

LEISURE AND TOURISM: AN APPROACH TO THE ECONOMIC REGENERATION OF HEAVILY INDUSTRIALISED REGIONS? THE EXAMPLE OF THE GERMAN RUHRGEBIET

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Introduction

Facing the decline of the raw material and later on manufacturing industry, huge formerly prospering regions of Central Europe such as the German 'Ruhrgebiet', have had to cope with rapid decline and the loss of almost all of their economic foundation. In the early 1980s, regional and economic policies attempted to bring about the necessary structural change to economically regenerate the region.

In the 1990s a special programme, the International Bauausstellung Emscher Park (International Building Exhibition of Emscher Park) best known as IBA Emscher Park, was implemented in order to lay new foundations of development for this large industrial and coal area in transition, which, with about 5.5 million inhabitants, is also the largest conurbation in Germany (Jolly, ???).

The IBA Emscher represents a so far non existent, very comprehensive approach towards regional renewal and restructuring. The renewal of the region includes a variety of objectives which comprise more than just the regional image and concerns above all economic revitalisation. Beyond the priority of promoting new development, one essential requirement in terms of future economic development was introduced, the concept of 'industrial tourism'. This concept mainly consists of the transition of former industrialised areas into leisure and tourism-orientated sites. In this context huge areas were transformed to parks, open-air museums and cultural heritage sites. Furthermore the establishment of large-scale leisure facilities such

as ski-domes, theme parks, musical theatres and huge spas was promoted. The motto could be described by the slogan: 'leisureralisation' of an industrial region!

This chapter provides an overview of the concept itself, by mentioning best-practice examples for the transformation of different sites, the methods of implementing a new kind of tourism, and finally the actual management of the new tourism destination. Furthermore a first review of the effects, the success of the concept, and the identified obstacles will be made. Finally, based on the experiences within the 'Ruhrgebiet', a possible transfer to similar regions will be discussed. The chapter attempts to point out, from an academic point of view, the framework conditions, the methodology and the results of the ambitious idea to transform an old industrialised region into a tourism and leisure destination.

The German Ruhrgebiet: geographical context

This section will give a background to the covered region, its history and its characteristics. Furthermore, trends within the tourism industry which formed the basis for any activity in the leisure and tourism sector at that time will be presented giving a rough idea of the circumstances which formed the starting situation for the 'leisurealisation' of the Ruhrgebiet.

The Ruhrgebiet as the industrial heart of Germany

Industrial development in the nineteenth century formed the 450 km² region in the German north-west known as the Ruhrgebiet, which became the largest German conurbation with around 5.5 million inhabitants today. Its appearance was characterised by the coal, steel and metal industries. After the decline of these industries the region faced an economic collapse which had strong impacts on all sectors. The job market collapsed and unemployment rates were rising on a daily basis. Furthermore the closure of the majority of companies in the coal and steel industry resulted in huge abandoned industrial estates within the Ruhrgebiet. These areas are a huge challenge for spatial planning not only because of their size and number, but also because of their ecological problems.

In this context the German government, including the local municipalities and NGOs, introduced the IBA Emscher Park in the 1990s. This developed, in a participative approach, an idea of what the region should look like in the future and at the same time ways in which to cope with the existing problems. The ambitious idea aimed to establish a totally new but trend-setting form of industry within the region: the tourism and leisure industry.

Between 1850 and 1950 the Ruhrgebiet was the main motor contributing to the rise of Germany as one of the leading industrialised countries.

For a long time the Ruhrgebiet had been the embodiment of economic success. Due to the fact that the Ruhrgebiet was totally dominated by the secondary sector, the start up conditions for tourism and the leisure industry were quite poor. Due to the region's industrial character, tourism has just been a peripheral activity in terms of business trips, congress and convention tourism. Although there was big potential for art and cultural tourism, the region mainly served local demand, shown by the low number of stays. Additionally the Ruhrgebiet cannot be classified as a region rich with classical sights and on the whole the image of the region was rather poor.

Accepting the aim of establishing a new form of industry in the Ruhrgebiet, the authorities had to identify ways of how to meet the expectations of demand and supply. What actual market trends could favour the new orientation of the Ruhrgebiet and therefore could be used to enable the process?

