

THE DECLINE OF INDUSTRY THE RUHR AREA IN GERMANY

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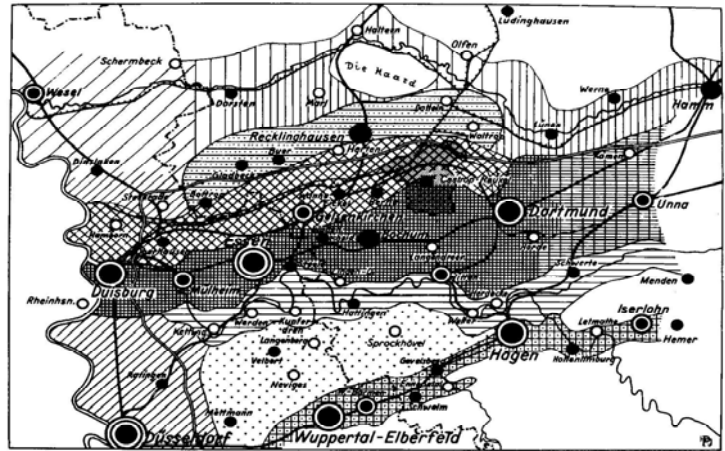
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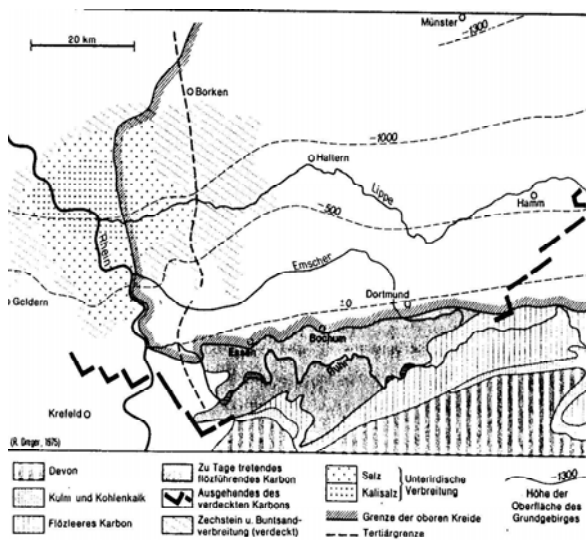
The Ruhrarea. A region or a city?

The Ruhr Area is a region¹ in Germany in the province of Nordrhein-Westphalia to the North of Düsseldorf between the river Rhine in the West and the Sauerland in the East and between the river Ruhr and the Lippe. Although it has in many respects the characteristics of a metropolis with a population of about 5 million inhabitants and a rather urbanised and suburbanised landscape, it is not a formal metropolitan area. The region can be described as an informal metropolis or to use the geographical term, a polynucleated region, as can be seen from this map. As such it can be compared to other urbanised regions in Western Europe, like the Randstad Holland in the Netherlands, or the Flemish urban diamond.²



49. Die Stadt Castrop-Rauxel innerhalb des Ruhrgebietes.

The Ruhr Area consists of a series of smaller and larger towns and communities, linked by suburbanised zones and areas. Although some of these towns



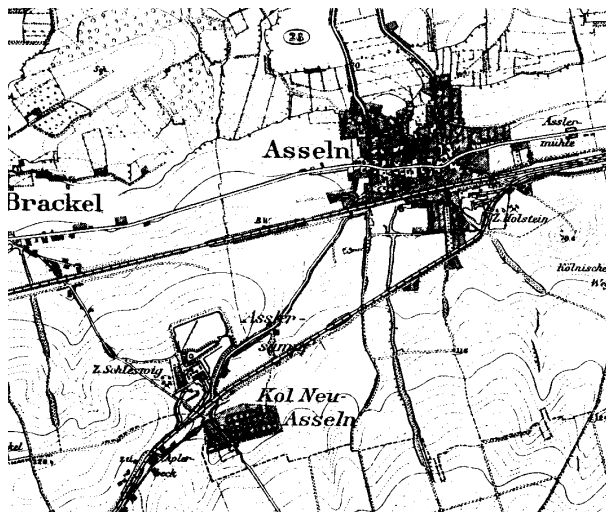
had a long history (particularly in the medieval road connection from Flanders to the East of Europe), they were relatively unimportant until the beginning of the nineteenth century.³ Until that time the region also lacked a political unity. Although incorporated in the Prussian realm after 1815 and as such dependent of the government in Berlin, it was never granted a metropolitan government or council.⁴ Attempts into that direction in the 1920ties were not successful⁵, and this situation still persist today. Although the area is nowadays a part of the Bundesland Nordrhein-Westphalia, it still is divided into three different

