we should add China, the United States, Canada, Russia, and Belarus to the supply chain of Migrant Journal. In fact, we could add China und the U.S. twice because the final, pure and bright cellulose fibres are transported in stainless steel tanks, a material that is sourced from these two countries and helps to avoid iron contamination of Colorplan paper.¹⁰

After the cellulose fibres had their chemical catharsis in Scandinavia, they travel via ship and truck to the paper mill of James Cropper in Kendal, northwest England, where they are transformed into their desired form. For this purpose, the natural force of thousands of litres of water is redirected from the nearby river Kent into a bulk of cellulose fibres. Once slushy and squishy, the fibres are mixed with a bunch of adhesives and chemicals. The exact compound is top-secret because it will lead to the unique structure, elasticity and feel of Colorplan that creates its Unique Selling Proposition on the global paper market. We don’t know a lot about the details of this process but one thing we can reveal is that particles of plastic are applied that consist of styrene and



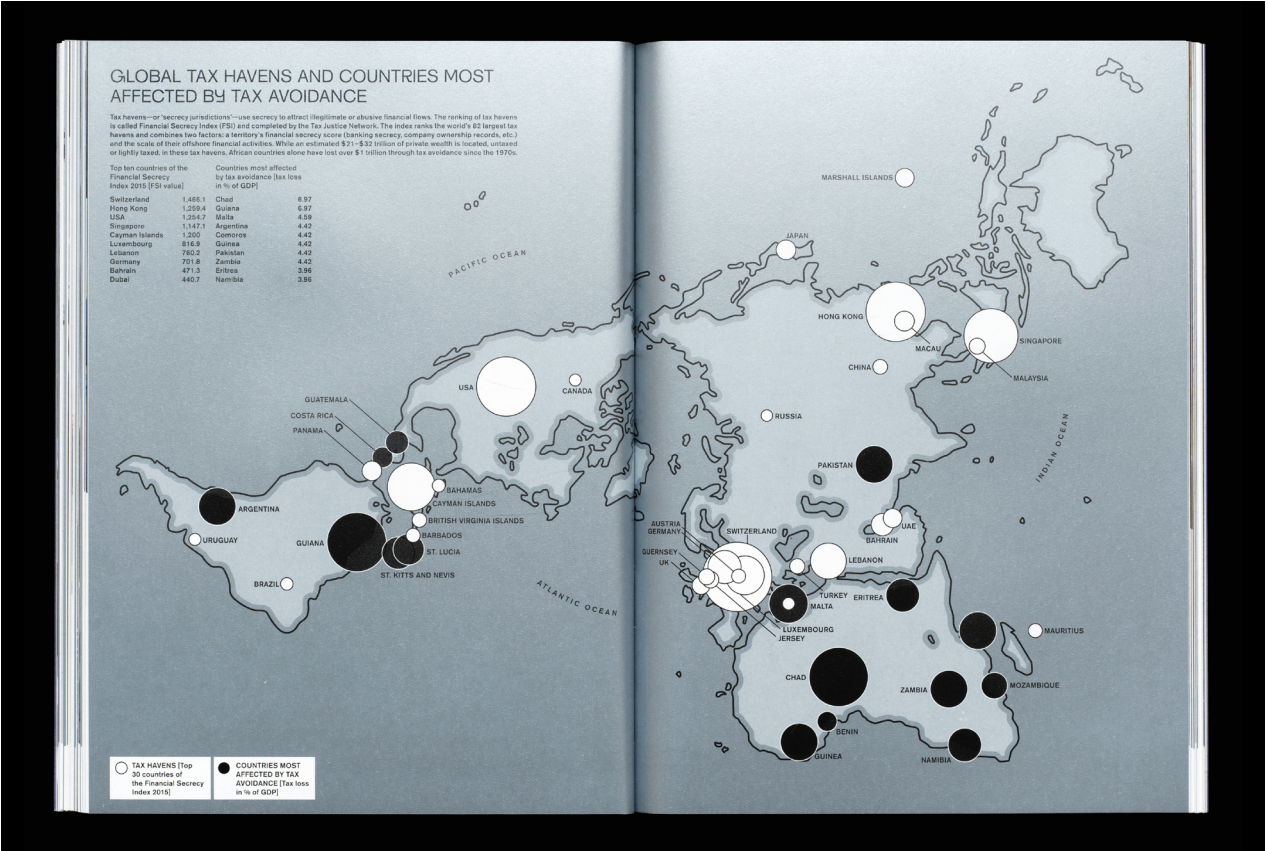
H

Jarvin surfaces with an octopus. While the states have made a concerted effort to move the Baku into settled communities on land, they claim that government promises of help have been hollow, leading them to return to the old nomadic way of life at sea.

