

A quick search on the internet for the Ruhr Area will very quickly turn up narrowly defined bordered territories. One will either find the Ruhr Area defined by the Regional Association Ruhr (Regionalverband Ruhr, RVR) or the RhineRuhr Metropolitan Region created at the Conference of Ministers of Spatial Planning (Ministerkonferenz für Raumordnung (MKRO)) in 1995. The former includes the cities of Bochum, Bottrop, Dortmund, Duisburg, Essen, Gelsenkirchen, Hagen, Hamm, Herne, Oberhausen, and Mülheim on the Ruhr, as well as the four further regional districts of Ennepe-Ruhr, Recklinghausen, Unna, and Wesel. The latter constitutes one of Europe's recognized largest metropolitan regions. It encompasses the RVR designated areas, but also extends southwards to include the Municipalities of Mönchengladbach, Wuppertal, Solingen, Remscheid, Krefeld, Leverkusen, Düsseldorf, Cologne and Bonn, and the districts of Mettmann, Märkisch, Rhein-Erft, Neuss, Rhein-Sieg, Bergisches Land, and Viersen. It is sometimes called the Mega City-Region RhineRuhr. The built up areas of this mega city can easily be identified in Google Earth at a scale of 1

cm/100 km as a grey P-shaped formation. These are two very different urban agglomerations, and neither map neatly over and across existing infrastructures nor do they correspond to perceptions of the area. Studies have shown that very few can correctly identify the administrative and territorial boundaries of the Rhine-Ruhr Area. Some perceptions include areas that lay still further outside these MKRO or RVR areas.

The simple magnitude of either Ruhr Area agglomeration renders locally specific city-spatial analysis, as desired by the New Metropolitan Mainstream project, about impossible. Housing five million residents, the Ruhr Valley (as defined by the RVR) spreads a distance of 116 kilometers from east to west, 67 kilometers from north to south, and covers 4,400 square kilometers. The Rhine-Ruhr Metro Region covers an additional 3000 square kilometers and is home to an additional 6 million. Overall population densities are thus comparatively low. Still, 10% of the German population lives here. The region was structured by the Rhine and Ruhr rivers, but also by the Emscher, and the Lippe, which historically, shaped the

Hansa trade routes in Westphalia. Upon discovery of the coal fields between the Ruhr and the Emscher, the region boomed. – particularly those that had already established trade route infrastructures. Today, both the Ruhr Valley and the RhineRuhr can be conceived as polycentric metropolitan regions composed of strong economically powerful cores and surrounding hinterlands. On the maps presented here, “subcentres” are simply the cities themselves and not neighbourhoods, as one might view on other NMM maps. The subcentres along the basin of the River Ruhr from Duisburg to Dortmund have blended together. Hinterlands can be seen surround these areas as one unit – particularly in the north and south east of the aforementioned “P-shape”.

The vast scale of either region also renders representation of the area on a single map – beyond simplified infrastructural or political/administrative assessments – entirely problematic. The maps presented below can be viewed perhaps as yet more ideas or suggestions of the region. The first set locates the Ruhr. The transportation

networks can then be viewed. On the other three maps, alternatives and contested spaces, flagship projects, and spaces of power in the (primarily RVR) Ruhr Area can be seen. This list, however, is not complete. Because of the scale, they also appear as microdots, simple pin-points on the page, a representation that may spark a variety of misinterpretations. These categories were chosen, however, because the Ruhr Area is the European Capital of Cultural for 2010 alongside Istanbul. Many of the flagship projects shown here stand in the foreground as the Ruhr showcases itself to the world. Hopefully, however, the suggestion of an “underbelly” – counter social movements along with their networks and infrastructures (newspapers, publishers, radio) – will come across as a reminder that the images and narratives produced and showcased in ECC 2010 gloss over real struggles and problems lived everyday in the region.

A satellite map of North Rhine-Westphalia, Germany. The state's irregular border is highlighted with a thick orange line. Internal administrative boundaries are shown with thin white lines. The text 'Nordrhein-Westfalen' is printed in white with a black outline in the eastern part of the state. The map shows a mix of green forested areas, brown agricultural fields, and blue water bodies like rivers and lakes. At the bottom, there is a copyright notice: 'Image © 2010 Aerodata International Surveys'.