governmental areas (*Regierungsbezirke*) and has a series of larger and smaller towns and communities.

The vast urbanisation of the region, which started at the middle of the nineteenth century, was overwhelmingly related to the industrialisation of the region. Although some coal mining for local and regional use (in particular for the iron industries in the more southern situated Bergische and Märkische areas) existed, the

growth of the mining industry started after 1838 when it became possible to cut the marl stratum. The introduction of both steam machines and fuel cokes gave an extra stimulus to this development, which soon led to the construction of mining colonies in the southern part of the region (see map). It was this type of development, combined with the iron industry, which gave the area its specific character. The dominance of both industries would last until the 1960ties.

During the “take-off” phase of industrialisation, which lasted from the 1850s to the crisis of 1873, not only was a series of mines opened, but the iron industry (by origin an industry to deliver the machinery for mining) also started to flourish. Well-known examples were the Krupp factories in Essen and the Bochumer Verein. Investment capital (also from Belgium and France) started to flow into the region and a series of railways were constructed. Because the best entrance to the coal stratum was located in the south of the region (as can be seen from the



geological map) the first development of the mining industry started here. However, developments soon spread in a more northern direction.⁶ This also can be seen also in the development of the process of urbanisation, although this was more visible in the eastern as in the western parts.⁷ The shift of mining in a northern direction, together with new urbanisation, lasted until the twentieth century⁸, although the length of shafts and technical problems also increased. Thus the Hellweg area was industrialised far

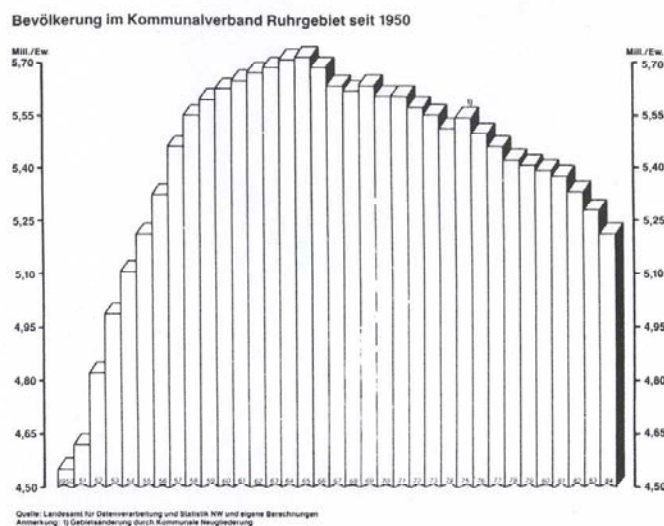
earlier than the so-called Emscher-Lippe area. But in all areas, , the form of urbanisation became a scattered one.

The process of industrialisation of the region continued with ups and downs until the 1960s. These ups and downs were not only related to technological innovations and changes, and to the political vagaries of war, but also to governmental actions. Since the 1870s the Ruhr was already seen as quite important for German economic growth and political power. In the so-called *Gründerzeit* the foundation was laid for the specific characteristics of the Ruhr industry: a strong direct linkage between coal and steel, a strong concentration into large firms, price-fixing and cartel agreements, and an absolute dominance of basic industries.⁹ Although new branches were developed at the end of the nineteenth century (e.g. chemicals and energy), they were strongly related to the already existing industries. That also held true for other economic activities in the area, for example small-scale business was also dependent on the dominant coal, steel and machine building. The power of these basic industries was so great, that they could successfully resist attempts of Daimler and AEG to establish factories in the region in the 1920s.