This concept is indeed not a new idea; in fact the first big technical museums were already established during the booming phase of industrial development. Since then the segment has grown constantly, for example by providing factory tours or establishing thematic routes dealing with aspects such as the exploitation and processing of silver in Saxony. A new trend was set in 1994 when the British Board of Tourism declared the 'Year of Industrial Heritage'. However Britain was not alone in preparing the path to industrial tourism as a separate segment in today's tourism industry. A short glance at other countries will demonstrate the already existing incipencies of 'industrial tourism'. In Denmark for example, the historic part of the Carlsberg brewery in Copenhagen had been put under protection and transformed into a museum in the beginning of the twentieth century. Canada invented a programme focusing on the restoration and commercialisation of the traditional waterways. The waterways are restored for today's leisure purposes, but also utilised for industrial tourism. The boat lift in Peterborough shows the interesting option of transforming such facilities into museums, but at the same time ensuring their function in today's leisure activities (see Ebert, 2004).

Probably one of the most ambiguous projects in the context of the re-orientation of the Ruhrgebiet is indeed the "Route der Industriekultur" (route of industrial culture), which will be discussed in the main section.

Large-scale leisure facilities and short-break trends

The new trend of the 1990s towards huge leisure and entertainment developments can be characterised by the slogan 'big is beautiful'. These new facilities aim to offer a versatile environment under one roof. The rapid growth of urban entertainment centres, musical theatres, multiplex cinemas, theme

parks, brand lands and arenas proves the attractiveness of these kinds of facilities for the public. These facilities serve today's consumer interests in being entertained, or as Opaschowski (ref ????) pointed out: "...all aspects of daily life which are not directly related to work should include entertainment" (p. ??). Exactly this mission is fulfilled by these new establishments, consequently leading to their multi-functional character, their huge scale and related to that to their variety of entertainment offers.

Beside the introduction of new tourism segments and offers, a third factor surely related to the new development has to be mentioned: the change of leisure and holiday behaviour. Since the beginning of the 1990s there has been a constant decrease of the classical once-a-year long-term holiday, towards more often but consequently shorter holiday breaks throughout the year; therefore leading to the rise of a new market for short-term holiday destinations. Of course there are already several tourism forms covering this segment, for example city-breaks, but still there is the option to establish a new destination without facing the competition of many long established destinations.

Accepting these trends as driving forces for future development in the tourism sector means that the strategy for the reorientation of the Ruhrgebiet had to be based on these trends. Consequently these finally influenced the strategy of leisureralisation of the Ruhrgebiet in the form of three major pillars for future development:

In this context, Steiner (2003) stresses that beside the mainly outside-oriented strategy of enabling tourism in the region, the local perspective of improving every-day life of the locals by establishing leisure and tourism infrastructure also played an important role. The strengthening of 'soft' location factors was also meant to spur on economic regeneration in other economical segments by raising the attractiveness of the region for living. "Tourism can therefore be seen as part of the structural change of the entire region" (Steiner, 2003: p. 65).

'Leisureralisation' of the Ruhrgebiet

This section provides an overview of the strategy, the practical procedure and the results achieved on the way to the development of the 'Tourism and Leisure Destination Ruhrgebiet'. Based on the strategy described above the aim was to develop a short-break destination relying on the industrial heritage on the one hand, and newly established large-scale leisure facilities on the other. At the heart of the specially developed masterplan was the concept of 'leisurealisation'. Leisurealisation in this context simply tries to describe the process how to transform an old industrialised region into a

leisure and tourism destination. This concept relied mainly on three missions:

- **Infrastructure:** The necessary infrastructure in terms of sites and points of interest had to be presented, processed or even established.
- **Awareness:** The awareness of the region as a tourism and leisure region had to be created.
- **Destination management:** All the efforts had to be bundled and the newly established destination had to be managed.

Infrastructure

The Ruhrgebiet is not very rich in classical sights such as ancient castles, beautiful landscape, and so on. Instead its character can be described as a huge conurbation relying on all kinds of heavy industry. These apparent disadvantages can however highlight certain facts. First, the large population within the region can function as an initial demand for the new leisure infrastructure. Already the domestic demand of around 5.5 million inhabitants can ensure the basic utilisation of newly established infrastructure. Second, the long history, the high number, and the variety of industrial companies and production facilities within the region offer the unique option to present a very broad overview of the history of industrialisation and therefore form a perfect starting position for establishing industrial tourism. Third, the closure of the often very centrally situated industrial complexes offers in many cases – quite unusual for today's urban planning – huge and rather attractive locations within the city centre for redevelopment. Finally, the industries left several impressive landmarks, for example the Gasometer in Oberhausen, which work as crystallisation points for local identity and image creation for the region.

