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*Metropole Ruhr -
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The changing face of the Ruhr: Concerts in the coal mine and excursions to the slagheaps

Known in German by the colloquial names «Ruhrpott» and «Revier», history was made in the past by the smoking chimneys of Europe's mightiest industrial region. In recent years it has re-invented itself as a centre for events and the arts, and as it becomes more integrated it serves a source of imaginative ideas which are being closely studied by other European manufacturing centres and conurbations. «The blue skies over the Ruhr» is now an established saying. A number of the pits have been turned into museums, theatres and jazz cellars, while slagheaps are being converted into green hills, parks and indoor ski slopes. Machinery houses and factories are being turned into galleries, concert venues, offices for creative architects, designers and artists, while the winding gear and towers offer spectacular viewing platforms for tourists. Former rail tracks have now been developed for use by cyclists, joggers and wanderers. This new industry is creating some urgently needed jobs, as well as attracting artists, ideas people and new companies, and boosting the self-confidence of the 5.3 million inhabitants from 170 nations who live in the new Ruhr metropolitan area. Other regions in the state of Northrhine-Westphalia and elsewhere in Germany have also been inspired by these changes, which are making headlines around the world.

Pioneering spirit: «A historical stroke of genius» and curiosity in Moscow

In effecting these structural changes the Ruhr region has been demonstrating a pioneering spirit for decades, which might have even aroused Moscow's interest during the Cold War. «A historical stroke of genius». That was the praise given by the former German chancellor Helmut Schmidt when new projects were launched three decades ago in an area previously dominated by steel and coal. The aim was to create, maintain and develop green spaces in an ecological way in order to assist the regeneration of people and nature. At the time the local municipal association succeeded in implementing this programme in the face of substantial resistance from industry and some of the local communities. Even then interest was being aroused in other countries, with exhibitions about the Ruhr region taking place in Rome, London, Lyon, Brussels and Moscow. The present-day Ruhr Regional Association (RVR - www.rvr-online.de) recalls this with pride in its chronicle recording the development of this region.

With the onset of the crisis in mining and the coal industry there was a need to create new jobs. Work began 40 years ago on the planning and construction of leisure facilities in the Ruhr, which still attract millions of visitors today. These include parks on former mining sites at Wischlingen (Dortmund), Gysenberg (Herne), Nienhausen (Gelsenkirchen/Essen), Vonderort (Bottrop/ Oberhausen) and Mattlerbusch (Duisburg), as well as the Kemnade (Bochum/Witten) and Xanten (Wesel county) leisure centres. Dedicated health and wellness facilities are no longer a novelty for people living in the Ruhr region either. According to RVR regional director Heinz-Dieter Klink: «Coal and steel belong to the past. The Ruhr region is reinventing itself.» The solidarity being shown by 53 towns and local communities in the region is a «guarantee of success».



«If you want to party you don't have to go all the way to Mallorca»

Compared with Berlin or Munich visitor numbers, especially from abroad, are still quite modest. However, the decision-makers in the arts and tourism in this new metropolitan region, which is bounded by the rivers Rhine, Ruhr and Lippe and occupies an area five times larger than that of the German capital, are rolling up their sleeves. For the first time in this region a concerted marketing, advertising and PR effort is being made. A sample: «If you want to party you don't have to go all the way to Mallorca», (in German the word "Zeche" has more than one meaning: "coalmine" and "celebrate").

As the official partner of ITB Berlin 2009 and as European Capital of Culture 2010 many opportunities are opening up for this group of towns and cities, which are becoming increasingly integrated and, together with the many green areas which surround them, look well set to face the world as the new «Ruhr Metropolitan Area». This is something that just about everyone between Duisburg, Wesel county, Oberhausen, Essen, Bochum, Dortmund, Ennepe-Ruhr county, Hamm and Hagen is extremely proud.

