

# **Renaissance of an Industrial Region: „Internationale Bauausstellung Emscher Park“ – achievements and future model for others**

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## **Abstract**

From 1988 to the year 2000 the IBA Emscher Park successfully changed the appearance of the Emscher Region, the northern Part of the Ruhr Area in the State of Northrhine- Westfalia, Germany. As an initiative conducted by the state government, the IBA Emscher Park implemented a strategic approach to link up urban development and landscape, to combine private investment and architectural quality and to systematic cross- border- planning of 17 municipalities in the northern part of the Ruhr Region. More than 120 projects were completed- with a total investment of 2.5 Billion €  
Since the year 2000, the cities and counties in the area continued to work on IBA- themes like the regional “Emscher Landscape Park” and the changing of the Emscher System. New masterplans were created to link up the IBA- principles with the new demands of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In December 2007, 35 Cities and three counties presented the “Concept Ruhr” the first initiative for the sustainable urban and regional development of the whole Ruhr Area. The “Concept Ruhr” focuses on the “ruhrbasics” - five guidelines for the development in the next decade- and includes 274 projects with a total investment of 6 Billion €

## **1. The Ruhr Region**

For a long time, the Ruhr Region - named after the river “Ruhr” in the southern part of the area – was known as one of the “old” industrial regions in the world, based on coal mining and steel production. During the last 40 years, the region faced a massive change of the economic situation, followed by ecological, social and urban problems.

The enormous change can be exemplified with the following figures:

Population in the metropolitan area of the Ruhr (4300 sqkm):

1950: 5.1 Million

1960: 6.2 Million

2006: 5.3 Million

Mining in the Ruhr Region

1956: 141 Pits, 470.000 miners

2006: 6 Pits, 28.000 miners

Students at Universities

1956: 1.500

2006: 152.000

Proportion of jobs in  
Industrial production

1970: 58%

2006: 28%

Services

1970: 40%

2006: 70%

Today the Ruhr Area is still a very powerful economic region. 13 of the 50 largest German companies are based in the region. Steel production, chemical industry and large power plants distributing all over Germany are supplemented by light metal manufacturing, car production, electronic industries and health industries. Research institutions and companies are growing, the universities are creating scientific networks with the private sector. Because of the geographical situation with 40% of the European population living in a 500 km circle the Ruhr Region also turns into a centre for logistics in Europe.

## **2. IBA Emscher Park**

This fundamental change in the economic Situation was an important fact at the end at the 1980ies when the IBA- strategy was created in the state ministry for urban development.

Another important fact was the special geographical character of the economic development and decline in the region: In the 19<sup>th</sup> century the process of industrialisation started along the river Ruhr in the south und went north- crossing the river Emscher- for more than 100 years. Technological progress und economic success lead into larger plants and more coal mines with intensified consequences for the environment, rapidly growing municipalities and growing ecological problems. While the southern part of the region slowly turned into a lively area with beautiful landscape and nice neighbourhoods, the dense populated northern part suffered with rip up landscape, enormous brownfields and low urban quality.

The river Emscher turned into a symbol for the up and down of industrialisation. Due to the permanent injure of the topography through coal mining, the river and its creeks were systematically transformed into an open waste water system that was very practical to handle. When mining came to an end in the central area, it became possible to think about changing this system by putting the waste water into underground tubes and create new landscapes and urban areas.

This Situation was the regional background when the state government decided to start the International Building Exhibition (IBA) Emscher Park. The words “Emscher Park” symbolised the target to change the urban and landscape quality of the northern part of the Ruhr Region with 800 sqkm, 17 municipalities and about 2.2 million people within 10 years.

The Term “International Building Exhibition” referred to the German tradition of building exhibitions. Since the 1920ies, German municipalities have organised these “exhibitions” to find good solutions for architectural or urban demands by inviting international architects and presenting the solutions to the international public. In the 1980ies the City of Berlin had created the IBA Berlin. For the first time in the history of IBA, Berlin integrated not only one area, but several parts of the city and also added the reconstruction of neighbourhoods to the traditional panel.

Proclaiming the program for the Emscher Region as an “IBA” was therefore an invitation for the international world of architects and planners to take part in the process; it was also meant as a sign, that the state government was taking the project as a serious obligation for ecological and urban change in the next decade. To guide the process, the government created a state owned private agency (IBA Ltd.) that was established in the city of Gelsenkirchen in the centre of the Emscher Region.

