

# **The New Emscher Valley – Reshaping an urban Landscape creates regional Identity**

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## **1 ABSTRACT**

The Emscher Landscape Park is the unique and unconventional regional park of Metropolis Ruhr. It covers an area of 450 km<sup>2</sup> and is developed under regional responsibility in a partnership approach among regional, local and state bodies. The Emscher Landscape Park forms the basic strategy for the sustainable development of a region which was determined by heavy industries for decades. With the creation of a completely new type of landscape the quality of life has been improved in many parts of the region. Unique new land art, new parks and park infrastructure were created which supported significantly the reception of a new image of the Metropolis Ruhr. This contributes as well to the successful European Capital of Culture 2010 bid of the region.

The further development of the Emscher Landscape Park in the coming decade will comprise an important milestone. In the very middle of the park where the landscape is most heavily influenced by industries, the river Emscher will be completely redeveloped. The whole river system which functioned as an open sewer for a century long period will be transformed into a natural-like river requiring a total investment of about 4.4 billion Euro. This design with its urban, economic and social dimension forms the basis for the creation of the New Emscher Valley. The central part of the valley, the Emscher Island, gives the stage to an international exhibition of visual arts in 2010. Artists will anticipate the monumental change and the challenging approach to redesign an urban river landscape.

## **2 EMSCHER LANDSCAPE PARK**

### **2.1 A Central Park for the Metropolis Ruhr**

Building on its own long term tradition of open space planning and development, Regionalverband Ruhr (RVR) has brought forward the idea of the Emscher Landscape Park as a main project of the International Building Exhibition IBA Emscher Park (1989-1999). It was aimed to develop a park in the center part of the metropolis. A powerful vision at that time but still striking as it claims the most industrialised part of the region as a park development area. Crucial part of the vision is a new East-West oriented greenbelt connecting the existing North-South greenbelts within the polycentric city region Metropolis Ruhr. Beyond the safeguarding aspect a quality based design approach for the open space development was applied. Yet the Emscher Landscape Park comprises a total area of 450 km<sup>2</sup> and forms the green backbone of the metropolis. Thus it is the largest regional park in Europe. The scope of the park was extended in a post IBA planning procedure after a comprehensive planning update which resulted in the Masterplan ELP 2010.

After 20 years of planning and implementation the Emscher Landscape Park is real and it has created in many ways a new type of urban landscape. Scenic park elements like the Tetrahedron in Bottrop or the brand new park Hoheward on the biggest slag heap area of Europe, are transformed remnants of the post-industrial era and contribute to a new modern image of the Metropolis Ruhr.

### **2.2 Reshaping the Landscape – building the regional Park**

As part of an overall regional strategy to support the structural change in the Metropolis Ruhr the Emscher Landscape Park is aiming to reevaluate a landscape which was used up by heavy industries in the last century. Same as the physical landscape, the identity of this cultural landscape has been shattered during several phases of development. The rise and fall of the coal and steel industries, the dramatic growth of urban settlements and the changes in population has caused a landscape with multiple identities. I. e. isolated fragments of different types of landscape appear often disconnected and in a poor quality. The strategy is to create a new identity and build up on the strength of this new post-industrial landscape. A crucial element in this process is an overall quality approach especially related to the design of landscape and built infrastructure. Design competitions form part of the planning process wherever appropriate. The cultural interpretation of the post-industrial landscape by the means of art is also a core element for the re-definition

of landscape sites in the Emscher Landscape Park (like the Tetrahedron or the „Bramme für das Ruhrgebiet“ by Richard Serra).

The development of the Emscher Landscape Park in the past and future period is a partnership approach. The regional partnership consists of 20 municipalities, two districts, three administrative districts, the Regionalverband Ruhr, the Emschergenossenschaft (a regional waterbody), the state of Northrhine-Westphalia and private actors. The Masterplan ELP 2010 works as a conceptual basis and was politically approved by all local parliaments. As the park development is a strategic initiative on state level it is supported by different state funds. A special fund is created („Ökologie-Programm Emscher-Lippe“) to support the implementation of park projects. Yet 200 different projects have been realised and still 250 projects are planned.