«Culture from ordinary people» and «a massive achievement»

The massive transition and change from coalmining and steelmaking to the creation of a location for the arts, with green spaces, lakes, and routes for cyclists and ramblers, has been widely acknowledged. Some of the opinions expressed by fans of the Ruhr region: «The wide-ranging emergence of art and culture in my homeland is not something that was imposed from above. It comes from the masses, from the people, from a multicultural melting pot.» These words were spoken in Hollywood by the movie actor Ralf Moeller, who still retains links with the Ruhr region and with his birthplace in Recklinghausen. Berlin-born Götz George, who is particularly familiar with Duisburg and the surrounding area from his role as police commissioner Schimanski in the television series «Tatort», emphasises the importance of «places where one encounters the people, because Duisburg owes its distinctive character to its hardworking and humorous inhabitants». The chief executive of Germanwings, Thomas Winkelmann, who was born in Hagen, says: «The changes taking place in the Ruhr region represent a massive achievement. In the former industrial area there are now some wonderful paths where ramblers can walk for hours in the fresh, clean air, enjoying nature without being disturbed by the noise of traffic».

Fighting the old prejudices about grey washing on the line

Nowadays the prejudices and age-old clichés about men slaving away in the mines while their washing turned grey from the muck coming out of the chimneys are far less prevalent. However, this image still persists in the minds of some people in other countries, to the dismay of many people in the Ruhr. Fritz Pleitgen, chairman of the board of the organisation RUHR.2010 GmbH (www.ruhr2010.de) in Essen, with responsibility for the European Capital of Culture, and Axel Biermann, general manager of Ruhr Region Tourism in Oberhausen (RTG - www.ruhrgebiettouristik.de), are aware



that more work must be done to persuade people to change their opinions. However, they are helped by the positive assessments from a number of foreign experts. As the Swiss writer Adolf Muschg, a member of the panel of judges for the competition to select a cultural capital in Germany, emphasises: «The Ruhr region no longer breathes in dust, but the future».

Cooperation with Linz, Provence and Tallinn

The region is collaborating with many arts managers in other European cities and metropolitan regions. Representatives from the Netherlands, Belgium, Austria, France, Estonia and Slovakia recently visited Essen and other locations in the Ruhr. RUHR.2010 managers met with colleagues from Liverpool and the Norwegian city of Stavanger. Especially close cooperation has taken place with other Capitals of Culture such as Linz (2009), Pécs in Hungary, which has been chosen along with the Ruhr metropolitan region for 2010, Tallinn in Estonia (2011) and Marseilles together with Provence (2013). The same applies to the twin German and Polish towns of Görlitz-Zgorzelec, which narrowly lost out to Essen, whose application was submitted on behalf of the Ruhr region. «There is a great deal of interest in Marseilles which, together with Provence, is also seeking to unify an entire region», according to the press spokesman for RUHR.2010, Marc Oliver Hänig. «We are very much the forerunners of this regional aspect and provide a model for the rest of Europe to follow».

Advertising using a satellite photo – the Ruhr region shines brightly

On his promotional trips Pleitgen, whose hometown is Duisburg, emphasises that, as it takes over as Capital of Culture, the Ruhr metropolitan region is «at a turning point», and is being transformed from a «historically important transit area» to a major tourism attraction. «We want to generate the Capital of Culture feeling in each of the participating cities and municipalities», Pleitgen states. «We want to imbue each and every one of the 5.3 million inhabitants with the feeling that we are doing this for you, and you are involved too!» The former director general of the broadcasting network WDR has a large map of the region in his office, dotted everywhere with coloured flags to mark the places that he has already visited. And he has been just about everywhere. Pleitgen is always keen to draw attention to a night time photo of Europe, showing that, along with London and Paris, the Ruhr shines brightly. In contrast other major cities, including Berlin, are not so prominently lit, and Pleitgen refers to them affectionately as «glowworms».