The program for the IBA Emscher Park was published in 1988 with a memorandum entitled “Workshop for an old industrial Region”. The memorandum described the guidelines for the coming work and invited all groups of the society to take part.

### **3. Achievements of IBA Emscher Park**

The memorandum defined the focus points for the program and the methods for developing the projects. 17 municipalities decided in their local parliaments to take part in the process. The members of the IBA- curatorium represented the political parties and important groups of the society. The role of the IBA Ltd. in Gelsenkirchen, was to guide the process, to initiate discussions and competitions, to moderate procedures and to help getting public funding for projects. The 120 projects themselves were in the responsibility of public institutions or private companies.

Five target- themes were followed during the IBA- time:

- The Emscher Park
- The Reconstruction of the Emscher System
- Working in the Park
- New Uses for old industrial buildings
- New Housing Projects

#### **Emscher Park**

All the municipalities agreed on the masterplan for the Emscher Landscape Park. It declared 320 sqkm in the region should be free from every new settlement in the future and should be developed to a large park area between the cities and inside the cities. Based on a historic outline from the 1920ties, the masterplan defined 7 regional greenbelts (A- G) that had to be developed in the responsibility of inter- municipal workgroups. Many local projects from small garden areas to a 100 hectar brownfield were developed as contributions for the Emscher Landscape Park.

The still growing Emscher Park has brought new opportunities to relax and to spare their leisure time for hundred- thousands of people. Even after 20 years the Emscher- Park- Concept is unique in the worldwide metropolitan areas.

#### **Changing of the Emscher System**

The open system of the Emscher (70 km) and its creeks (250 km) is collecting the waste water of more than 2 Million people and thousands of private enterprises. The System is managed by the Emschergenossenschaft, a private cooperative owned by the cities and the large private enterprises. The cooperative charges all households and companies for collecting and cleaning of the waste water.

Changing the whole system is still a challenge for the next generation. Step by step in all the creeks and the river itself the waste water has to be separated from the natural water and put into a new constructed underground tube system. After this the surface is remodelled, the natural water stays in the “new” creek and the banks are landscaped.

IBA Emscher Park has opened up the perspective that the changing of the system is possible and valuable both for stakeholders and the people in the region. The reconstruction of the first creeks in the IBA- time created beautiful showcases.

### **Working in the Park**

With a strategic link to the Emscher Park- concept the general idea of this target was that new industrial or service areas should be implemented on brownfields. Brownfields were no longer seen as risky “no go- areas”, but as opportunities for new investments. Inspired by the low costs for the land itself the IBA- areas - many of them very close to the city- centers – were developed by combining green spaces with the new infrastructure and linking them to the near urban areas.

This special approach created some very attractive business- areas with 5000 new jobs in the Emscher Region. Although other projects in the smaller cities were not completely successful in selling all the land to private investors, the principle of “brownfields first” is still a basic rule in the region.

### **New uses for old industrial buildings**

The decline of steel industry and coal mining had left behind many unused buildings. The IBA- idea based on the understanding, that these buildings were valuable because they were part of the regions history, gave identity to people and cities and offered countless opportunities for new uses if only creativity was allowed.

At the end of IBA many projects in old industrial buildings had been completed- including some of the “working in the park” activities. Other buildings were reused for cultural purposes. A former steel plant was completely integrated in a new city Park in Duisburg; the former worldwide largest coalmine “Zollverein” in Essen has meanwhile been announced as “World Cultural Heritage”. All projects are linked with the “Route of Industrial Heritage” which is now one of the most successful tourist attractions in the Ruhr Area.

### **New housing projects**

IBA- housing projects stretched from the renovation of historic worker settlements to completely new settlements. The new housing projects again were based on the general agreement, that no green spaces should be used as construction sites. Many of the buildings had a special experimental character- as low energy buildings or with reusing the rain water, by using new materials or by integrating the residents in the process of planning and construction.

During the IBA- process about 7.500 flats were constructed. Although in the cities they are not as visible or spectacular as new business- areas or the reused industrial buildings, many of them have influenced the process of implementing new technologies or the process of redefining state rules for housing construction.

### **The methods of IBA**

Beside the visible results of IBA and the continuing work on Emscher Park and Emscher System some of the methods of implementation are still important to be looked at.

From the beginning the government made it clear, that the whole IBA- Process had to be based on a political consensus in the region, that this new approach for a special part of the Ruhr Area had to be based on the participation of the municipalities and regional organisations. The consensus was fundamental for the implementation of the projects and the acceptance in the region.