Considering these four facts, the introduction of leisure and tourism infrastructure is in many cases related to the former industrial complexes. The complexes themselves or, better, their locations are the initial starting point for future development. In order to preserve the character of the region, ways had to be identified to cope with a certain number of former production sites. The strategy developed consisted of three different approaches:

The ambitious plan of restructuring an entire region by changing a major part of its existing built environment of course leads to the question of how to finance these plans. The masterplan allotted a combination of private, public and public-private partnership financing for the investments as well as for the maintenance of the industrial sites. For the purpose of a better understanding of the concrete procedure a few best practice examples can be presented.

Amongst the extensive number of monuments some had to be chosen for conservation in their traditional appearance to function as sites for the 'ideal industrial monument'. Their appearance was not allowed to be changed and their further function as a tourist site was determined. The project of 'Zeche Zollverein', the most technically advanced coal mine in the entire Ruhrgebiet at the beginning of the twentieth century, is chosen here as a best practice example. This coal mine was unique not only because of its modern technology, but also its outstanding architecture, often compared with famous German 'Bauhaus' architecture. The responsible Municipality of Essen founded the so called EGZ (Development Association Zollverein) as a publicly financed but independent company. The aim was at mainly but not entirely forming a tourist attraction. The main topic chosen for tourist use was of course industrial heritage represented by a museum on the industrial development in the region and the site itself. Furthermore the central information centre for industrial tourism was established in the complex. In addition to the theme of industrial tourism a museum for modern design was also established. The efforts towards a completely authentic renovation of the complex using the tourism topic were recognized by UNESCO, leading to the Zollverein being designated as a world heritage site in January 2001. This fact of course resulted in another tourism boost for the site.

Change of use does not only refer to the new utilisation of buildings by preserving their traditional architecture as shown by the Duisburg example. The so-called 'landscape park' of Meiderich is a good example of the fact that industrial complexes can also be used for totally different purposes. The former steel factory was converted to a free entrance outdoor adventure park. The buildings were not restored in general; they function as scenery for today's leisure utilisation. Former coal bunkers have been converted to free climbing areas and playgrounds for children, and the former gasometer now functions as an indoor diving centre. The mining dump areas work as hiking and mountain bike trails. Furthermore amazing light installations present the whole complex in the 'right' light. A cinema was opened in one of the former steel production halls, gastronomic infrastructure and event areas complete the range of offers. At the same time it is still possible to visit the industrial scenery, for example the former blast furnace. Beside individual tours, guided tours are also offered on demand. This symbiosis ensures a unique experience for all kinds of visitors independent of their motives to visit the site.

Apart from the already mentioned options, which more or less end up in the retention of the built environment, there is also the option of demolition and establishing new leisure and tourism oriented infrastructure. This strategy was favoured in centrally located and accessible areas. Different to

the before-mentioned alternatives, in these circumstances private investment played the major role. Local demand, proximity to other agglomerations in the Netherlands and Belgium and, last but not least, public subsidy caused a small boom in private investment in the region. Snow domes, tropical spas, musical theatres, and so on appeared in the region within a few years. Alongside national players, several international affiliated groups in the region also built up the new face of the Ruhrgebiet. Time Warner for example opened up a holiday park on an abandoned industrial estate in Bottrop. However probably the most amazing project took place in Oberhausen in the area of the major steel works in the region. Within 10 years, possibly the biggest agglomeration of shopping and leisure infrastructure in Germany will appear in this area. The heart of the complex, represented by a 70,000 m² (about 17 acres) shopping mall is surrounded by a holiday park for children, the so-called promenade, consisting of more than 50 caf es, bars and restaurants, an arena for 13,000 people, a musical theatre, a Cineplex-cinema, a 3,300 m² sea life aquarium and a marina. This Urban Entertainment Centre is in itself a major visitor attraction in Ruhrgebiet.

Creating awareness

By establishing leisure- and tourism-relevant infrastructure the foundation for the new orientation of the region was laid. However the attractiveness of any region or destination is strongly influenced by its image and the awareness of the potential customers. In this context the Ruhrgebiet has a certain lack of acceptance, as mentioned earlier. The associations with the region were still strongly influenced by its traditional role as the heart of German heavy industry. Hence, creating awareness and changing the image of the region plays an important role in the whole development. On account of the large number of residents within the region, the plan aimed at a differentiated campaign and not only on supra-regional marketing to attract people from outside to the region, but also to promote the new infrastructure within the region to ensure a local demand. This local demand, if it is efficiently utilised, is already able to guarantee sufficient funding for the major part of the newly established infrastructure. This fact of course strongly influenced the decision of many investors to come to the region.