89

SOUTH-EASTERN ASIA

LAST OF THE SEA NOMADS



Top: Last of the Sea Nomads by James Morgan in Migrant Journal 3, Flowing Grounds. Image: Migrant Journal;
bottom: Global tax heavens and countries most affected by tax avoidance in Migrant Journal 2, Wired Capital.
Image: Migrant Journal

46 CM



F

An employee of Jetback Captain demonstrates this new watersport, now available on the island. A 2000cc motor pumps water up through the Jetback, propelling the client out of the sea (239 for a 20-minute session). Mike Thelander, the owner of the company, remarks, "The Jetback is zero gravity. The Captain are your leaves, we are in the right place!"



F

Tractors plough through piles of sand deposited by sand barges at the Forest City development, to make four artificial islands in Johor, Malaysia. The project has displaced aboriginals, disrupted traditional fishing grounds and local ecosystems.

59

ASIA

SHIFTING SANDS

Top: The Heavens by Paolo Woods and Gabriele Galimberti in Migrant Journal 2, Wired Capital. Image: Migrant Journal;
bottom: Shifting Sands by Sim Chi Yin in Migrant Journal 5, Micro Odysseys. Image: Migrant Journal

47 CM

maleic anhydride¹¹, substances that went through an intense chemical workout in the United States and Germany but are based on the good old liquids of oil and natural gas (in this case mainly extracted from the Middle East, South America, and the U.S.). After some more drying, we are almost done. The final cherry on the paper cake comes in the form of chalk, starch or polyvinyl alcohol.¹² The latter is another kind of plastic that is manufactured in China and the United States.¹³ Its main purpose is to “close” the paper before it gets ready for transport, meaning that it gets rolled on cable drums of superhuman size that are up to three metres in diameter and weigh more than four tons. But since we never need more than 150 kilograms for our usual cute print-run of 3,000 copies, James Cropper simply sends a pallet of Colorplan in the back of a DHL-truck to our printer in Pliezhausen.

And this is only Migrant Journal’s cover. Its global flow of materials triggers forces that extract resources, rearrange substances, channel energy, alter landscapes, and redirect rivers. Needless to say, that all of Migrant Journal’s components – like glue, ink, pigments, threads, special metallic colours, packaging, etc. – and their supply chains could be unravelled and analysed this way. But watch out, because if we continue to trace the hidden flows of materials that enable Migrant Journal to live, we might bump into a couple of unwelcome social, political, and economic consequences.

For a starter, we make great use of crude oil – probably not the most environmentally friendly substance. It is used to produce the fuel for the cargo ships, trucks, and planes that transport our materials. It is used to produce the plastic particles that strengthen our paper. It is used for the liquid component in our inks.¹⁴ And, of course, it is also used for the first thing you see when you open the cardboard envelope after delivery: a plastic wrapping that protects our journal. Is it controversial that we have criticized the methods and consequences of oil extraction in several articles of Migrant Journal while at the same time the journal wouldn’t exist without it?

Also, the factories, ships, planes, and trucks in our supply chain burn wood, petrol or gas to power their engines, which emit a lot of carbon dioxide. For example, the German paper mill producing our inside paper (called ProfiBulk) states that it emits more than eight tons of CO₂ for the 20,000 copies of Migrant Journal we have produced in total. This is the equivalent of roughly thirty flights from Dusseldorf to London but unfortunately represents just a tiny part of our production chain.¹⁵ Let’s not forget to add the emissions from several other factories and an armada of means of transportation to this calculation.

The unravelling of our supply chains also revealed that most of our materials are produced, distributed, and sold by multinational companies. For example, the US-based chemical giant Huntsman Corporation (with its German joint venture Sasol-Huntsman) is the world’s major producer of maleic anhydride, a key component needed for our paper. Probably you don’t know, but Huntsman is infamous for tax evasions, ranking number one on the Toxic 100 Air Polluters Index of the United States, as

well as inventing the plastic clam shell food container for Burger King.¹⁶ With every page of paper produced for Migrant Journal, we pay into their bank account. Furthermore, we also support the swindling managers of South-African-based company Sappi Limited, who control the production of our inside paper and were investigated by the European Commission for illegal price fixing. And if this wouldn’t be enough, we found out that we are collaborating with the multinational investment bank Goldman Sachs, who owns Flint Group – the company that produces the ink for Migrant Journal. Among a lot of other disgraceful acts of banking, lobbying, and speculation, Goldman Sachs made billions of fraudulent dollars during the financial crises of 2007/2008.¹⁷

And it is here, where the research of our supply chain had to end – simply because we cannot dive any deeper into the depressing darkness of this black hole. Instead, we are pondering over the nerve-racking question: How can we ever produce cultural goods ethically in an age of resource scarcity, ecological catastrophes, and increasing global inequality?