All this led to a situation in which the stimuli of the market were rather weak. Although some economic rationalisation took place in the 1920s and the effects of the economic crisis of 1929 were tangible, in the twentieth century the

region underwent several periods of growth as a result of the political situation. Typical examples were the increase of production as result of the reparation payments of the Versailles Treaty, stimulation within the framework of the policy of autarky and war industry after 1933, and the reconstruction policy after the Second World War.¹⁰ The dominance of the heavy industry was not alone visible in the landscape and in the economic structure, but also had specific social effects. Typically, the possibility for female labour was weak, not only because demand for this type of labour did not exist in these industries, but also because salaries of married labourers were relatively high.

Because the region itself could not fulfil the enormous demand for labourers, immigration from elsewhere (in the beginning from the adjacent areas, but soon from other parts of Germany; in particular from the eastern parts of Prussia and nowadays Poland) led to a vast increase of the population. Between 1871 and 1905 the population increased from 723,000 to 2.6 million inhabitants. This had its effects on the process of urbanisation in the region. Although until 1850 the existing centres could attract some newcomers, the population soon started to sprawl into the countryside. A vast series of new settlements were constructed. Even in situations where this kind of new settlements was made in the neighbourhood of existing towns, the new suburbs soon dominated the urban landscape and left old centres in a state of neglect. Good examples can be found a.o. in Essen, where the Krupp factory started at the outskirts of the town, but soon dominated a vast area around



the town, not only because the number of factory buildings increased, but also a whole series of housing areas were built for the labourers.

The immigration led to a vast increase of the population of the area; not only during the second half of the nineteenth century, but also into the twentieth century.¹¹ The last period of mass immigration started after World War II, when large numbers of people

coming from Eastern Europe and former parts of the German empire increased the regional population. Only after the industrial crisis of the 1960 and 1970s did this flow of newcomers stop and reversed into a process of emigration (see map¹²). This process still continues today. The population of the Ruhr Area is now about 5.4 millions; however, many younger people are leaving the area.

The effects of immigration on social structures and culture of the area remain a controversial topic. In particular, during the heydays of mass migration during the nineteenth century many critical observers (Tönnies, Simmel and Weber e.g.) opined that this would led to anomie and disruption of social life; ideas which can also be found in the classical work of Köllmann.¹³ Whether this was true is debatable, as can

been seen in Jackson's book about Duisburg. However, it cannot be denied that in some ways the background of the immigrants structured the culture of the area.¹⁴ Although the low-density type of urbanisation with a large scattering of habitation diminished after WW II, the greater influence of urban centres was also reflected in a greater social division. In particular city centres became lower class areas (consisting for a large part of non-European immigrant labourers) areas. Those developments were strengthened in some ways by the policy of some of the communities to construct new centres outside the traditional ones (Marl, Castrop-Rauxel, Bergkamen and Rheinhausen) to replace the centre of the community to an artificial geographical one.

Although it was clear at the end of the nineteenth century that the industrialisation of the Ruhr Area had led to a rather uncontrolled process of urbanisation, it would prove less easy to find solutions for the related disadvantages. The process of enlargement of the cities in the early twentieth century was aimed at alleviating the greatest abuses, but the results were not always encouraging. Another answer was the foundation of an intra-urban planning organisation, the *Siedlungsverband Ruhrkohlen Bezirk* (now *Kommunal Verband Ruhrgebiet*), in the 1920s. One of the reasons for a common action by the towns in the area was the expectation that an additional 600,000 labourers were needed to fulfil the duties of the Versailles Treaty. It was this organisation that played an important role in the development of the infrastructure of the region, but although its director, Robert Schmidt, tried to convince people about the necessity of a wider metropolitan organisation, planning remained the most important task. And, finally, the discussions in the Prussian parliament in the 1920s about a new administrative structure, in particular the proposal of the Prussian government in 1929 to make a *Stadtgemeinde Ruhr*, worked out negatively. Only the communist party (KPD) accepted this idea based on ideological reasons. For most of the other parties the resistance against the formation of a metropolitan area was based on anti-urban feelings (in particular within the conservatives and the catholic party).