Hence the intra-regional marketing aimed at promoting the new opportunities within the region and stressed the attractiveness of the different institutions, their accessibility, and so on. In addition, the campaign tried to promote some sort of local identity or pride in the region, by stressing the uniqueness of the region in form of its industrial architecture or the high percentage of existing green space. The initial local incomprehension of reasons to visit the region changed when the

unique character of the region was realised. Former ignorance towards the attractions within the region transformed to an approval of their own efforts, for example the fact that the restored gasometer of Oberhausen is one of the biggest gasometers in the world. This change of local attitude can be seen as another important factor on the way to establishing a tourist region; only the conviction of the locals of the attractiveness of their region can ensure a competent and positive appearance in the eyes of visitors.

The results of this campaign can be shown by taking into account the results of a representative study on the perceptions of the region by locals in 2001. Of course the image is dominated by the coal mining industry, but already the second position is one of the favoured aspects of 'green space'. Also the aspect 'region of origin' illustrating the strong regional identity is to be found amongst the top four positions. Furthermore aspects such as 'structural change', the 'positive development' within the region and the existence of new 'leisure facilities' clearly show the real change of perception towards the favoured aspects of the region (see Table 1).

Table 1 **Perceptions of the Ruhrgebiet by locals and non-residents**

<i>Inside View</i>	<i>Rank</i>	<i>Outside View</i>
Coal mining (31%)	1	Coal mining (49%)
Green spaces (18%)	2	Industry (18%)
Industry (14%)	3	Certain cities (14%)
Region of origin (11%)	4	Metropolitan area (11%)
Metropolitan area (8%)	5	Traditional industrial area (8%)
Attractive place for living (8%)	6	Football (8%)
Many people (7%)	7	Iron & steel industry (7%)
Structural change (6%)	8	Pollution (6%)
Positive Development (6%)	9	Dirt (6%)
Leisure facilities (5%)	10	Positive Change (5%)

Source: (2001)

In addition to the local insights a nationwide perception study of the region was also conducted. In this case the results were not so overwhelming. The persistence of old images is still rather strong, but taking into account that the German nation consists of more than 80 million people, the recognition of a 'positive change' by almost 5 per cent can be seen as light at the end of the tunnel and a step in the right direction.

Destination management: the 'Route of Industrial Culture' and on-site quality management

The new awareness within the region and the slowly changing image of the region on a national basis formed the opportunity to concentrate on the development of the destination and its management. The existence of leisure and tourism infrastructure and awareness of this kind of infrastructure is the precondition for a destination, but it is not sufficient to only talk about the destination. Aspects such as marketing, distribution and centralised management are also an integral part of a destination. Due to this challenging situation a completely new institution was founded: the RTG (Ruhr Tourism Ltd.). This institution brings together all relevant actors in the context of tourism and leisure management. The RTG works as a tourist agency, as a tour operator and as a tourism promoter at the same time. As a private company it is still subsidised by the public sector but is aiming at financial independence in the near future. The central aim of the RTG, compared to its ancestor the IBA, was to form a destination.

The conglomerate of different sites, institutions and attractions had to be bundled and marketed. The tool developed to fulfil this mission was the so-called 'Route of Industrial Culture'. Due to the heterogeneity of the sites this central brand brings together all leisure and tourism offer in the region. This route connects more than 50 newly established attractions and amongst others, the already presented sites in Essen, Duisburg and Oberhausen. It works as a main guide for visiting the region. In addition to this main route, 24 thematic routes were established focusing on special topics, for example living conditions of workers, steps in the production of steel, the role of transport within the industrialization process and so on. Unlike the thematic routes, the main route refers to a lot of different topics; it more or less combines the best of all routes. In this context it is also important to stress that the sites of the route are quite different to traditional sites; not only did it include the newly established Centro-complex but also several artworks or sites illustrating the transformation of the region by comparing the initial and the final situation. Furthermore in order to show the character of the region, typical structures such as worker housing estates are also being promoted as sites. Hence the 'Route of Industrial Culture' has to be understood as a guideline to experience the region as a whole and not merely as a string of sights.