Of course, we could have tried to dive deeper and wider, tracing the whole earth unfolding through the production and distribution of our journal, while we are relying on ever-more resources to undergo this investigation. But would that have helped to judge the ethics of our project? Would it be enough to compare all negative impacts of this project with all the positive ones, draw a line, and compare? Is ethics a matter of quantifying and calculation? Probably not.

Because, after all, Migrant Journal is (although a project dedicated to untangling and mapping everything) something that is, in fact, not mappable in its entirety. And so is the attempt to investigate our environmental, socioeconomic or political impact an impossibility. Because while we are on this journey new connections are made and old ones remade, instantly and relentlessly. There is no linearity and therefore no overview possible. We can only look at the fragments and surmise they inter-connected well-beyond the scope of our perception.

Therefore, this project can’t be separated from the context it exists in, is based on, and entangled with. We are not just distant observers; we are part of the mess. Migrant Journal is a physical object leaving a footprint we can only guess about but luckily, it’s more than that. Reducing it to the material dimension wouldn’t do the project justice. The reason why people all over the world order an issue of Migrant Journal is because it’s a catalyser for freeing migration from the prejudices of crisis, normalizing, grounding, and extending a too narrow definition. It brought together people and ideas, sparked discussion, and initiated change. Over six issues, Migrant Journal has embraced the boundless topic of migration in its unfathomed richness and sublime complexity. This would have not been possible without the infrastructure we relied upon. To think about “future sense” thus means to acknowledge once own position, how the contexts we inhabit afford our being and thinking, and how this in turn is reflected in work we are producing. Migrant Journal is as much a product of the system that it tries to criticize.

1 Starr, S. (1999), “The Ethnography of Infrastructure”, American Behavioral Scientist, Vol. 43, no. 3, p. 382.

2 Royal Mail (2019, August 24), “Full Year 2018–19 Results and Strategy Presentation” Royal Mail Group www.royalmailgroup.com/en/investors/full-year-results-2018-19

3 Mail Online (2020, Jan 14), “The Royal Mail’s Worldwide Distribution Centre – as big as six football pitches and more advanced than a space shuttle Daily Mail” Daily Mail www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-511926/The-Royal-Mails-Worldwide-Distribution-Centre--big-football-pitches-advanced-space-shuttle.html

4 Bridle, J. (2018), New Dark Age: Technology and the End of the Future, Verso Books, p. 38.

5 James Cropper also creates materials for aerospace, defense, fuel cells and automotive and has customers in more than 50 countries worldwide (www.jamescropper.com/about).

6 Apart from cellulose fibres from different types of wood a top-secret compound of dozens of other small ingredients from all around the world is added.

7 Dolan, A. (2019), “James Cropper Speciality Papers Fibre Sourcing Statement”, James Cropper Speciality Papers.

8 By the way, cargo ships for woodchips – so-called woodchip carriers – are very popular nowadays since the woodchip market has grown almost 75% over the past 15 years (mainly because a lot of wood is needed for the building boom in China). The woodchip carrier industry is dominated by Japanese and Chinese shipbuilders, who name their more than 200-metre-long and 65-megaton-heavy vessels UFO catcher or Snow Camilia. Apparently, some pulp mills even have their own woodchip carrier, like the Japanese paper company Hokuetsu. According to the Wood Resource Quarterly (WRQ), more than 35 million tons of woodchips are shipped every year.

9 www.pulp-paperworld.com/european-news

10 Wikipedia (2020), Kraft Process. www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kraft_process

11 If you want to transport liquid maleic anhydride you need approved tank cars of stainless steel (from China again!?), which are insulated and provided with heating systems to maintain a temperature of 65–75 °C.

12 OroVerde (2020), Save our Planet – Papierherstellung. Unterrichtsmaterial Save our Planet, OroVerde.

13 Merchant Research & Consulting (2020), Polyvinyl Alcohol (PVOH): 2019 World Market Outlook and Forecast up to 2028. www.mcgroup.co.uk/researches/polyvinyl-alcohol-pva

14 Wikipedia (2020), Paper. www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paper

15 Schmallenbach, J. (2018), Umwelterklärung Sappi 2017. Sappi Limited.

16 Political Economy Research Institute, MIT (2019), Toxic 100 Air Polluters Index. www.peri.umass.edu/toxic-100-air-polluters-index-current

17 Taibbi M. (2009), The Great American Bubble Machine. Rolling Stone Magazine.