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A satellite view of the Ruhr region in Germany, outlined by a thick orange border. The landscape is a mix of urban areas, forests, and water bodies like the Rhine river at the bottom left. Numerous locations are marked with green pins and labels: Chemiepark Marl, Movie Park Germany, Maximilianpark, Umspannwerk Recklinghausen, Alpincenter Bottrop, Nordsternpark GmbH, Kokerei Hanso, Zentrum für Internationale Lichtkunst, MerkeZ Moschee Duisburg, Gasometer W.L., Industriemuseum Zeche Zollern, Dortmund Union-Brauerei, Duisburg Landschaftspark Duisburg-Nord, CentO Park Freizeitpark, Zollverein, Jahrhunderthallo Bochum, Museum der Deutschen Binnenschifffahrt, Innenhafen Duisburg Entwicklungs GmbH, and Kettwilergrundbach. At the bottom center, there is copyright information: "Image © 2010 Aerodata International Satellite Image © 2010 Google Inc. All rights reserved. Map © 2010 Geo.com". In the bottom right corner, the Google logo and "©2008" are visible.

European Capital of Culture 2010 – half a narrative

“Theater Wagen, Musik Leben, Sprache Erfahren, Kreativwirtschaft Stärken,Feste Feiern, Europa Bewegen, Mythos Ruhr Begreifen, Metropole Gestalten, Bilder Entdecken,”

the events taking place in the name of the European Capital of Culture 2010 number in the 1000s. They will take the form of concerts, exhibitions, poetry readings, music festivals, film festivals, attractions for children, theatre pieces, and openings (including the opening of the Dortmund U). Participating are the 52 cities and districts of the RVR defined Ruhr Area. The program gives the Ruhr Area an opportunity to showcase itself to the world, and as such the EEC 2010 is dominating public discourses in the area this year. Launched by prominent persons including (now former) German President, Horst Köhler, Jose Manuel Barroso, President of the European Commission,

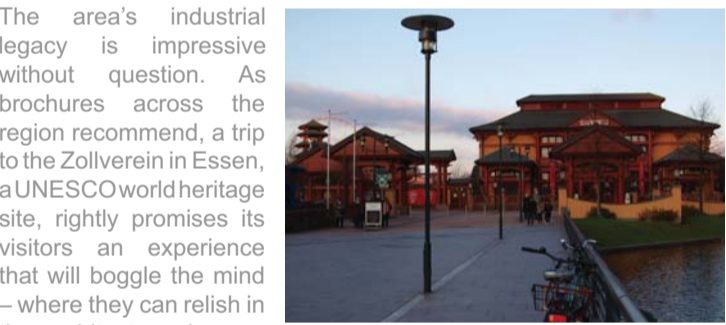


Duisburg Port

Herbert Grönemeyer (German performer), and Hans-Dietrich Genscher, the former Foreign Minister, the extravaganza intends to show the Ruhr Area, its history, its transformation, its “culture”, and its art, and “Ruhr2010” is widely advertised across Germany and beyond, with support from national institutions such as the German Rail which offers visitors special rates to, from, and around the state of North Rhine-Westaphalia.



If one were to name an outstanding characteristic of the Ruhr Area, one would likely refer to the Ruhr Area’s industrial past. Although for some this reference may come across as another dull metanarrative akin to the idea of Canadian beavers, lumberjacks, and mounted police, this impression is not unfounded. When the coal fields were discovered, 100s of mines were opened and entrepreneurs from around Europe gravitated to the region to cash in on the newly exposed natural resources. The Ruhr Area produced, coke, iron, steel, and hundreds of millions of tons of coal per year, it supplied not only Germany with these goods, but also Belgium, France, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands as well, whose combined output totaled less than 80% of that of the Ruhr’s. The Ruhr Area coal and steel industries employed over half a million men, and the population of the Ruhr swelled – in some cases 700-fold, due to the promise of employment. In the 1950s, the Ruhr Area production processes in the coalfields constituted over 12% of the German gross national product.