Destination Ruhr, a new addition to the market - Berlin and Cologne attract more visitors

The German capital, Munich and Hamburg, as well as the main cities of Northrhine-Westphalia Cologne and Düsseldorf, have fewer inhabitants, less light and fewer lamps. However, as established destinations they attract many more visitors. Each year 7.5 million overnights are recorded in the capital, 40 per cent of them from abroad. The



Ruhr region attracted some 2.5 million visitors in 2008, of whom over 400,000, around 17 per cent, came from other countries. However, such comparisons do not provide an accurate picture. As the head of tourism for the Ruhr region Biermann makes plain: «Our region is a newcomer to the market. That is what makes it so exciting, because previously the Ruhr region was not regarded as a traditional destination».

However, if attracted by a suitably attractive occasion, large numbers of visitors will travel long distances: to Bochum, Essen, Duisburg, Gladbeck for the RuhrTriennale (www.ruhrtriennale.de), the international Festival of Arts in the Ruhr Region, to the Movie World leisure park in Bottrop, to the long-running musical Starlight Express in Bochum, to the Carnival of Cultures in Essen. Biermann: «With the Capital of Culture project we want to make the region a destination and a distinctive brand. “Change through culture – culture through change” is the slogan with which we want to stand out from other destinations».

«Persuading travellers to stay longer» - a warning against over-optimistic expectations

«Persuading travellers to stay longer», is the slogan being used by the new metropolitan region. It is also very necessary because, on average, visitors only stay for two nights. Two thirds of them are business travellers. There are more than 560 hotels with some 35,000 room and an occupancy rate throughout the year of less than 40 per cent. RUHR 2010 reports that a 25 per cent increase in overnights is expected in 2010, compared with 2009. In view of some encouraging growth rates recently, some decision-makers and politicians are already talking about a «tourism boom» or become euphoric about the title of European Capital of Culture. In view of some of the over-optimistic expectations and the shortage of fund, many commentators in the press recommend a more modest approach, calling for deeds and facts rather than grandiose statements.

Belgium and the Netherlands as the most important foreign markets

According to RTG general manager Axel Biermann «by far the most important market» is that of the neighbouring countries, Belgium and the Netherlands. Luxembourg, Switzerland, Austria, Poland, the United Kingdom and some parts of the Scandinavian countries are also showing interest in the Ruhr metropolitan region. «We are in close contact with the representatives of the German National Tourist Board in Amsterdam, Brussels and other cities». According to Biermann the most popular reasons for a visit among people in neighbouring countries are the favourable shopping opportunities, especially at the CentrO in Oberhausen, almost certainly Europe's largest leisure and shopping centre, and entertainment facilities such as the Alpincenter in Bottrop. This indoor ski slope has been constructed on a forming mining slagheap. At 640 metres it is the world's longest indoor ski slope and is open throughout the year. «The Ruhr region – Germany's largest leisure and adventure park», claims the German National Tourist Board (DZT - www.deutschland-tourismus.de) in Frankfurt.



The change from an industrial structure to an industrial heritage trail

Blast furnaces, gasometers and winding gear are still prominent features of the landscape in the Ruhr. Nevertheless far-reaching changes have occurred. In the Ruhr region itself there are now only four working mines, employing just under 30,000 people. By comparison: in 1920 there were 196 pits with a total workforce of 470,000. Only three coking plants and six blast furnaces are still in operation. Although this remains Germany's most important energy producing region, it is now also a major location for logistics, advanced medicine, technology parks, university research and much more besides. Along today's industrial heritage trail (www.route-industriekultur.de) increasing numbers of visitors from home and abroad are attracted by the monumental structures erected during the boom in coal and steel production of the past.

