



## **Ruhr Valley, Germany** Experiences and Perspectives

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### **1. Things have changed at the Ruhr**

The focus of the conference – the 25 years between 1988 - 2013 – includes massive changes, a wide range of new strategies and best practice projects (including real highlights) and a steady ongoing process to qualify the economy and the living conditions in each of the cities at the Ruhr. The vision today can be called Sustainable Ruhr – but there are several steps ahead.

We have discovered, that there is no “re”-development and that it is necessary to continue from where we came and where we are today. Industrial heritage became the (accepted) subject of identity in the last 25 years: the roots and some basics for our future. Co-operation and competition are the skills, which entrepreneurs, engineers and workers have learned and incorporated by 150 years of industrial development.

Physically the sky over the Ruhr is blue again (which was an unbelievable political campaign promise from Willy Brandt in 1961), the industrial contaminated soils are mapped, cleaned (or capsulated), the brownfields are reused by business or converted in cultural, social or ecological important buildings and parks, the urban landscape is connected and transformed into the regional park system Emscher Landscapepark, numerous unused transport railway tracks are changed into a complete bike-way-system and the river Emscher (that was misused as a waste-water-canal-system for more than 100 years) will be ecologically converted by 2020 - with a total water-based-investment of 4.5 Billion Euro. Really great investments into the environmental quality of the Ruhr have been made in these 25 years.

The conversion of the Ruhr region started in the end of the 1950s and is not “finished” yet. The population is slowly shrinking, the domination of heavy industries (coal and steel) is past and their decline was “managed” as a soft landing: supported by a regional consensus between government(s), parliament(s), politicians, companies, unions and the people. The structure of companies, industries and the regional (and international) business and labor market are changing continuously: new products, new productivity, new ways of worldwide work-share and trade. The Ruhr has learned to live with this – and to search for next solutions together.

Not all of the people where (are) able to join the change, not all of the neighborhoods made the change and the long term unemployment rates (concentrated in poor neighborhoods) are one of the still existing structural problems at the Ruhr.

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We had to learn, that the change of a whole region takes decades – and that we are part of these. The population itself changed, it became more international (by working immigrants from south and east Europe and Asia) as well as elder and cultural divers. The demographic change is a current challenge for all cities and their infrastructures.

The policy for an active structural change was started in the late 1960s and 70s by the founding of new universities and public and private research capacities. Besides the training of mining engineers there were nearly no higher education offers. Today the Ruhr counts 5 universities, 1 art school (Folkwang) and 10 universities of applied science and yearly 230.000 university-students. The University Alliance Metropolis Ruhr (UAMR) is a current co-operation between the universities focusing on the international competition of knowledge and science. The cities have just started to co-operate in the context of better education under the label: Knowledge Region Ruhr.

### **2. Regional Co-Operation at the Ruhr**

It is a group of independent single cities, which form the agglomeration Ruhr in the west of Germany. There are 11 big cities and 4 districts (collecting the middle and small sized towns) and all together they are 53 cities and 5.1 million inhabitants.

There has never been one dominating or ruling city or a strong regional organization, which steers the development. None of the towns has been a higher governmental city, the harbor for all the others or an outstanding important military base.

They all grew fast and with the industry since the middle of the 19th century. They grew with coal and steel and became the most powerful heard of the industrial Germany. Nearly all urban development where based on industrial interests. It where these heavy industries, that started to decline since the end of the 1950s. Since 60 years the region is going through a process of “structural change” – a wording that summarizes a couple of different strategies, policies, projects and different governments during this time.

This decline has started to be seen not only as a great problem but at the same time as a unique potential for new developments. The shared goals for development are the future of the region based on new economic, social, cultural and environmental qualities. The poly-centric structure of the Ruhr is not a problem – it is the realistic situation yesterday, today and tomorrow. It demands a kind of policy-management that is able to work with this structure, to support the single members (cities) and to provoke their potentials and power. Inter-local and regional cooperation of towns is not an invention of the Ruhr, but it is the necessary for the future of this region.

There is a lot to do – to be successful in the regional, national and international competition between the metropolitan regions in the world. The current political label of the region and the cities is today: Metropolis Ruhr

### **3. Learning from experiments**

The International Building Exhibition Emscher Park (IBA) from 1989 to 1999 was a unique workshop for the future of old industrial regions.

