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**The Ruhrgebiet – a region in the process of creating  
its own particular culture**

In the last few years the Ruhr area (or Ruhrgebiet, as it is known in Germany) has been struggling to break free of its overriding industrial straitjacket. For decades the rhythm of life here was dictated by machinery, noise and shift work. Life-styles and attitudes grew out of coal dust and working-class housing estates. But then the blast furnaces and collieries were closed down. And only when people looked back on the silent plants did they see the peculiar beauty inherent in the gigantic buildings and ornamented industrial plants.

Nowadays disused industrial sites are considered to be a part of the region's cultural heritage. The certainties and securities embodied by the huge sites are long since gone. In their place something new, unfinished and fluid is struggling to come to the surface.

But what remains? Is the Ruhrgebiet no more than a geographic area between the Ruhr and Lippe rivers? A psychological phenomenon with neither contours nor substance? An environment shaped by economic crises and football? Or might it be an example of an unparalleled metamorphosis from an industrial colossus into a fleet-footed millipede.

A region standing on its own feet and finding a new sense of self-esteem from the cultural heritage handed down from the industrial era. Huge, partitioned industrial buildings, flooded with light like medieval cathedrals, disused steel mills, spectacular landscapes with colossal rusting steel monuments in a reinvigorated natural environment. Or factory facades with curving Baroque features, Art Nouveau decoration, expressively serrated or designed along cleanly functional lines in the Bauhaus style.

**The Ruhrgebiet is  
European Capital of Culture 2010**

Change through culture has paid off. On 11<sup>th</sup> April 2006 the EU expert jury recommended that the title of European Capital of Culture 2010 be

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awarded to the Ruhrgebiet. Essen had gone into the running on behalf of the whole region. Around 20 other cities and towns had applied for the title.

In the Ruhrgebiet winning the title has been seen as a signal that 5,300,000 inhabitants from 140 nations are on the way to creating a new type of European cultural metropolis. The transformation from a traditional industrial region to a new and lively urban topography by means of culture was a compelling factor in the jury's decision. They are convinced that in 2010 the Ruhrgebiet will be able to attract the attention of people all over Europe and act as a symbol for other urban conurbations which are faced with similar changes.

### **Culture in the Ruhrgebiet – worked for, not inherited**

Middle-class cultural activities originated more than a century ago from private initiatives, for the region could boast of very few aristocratic legacies. Those which survived, like the "Golden Madonna" in the Essen cathedral treasury which is over 1,000 years old, were therefore even more meticulously cared for.

The aspirations of middle-class patrons, city fathers and cultural administrators have ensured that almost every large city now has its own theatre, its museum and, in some cases, even its own particular arts festival. And immense efforts have been made to rectify cultural deficits despite the pressing need for public economies.

In 2002, for example, the city of Dortmund opened a new concert hall in the city centre. In March 2003 the "Westfalen-Lippe" regional authority opened its specially designed Westphalian Archaeology Museum in Herne. Since January 2004 children from all over the region have been flocking to the Atlantis Children's Museum in Duisburg. And in June 2004 the city of Essen celebrated the opening of its new concert house in the renovated "Saalbau".

And there are new plans: Hagen wants to build a new museum in honour of Emil Schumacher, the famous "informal" painter who was born in the town. Since June 2005 Dortmund has been housing a collection from the Old National Gallery in Berlin. The so-called "Small National Gallery" in the Museum of Art and Art History exhibits 19<sup>th</sup> century painting.

The Dortmund "U", the historic industrial symbol of the old beer city is being rebuilt into a new, larger exhibition site for the pictures from Berlin.