Centro, in Oberhausen.

through a gallery, view the coke ovens by way of a Ferris wheel, or go for a dip in the Werkschwimmbad. The North Duisburg Landscape Park also offers a varied palate of entertainment such as Scuba-diving in the former Gasometer, or swinging around the climbing park. And to remember the experience – and the history of the industry – visitors will be hard pressed to overlook the postcards that are available by the many 1000s at train stations, museums, shopping centers across the Ruhr Area. Proponents of the Ruhr ECC 2010, such as the Chairman of the Supervisory Board of E.ON who is also the Chairman of the Supervisory Board of Ruhr2010, might indeed like to entertain the idea that they have located a New Metropolitan Mainstream. However, these flagship projects, glittery and glamorous as they may be, do not make up for the long and painful years of economic decline that the Ruhr Region has suffered for the past 30 years. Any NMM narrative then, must put this imagery in context and tell the story of Others.

train station in Oberhausen

North Duisburg Landscape Park



The Mass Production of a Legacy

Studies have shown that many people, even residents of the Ruhr Area, cannot precisely identity where the Ruhr Area is, or what it encompasses. There are various definitions, socio cultural, political economic, and territorial geographical. Generally the Ruhr Area is refers to an urban agglomeration in the German State of North Rhine-Westphalia, along the Rhine, Ruhr, Lippe and Emscher Rivers. The “RhineRuhr” is the largest and widest designation, that was negotiated by various levels of government and agreed upon by the Conference of Ministers for Spatial Planning (Ministerkonferenz für Raumordnung (MKRO). It is composed of Westphalia’s larger cities, Cologne, Düsseldorf, as well as RVR Ruhr Area, and was conceived as one of the European Metropolitan Regions. This designation also represented a shift in spatial policy from city-oriented distributional arrangements towards metro regions as economic growth engines,



centers for innovation, and competition, within a web of wider European urban networks. The RVR Ruhr Area is less an economic or structural idea than it is a cultural idea, and its social spatial arrangement can be interpreted as a specific political project that celebrates the industrial legacy while: a) disregarding the historical specific trajectory and social spatial context of the regions formation; and b) forgetting the Other actors involved in the production processes; and c) ignoring the ineffectiveness of post-industrial flexible processes of production to employ the surplus of labour, or to serve a functional economic base in place of industry and its corresponding welfare states. A certain mythology of the Ruhr Area is thus easily identifiable. The NMM maps of the Ruhr Area show that where or what the Ruhr Area is, is, to a large extent, ambiguous and even arbitrary. The cities of Westphalia date back, of course, much further than the industrial revolution. There is evidence that the Hellweg trade route, which begins at Alt Homburg (Duisburg) on the Rhine and stretches past Paderborn to the Teutoburger Forest, was used as early as the Romans. This trade route, which tapped into the Hansa seaway trade routes, spurred urban growth in the middle ages. Passing through the Ruhr basin, Duisburg, Dortmund, Unna, Werl, Soest, and Paderborn all profited from their strategic locations. Later, when the railways were built, these cities were poised to participate in the production, distribution and exchange of coal and steel. The truncated local specificity of the Ruhr Area, as it is marked and marketed today, is in part a product of the Second World War. Eastern cities of the pre-war industrial region that served as export passages to the eastern markets declined in regional economic significance as their eastern markets vanished after the division of Germany at the Potsdam Conference in 1945. The mass fabricated memory of the Ruhr’s industrial past persistently heroizes the (usually male) workers and their company owners (August and Joseph Thyssen, Friedrich Krupp, Reinhard Mannesmann, Eugen Langen, Franz von der Wenge, Princess Maria Kunigunde von Sachsen, Heinrich Huyssen), and effectively overlooks all of those who were present but were not protagonists in industrial production processes. The role of women, for example, plays only a cursory role in the marketed Ruhr Area. Every once in a while a token exhibition of women in the Ruhr takes place, but generally their role is cursory and their lesser status ignored completely. Women were generally prohibited from working in the mines. Well into the 20th century, women’s spheres were primarily confined to the house and hearth:

