Ruhr Conference - sectors and projects

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The Ruhr – a region of opportunity

The Ruhr area is a region of opportunity, a crucible of ideas and innovations, a drawing board for the future. It is one of the most extensive providers of tertiary education in Germany, boasts a range of cultural activities unmatched in Europe and is becoming a magnet for start-ups.

The Ruhr area is a fully-fledged metropolitan region with its own identity and a proud history of highs and lows. More than anything, it is home to over five million people, all of whom are glad to call it the centre of their lives. Diversity and cohesion are writ large in the Ruhr. People can rely on each other – today as in the past.

These are the strengths that the Ruhr Conference latches onto. It brings together not only people but also business and trade unions, science and culture, churches and endowments, societies and associations and in particular its 53 cities and towns – guided by the principle that a metropolitan region can only become a cradle of opportunity if its component parts form a closely-linked network. Only if all actors are pulling in the same direction can ideas be brought to fruition. Which is why our watchword is: Menschen machen Metropole – the metropolis is made by people.

The Ruhr Conference relies on innovation, inspiration and brain power. The Ruhr area is already making an impression with its science and business, its research work and practical implementation, and these achievements have to be built on. Ideas are the key raw material for building this land of opportunity.

Girded with this conviction, the Ruhr can also be a pioneer when it comes to devising solutions for the global challenges posed by climate change, digitalisation, mobility, sustainable industries and the need to secure good forms of gainful employment, lifelong learning and a high quality of life.

This dynamism also bolsters the Rhine-Ruhr region’s planned application to host the 2032 Olympic Games. A networked metropolitan region that breathes innovation and initiative – within its own boundaries and beyond.

The Ruhr Conference is all about connecting people, breaking new ground, acting boldly and above all being in it for the long haul when it comes to putting projects into practice. Which means the Ruhr Conference focuses on five sectors as it goes about generating ideas, impetus and initiatives for this region of opportunity:

- Ruhr region of opportunity: Networked mobility – short distances
- Ruhr region of opportunity: Thriving economy – good forms of work
- Ruhr region of opportunity: Lived diversity – strong cohesion
- Ruhr region of opportunity: Secure energy – healthy environment
- Ruhr region of opportunity: Excellence in education and research
We have a plan and a goal: to work together to make the Ruhr area an innovative, connected, prosperous region of opportunity and ensure that it remains a cherished home for over 5m people – with stimuli for the whole of North Rhine-Westphalia and beyond.
Ruhr region of opportunity: Networked mobility – short distances

We want to work together to develop the mobility of the future in one of the largest conurbations of Europe. Functioning transport infrastructure is the lifeblood of a region of opportunity, connecting 5 million people in a web 4,400 square kilometres in area.

The short distances involved are a major advantage for the Ruhr area, with maximum opportunity depending on people being able to get from A to B fast and reliably. This is why we need to set up efficient infrastructure to and from the doorstep.

Mobility is not only an engine of prosperity and economic development. If the diversity of the Ruhr area is to be fully harnessed – ranging from its cutting-edge education and health service to its music concerts and football derbies –, well-oiled communications are essential.

A forward-thinking transportation model for our region of opportunity is therefore all about mobility, sustainability, economic ripple effects and road and rail infrastructure linking communities large and small.

The Ruhr Conference has assembled a raft of measures aimed at enhancing this web of mobility. They include the modernisation, overhaul and selective expansion of existing structures such as the train network, giving more people an incentive to use public transport when travelling to work or to friends and family.

The reactivation of decommissioned routes and introduction of express buses can improve communications between cities and outlying areas. Where scheduled services are not viable, on-demand transportation may be a solution.

The combining of different modes of transportation is facilitated by park-and-ride, bike-and-ride and vehicle-charger stations. A unitary e-fare system and a journey-calculating app encompassing all modes of transportation are making travelling a user-friendly experience and improving quality of life across the region.