Work has just been completed on converting the old coal wash plant at the Zollverein World Cultural Heritage site. ENTRY, the international design fair opened here in August 2006.

| <b>Artistic life in the Ruhr:<br/>an overview based on artistic categories and buildings</b>   |        |   |
|--|--------|---|
| Concert halls  | 2      | Dortmund, Essen (opened June 2004)  |
| Festival theatres  | 3      | Recklinghausen (Ruhrfestspiele HQ), Bochum (Hall of the Century), Duisburg (the main power station in the North Duisburg Landscape Park)                              |
| Opera houses/musical theatres  | 5      | Duisburg, Essen, Gelsenkirchen, Dortmund, Hagen   |
| Regional theatres  | 2      | Castrop-Rauxel, Dinslaken   |
| (City) theatres  | 8      | Duisburg (joint run with Düsseldorf), Moers, Mülheim (independent theatre company), Essen, Bochum, Dortmund, Hagen, Oberhausen  |
| Symphony orchestras  | 6      | Bochum, Dortmund, Duisburg, Essen, Hagen and the Neue Philharmonie Westfalen Federal Orchestra (main concert venues in Gelsenkirchen, /Recklinghausen and Kamen)      |
| Ballet companies   | 5      | Duisburg, collaborating with Düsseldorf), Essen, Gelsenkirchen, Dortmund, Hagen   |
| Local arts and community centres   | ca. 30 | incl. Bergkamen, Bochum (3), Bottrop, Dortmund (2), Duisburg, Essen (2), Gelsenkirchen, Hagen (4), Herne, Marl, Mülheim, Oberhausen (3), Recklinghausen, Witten, Unna |
| Museums<br>(art/cultural/industrial/natural etc.)  | 200    | in the entire region  |
| Taken from a survey made for the region's application to be nominated as the "Cultural Capital of Europe" and the "Museumshandbuch Ruhrgebiet", Bottrop 2003 |        |   |

## **Regional organisation**

The Ruhr area is made up of 53 towns and cities. The major cities in the heart of the Ruhrgebiet are Duisburg, Mülheim, Oberhausen, Bottrop, Essen, Gelsenkirchen, Bochum, Herne and Dortmund. Hamm and Hagen are situated on the eastern edges of the Ruhrgebiet. And there are further urban district centres Recklinghausen, Hattingen and Gladbeck to name but three.

Since 1920 the towns and cities have been united in a regional umbrella organisation which was renamed the "Regionalverband Ruhr" (Regional Association of the Ruhr) in October 2004. This institution is responsible for a variety of activities above and beyond those undertaken by the individual local authorities. These range from the construction and operation of major leisure facilities to PR work for the whole region.

3,500,000 people are now living in the Ruhrgebiet.

## **The Impulse**

At the start of the 20th century, Karl Ernst Osthaus (1874-1921), an industrialist, art-historian and patron living in Hagen, initiated an artistic movement that still remains influential. His view of art as a powerful force in industrial city life and of the necessity for art over and beyond the levels of representation and individual pleasure has become known in art history as the "Hagen Impulse".

In 1902, Osthaus founded the Folkwang Museum in Hagen. This was the first museum in the world to exhibit classical works of modern art which at that time, of course, were still considered avant-garde. Osthaus collected works by Rodin, Degas, Cézanne, Renoir, Gauguin, Corot and van Gogh. In 1922 the city of Essen acquired the collection from Osthaus's heirs, thus laying the foundation for today's Folkwang Museum in Essen. The Karl Ernst Osthaus Museum, now housed in the building of the Hagen City Museum, was restored in 1992 and the original Art Nouveau interior decoration by Henry van der Velde has once again been revealed.

[www.museum-folkwang.de](http://www.museum-folkwang.de)  
[www.keom.de](http://www.keom.de)

Osthaus's idea of the intimate connection between all artistic forms was taken up in the programme of the Folkwang Academy in Essen, which was founded in 1927 by the choreographer Kurt Joos and the opera house director Rudolf Schulze-Dornburg. Today the academy is attended by around 1,000 pupils from all over the world. Here music, drama and dance are taught on an interdisciplinary basis.