“Sie stand an der Spüle und schälte Kartoffeln. „Sei froh, daß du noch lernen kannst. Die Schinderei kommt früh genug. Guck dir meinen Jungen an. Knapp fünfzehn, und die Hände voller Schwielen....Ich war von Anfang an dagegen. Von Anfang an. Er und mein Mann können sich zu Hause nicht leiden und fluchen und brüllen und prügeln sich fast, und jetzt arbeiten sie noch in derselben Halle. Dann will es jeder besser wissen, und ich steh dazwischen und werd verrückt vor Angst. Ich kann das Wort Gute-Hoffnungs-Hütte schon nicht mehr hören. ...Wenn der nur nicht so wild wie sein Vater. Immer und immer betrunken. Immer nörgelig. Du ahnst nicht, was ich hier auszustehen hab....Ach, was erzähle ich dir. Geht euch vergnügen. Seid sorglos und unbeschwert. Soll ich dir noch Matjesbrot machen?“ Ralf Rothmann (2000), “Milch und Kohle”, page 34.

Not one woman remembered



The Other Side

The inability to come up with a positive narrative for the growing numbers of economically and/or socially disadvantaged, excluded, and marginalized Others is the glaring blind spot in the mainstream marketed description of the Ruhr Area. Economic decline began 30 years ago as industry began shutting down and moving production processes elsewhere. The institution of horizontal production systems, such as those projects of the International Building Exhibition (Internationale Bau Ausstellung (IBA)) Emscher Park, was unfortunately ineffective on a large scale, and ultimately amounted to only meager punctuated attempts to revive localized areas. The flexible economy has only led to economic polarization income levels and precarious living arrangements. This situation has only amplified in recent years with the financial crisis, which has wreaked havoc across the cities.



Unemployment is rising, and housing is more and more precarious as units that once upon a time belonged to company towns were sold to private equity funds, which have since collapsed. Alternatives exist (such as Riweitho e.V.), but they are few and far between and seldom, if ever, supported with state funds. The contemporary Ruhr Area is thus much more than the blue, green, and red lit-up coke-ovens, or the blue, red, and purple lit-up modern buildings of the redeveloped Duisburg port.

Just east and outside of the RVR Ruhr area is Germany’s largest deportation jail. Another is located to the south. Although Germany has strict laws concerning the administration of illegal residents (laws that are entirely contestable), human rights groups have shown over and over again that deportees deal with unfriendly escorts, extended and unpredictable waiting times without legal consultation, and substandard living conditions for detainees. It has also been heavily criticized that German laws also do not investigate thoroughly enough the consequences of its deportation practices, as some deportees face life threatening situations in the country to which they are deported.



Deportation jail, Büren

The Ruhr Area is home to several generations of Turkish migrants, who were permitted into Germany on limited residency permits to rebuild the war-damaged cities. The industrial area of the Ruhr – because of its railway infrastructure and because of the industry’s (e.g. Krupp, Rheinmetall) ability to produce war heads – was one of the primary targets of the allied countries against Germany. In 2000, many of the “Guest Workers” and their families were granted unlimited residency, and offered German citizenship (upon relinquishing the Turkish citizenship). Notwithstanding, Islamophobia has been on the rise since 2001, as has membership in extreme-right wing political parties.

The flagship project of the Duisburg Mosque is a peculiar twist. It is the largest mosque in Germany, and has been continually and hatefully contested by German right wing parties since the days of its conception. In opposition, the mosque hosts anti-fascist demonstrations, and its members clearly position themselves as committed to intercultural openness and interreligious education and exchange. Yet, there remains a lingering question, because the Duisburg Mosque replaces many of the “backyard mosques”. To what extent then, is the replacement of these smaller, lesser known, lesser understood congregations by a large single visible and so called legitimate place of worship a process of channeling, controlling, and harmonization of Others?



