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Resource Region: REGIONALPARK MITTELDEUTSCH LAND

Regionalpark Mitteleutschland (Regional Park of Central Germany) is a creative vision and a political and cultural task. This approach stands for similar tendencies, challenges and action options of regional planning in other urbanised or suburbanised regions in the industrial world. For over a year now, Regional Park Mitteleutschland has been taking shape – it is being discussed, taken note of, viewed euphorically or sceptically or with disbelief and at the same time driven on with concrete plans and projects at various levels regional levels and political bodies by initiatives, enterprises and associations. It is "in a state of flux". According to one thesis it is a concrete expression of a "resource of a new kind" for shaping space.

1. Starting position

The Regional Park is situated between the conurbations of Leipzig/Halle and Berlin/Potsdam. This area has been one of eastern Germany's regions of dynamic transformation since 1989/90: Formerly a central industrial area in this part of Germany referred to as Berlin's "back yard" and characterised by chemical industry, machine building, mining and extensive military areas, but first and foremost by severe environmental pollution, this region initially became a deprived area – economically and socially. But in the meantime it has also become a region with an influx of enormous investments for rehabilitation, infrastructure, major industrial projects and urban and landscape renewal. The cities of Leipzig, Halle, Dessau or Potsdam have become places of radical transformation, of contrasts and of shrinking population. But they are also areas of a variety of new projects, some of which were presented to the world public at EXPO 2000.

2. Components

This corridor with a population of at least two million (not counting Berlin), which measures about 150 by 60 kilometres and touches four states of the Federal Republic, represents an unusual sequence of urban and rural landscapes:

- Formerly dominated by lignite mining, the *southern Leipzig area* is one of Germany's most extensive and multifaceted landscapes. Extensive rehabilitation and reconstruction work is in progress. Formerly an open-cast mine, Cospudener See is the first newly created lake which has become a popular tourist attraction.
- The *northern Leipzig area* with its new fairgrounds, an international airport and numerous commercial locations, is one of the most dynamic

areas, with direct connection to Leipzig and Halle and cross-regional rail and autobahn links connecting Berlin, North and East Europe, southern Germany and South and West Europe.

- The *urban and suburban settlement landscape between Leipzig and Halle* represents an area of concentration of European dimensions: the large modern chemical industry area of Leuna/Merseburg, old town centres and resort towns, old industrial sites, industrial areas stemming from the period of rapid industrial expansion in Germany (1871-73), settlements built between the two world wars, prefabricated settlements – areas of renewal interspersed by signs of decay everywhere, as well as a mix of the most up-to-date commercial sites, shopping facilities and settlements along autobahns. A "new centre" seems to be coming into being between the major cities – a fascinating and at the same time amorphous development space around the centres of Leipzig and Halle, which also form part of the Regional Park.
- Adjoining this area of concentration to the north-east is one of the most easily remembered regions in terms of its cultural historic features; it has become one of the most innovative regions in recent years: The industrial and mining areas of Wolfen /Bitterfeld /Delitzsch, the *Gartenreich Dessau-Wörlitz* (Garden Realm of Dessau-Wörlitz), Wittenberg (the town put on the map by Luther), the Bauhaus city of Dessau, the Dübener Heide Nature Reserve – a valuable natural and cultural landscape in the centre of the Regional Park offering interesting tourist attractions and novel services. The triangle formed by the cities of Dessau, Bitterfeld and Wittenberg, the *industrial garden area*, is the centre-piece. "Ferropolis – the city of iron" is the most spectacular project.
- *Ferropolis* is situated in the centre of the future Regional Park. This internationally known landmark and art centre and the former lignite mines (south-west of Delitzsch via Goitzsche, the Mulde river, Gröben, Golpa-Nord to Bergwitz) form a multifaceted lake and cultural landscape. It will be a testimonial to **creative rehabilitation** of a landscape once damaged by man.
- The *meadows of the Elbe*, the Mulde and Saale rivers form an East-West divide over the entire area. These most sensitive areas are documented as a UNESCO biosphere reserve; they are also most attractive in terms of their ecology. The Dessau-Wörlitz Garden Realm, which in the meantime has been put on the World Heritage List, the reform landscape of the 18th century, stretches along the south bank of the Elbe. Today, it is a Mecca of cultural tourism. But the area is also characterised by a fragmented economic and settlement landscape which poses major planning challenges. The Elbe also links the region with other regions between Hamburg and the Czech Republic – i.e., an ecological refuge of international significance, a string of picturesque towns and a potential chain of future industry (from environmentally compatible shipping to fishing industry and tourism).
- Rising above the northern bank of the Elbe is the *Fläming*, a sparsely populated range of wooded hills with agriculture as the predominant industry and noted for its recreational value. Another nature reserve in

which a proper balance has been struck between agriculture, forestry and individual tourism with a variety of services is situated. The settlement culture is characterised by small picturesque towns.