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It was the invitation to 17 cities, that were suffering a lot from the decline of old industries, to develop their own new perspectives and creative projects and to expose them in auditorium of an international building exhibition.

It focused on the (missing) qualities of urbanism, urban landscape, cultural identities, industrial heritage and environmental qualities (especially of the water-system, named Emscher). Change without Growth – was a completely new headline (not only) in the Ruhr.

IBA Emscher Park was limited for 10 years. It was a wide mixture of informal and formal, of top-down and bottom-up, of stimulating and steering, of experimenting and professional making, of international competitions and wise selection of advisors.

IBA Emscher Park was the consequent combination of strategy and project. At the end there were more than 100 single projects build, finished and exposed.

The quality of the projects was important—often mind blowing! If “Landscape Park Duisburg-North” (on a former blast furnace) or “Gasometer Oberhausen” (an “exhibition-room” in an old industrial Gasholder of more than 100 m height), if “Tetraeder Bottrop” (a steel tetrahedron sculpture of 60 m length at all of its sites on a mining hill) or Richard Serras “Bramme für das Ruhrgebiet”, if world heritage listed coal mine ensemble “Zollverein” or the conversion of a former steelworks gas-turbine-hall to the festival-hall at “Jahrhunderthalle”...they all changed our view, our interpretation of the link between city, industry, landscape and culture.

IBA Emscher Park was a production, professional planned, managed and performed—like a great opera with a great regional, national and international audience.

IBA Emscher Park was itself a Best Practice Story: that it is possible, that innovation can be made here, that the decline includes the beginning, that the old stuff includes the identity of the region: the industrial heritage. Regional and local proud is one of the still existing results of IBA.

### 4. Continuity and new developments

The strategies and projects, which were started in the 90s are continued and also completed by new ones after IBA Emscher Park was finished.

- The Emscher Landscape Park comes to be the unique regional park and is managed in close connection with 20 cities today.
- The Route of Industrial Heritage is a blueprint for wide range of cities with an important industrial past and
- The ongoing renewal of the whole Emscher River-System stays to be a challenge and chance for all participants.
- The new international high-end music and theater festival Ruhr Triennale (which changes its creative directors every three years) is performing (only) in the cathedrals of industrial heritage since 2003.
- Ruhr 2030 is the voluntary strategic cooperation of the planning directors of the 11 big cities since 2002, which asks for a long term view for urban developments.

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- The label of Concept Ruhr covers since 2007 the cooperation of 41 cities (with nearly 400 projects) for the sustainable urban development in the coming decade.
- The inter-local working group named Chance of Change prepares the necessary steps in front of the closing of the last hard-coal mines until 2018 (when the federal government ends to subsidy the German coal production by law).
- The different Fields of competence are organizing themselves: including the cooperation between companies (b2b) and the public sector (b2c).
- Another innovation was a regional competition under the label Innovation City Ruhr in 2010. This competition asked for one existing urban neighborhood of 50.000 inhabitants to be converted until 2020 totally under the aspects of low energy consumption, energy efficiency and low climate impact. A model of urban change is needed and all the big cities of the Ruhr joint the competition, which was won by the city of Bottrop. The (already) build city is in the central focus for urban climate change at the Ruhr.
- The Ruhr region was nominated as European Capital of Culture in 2010. Its successful central motto during the Europe-wide bid was: "Change through Culture—Culture through Change".

The Ruhr won the competition because of its new integration of industrial heritage as the basis for economic, social and ecological change. It was not a new "Creation" for the year 2010, but the presentation of all the projects and sites, that have been converted during the 20 years before.

It was the city of Essen that went into the European bid – as the ambassador and representative of all Ruhr cities. There had been an internal agreement between all cities, that the best competitor goes first and that the whole region will celebrate the year as Capital of Culture if Essen wins the competition.

Co-operation and trust was again a basis for success.

Beside the figure of 10,5 millions of visitors to the great amount of sites and nearly 6.000 events during the Capital of Culture 2010, the year have been of a great importance in the Ruhr region: the people of the Ruhr could verify that their integrated way of development is of some importance.

Parallel and well connected to these processes a new formal Regional Plan Ruhr is prepared by the Regional Association Ruhr (RVR) and has to be delivered by 2015/16. A great challenge now is to incorporate informal and formal planning on the regional level.

All the cities are intensively involved.