Privatisation of land: Europark



Hamm train station

Given the thinness of building a city on memories, one might argue that perhaps the German government and European institutions are on the right track to rearticulate the area in terms of a polycentric RhineRuhr mega city – an urban landscape of densities, exchanges, networks, and flows, embedded in larger European pathways. But both the RVR Ruhr and the RhineRuhr require scales of analyses that foreclose local comparisons and eclipse locally specific problems; thus, contributing to a post-political consensus across the entire region. Some say that both are theoretical and/or ideological constructions and have little meaning at city or neighbourhood levels.

Notwithstanding the RhineRuhr concept, the RVR Ruhr Area is already vast and conveys little feeling of a unified city. The Ruhr urban region, at the large scale presented on the maps, is not the typical city with a dense urban core and corresponding periphery. There is no single urban historic centre either. Some built up areas, particularly in the Ruhr basin, blend into one another. In other places municipalities are separated by stretches of agriculture. Travelling by car along the autobahn between Cologne and Dortmund or through the Ruhr basin (along the A1 or A40 for example) one will certainly notice a rise in traffic, and the frequency of traffic jams. Likewise the regional and interregional trains through the Ruhr basin will also be busy more often than not. But a north-west train trip through the region will more likely convey the mood of emptiness -- empty and grown over warehouses still stand, and fields and fields of agriculture mark most of the landscape between rail stations. One can also easily bike tour through the region without ever entering a cityscape. Even the last of Europe’s wild horses roam its northern edge (albeit in a rather human controlled condition). The Ruhr Area, is amazingly devoid of people.

Not surprisingly, given an impressionistic tour through the region, the Ruhr Area is one of Germany’s shrinking regions with a decreasing and aging population. There has been statistics that say that up to 13% of the housing units in the region are empty, Herne and Duisburg expect to lose 10% of its residents, and in Bochum, there is talk of tearing down excess units in order to maintain market rates. This emptiness is well overshadowed by the EEC 2010, and other imagery of the area as a mega-city region.

Gelsenkirchen and Duisburg train stations midday on a Monday



Synthesis over all four projects and outlook

The RhineRuhr is likely to be one of the largest urban areas of the many presented at the conference of the New Metropolitan Mainstream in Zürich. Stretching across 7,500 square kilometers and housing 11 million, it is one of Germany’s largest urban areas with an oxymoronically and comparatively low and ever decreasing population density. Cities situated on the Hellweg Trade Route (that traced the Rhine River and its tributaries, the Ruhr, the Lippe, and the Emscher) expanded during the Middles Ages. During the industrial revolution, the area’s coal and steel production industries boomed, and for over a century entrepreneurs from all over flocked to the region to set up shop. The region today is markedly post-industrial, and given the failure of tertiary economies and their associated political economic structures to serve as a basis for even distribution combined with the further expected decline that city officials continue to calculate, one might say that the region is also markedly post-flexible.vvhzzvh The scale of this area leaves little to be examined at the

local level. Projects of the Regional Association Ruhr (RVR) capitalize on this ambiguity and endorse such programs as the Ruhr Area as a European Capital of Culture for 2010, which place the industrial heritage of the region in the foreground as a common history of all cities and their inhabitants of the area. In the process a partial and mostly glossy metanarrative is fabricated that delivers only a part of the story. Indeed, the Ruhr Area and the MKRO RhineRuhr is much more unevenly distributed and polarized then would be suggested in these urban marketing strategies. Herstories and Otherstories are urgently needed to counterbalance the weight and dominance of these projections. Perhaps of the outstanding questions for the New Metropolitan Mainstream project is: at what level should the Ruhr area be conceived? To remain on the regional level is to foreclose analyses of the locally particular and corresponding effects at the city, neighbourhood, institutional, or individual level. Above, I have shown only a couple of problems, and for some, they

will be too many and too sharp. For others, they will be be far too few and not go far enough. On the other hand, to focus too narrowly on micro specificities is to neglect the ways in which cities are interconnected and networked. At what level should the urban space be perceived? How to levels create inaccurate fissures in the analysis?