[www.folkwang-hochschule.de](http://www.folkwang-hochschule.de)

Osthaus took the name Folkwang from Nordic mythology: "Folkwang" is the hall of Freya, the goddess of love and beauty, and, according to Osthaus's understanding, an artistic venue open to everyone.

## **The RuhrTriennale: the Festival of the Arts**

All good things come in threes. The mega festival known as the RuhrTriennale takes place on a three year rotational basis under the direction of a chosen Intendant, and offers contemporary interpretations of opera, theatre, music and art. The ambitious aim of the founding Intendant, Gerard Mortier – the former head of the Salzburg Festival and now head of the Paris Opera House – to present international works in disused industrial venues and to attract the interest of audiences from near and far to the Ruhrgebiet, has met with growing acceptance and resonance from year to year.

Jürgen Flimm, Mortier's successor - and also the Intendant of the Salzburg Festival – has therefore taken over a festival which has established itself internationally, although he has to make do with a more restricted budget. 42,000,000 Euros were set aside for the first three-year cycle from 2002 to 2004 inclusive and a further 38,000,000 have been planned for 2005-2007 inclusive.

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The festival is funded by the Federal State of North-Rhine Westphalia and the European Union. It is presented by the "Kultur Ruhr GmbH" under the financial responsibility of the "Projekt Ruhr GmbH", the Regional Association of the Ruhr and the "Verein pro Ruhrgebiet".

[www.ruhrtriennale.de](http://www.ruhrtriennale.de)

### **Festivals and Exhibitions**

The performing arts festival in Recklinghausen, known as the "Ruhrfestspiele", is another good example of how the region has forged its own particular culture. Founded in 1946 by actors Hamburg actors along the motto of "Art for Coal", the Festival is still funded by the German Trades Union Federation and the city of Recklinghausen. In the 1990s the theatre director, Hansgünther Heyme, revitalised the "Festspiele" as a European festival featuring both home-grown productions and companies from abroad. Growing audiences were proof of wide-spread public approval for this policy.

Heyme's era as "Intendant" came to an end in 2003 when he was succeeded by Frank Castorf, head of the Berlin Volksbühne. Castorf's regime, however, only lasted for a single season, for the radical change in style and programme he presented to the public in 2004 under the motto "No Fear" resulted in a drastic reduction in ticket sales. The new Intendant (initially for the 2005 and 2006 seasons) was to be the founder and director of the "Théâtre National du Luxembourg", Dr. Frank Hoffmann. New attendance records were achieved during his two seasons as Artistic Director.

[www.ruhrfestspiele.de](http://www.ruhrfestspiele.de)

The Ruhr Piano Festival also owes its existence to private initiatives and commitment from within the region. Every year the "Initiativkreis Ruhrgebiet", an alliance of 60 leading enterprises from the region, invites top-class international pianists to participate in a series of concerts.

[www.klavierfestival.de](http://www.klavierfestival.de)

The exhibitions presented since the 1950s by the "Kulturstiftung Ruhr" in the Villa Hügel in Essen - the former residence of the industrialist Alfred Krupp - have aroused particular public interest.

[www.villahuegel.de](http://www.villahuegel.de)

Das Essener Museum Folkwang, in den 20er Jahren von Hagen nach Essen gewandert, ist immer wieder Publikumsmagnet mit großen, international beachteten Ausstellungen.

[www.museum-folkwang.de](http://www.museum-folkwang.de)

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It is impossible to overlook the amount of galleries, arts centres, musical initiatives, artistic societies and initiatives in the area. They all ensure a high level of "grass-roots" input to nurture cultural developments in the Ruhrgebiet.

### **Artists, architects and directors**

Many well-known names are connected with the artistic life of the region. Saladin Schmidt, the acclaimed theatre director of the 1920s, founded the reputation of the theatre in Bochum, a name which has been furthered by the work of Peter Zadek, Claus Peymann and the actual director Elmar Goerden.

[www.schauspielhausbochum.de](http://www.schauspielhausbochum.de)

The Finnish architect Alvar Aalto was responsible for designing the Essen Opera House, whose curving white facade with its elegant rows of windows houses one of the leading musical ensembles in Europe.