We want our region of opportunity to set the standard for innovative, interconnected mobility within a pulsating metropolis.
Ruhr region of opportunity: Thriving economy – good forms of work

The Ruhr area already boasts strong industries, thriving SMEs and a hard-working labour force, all of them hubs of creativity, entrepreneurial spirit – and courage.

Courage to tackle challenges. In recent years the metropolitan region has been an example of how to address and overcome the challenge of structural transformation. But for all its achievements, much remains to be done. So the Ruhr Conference has set itself the task of sounding out solutions, identifying potential and setting courses to ensure that the area lives up to its claim to be a region of opportunity.

This also means that successful business must go hand-in-hand with wholesome forms of work. Only if we create a framework for sustainable future economic growth will we be able to fashion the jobs of the future. And only then will the Ruhr area become a driving force in a thriving German economy.

The Ruhr Conference has developed a wide variety of ideas. Its aim is for the Ruhr area to be a beacon not only of opportunity but also of innovation – in the region, across North Rhine-Westphalia and much further afield. To this end it has hosted events and conferences and launched initiatives such as the “Innovation Ruhr 2030” project.

But existing companies and fresh start-ups – not just ideas – need room in which to grow. This involves rethinking regional economic policy. What use might industrial wasteland be put to, for example, to allow new enterprise to take root and flourish?

The transfer of knowledge from universities and research institutes to firms offering practical applications is another pillar of economic progress. One example is the Start4Chem incubator that serves as a hotspot of innovation for the chemicals industry.

Digitalisation is also hugely important, with new applications and creative solutions such as digital tourism projects being developed. This is particularly true for the evolution of working conditions – which is why the Virtual Competency Centre is advising firms and employees and bundling know-how to foster the digital transformation of workplaces.

We want the Ruhr area to be associated with economic success, technological innovation and jobs that are in tune with modern needs and aspirations. And to be known as a location where intelligence and hard work put daring ideas into practice.
Ruhr region of opportunity: Lived diversity – strong cohesion

The Ruhr region of opportunity is very much about cohesion and pulling together, be it at work, in clubs and societies or in people’s residential communities. One of the things about the Ruhr area is that its inhabitants have always taken the diversity of their environment for granted, living in close community, not simply alongside one another.

This embracing of diversity also involves, on the one hand, valuing one’s fellow citizens - including the differences that make up a community – and, on the other hand, appreciating the commonalities, especially the urge to work together to help the area prosper. But it also means drawing red lines when it comes to issues such as clan criminality and groups that reject the rule of law.

The rule of law is a precious and vital foundation of our living together. By building bridges and providing effective access to our system ruled by law this ideal evolves its integrative and embracing impact on forming an open society.

Diversity and cohesion are as inherent to quality of life in the Ruhr as good living conditions, high standards of healthcare, a panoply of sports facilities, media outlets and cultural amenities and, not least, a bustling community of volunteers and charities. The ideas and impulses generated by the Ruhr Conference latch onto this existing set-up.

That is why the Ruhr Conference relies on collaboration. Housing is one example of this: the plan is to push on with joint supra-urban projects involving construction on vacant inner-city sites.

Collaboration and networking are also key elements in our Virtual Hospital and Midwifery Centre projects, which highlight the usefulness and effectiveness of working together – especially in situations where supply and demand exist independently of residential location.

Commitment and enthusiasm are key pillars in the cohesion of a region. This is as true of companies and clubs as it is of sports projects. And as participation requires information and networking, media initiatives focusing on local and regional news coverage also have an important part to play.

The Ruhr Conference also spotlights extraordinary projects showing extraordinary potential. Examples here are new art forms such as Digital Art, Contemporary Circus, Urban Art, and electronic dance music.

We foster strengths where we have identified them – and in the Ruhr area this means its inhabitants’ unique tendency to pull together as one. This is the only way that our region of opportunity will retain its status as a pleasant place to live for over five million people.
Ruhr region of opportunity: Secure energy – healthy environment

The switch to renewable energies poses considerable challenges to North Rhine-Westphalia in general and the Ruhr area in particular. This is because the equation has to reconcile the imperative of renewability with those of secure supply and affordability.