More tours of the Ruhr are being included in travel catalogues

In carrying out their promotion work some of the agencies and tour operators specialising in this region rely on localised inside knowledge or their deep roots in the Ruhr. They include Tour de Ruhr (www.tour-de-ruhr.de), ruhrKultour (www.ruhrkultour.com), ConTour (www.contour-ruhr.de) and Tour Service Ruhr (www.tourserviceruhr.de). Larger players such as Dertour, Neckermann, Thomas Cook, Ameropa and TUI also include the Ruhr metropolitan area in their catalogues for city tours and leisure parks, as does Alpetour, which specialises in organising trips for school parties and youth groups. Head of tourism for the Ruhr Biermann: «The range available in the catalogues is constantly increasing. For example, Neckermann has recently included Duisburg and Dortmund». And Biermann adds: «We will be completely overhauling our website at www.ruhr-tourismus.de and will be launching it as an internet information and reservation portal». The basic version, including hotels for which bookings can be made, is being presented at ITB Berlin.

Highlights: World cultural heritage: Zollverein mine and Oberhausen gasometer

The historical industrial sites include over 50 main attractions, all of which are easily reached by bicycle, and since 2001 they have also included one that has been declared a world heritage site by the United Nations. The Zollverein mine (<http://www.zollverein.de>) in Essen, built in the Bauhaus style, is regarded as one of the world's finest examples. At one time it possessed the most up-to-date winding installation, but it is now earning a reputation as a centre for the arts, theatre and design. The former boiler room has been transformed by the prominent architect Norman Foster and now houses the Northrhine-Westphalia Design Centre (<http://de.red-dot.org/design-zentrum.html>).

In a series of loops the 700 kilometre «Industrial Heritage Trail for Cyclists» takes in many attractions between Duisburg in the west and Hamm in the east. Most of the way it runs along disused railways, attractive waterside and woodland paths, or little-used roads. The brand new Ruhr valley cycle path is steadily gaining in popularity. It leads



from the source of the Ruhr in Winterberg/Sauerland and runs for 230 kilometres all the way to Duisburg, where the river joins the Rhine. RUHR.2010 press spokesman Hänig has already pedalled the entire distance. His verdict: «a deluxe way to experience nature».

Not to be missed: the Tetraeder (Tetrahedron) in Bottrop. It stands 60 metres high, and the waste tip on which this steel and pipe artwork stands is 90 metres in height. Visitors can ascend the mound using a number of different routes, and there are 387 steps to climb. Wide-ranging views of the Ruhr area can be obtained from the top. Between 1989 and 1999 this structure was already attracting visitors from Germany and abroad as part of the International Building Exhibition Emscher Park.

The views are also spectacular from the top of the 117 metre high gasometer in Oberhausen (www.gasometer.de), one of the so-called anchor points along the Industrial Heritage Trail. A glass-walled elevator inside goes all the way up to the dome. «From the top I can see the whole western Ruhr region laid out at my feet», enthuses part-time guide and head of Germanwings Winkelmann. Situated between the Rhein-Herne canal and the CentrO, this gasometer is a landmark for the city and the region and an «important symbol of the structural changes taking place in the Ruhr region». Built in 1929 to store gas from the coking plants, it is now definitely Europe's most unusual exhibition hall», the manager explains.

Hohenhof in Hagen and Villa Hügel in Essen

Of course his birthplace of Hagen offers some highlights along this trail of historic buildings. «I am always delighted to be able to take friends and visitors to the Hohenhof, one of Europe's most historic buildings», says Winkelmann. It was built at the beginning of the last century by the Belgian architect and designer Henry van de Velde as the residence of the patron and promoter of the arts Karl Ernst Osthaus, and it is one of the few examples of Jugendstil architecture that has survived unscathed.

The tour also takes in the Hansa coking plant in Dortmund, now a massive sculpture which is accessible to the public, the Centre for International Lighting Art in Unna, renovated mineworkers' estates such as the Margaretenhöhe in Essen, and the nearby, castle-like Villa Hügel (www.villahuegel.de). This former residence of the Krupp family of industrialists is an important venue for exhibitions and is also open to visitors.