Although after World War II the old planning organisation revived again (under a new name), it has lost some of its power. Part of the planning process went to organisations on a state and federal level, thus it never became a kind of metropolitan board. The most powerful players in the area remained the local communities. Although some co-operation still existed, at the same time they had to concur. Particularly after the decline of the basic industries, a type of Darwinist struggle developed between them.¹⁵ The lack of metropolitan administration became clearly manifest after the decline of the basic industry.

Structural changes

More than a century ago the structure of the region and of its urbanisation was dominated by the heavy industry. This was characterised by a regular influx of newcomers, the presence of a relatively small but powerful upper class, a slow rate of modernisation of the economic structure, ecological problems and scattered habitation with little planning for the whole area; not surprisingly, it was called the 'Wild West of Prussia'.¹⁶ Although some new industries were emerging, the majority of them were related to the traditional industrial activities of the nineteenth century;

this situation lasted until the 1960s. After a final period of vast economic growth in the 1950s (the so-called *Wirtschaftswunder*), the economic situation started to change. Whereas in the past it may have been necessary to change the location of mining, because mines were depleted, coal mining was now in a more structural dangerous position. And not only mining, but also the other basic industry, steel production, was facing a worldwide crisis. Between 1974 and 1988 Duisburg, together with Rheinhausen, where about 70% of German steel was produced, lost about 87,000 of its 210,000 jobs in steel making. Whereas in the 1960s it had still been possible to find a 'soft' solution (e.g. by means of earlier retirements) in the 1970s this was not possible anymore.¹⁷

Thled to an enormous increase in unemployment figures and a slowing down and after some time a decline of the population of the area. Although the Ruhr area was not the only urbanised area to suffer from these developments (a comparable situation could be found in the south of Belgium, north of France, in Asturia in Spain and the Pittsburgh region in the USA) the effects were similar. In his book on Asturia, Köhler sums up the most important theories which try to explain these developments; decline as a result of tertiarisation, of institutional sclerosis or product cycles.¹⁸ Although these theories are based on generalisations and mostly related to national economies, it is clear that they can help explain the developments leading to the decline of industries. General problems in regions with a declining industry are:

- The development of new growth zones in non-industrial areas and the removal of economic activities.
- One-sidedness of economic activities and a strong impact of traditional core industries of early industrialisation; a failure in diversification of economic activities and dependency on large industries.
- A high level of protection and intervention by the state; low level of private initiative.
- One sided qualifications within the labour force.
- Infra-structural difficulties.
- Ecological problems and bad housing situations.
- Defensive position of social actors.

Köhler distinguishes too:

- regions of the first generation of industrialisation: the mining areas, which suffered from the coal crisis of the late 1950ties with its mechanisation, the concurrent growth of new production areas and the increase of new types of energy.
- regions of the second generation: areas with steel industry, textiles and/or shipbuilding which suffered an economic crisis in the 1970ties as a result of the competition from other production areas and new technologies.¹⁹

It becomes clear that the Ruhr Area suffered from both crises, because the latter was intertwined with the first. Many of the problems visible in other regions were present in the Ruhr too.²⁰ This is reflected particularly in changes in the labour market.

	1960	1970	1980	1992
Population total total(millions)	5.7	5.7	5.4	5.4
Working population (millions)	2.33**	2.20	2.06	2.06
Students in higher education	-	15,963	87,983	149,876
Workers in Mining	653,612	418,142	325,020	202,062
Workers in Industry	1,037,146	862,210	721,111	550,487
Workers in Services	895,900*	881,100	968,000	1,181,100
Unemployed people	11,732**	12,762	104,232	264,304
Social relief in millions of DM	147,071**	215,028	759,612	1,995,285

*= 1962 **=1964

Source: *Zahlenspiegel Ruhrgebiet- Strukturdaten im Zahlenvergleich* (Essen, 1993 (KVR))

However, although the decline of industrial labour was quite fast, this was not totally compensated by an increase of work in the service sector. If one compares this growth with the growth of services in the European Union in general, or Germany in particular, the growth rate of the services was not spectacular.