- Bordering this area is another low land, the *glacial valley of Baruth* – a tranquil zone characterised by open landscape; the accent here is on health tourism. To the north-east, this area abuts the suburbs of Berlin known here as the „Speckgürtel“ – literally: "bacon belt" – characterised by an amorphous landscape made up of newly-built commercial facilities and residential areas and diversified infrastructure. Embedded in it is one of the many military conversion areas. Abutting this is the catchment area of the Havel river.
- The *cultural landscape of Potsdam*, which has also been put on the UNESCO World Cultural Heritage List, the attractive urban area of Potsdam and the media town of Babelsberg form the Regional Park's northern boundary adjoining metropolitan Berlin.

3. Opportunities

"The metropolises touch each other..."

These landscapes are not simply a succession of "green stretches of land", "spacer areas" or "urban strips", but represent a compact **"corridor of potential"** in terms of their economy, ecology and cultural history. At the same time they are a space of contradictions uniting historically different cultural landscapes – some of them enjoying the world's highest level of protection –, which represent an almost unique succession of man-made landscapes overformed by man. In a certain sense they are experimental areas for new landscapes and town sections – in the wake of the age of waste of resources. Although in the short term, the Regional Park should not be seen as a space that is likely to experience rapid population growth, but as one that is likely to show dynamic growth of new branches of industry. Growth and shrinkage are being shaped simultaneously, resulting in an equilibrium, which is the basis of sustainable development.

4. Alternative

The "balanced city": the metropolises keep their distance!

A "balanced city" can be an alternative to an intermediate city, to suburban sprawl. The Regional Park Mitte/Deutschland represents the scope of action of players in space to form a synthesis of independence and "globalisation". The landscape is not "adapted" to an anonymous market, but reinforced in its cultural, ecological, economic and social identity when the players embrace this vision and shape it themselves. In this sense, the Regional Park is a cultural programme. The Regional Park acts as a framework for shaping a specific quality in individual parts. It can then become a "resource".

The metropolitan spaces of Leipzig/Alte and Berlin/Potsdam are linked by the Regional Park Mitte/Deutschland and at the same time separated by it. A

succession of anthropogenic landscapes in which people effectively manage their affairs and shape their environment with due respect for the natural and man-made heritage creates this uniting separation. The Regional Park forms a link between the former leading Central German industrial area and Berlin, establishing a new, balanced connection between the capital and its former "back yard".

5. Learning and marketing

The Regional Park is also a place of learning in the field of landscape and town planning: it is a network of regional educational institutions with instruction offered in various fields tailored to the area and model places of renewal, i.e., also an "institution" which networks the development of individual towns, cities and landscapes with the region as a whole, co-ordinates research and education in the region and develops international contacts to other regions.

A marketing strategy built around the Regional Park gives the individual regions greater weight within a wider framework. With the Regional Park, the Central German area can attain a position which is perceptible in concert with the major conurbations and which can highlight its special features.

6. Term

The Term **Mitte Deutschland (Central Germany)** relates to the 1920s. At that time, the Central German industrial district came into being as a planning and economic zone stretching across Leipzig, Erfurt and Magdeburg, with Merseburg as its hub. Today this term is still used colloquially, even though historically, Central Germany no longer exists.

7. Comparison of regional projects

Regional Park Mitte Deutschland is part of a current trend toward regionalisation, which has been going on nationally and internationally since the '90s. A new dimension of regional development was opened with such regional projects as the Emscher Landscape Park.

Similar major regional projects have come into being in the Frankfurt/Main area and include the *Landschaftspark Bodensee-Oberschwaben* (Landscape Park of Lake Constance, Upper Swabia). Work on another regional park was started recently when the *IBA First Flicker-Land* (International Building Exhibition Prince Flicker Land) was opened in Lusatia. Experience gathered in the IBA Emscher Park and in the Industrial Garden Realm projects is being utilised here. Regional parks are also increasingly being created abroad as a form of integrated development. They include a park in the Po Delta in Italy, a similar park east of London, the "Regional City" in the USA (e.g. Portland, Oregon) and others. The Regional Park Mitte Deutschland not only follows a trend, but adds a new facet to it by virtue of its characteristic "European dimension" and its specific approach, namely that of a *balanced city*.

8. Model

The Regional Park can be seen as a model for a new kind of thinking as regards resources. It is no longer simply a matter of clearly definable "available" nature, but of how to shape balanced relations between nature and the people making use of it and of the cultural aspects involved. The towns, cities and landscapes used by people are the most important resource for a future fit for human beings. Now that the entire landscape has been overformed, exploited and reshaped or "done up" by man, new ways need to be created to make it possible not only to counteract the urge to equalise and adjust to other regions in the sense of increasing one-sided efficiency of utilisation, but to provide a qualitative alternative which arises from the existing stock. Moreover, a new regional policy reaching beyond administrative confines and parochial politics and yet preserving local independence and armed with the necessary competence for action must be put in place to carry out this planning and development work. New methods of participation (e.g. "Charrtet") and relations of cooperation between the players (networks) are equally necessary. But first and foremost, the hierarchical spatial organisation must be fundamentally reviewed and replaced by a framework policy of spatial development oriented on identity-preserving models.

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