

Urban Footprints: from Bata City to Nike Town

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The manufacturers of global brands leave their “spatial footprint” across the globe: The corporate purview of companies such as Nike, Puma, Apple, Camper or H & M, extends worldwide, from manufacturer and supplier to sales and distribution networks and retail outlets. Their transnational division of labour and the associated invisibility is countered by the endeavour to form identifiable locations for their customers. The debate on branding has explored the new role of architecture and design in the creation of a brand identity in depth. This development is not a new one, but gained an international dimension in the opening decades of the 20th century through firms such as Bata. Tomas Bata was a global entrepreneur: In his endeavour to lead the global market in shoe production, the company built satellites towns for shoe manufacture, where the town planning and architecture followed the example set by the Zlín model. The export of technology was thus associated with the export of a way of life and living. In this respect, the Bata company played the part of a moderniser on its own account, selling not only footwear, but also a promise of consumption and prosperity around the world.

The urban and social conditions of two Bata satellite towns, Batanagar in India and East Tilbury in Great Britain, will be compared with the contemporary “urban footprints” of global firms, such as Nike. The case studies illustrate different facets of the globalization of city, architecture and everyday culture, which offer important insights into the mechanisms of the production of space in the context of a globalised economy and division of labour. The historical comparison with contemporary brands such as Nike also allows an information gain regarding the correlation between the standardization of construction, architectonic modernity, the internationalization of the economy and the global consumer culture.