That does not mean, however, that the results of the process of restructuring were only negative. It did offer the possibility to implement important measures for improvement of the environment. Not only was the quality of water and sewage improved, but also new woodlands and parks were constructed.²¹ The policy of restructuring also included attracting service-oriented and leisure-related activities, as well as an aim to change the structure of the labour market. For that reason a number of universities and polytechnics were founded, which were intended not only to improve the level of education and schooling in the area, but also to create a spin-off of service oriented firms. To improve the cultural structure of the area several initiatives were made. Museums, theatres (a.o. the famous Ruhr theatre in Bochum), and concert halls were constructed. The interest in culture and lifestyle also could be found in the investments in developments in design, film and new ways of shopping (malls). However, it is debatable whether these trends were positive in every respect. New shopping areas can be seen as a competition to existing traditional shopping. Finally, one tried to create a new urban landscape. For a long time, this planning was done in the tradition of the modernism of the 1960s.

As elsewhere in Europe (both in the east as in the west), a general belief in modernity and progress in urban planning dominated. The underlining premise was that societies could be planned and constructed. Existing traditional urban forms and architecture were seen as a problem and in many cases one was prepared to let them deteriorate and be demolish. The most important idea was to develop newly planned sub-urban areas with either apartment buildings or series of family homes and with a vast structure of motorways.

In many cities this development was never totally successful, either because it was too costly or because it was too difficult to eradicate all the traditional structures and buildings. However, within the Ruhr Area this policy was easier to implement than elsewhere. Cities, generally themselves the result of more recent developments, were also badly deteriorated due to two decades of neglect and warfare. Because industry started to boom in the 1950s and large numbers of new labourers were attracted as a result of post-war mass migration (the Ruhr population increased by one million in a few years), the necessity for new urban planning was manifest, and at the same time the thresholds for demolishing traditional urban areas became lower. This led to an extensive process of sub-urbanisation in which sometimes even new city centres were constructed. 'Automobilisation' and apartment buildings were keywords during this period. The resistance against the demolishing of traditional neighbourhoods was weak, because the labour population saw this policy as a liberation from the traditional social control. However, besides the sprawl of housing and motorways, it also led to financial scandals (the problems with the Housing Agency "Neue Heimat" was one of them).

During the following period, when economic problems started to increase, resistance towards a rigorous demolishing policy arose. In a series of successful actions it was possible to save industrial and mining settlements. At the same time it was rather difficult to convince factory owners to give up wasted property. One of the most important measures of this period was the improvement of environment control. Although pollution diminished partially as result of the slowing down of industry, the results of an ecological policy were rather impressive.²² Another part of policy-making in this period was more debatable: the construction of new shopping areas. These malls, easily accessible for cars, not only led to competition between different cities in the area, but also led to a decline of traditional shops in the centres.

Conclusions

Compared to other regions of Europe, which were affected by the decline of industry, the Ruhr Area did not collapse totally. The structure of industry with its dominance of large-scale factories, however, was a major obstacle to change, not only for the labour market, but also for the process of urbanisation. Several waves of mass immigration (the last one after World War II) had already had a great impact on the structure of the urban landscape. Scattered habitation and unclear urban development patterns had emerged. During the last phase of an economic upswing this situation was also aggravated by the construction of a series of motorways to meet the demands for 'automobilisation'. Although some attempts were made to make the area more of an administrative unity, this policy never was really successful. The area was and still is a kind of informal metropolis, in which several urban centres compete with each other and a part of the decision making is done outside the region.

From the urban perspective, the point of departure during the process of de-industrialisation was very difficult. The preponderance of large industrial areas within an (sub-)urbanised region created extra difficulties for planning authorities, particularly because factory owners were not very willing to give up their rights. It

was some time before, that it became possible to integrate industrial areas into a new urban landscape; e.g. as museum or business park for new firms.

The dominance of heavy industry also had other effects. It not only meant a predominance of labourers in the working force, but also a relatively low participation of women in the labour market. Because, during the last period of economic growth, labourers with a lower level of education had been recruited from outside Germany and outside the EU, these groups were particularly vulnerable for the risk of unemployment. The decline of industry not only meant the development of social weaker traditional urban centres with mass unemployment, but also placed a heavy burden on urban governments to supply social help. These great demands on the social budget left less resources for other urban policies. This was particularly visible at the time that the regional (*Landesregierung*) and federal governments started to slow down financial help (especially after German unification).