The fundamental activities like Emscher Landscape Park were based on the voluntary will of the city administrations to think across the city borders to make the strategy possible. The workgroups for the regional greenbelts developed a permanent training ground for inter-municipal thinking.

In addition to that, the IBA- process also emphasised the cross- project- thinking. In addition to the efforts for every single project, there were always additional aspects: What about the neighbourhood of the project? How is the project linked to the surrounding project? What about the area in between?

IBA focused on high level quality in the projects. Therefore all projects- from housing to reconstruction of buildings up to landscaping activities and artwork were based on mostly international competitions for planners and architects. All competitions were announced by IBA Ltd. and the investing institutions and companies. The competitions were well prepared and often challenged the technological or social competence of the participants. In many cases cross- disciplinary competitions asked for teams from architects, engineers or artists.

Whenever possible, IBA- projects involved residents, people initiatives and associations from the very beginning. Many projects also had opportunities to integrate aspects of professional qualification or finding new jobs for unemployed people.

To be open for ideas and new technologies, to take everybody for serious and to exclude nobody from the permanent process of finding good solutions was an ongoing challenge. So what could be seen during the final presentation in 1999 was not only the work of planners, administrations, businessmen and people in IBA Ltd. Thousands of voluntary participants and friends of the IBA took over responsibility and made things happen.

### **4. The inheritance of IBA Emscher Park**

The IBA- Area with 800 sqkm and 2.2 million people covered one fifth of the metropolitan area with about 40% of the population. From the perspective of 1988 to 1999 it was very important to organise a special effort for the disadvantaged part of the region. More than IBA projects have indeed changed the appearance of the region and created new urban qualities, have strengthened the identity of the region und contributed to the changing image of the region.

The organised process of defining and realising design qualities has become a permanent practice in the whole metropolitan area of the Ruhr. The cross- border planning activities of city and county administrations are permanent and successful. Public and private

organisations are working on the further development of the Emscher Landscape Park and the changing of the Emscher System.

But it is also important to recognise, that the framework of challenges and opportunities in the metropolitan area of the Ruhr is different to the early 1990ies when the IBA- projects started.

Today the public sector is no longer able to spend as much money for urban and landscaping projects. In some of the former IBA- projects there is an ongoing debate on the permanent follow up- costs. On the other hand the private real estate business is now looking into the Ruhr Region with growing interest and the basic economic situation is much better than it has been 20 years ago.

The process of structural change in the metropolitan economy is no longer bound to the decline of the mining sector; it has to face permanent challenges in different branches and areas.

The demographic change to an elder and multicultural society is speeding up and needs new answers for the organisation and qualities of cities in the whole metropolitan area.

## **5. Securing Consistency in long term projects**

The two fundamental targets of the IBA Emscher Park – the Emscher Landscape Park and the changing of the Emscher System are still in an ongoing process of planning and implementation.

The responsibility for the further development has been taken over by the Emscher Cooperative (Emscher System) and the Association of the Ruhr Municipalities (Emscher Landscape Park). The guidelines and projects are developed in a permanent dialogue in the Region.

### **Emscher Landscape Park**

In the year 2005, all the local and regional parliaments agreed to the new masterplan “Emscher Landscape Park 2010”. During a two years process of discussion, the region developed the idea to extend the total park area from 320 sqkm to 457 sqkm.

For the first time the “Emscher Park” is no longer focused to the Emscher Region. It is now stretching out to the south in the direction of the river Ruhr and to the northeast into the rural areas at the borderline of metropolitan Ruhr.

By combining public funding from the state government, European Union and municipalities add new elements to the extended park year by year.

### **Changing of the Emscher System**

In 2006 the Emscher cooperative presented the masterplan “Emscher Future” as the result of a three year process of technical research, planning discussions and public dialogue in the region.

The technical process of putting the waste water into tubes has already been realized on 170 of 400 km. In 2010 the first 20 km of surface along the river Emscher itself will be completely changed into a new river with riverbanks and trails.

Step by step the transformation of the river and the creeks is moving on. The Emscher Cooperative will be investing 4.4 Billion € in changing the system. The “Emscher Valley” and the 23 km “Emscher Island” between the Emscher and the “Rhein- Herne shipping canal” are creating many new opportunities for the urban development of the cities and the further completion of the “Emscher Landscape Park”,

## **6. “Concept Ruhr”: Preparing for the next decade**

At the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century the metropolitan area of the Ruhr is in the movement. Business groups are investing heavily in the inner cities and are contributing to a revaluation of city locations. Large industrial companies are building new headquarters in the cities and are investing on their industrial sites.

