

Ruhr area

My contribution to the topic "Cities and Cultural Diversity" is the example of the Ruhr area, this year under the name of RUHR.2010 European Capital of Culture.

The story of the Ruhr Metropolis is about a new identity of a former industrial region in the western part of Germany. It is the third largest conurbation in Europe after London and Paris. It comprises 53 cities containing 5.300.000 people from over 170 nations. Diversity is part of the cities and social life since the middle of the 19th century. Industrial workers came here from all over the world.

The Ruhr area has become a miniature version of Europe. It has been defined by immigration from countries all over Europe. For centuries the region was dominated by the coal and steel industries, and its inhabitants laboured under the harshest conditions to transform an insignificant strip of land into the powerhouse of German industry.

Despite language barriers and cultural differences the workers in the pits and blast furnaces were forced to rely upon each other blindly. This sense of togetherness has left a strong mark on the identity of its inhabitants. The decline of the coal and steel industries has been an enormous challenge for the people in the Ruhr: a challenge of change and structural transformation.

Diversity was/is during this process a chance and at the same a challenge.

The inhabitants of the Ruhr have developed a new identity. The medium that used to bind together the diversities and different communities in the past was work: mining and heavy industry. With their decline the identity of the region and its people was at stake. Culture is now the major element that is binding it together today.

People from over 170 nations live in the Ruhr Metropolis today. Today 50% of the young people will have an immigrant background. A coming together of the different social environments and identities is of vital importance. Without culture this would not be possible.

The topic migration and diversity is an essential part of the European Capital of Culture-conception. A festival of diverse cultures celebrates the extraordinary and also everyday features of regional, European and worldwide social interaction. It is about opening up the society to intercultural activities, dialogue and mutual respect. A Diversity_Lab tries to research into burning contemporary questions like how we react to other cultures, alien features and inequality. A Diversity_Festival stages international music, dance and theatre performances, crossover, exhibitions and literature. Diversity_Cooperations present contemporary innovative projects by intercultural grassroots groups and cultural institutions.

RUHR.2010 aims at networking, supporting and linking as many different actors of different cultural backgrounds as possible. In this way a metropolitan area can celebrate one of its most fundamental features: diversity.

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