It is debatable to what extent the financial help of regional and federal governments had been effective. It did solve some of the worst and direct effects of the decline of industries, but at the same time it was only a temporary relief and clearly meant a postponement of execution. The final concentration of steel industry in the western parts of the area and the closing of mines could not be stopped. However, due to financial aid it was possible to stimulate ecological policy, recreation and service-oriented industries (the foundation of a series of universities and polytechnics was particularly important).

At this moment one can say that the image of the Ruhr Area as an urban region is mixed. The decline of industry did not lead to a total collapse of the region and new economic and leisure activities were instigated. However, unemployment rates are still high and the population of the region is still decreasing. Especially problematic is the emigration of younger persons. The region still does not have a metropolitan council or government and the competition between the different urban centres to attract new activities is great. At the same time, however, their financial situation remains critical.

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- ¹ Rainer Schulze, "Region - Industrialisation - Structural Change. A Regional Approach to Problems of Socio-Economic Change," in *Veröffentlichungen des Instituts zur Erforschung der europäischen Arbeiterbewegung. Schriftenreihe A, Darstellungen ; Bd. 3*, ed. a European comparison Industrieregionen im Umbruch : historische Voraussetzungen und Verlaufsmuster des regionalen Strukturwandels im europäischen Vergleich = Industrial regions in transformation : historical roots and patterns of regional structural change (Essen, 1993).
- ² Hans van der Cammen, Derek Gowling, *Four metropolises in Western Europe : development and urban planning of London, Paris, Randstad Holland and the Ruhr* (Assen, 1988).
- ³ That makes the region different of the Randstad and the Flemish urban area, because there we have a long-standing tradition of urbanisation.
- ⁴ Although the name Ruhrarea was already used in 1878, the official name was "Rheinisch-Westfälisches Industriegebiet" until the end of the nineteenth century. Popular names were Ruhrpott, Kolenpott and the Pott.
- ⁵ The discussion in the Prussian parliament about a proposal of the Prussian government in 1929 to make a Stadtgemeinde Ruhr went out negatively. Only the communist party accepted this. There was in particular resistance against the formation of a metropolis, based on anti-urban feelings (in particular with the conservatives and the catholic party). The ideas of the leader of the Siedlungsverband Ruhrgebiet, Robert Schmidt who intended to make his organisation the starting point for a metropolitan council were not successful too.
- ⁶ Wilhelm Brepohl, *Industrievolk im Wandel von der agraren zur industriellen Daseinsform dargestellt am Ruhrgebiet*, Soziale Forschung und Praxis, 18 (Tübingen,, 1957).
- ⁷ Helmuth Croon and Kurt Utermann, *Zeche und Gemeinde : Untersuchungen über den Strukturwandel einer Zechengemeinde im nördlichen Ruhrgebiet*, Soziale Forschung und Praxis, 19 (Tübingen,, 1958).
- ⁸ Manfred Hommel, "Entwicklung und Integration junger Industriestädte im nördlichen Ruhrgebiet," in *Probleme des Städtewesens im industriellen Zeitalter*, ed. Helmut Jäger (Köln/Wien, 1978). Manfred Hommel, "Entwicklung und Integration junger Industriestädte im nördlichen Ruhrgebiet," in *Probleme des Städtewesens im industriellen Zeitalter*, ed. Helmut Jäger (Köln/Wien, 1978), 108-133.
- ⁹ Before the Second World War nine firms produced about 98% of the output of coal and steel in the area.
- ¹⁰ Even the economic policy of the allied occupation was not always consequent in the second half of the 1940ties. At one hand the increase of coal production was stimulated to help to reconstruct Europe, but at the other hand a lot of factories were demolished or de-placed within the framework of the dismantling of German industry.
- ¹¹ James H. Jackson, *Migration and Urbanization in the Ruhr Valley, 1821-1914* (New Jersey, 1997).