Major challenges are also being posed by climate change, which has dealt rural and urban areas alike the double blow of hot, dry summers and torrential rainfall. Equally problematic is the creeping reduction in biodiversity, which is evident from the dwindling numbers of insects and the dying out of rare fauna and flora.

Alongside its focus on the security of energy provision, its adhesion to climate-protection goals and its moves to adapt to a changing climate, the Ruhr Conference is therefore also concentrating on fostering a healthy environment. A robust environment made up of intact ecosystems is the foundation enabling human beings to live good, fulfilling lives. It is a prerequisite for a thriving region of opportunity.

The challenges relating to energy, climate and the environment are also creating great opportunities for the metropolitan region, however. Any solutions devised are not only of benefit to the Ruhr area but can also be applied worldwide, making our region a model for others. This is the case for both urban energy solutions and green infrastructure.

For instance, the Urban Energy Solutions project cluster is working to extend production of electricity and heat from renewable sources. The aim is for smart residential developments to show that much can be achieved in existing buildings as well as in new builds. An initiative targeting craftsmen, for example, provides training and information to subcontractors, planners and architects involved in construction projects.

A cluster of cutting-edge firms developing innovative solutions for industry has been tasked with using practice-oriented research to pave the way for climate-neutral industry in the Ruhr area.

The “Green Infrastructure 2030” project is another initiative addressing the issue of strategic collaboration and implementation – beyond municipal boundary lines. It aims to create a network of natural green areas and undisturbed spaces across the region, promoting biological diversity, improving quality of life and reducing the effects of climate change.

The “Resilient Region” project looks at solutions to acute climatic changes such as heatwaves, storms and intensive periods of rainfall. Practical possibilities include rooftop greening, evaporative cooling and the de-sealing of paved areas.

We want to create the conditions for a metropolitan region that is low on emissions and an agreeable place to live, an area where safe and secure energy forms and a healthy environment are just as self-evident as economic prosperity. This is the only way to establish a sustainable region of opportunity that is fully equipped for the challenges of the future.
Ruhr region of opportunity: Excellence in education and research

Education and research are already an important area of focus in the Ruhr area – for a simple reason: a region of opportunity relies on its inhabitants having access to excellent education and training and its universities and institutes enjoying the very best conditions in which to conduct research.

This is precisely where the Ruhr Conference comes in. Great education is the key to a life of self-determination. Only if children are given equal access to schooling, regardless of background and postcode, is upward social mobility through education possible.

This is why the Ruhr Conference is occupied with schools, teaching staff and their interaction with parents. It aims to identify areas where improvements need to be made and where more resources are required.

A number of initiatives running parallel to this seek to recognise and foster talent during pupils’ school years, when they are looking for careers advice and prior to choosing a course of study.

In an age of lifelong learning the Ruhr Conference also promotes further education and training, supporting part-time education programs and preparing people for jobs in the digital labour market.

A glance at the universities reveals that the Ruhr area has achieved an enormous amount since the creation of its first universities in the 1960s. Today it is one of the most densely served regions in Europe in terms of academic institutions.

The next step is to take research, too, to the next level of excellence. To this end the three universities of Bochum, Dortmund and Duisburg-Essen plan to work closer together in future and are bundling their research facilities devoted to modern interdisciplinary subjects such as life sciences, materials science and computer/data science.

The idea behind the Urban Health research centre is to explore the effect of factors such as income, education and the environment on public health in large cities and to come up with solutions.

“Ruhrvalley” is an initiative that creates research professorships and infrastructure as a way of expanding the existing research network dedicated to mobility and energy solutions and providing new stimuli for the metropolitan region.

We want to make the Ruhr metropolitan area into a region of opportunity whose trademark is upward social mobility through excellence in education and research.