Duisburger Hafen, one of Götz George's favourite places

The Duisburg inner port (www.innenhafen-portal.de), now known as the «Ruhr cultural port» and «port of the Cultural Capital», was and still is one of Götz George's favourite places in the Duisburg area, as he revealed recently. In place of the extensive industrial wasteland portrayed in the television series in which he played the character «Schimanski», it now boasts elegant promenades as well as art and culture in the old warehouse district. In 2010 the new ashlar of the Küppersmühle museum, designed by the renowned Swiss architects Herzog & de Meuron, will tower over the rooftops. Götz



George enjoys going where people congregate and talk to one another. There are numerous, inviting German, Turkish, Croatian and Italian bars, where the multicultural mixture of people who live in Duisburg and the Ruhr region can meet with the rest of the world. One of the most attractive lakeside areas in the Ruhr can be found only a few kilometres from the city centre. Extensive woodlands, pathways and many water sports opportunities attract visitors to the area known as «Sechs Seenplatte».

A visit to a mineshaft is obligatory for Ralf Moeller

As a part-time tourist guide, what would actor and former bodybuilder Moeller show if a good friend such as Arnold Schwarzenegger were to visit his former home? «Many of the attractions are underground. A trip down a mineshaft is obligatory, and offers so many different opportunities», according to the movie actor. Walks, historical fact-finding, dinners, the classics, rock music, weddings – all under the ground. To attend the European Classics Festival audiences have to descend to a depth of over 1,000 metres in the Auguste Victoria/Blumenthal mine in Haltern, in order to hear jazz from Klaus Doldinger and his Band. And many couples have pledged their troth 17 metres underground in the Bochum Mining Museum.

Ruhr Theatre Festival as «art versus coal» - The arena in Gelsenkirchen

«In May and June the Ruhr Theatre Festival in Recklinghausen, with dance, plays and cabaret, is well worth a visit», according to «travel guide» Moeller. Now an internationally recognised festival (www.ruhrfestspiele), it originated from below, so to speak. During the cold winter of 1946/47 miners from the König Ludwig 4/5 pit in Recklinghausen-Sudewich saved several theatres in Hamburg from closure by delivering truckloads of coal, and this has still not been forgotten. Afterwards the trade union federation Deutsche Gewerkschaftsbund (DGB) set up the Ruhr Festival, known originally as Culture for the Miners.

For movie star Moeller the football teams in the region are also a tourist attraction: «I would take guests to a Bundesliga game, to see either Dortmund or Schalke.» The Veltins-Arena in Gelsenkirchen, home of FC Schalke 04, is «a pilot project for the entire world», was the opinion of FIFA president Joseph Blatter at the inauguration in 2001. The roof of the stadium, which has a capacity in excess of 61,000, can be opened if required. On 9 January 2010 this multi-purpose arena will be the venue for the opening ceremonies of the year of the Capital of Culture.

Datteln and Waltrop: Smaller places with some big attractions

Quite apart from all the big events, the many smaller places in the Ruhr region that offer some outstanding attractions should not be forgotten either. Examples include Datteln (Recklinghausen county) and Waltrop, where Manni Breuckmann likes to take a walk. Every football fan who listens to the nationwide WDR conference link for coverage of Bundesliga games is familiar with this busy reporter, who has virtually acquired cult status. Travel guide Breuckmann would show his «guests the 'world's largest canal hub',



which is how the people of Datteln proudly refer to the four inland waterways that meet there». A stroll along the narrow canal paths is an idyllic and relaxing way to spend some time. Another fascinating place to visit is the old Henrichenburg ship lift in neighbouring Waltrop. However, the reporter's «personal tour de Ruhr» would begin at Dortmund and Schalke on account of the «two most impressive stadiums in the Ruhr region».