[www.theater-essen.de](http://www.theater-essen.de)

In Duisburg the works of the sculptor Wilhelm Lehmbruck have laid the basis for the collection in the sculpture museum which bears his name. Here visitors can see international 20th century sculptures, including works by Henry Moore and Chillida. The huge window areas in the light, airy building, which was opened in 1964 and designed according to the plans of the sculptor's son, Manfred Lehmbruck, open out the building to its immediate environment.

[www.lehmbruckmuseum.de](http://www.lehmbruckmuseum.de)

### **European Capital of Culture 2010 in the Ruhrgebiet – the facts**

For the first time ever a region with 5,300,000 inhabitants – and not a single city – will be carrying the title of European Capital of Culture: the Ruhrgebiet, with Essen as its standard-bearer. Pécs in Hungary and Istanbul in Turkey are the other towns which have been selected. The three European Capitals of Culture in 2010 have already begun preparations for the festivities.

At the time of writing 10 major projects for the European Capital of Culture year are being prepared, under three main categories: "City of Possibilities", "City of the Arts" and "City of Cultures". The whole of the Ruhrgebiet will be involved in staging the programme. The main reception centre for visitors will be the Zollverein World Cultural Heritage site in Essen.

From 2006 to 2010 a total budget of 78,000,000 Euros has been set aside for the preparation and implementation of the European Capital of Culture year. The Ruhr Regional association (RVR), along with the city of Essen, the "Initiativkreis Ruhrgebiet" and the Federal State of North-Rhine Westphalia, will be setting up an official body to organise and run the European Capital of Culture in 2010.

[www.kulturhauptstadt-europa.de](http://www.kulturhauptstadt-europa.de)

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## **The Zollverein World Heritage Site**

The beacon of the Ruhrgebiet's industrial heritage is the Zollverein industrial and cultural site in Essen. In November 2001 the disused colliery and the adjoining Zollverein coking plant were inscribed into the UNESCO list of World Heritage Sites. The World Heritage Committee praised the exceptional value of the Bauhaus-style architecture of the industrial complex which set an example for modern industrial building for the following decades.

Designed by the architects Fritz Schupp and Martin Kremmer, Zollverein Pit XII started operations in 1932. At the time it was part of the most up-to-date and largest coal mining plant in the world. After the colliery was closed down in 1986 there was a battle between those who wished to preserve the monument and those who simply wanted to demolish it. The battle was won by the former. The nearby coking plant, also designed by Schupp and Kremmer, was constructed between 1957 and 1961 and remained in operation until 1993.

The huge halls, engine houses, railway tracks, cooling towers and coke ovens are spread over 100 hectares of land in the north of Essen. In addition to the striking pithead tower of shaft XII, other particularly imposing features include the over 24-metre high coal washery building with its huge jiggling machine where the coal was separated from dead rock in a similar fashion to that in which gold was washed. Here, however, yields were not counted in nuggets but in tons per day.

The batteries of ovens in the coking plant - a 600-metre long series of upright narrow ovens in which the coal was baked to coke for use in blast furnaces - are equally impressive. The water basin in front with its footbridges has an unexpected Venetian flair – when there are no ice-skaters gliding over the extensive surface in winter.

[www.zollverein.de](http://www.zollverein.de)

Work has already started on converting the site to an international centre for art and design. A master plan was drawn up by the Dutch architect Rem Koolhaas in February 2002 which foresees a commercially used ring of buildings around the preserved museum core of the Zollverein site.

### **New uses for the site include:**

- the Zollverein School of management and design GmbH (a private high school which was founded in November 2003 to promote a close and intensive relationship between business and design. Its president is Prof. Dr. Ralph Bruder. The first students will enrol in the winter semester 2004/05 for an international post-graduate course, a Master of Business and Administration programme. Further courses are being planned. The Zollverein School will be housed in a new building in the shape of a cube designed by SANAA, a group of Japanese architects.
- a commercial design park ("creative village" based on plans submitted by Rem Koolhaas) on the "white side" of the coking plant.