With the creation of the 'Route of Industrial Culture' the heart of the tourist product in the region had been developed. Any further efforts aim to assure the continuance and at the same time the enhancement of it (see Ebert, 2004: p. 27). Respectively the implementation of the so-called Ruhr Pott Card has to be understood as a supporting tool for the route. This card

works as an 'all-inclusive' offer, which differentiates it from classical reduction cards. It offers free entrance to the included institutions and free public transport. This card, aimed at both tourists and locals, became a big success after initial problems on the distribution and marketing side: 50,000 cards are sold each year with an increasing trend (see Steiner, 2003: p. 68).

Due to the fact that numerous locations are involved in the routes, the proper quality management of each of the sites is also a very important dimension. A screening system had been introduced for the different sites. In cooperation with local universities, evaluations of customer satisfaction are conducted on a regular basis. In this framework the authors also performed an evaluation of one of these locations, namely the Zeche Zollern. The analysis of the results proved the importance of such quality management measures. By taking a look at the results one has to first of all stress the high level of general satisfaction. However the results show that the only main weakness of the actual product is identified in the field of service. The infrastructure itself is evaluated rather positively but aspects such as kindness, shop or opening hours are considered as weaknesses of the product. However according to Alfrey and Putnam (1992: p. 283), "Most industrial heritage projects that have been at all successful have become so through extraordinary personal talent, imagination and energy – of both employed staff and volunteers". In this context only a continuous improvement of the process can ensure some sort of service orientation within a traditionally secondary sector orientated population.

Results and transferability

A very positive overall conclusion can be drawn on the implementation of the project 'leisurealisation of the Ruhrgebiet'. However the successful implementation is no guarantee of success in terms of the initial aims. Therefore this section will deal with measurable results of the project, the circumstances and the possible transferability.

Indicators of leisure and tourism industry development

Accepting that hard figures can reflect the dramatic change only roughly, they still offer a good overview of the situation. To start with the number of overnight stays – referring to official statistics – has grown from 1.3 million stays in the entire region in 1987 to 4.3 million in 2004; an increase of over 330 per cent. Furthermore the average duration of stay within the region has roughly doubled from 1.3 to 2.4 days. Consequently the number of lodging facilities has increased clearly, for example in the city of Dortmund the number of beds doubled. Also the local association of the hospitality industry

stated a clear increase in employment in this segment and furthermore an increase of apprenticeship training positions, which also ensures a long term effect of the development within the hospitality segment. Consequently the region as a whole can nowadays be regarded as one of the driving forces of tourism within North Rhine Westphalia. The conglomeration of leisure facilities is, regarding the number but also the diversity, the biggest in the entire Republic of Germany.

The 'leisurealisation' of the Ruhrgebiet: a pure success story?

Of course as presented the project was successful in a lot of individual areas, but was it able to reach its major goal? Each project has to be measured by its aims. The main goal of the project was economic regeneration based on a new form of industry. The leisure and tourism industry in combination with other tertiary industries should ensure a sufficient employment and regeneration of the economic power of the region; both aspects could so far not be reached. Roughly 20 years of huge investment, from both the public and the private sector, enabled a process, in its kind surely unique, of restructuring a region: one that changed its entire character, but so far the region is still a problem area. Of course the prospect for the future is much better. The region is now able to a certain degree to face competition for investment, especially when considering the perception that the region really will some day meet the achieved situation. But at the same time further investment will be necessary to ensure further positive development, which maybe the major problem in the future. Without a doubt the region was put in line for a better future and the results being achieved are extraordinary. Therefore maybe we can accept this example as a success although it does not yet meet its major goal.

Consequences

The experience of the Ruhrgebiet may be an appropriate example for many similar regions in Europe. The consequent implementation, the cooperation of all social groups, the creativity for example in case of the new utilisation of previously abandoned industrial estates, and last but not least, huge investment formed a new region within the borders of the former one. But the example also shows clearly how much time has to pass until all the efforts show their initial consequences. The persistence of images and attitudes is enormous. But these two aspects especially are major factors for real economic regeneration. The officials can set up the environment by introducing plans and investing money, but in order to attract further investment the perception of the region has to be changed, which takes time and needs efficient marketing. Furthermore the attitudes and the mentality of the locals

quite often characterise a region much more than any circumstances. Therefore any changes should always take the locals into consideration. The establishment of a tertiary sector-oriented form of industry urgently needs people with a certain level of service mentality, which is rather hard to find in an industrial environment. Therefore not only the obvious infrastructure of a region, but also the mentality of the locals and the perception of the region has to be changed in order to achieve a long-lasting change.

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