Today the Ruhr Area is one of Europe's greenest urbanisations, thanks to the highly developed open spaces which form part of the region's decentralised residential structure; the landscape between the cities has become one of the region's trademarks.

Leisure time, sport and tourism have become important factors of the value creation in the region. Middle- sized companies and international business groups from the entertainment sector have discovered the region's potential.

On this background, at the end of 2007 three counties and 35 cities with a population of 4.8 million created the “Concept Ruhr” as a common strategy for the sustainable urban and regional development in the next decade. The strategic objectives of the “ruhrbasics” are underlined by 274 projects. The local and regional parliaments have approved the “Concept Ruhr”. The project proposals will be financed by approximately 1.6 billion € in public funding and about 4.4 billion € deriving from private investment.

The strategic objectives of the ruhrbasics that will shape the structure of the metropolitan area in the next ten years consist of five themes:

- ruhrlines: the east- west development axes
- ruhrcities: the quality of city centres and city districts
- ruhrexcellence: the development of high quality industrial and estate locations
- ruhrinvest: framework conditions for private investment in development areas
- ruhrvents: high quality events to enhance the region's profile

Each theme has regional importance and will contribute to the development of the metropolitan area as a whole. However each project also serves to improve the quality of life on a local level and strengthen the economic development. Specialized areas are regarded from a holistic point of view: the chemical industry, the energy or health management sectors, logistics, office and leisure industry locations.

### **ruhrlines: The axes of the metropolitan area**

With the IBA Emscher Park 20 years ago, the Emscher River became one of the regions central axes. Based on the masterplan “Emscher future” the projects under way to regain the river will rise living quality and create many opportunities in the medium term.

In the last few years the discussion on the future of the metropolitan area has begun to consider additional east- west axes, the development of which is symbolic for the way the region is growing closer together.

The “Ruhr Valley Initiative” is working on raising the attraction of the river Ruhr and the Ruhr Valley area. This initiative includes projects to promote tourism, revalue urban spaces and to develop regional marketing. The intensive work in the likewise idyllic southern part of the region clearly shows that the metropolitan area has finally shaken off its reputation of being an “old” industrial region.

In the wake of the promotion for the “European Capital of Culture 2010” the urban and artistic ideas regarding the A40 motorway have been taken up and are being condensed in a special “motorway- plan” that will affect the whole region.

A few months ago, the cities and counties along the most north river “Lippe” decided to coordinate project ideas along the course of the river and combine them in a single joint strategy. A new pole of landscape development, tourism and leisure attraction in the metropolitan area will thus be created alongside the river Ruhr and the Route of Industrial Culture.

About 90 projects belong to the “ruhrlines” category.

The four east- west axes will become the focus for the regional development in the next few years. No where else it will be clearer to see that the metropolitan area is not just an agglomeration of cities, but a region with a common identity.

### **ruhrcities- city centres and districts**

Recently urban development policy has taken a closer look at urban renewal in the city- centres and the renewal of highly concentrated city districts.

Intensive work to renew urban spaces is under way all over the region. Here, many forms of public- private partnerships can be found. Within the next 10 years the “ruhrcities” will present an almost universally transformed picture.

The pace of demographic transformation and the changes in the ethnic composition of city districts is an issue that concerns many metropolitan regions. Urban development policy in the Ruhr Area has developed a wide range of instruments that are put into practise in current and future urban renewal projects. Re- valued urban spaces and “good neighbourhood” initiatives practised by the inhabitants have become trademarks of the region.

Around 120 projects can be counted as contributions for the “ruhrcities”.

Thus a circle of redeveloped und renewed city districts will embrace the new “ruhrcities” and make important contributions to the regions economic growth und stable social development.



### **ruhrexcellence- the development of high- quality locations**

Every metropolitan region needs a good supply of well distributed commercial and industrial locations. One fundamental advantage of the Ruhr Areas decentralised settlement structure is a comparatively large number of sites available for new uses.

What counts most of all is the possibility to offer sites that are economically advantageous and both well placed and of high urban quality. As a rule, such locations should also be able to offer the possibility of combining commercial investments with high quality residential accommodation, leisure facilities and cultural offers.