Problems with finances and projects

Financial crises and unemployment are causes for concern and in some regions and problem areas in the Ruhr they are among the most severe anywhere in Germany. As a result municipal tax revenues have fallen and, with the recent onset of the recession, this situation is producing additional financing problems for 2010. With the aid of funding, including assistance from the European Union, at the present time cultural centres and museums are being built or improved, and stations are being modernised in Essen, Duisburg, Dortmund, Hagen and a number of other locations. However, many cities in the Ruhr suffer from serious over-indebtedness. Due to a shortage of finance the construction of the visitors' centre in Oberhausen, one of five planned for the Capital of Culture year, is in doubt. And the world-renowned Love Parade, which brings a million people onto the streets of Bochum, has been cancelled for 2009 due to infrastructural problems. However, many major international events are preceded by various worries and delays. Regarding the problems and criticisms facing 2010 Fritz Pleitgen says: «The stronger the headwind, the better the lift».

Ruhr metropolitan region at ITB Berlin: «Outstanding opportunity»

Now the Ruhr metropolitan region is in the spotlight at ITB Berlin. As two of the main exhibitors at this event, the tourism promotion organisation Ruhrgebiet Tourismus and RUHR.2010, along with 27 co-exhibitors (2008: 15) will be occupying an area measuring 400 square metres (2008: 220). Biermann: «This is an outstanding opportunity to establish ourselves as a tourism destination». As a result of the partnership and the Capital of Culture project the region is now becoming a recognised destination among international tourism experts and tourists themselves.

And as David Ruetz, Senior Manager ITB, points out: «With the Ruhr region as its partner region ITB Berlin 2009 aims to provide an important forum for an exchange of ideas with experts from other conurbations, in an effort to promote cultural and art tourism and environmentally aware travel in urban regions that are becoming increasingly integrated». Moreover ITB Berlin is «an excellent platform for advertising the Ruhr metropolitan region internationally as Europe's Capital of Culture».

The Ruhr region is presenting its wide range of attractions for 2010 on the Exhibition Grounds: a total of 150 projects and 1500 events. There will also be a «Day of Songs», when 300,000 singing enthusiasts will join in a song, and a day on which the A 40, the main highway through the metropolitan region, will be completely closed to traffic and



will instead become a boulevard of art and culture.



ITB Berlin Convention 2009 takes place from March 11 to 14, 2009 in halls 7.3, 7.1 a and 7.1 b. The first **ITB Tourism and Culture Day** is hosted in cooperation with the ITB partner region 2009 – **Ruhr.2010 European Capital of Culture**:

- 11.00 – 11.10: *Opening*
Hosted by: Prof. Dr. Ute Dallmeier, General Manager
Tourismus NRW e. V.
Dr. Wolfgang Isenberg, Director, Thomas-Morus-Academy Bensberg
- 11.10 – 11.30: *Culture as Tourism Resource*, Speaker: Prof. Dr. Harald Pechlaner, President, German Society for Research in Tourism (DGT e. V.), Catholic University Eichstätt-Ingolstadt
- 11.40 – 12.00: *What Role does Culture Play for the German Tourists? Results of A Recent Empirical Study (sponsored by Gebeco)*
Speaker: Prof. Dr. Albrecht Steinicke, University of Paderborn
- 12.15 – 13.15: *What Impact do Events in Cultural Capitals have on Tourism?*
Moderated by: Dr. Christiane Florin, Culture Editor, Rheinischer Merkur
Panel guests: Thomas Bohlander, Managing Director, Gebeco
Dr. Fritz Pleitgen, Managing Director, Ruhr.2010 GmbH
Sir Bob Scott, Executive Chairman, Capital of Culture Company Liverpool
- 13.30 – 14.15: *Culture, Tourism and the Media*, Speaker: Prof. Dr. Norbert Bolz, Media Scientist, Technische Universität Berlin
- 14.30 – 15.30: *Sales of Trips to Cultural Capitals*
Moderated by: Peter Hauptvogel
Panel guests: Martin Katz, Managing Director, Ameropa-Reisen GmbH
Burkhard Kieker, Managing Director, Berlin Tourismus Marketing GmbH BTM in spe
Mag. Martin Schobert, Head of Research & Development (CIO), Austrian National Tourist Office
Hasso von Düring, CEO, TUI Leisure Travel GmbH (TLT)

For further information please visit: www.itb-convention.com

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