### 2.2.1 Elements of the Emscher Landscape Park

The park forms in its regional dimension of 450 km<sup>2</sup> a pattern of different elements which all contribute to the revaluation of the industrial landscape. The park is as unconventional as the Metropolis itself. New parks were created on former steel plants like landscape park Duisburg Nord or on the remnant of a coal mine (Nordsternpark in Gelsenkirchen) all being devastated areas before restructuring. Other park elements are the landmarks all developed on big slag heaps which dominate the urban landscape in a lowland area. By the means of art and quality design schemes these slag heaps were highlighted. Examples are the Tetrahedron in Bottrop, the “Stairway to Heaven” created by the artist Herman Prigann in Gelsenkirchen or the sky observatory on the slag heap Hoheward in the center of the regional park. A unique quality of the Emscher Landscape Park is the combination of industrial sites and the specific flora and fauna which developed on these habitats. This wild beauty is being developed and presented to the public as the “Industrial Nature Trail”. To make this new landscape accessible a cycle path network is being implemented. Again as a unique quality of the urban-industrial landscape many new paths were built using former railway tracks as their basis. The Emscherpark Cycle Trail is nowadays the backbone of a leisure oriented touristic approach. It is strongly connected to the Industrial Heritage Trail which values the very unique selling proposition of the region.

## 3 CREATING AN URBAN RIVER LANDSCAPE

### 3.1 Restructuring a River System – The new Emscher System

Based on a very strategic decision, taken in the early 90ies by regional representatives, the responsible body Emschergenossenschaft started with the complete redevelopment of a whole river system. Since more than a hundred years during the rise of the heavy industry the Emscher system was used as an open sewer system. The river Emscher and its tributaries were technically treated to guarantee an efficient waste water removal. The reconstruction will now remove the waste water from the river by building a new underground sewer. As a final result a new river with clear water will appear.

Some figures clarify the dimension of these “generation project”: The overall investment budget is at 4.4 billion Euro including three new state-of-the-art waste water treatment plants. Almost half of this impressive budget has been spent for the restructuring. A total length of 350 km rivers and brooks will be transformed from technical waste water canals to natural like waterbodies as far as it is possible in the urban settlement area. The whole length of the new underground sewer is 400 km with a 3 m diameter of the main sewer underneath the river Emscher. It is aimed to finalise the sewer in 2020 and have the ecological improvement of the river system implemented in 2027. A giant and ambitious project which effects the region with a social, economic and cultural dimension and bringing a monumental chance for its renewal.

### 3.2 The new Emscher Valley

The renewal of the Emscher system will completely change the quality and the perception of the most industrialised part of the Emscher Landscape Park and is a challenge for the next decade of park development. The revitalised Emscher will function as a continuous green axis in the regional greenbelt network. As the redevelopment of the river system will affect an area beyond the waterbody, a vision of the New Emscher Valley is created. A powerful vision again as the urban landscape itself lacks any quality of a

river landscape. Thus planners are facing a challenging process to implement a quality approach in the New Emscher Valley.

The current planning approaches are focused on the Emscher Island. A narrow stretch of land in the Emscher Valley which “banks” are formed by the river itself and the adjacent Rhein-Herne-Canal. The Island is the very heart of the regional park and is even a portrait of its diverse structure. It comprises industries, technical infrastructures, urban settlement, farmland, gardens and brownfield areas. The island stretches 34 km from Oberhausen to Castrop-Rauxel in the East. The width of the island varies from 200 m where both waterbodies are only disconnected by a dike up to 2 km in the eastern part with a rural landscape. During European Capital of Culture Ruhr.2010 the Emscher Island will be the fairground of an international exhibition of visual arts. 24 artists are invited to examine with their art work the dramatic change the landscape will face in the coming decade. The art work will contribute to highlight the Emscher Island as an exciting future place offering new space for quality of life.