During the last year the Ruhr Area has created the first generation of such “excellence projects” spread out over the region.

The second generation of “ruhrexcellence” is now being implemented, in cooperation of public and private partners, thus paving the way for the step by step introduction in the next 10 years. This includes projects like “Ruhrbania” in Mülheim by the Ruhr, the “Sports Park” in Oberhausen or the “Marina” in Essen- both close to the river Emscher, the “Thyssen-Krupp Site” in the city- center in Essen, the “Arena- Park in Gelsenkirchen, the “Hydrogen-Park in Bottrop”, the development of the “House Aden” site in Bergkamen or the “New Park” in the county of Recklinghausen.

The category of “ruhrexcellence” is supported by 35 projects.

### **ruhrinvest- growing private sector involvement in urban change**

Worldwide operating companies and medium- sized investors have begun to exploit the changes in the regions urban landscape for their specific interests. A wide range of private sector investment projects has already been implemented throughout the region. Today the largest and most spectacular construction sites in the region are thriven by private investments.

In the meantime also small businesses have also begun to convert former industrial buildings for their own purposes. A growing group of developers is coming of age, which successfully concentrates on apparently problematic sites, consciously avoiding the classic “A1” locations.

Taken as a whole, the metropolitan area of the Ruhr has significantly increased its attraction as a location for private sector property development. To stimulate and increase these activities, is the purpose of “ruhrinvest”.

About 100 projects belong to the “ruhrinvest” categorie.

### **ruhrevents- high quality events to enhance the regions profile**

Urban and regional administrators all over the world are that staging events with international attention is an important contribution to image- building: A positive impression on the outside while on the inside the self- confidence of the inhabitants grows.

The large- scale that are most successful in this respect do not only create “software” in the sense of one- off events lasting a day but also “hardware” in the form of permanent exploitable locations, attractions and enduring investments.

The “European Capital of Culture 2010” will give the metropolitan area of the Ruhr the opportunity to realize such an event. It will be based on a combination of attractive event days

and enduring effects that are guided by the regions strategic development objectives. Inner City activities like the “Dortmund U” on a former brewery site, the measures along the A40 motorway or the projects on the “Emscher Island” acquire particular significance in this respect.

About 40 projects are supporting the “ruhrevents” category.

## **7. The projects of the “Concept Ruhr”- a network for regional progress**

Most of the 274 projects have a confederate character- for example the Mühlheim “Ruhrbania”. project is situated at the river Ruhr (ruhrlines), right in the city center (metrocities) and is focusing on high quality and private investment (metroexcellence). The “Dortmund U” is part of the “European Capital of Culture”- preparations (ruhrevents), is targeting private investment and high quality architecture (metroexcellence) and situated in the city centre (metrocities).

Some projects are already under construction, more and more of the others will leave the planning stage and start the implementation.

### **Decentralised structure and coordinated action**

All projects in the “Concept Ruhr” are based on the strategic lines for the regional development, but will be carried out in the caring responsibility of the local authorities.

The sub- regions of the metropolitan area of the Ruhr are and will remain different: The countryside and the village- like city- districts alongside the Ruhr clearly differ from the density of the Emscher- area. The tasks to be performed in the steel and port city of Duisburg to not resemble the challenges to be faced in the Recklinghausen county with its chemical industry and potential for receiving large- scale industrial settlements. The settlement structure in the city of Hagen with a complex topographic situation differs from those in Dortmund or Gelsenkirchen.

The distinct nature of the areas sub- regions continues to be one of its significant characteristics and advantages.

## **8. Conclusion**

The IBA Emscher Park from 1988 to 2000 was an important step for the sustainable development of the Emscher Region as a part of the metropolitan area of the Ruhr. The IBA projects have changed the appearance of 17 cities. The ongoing long term projects “Emscher Landscape Park” and “Changing the Emscher System” are continued on the basis of new masterplans.

Today the economic, ecologic and social framework for the regional development is much different from the situation at the end of the 1980ies. Based on the IBA- related tradition of coordinated regional action the region has developed the “Concept Ruhr” as the new fundament for urban and regional sustainable development in the next decade.

While IBA was only focussing on a small part of the Ruhr area, “Concept Ruhr” is made for the whole region. While IBA was a “top- down”- process thriven by the state government, “Concept Ruhr” is a “bottom- up” initiative thriven by the common will of the cities and counties.

Gerhard Seltmann/ February 2007