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- ¹² Andreas Schlieper et al., *150 Jahre Ruhrgebiet : ein Kapitel deutscher Wirtschaftsgeschichte*, 2., unveränd. Aufl. ed. (Düsseldorf, 1986).
- ¹³ Wolfgang Köllmann, *Bevölkerung in der industriellen Revolution : Studien zur Bevölkerungsgeschichte Deutschlands*, Kritische Studien zur Geschichtswissenschaft, 12 (Göttingen, 1974).
- ¹⁴ Klaus Tenfelde, Ruhrstadt. Historischer Hintergrund [pdf] (2001 [cited]); available from <http://www.ruhr-uni-bochum.de/isb/aktuelles/texte/Ruhrstadt-Historie.pdf>.
- ¹⁵ S. Kühn, "Der Kommunalverband Ruhrgebiet als regionale Interessenvertretung," in *Das Ruhrgebiet, ein starkes Stück Nordrhein-Westfalen : Politik in der Region 1946-1996*, ed. Heinz-Jürgen Priamus, Schriftenreihe des Instituts für Stadtgeschichte. Beiträge (Essen, 1996). S. Kühn, "Der Kommunalverband Ruhrgebiet als regionale Interessenvertretung," in *Das Ruhrgebiet, ein starkes Stück Nordrhein-Westfalen : Politik in der Region 1946-1996*, ed. Heinz-Jürgen Priamus, Schriftenreihe des Instituts für Stadtgeschichte. Beiträge (Essen, 1996), 97-109.
- ¹⁶ Since the 1920ties an organisation for planning (*Siedlungsverband Ruhrkohlenbezirk*) existed (now *Kommunalverband Ruhrgebiet*) which was important in particular for the planning of the infrastructure. It played an important role in the development of new leisure activities in combination with restructuring old industrial areas (e.g. Emscher Park).
- ¹⁷ Thorsten Gresser, "Pittsburgh and the Ruhr Area: Common Patterns in the Fight against Shutdowns during the Decline of Steel," *Jahrbuch für Wirtschaftsgeschichte* 2001 (2001). Thorsten Gresser, "Pittsburgh and the Ruhr Area: Common Patterns in the Fight against Shutdowns during the Decline of Steel," *Jahrbuch für Wirtschaftsgeschichte* 2001 (2001): 65-74.
- ¹⁸ Holm-Detlev Köhler, Hans-Böckler-Stiftung., and Institut zur Erforschung der Europäischen Arbeiterbewegung., *Altindustrielle Regionen und Strukturkrise : vergleichende Forschung zu Asturien (Nordspanien) und dem Ruhrgebiet* (Düsseldorf, 1994).
- ¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 22.
- ²⁰ Gerd Köhler et al., *Das Ruhrgebiet im Umbruch : Beiträge aus Hochschulen und Gewerkschaften zur Strukturkrise bei Kohle und Stahl : Dokumentation der Woche der Wissenschaft vom 25.-28. Mai 1987 in Recklinghausen*, 1. Aufl. ed., GEW Forum (Freiburg im Breisgau, 1988).
- ²¹ Andreas Bendig, "ökologische Bewertung von Hochwasserrückhaltebecken am Beispiel von zwei Standorten im Ruhrgebiet" (Geographisches Institut der Ruhr-Universität Bochum, 1995). Andreas Bendig, "ökologische Bewertung von Hochwasserrückhaltebecken am Beispiel von zwei Standorten im Ruhrgebiet" (Geographisches Institut der Ruhr-Universität Bochum, 1995). Pages.; S. Brandolini, "Paradise found (Once a postindustrial wasteland, Emscher Valley in Germany's Ruhr region is now a cultural promised land)," *Architecture* 89 (Nov, 2000). S. Brandolini, "Paradise found (Once a postindustrial wasteland, Emscher Valley in Germany's Ruhr region is now a cultural promised land)," *Architecture* 89 (Nov, 2000): 75-+.; Franz-Josef Brüggemeier and Thomas Rommelspacher, *Blauer Himmel über der Ruhr* :

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²² Brüggemeier and Rommelspacher, *Blauer Himmel über der Ruhr : Geschichte der Umwelt im Ruhrgebiet 1840-1990*.