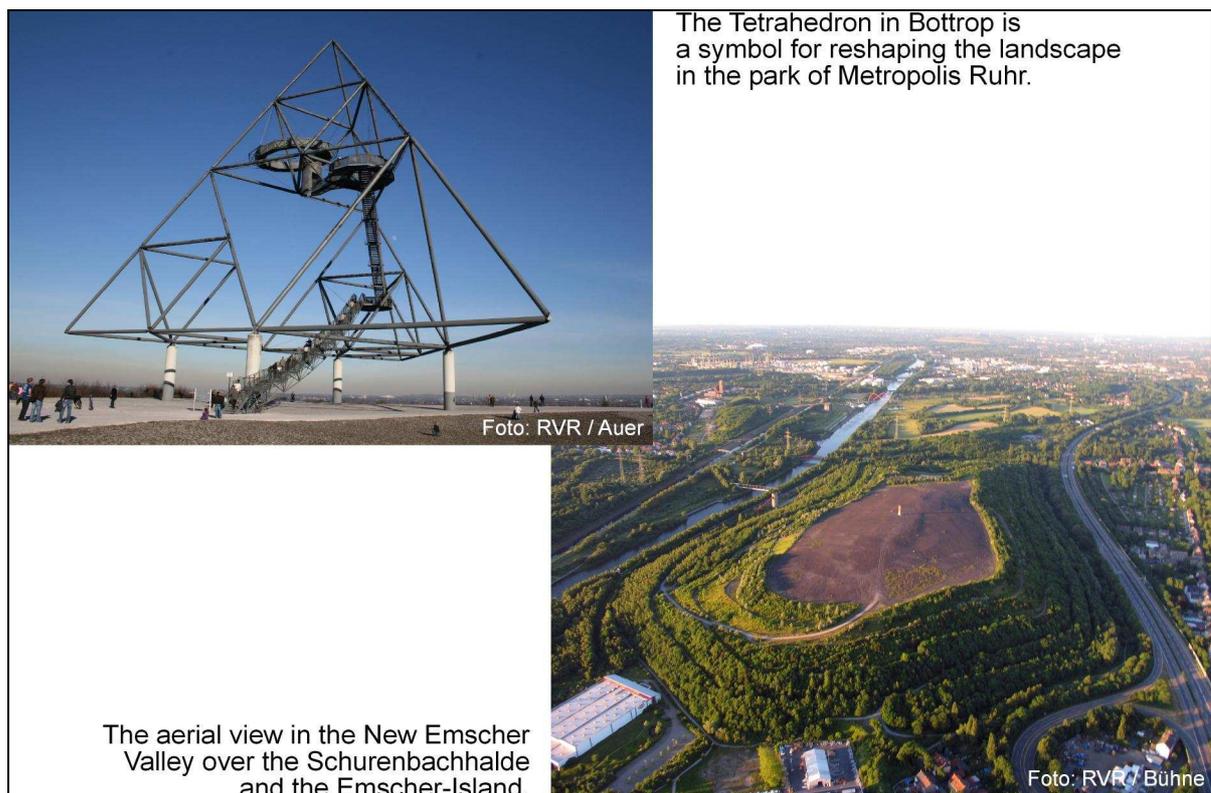


Fig. 1: Landmarks of Emscher Landscape Park

#### 4 CONCLUSION

The ecological restructuring of the region has made the Emscher Landscape Park the European Flagship for a forward-looking urban remodelling and structural change. On the occasion of the European Capital of Culture Ruhr.2010, the Emscher Landscape Park will be the central venue. After 20 years of planning and implementation the park further lives, grows and prospers. Even today perfectly constructed paths together with an expressive landscape architecture make the park attractive. High-class bridge architecture establishes new relations. Efficient maintenance management guarantees a pleasant stay. The RVR and the many partners of the Emscher Landscape Park stand for it. The Central Park of the Metropolis Ruhr is continuously being further developed. The New Emscher Valley still conceals unforeseen qualities for living, working and recreation at the water – a golden opportunity for the region.

#### 5 REFERENCES

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