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The converted coal washery with its 15,000 square metres of usable surface will house:

- the Ruhr Museum as the "cultural memory of the region" (the contents of the Essen Ruhrland Museum are to be included in the new museum)
- the visitor centre on the roof as a hub around which the region's tourist activities will revolve.
- the international design exhibition ENTRY (august till december 2006)

The conversion of the coal washery (at a cost of ca. 42,000,000 Euro) should be completed in 2006. The entire Zollverein project will be financed by approximately 110 million Euro funds from the EU, the state of North Rhine-Westphalia and the city of Essen. Subsidies from the EU will come to an end in 2006.

The Zollverein site is currently being used in a variety of different ways. In 1997 the NRW Design Centre moved into the former boiler house which had been redesigned by the British architect Sir Norman Foster. The preserved industrial building contains exhibitions of prize-winning items from international competitions for the red dot design awards. Each year the awards are given in a series of different categories.

[www.red-dot.de](http://www.red-dot.de)

The debate as to whether to preserve the World Heritage Site along "authentic" lines or to use the site for new business initiatives has still not been settled. The architects Schupp and Kremmer cloaked a huge apparatus of mining machinery within a thin facade of brickwork and at the time no one foresaw that the site would still be in use a century later.

### **The Industrial Heritage Trail**

At the heart of the altered consciousness of the "new Ruhrgebiet" is the Industrial Heritage Trail, a sign-posted circular tour through the region covering a distance of 240 kilometres. The trail was opened in 1999 to mark the end of the International Building Exhibition in the Ruhrgebiet. It guides visitors around the 19 anchor points of the so-called "Cathedrals of Labour" whose impressive, monumental architecture preserves the memory of the region's industrial past.

In addition to the Zollverein World Heritage Site in Essen, other outstanding examples are the North Duisburg Landscape Park and the Hansa Coking Plant in Dortmund.

[www.route-industriekultur.de](http://www.route-industriekultur.de)

Once a year the Ruhrgebiet celebrates itself and its culture with a special event known as "ExtraShift – the long night of industrial heritage. The urban region of the Ruhrgebiet was suddenly experienced by travellers as a single entity. Rail and bus shuttle services kept night-lovers on the move throughout the whole region and enabled them for one short night to experience a new "Ruhr City" in the literal sense of the word. Shuttle services from every corner of the region transport visitors to the various highlights in different industrial settings.

[www.extraschicht.de](http://www.extraschicht.de)

### **Landmarks and artistic works on mining tips**

The Ruhrgebiet landscape didn't simply come into existence of its own accord. Over the years it was exploited, built on, criss-crossed with streets and dug over. One of the primary objectives of the "Siedlungsverband Ruhrkohlenbezirk" (founded in 1923) - the forerunner of the Regional Association of the Ruhr (RVR) – was to organise the industrial landscape, make it habitable and make plans for its future development. As early as the 1920s efforts were being made to improve the residential environment by "greening over" mining tips, railway embankments and other inclines.

At first black mountains of coal waste were piled up erratically, whose bizarre surfaces resembled desolate moonscapes. These were followed in the 1960s by enormous, stringently horizontal mining tips resembling table mountains, which rose uniformly and steeply above the flat landscape. It was only in 1967 that new guidelines were introduced enabling engineers to design the tips with quasi-natural slopes.

Nowadays these mining tips are regarded as topographical constructions whose artificial character presents a challenge to landscape architects, artists and conservationists. The aesthetic interplay of urban landscapes and man-made hills creates landmarks whose effect is emphasised by artistic works which have been specially conceived and produced for these exceptional locations. Their mysterious charm and atmosphere has created new, singularly typical sites in which the Ruhrgebiet can express its cultural identity.

Translation: Roy Kift