'Change of Perspective’ – an interdisciplinary approach to communicating the industrial cultural landscape of the Ruhr region

The Ruhr Regional Association is the developer of the Industrial Heritage Trail (Route Industriekultur) - a project that has linked many sites of industrial heritage importance since 1999. The network for whose maintenance the Industrial Heritage Team is responsible, provides, among other things, an information infrastructure in the form of signs at many locations along the route. It consists of 57 so-called primary sites: 27 anchor points, 17 panorama points and 13 housing settlements and about 1,000 secondary sites grouped into 31 thematic routes. The Industrial Heritage Trail came into being during the IBA Emscher Park - a structural and future programme of the state of North Rhine-Westphalia that between 1989-1999 produced many projects to overcome the structural crisis in the Ruhr region. It contributed decisively to a new self-confidence of the region. The Industrial Culture Route served as a best practice example and a model for many industrial culture routes in Germany and Europe and continues to develop. An essential building block here is the digital guide "Change of Perspective".

From 2017 until 2019 the Industrial Heritage Department of the Ruhr Regional Association has developed a project that pursues a completely new approach in the communication of the industrial cultural landscape and focuses on the interrelationships of this landscape through storytelling - the audioguide ‘Change of Perspective’.

This project was funded by the European Union and was developed in close cooperation with the subsidiary Ruhr Tourismus GmbH. Ruhr Tourismus GmbH is the marketing company of the Ruhr Regional Association and is responsible for the tourism marketing of the region. Therefore, the division of tasks during the EU project was also derived: Ruhr Tourismus GmbH was responsible for the marketing of industrial heritage in the Ruhr region, while the Ruhr Regional Association was to take over the mediation of the industrial cultural landscape. The goals of the EU project were to develop a vision for the future of industrial heritage in the region, to position industrial culture even better in terms of tourism, to address new target groups, to explore new marketing and communication channels and to make it possible to experience the interrelationships of the industrial cultural landscape.

Within this framework, the digital guide "Change of Perspective" has been created, which guides visitors along routes through experience spaces that include anchor points of the Industrial Heritage Trail and its surroundings. By that the visitors understand how industrialization shaped the entire area of the Ruhr region in the past and how the industrial cultural landscape of today has been created. The multimedia-supported tours on the Industrial Culture Route are a very special experience: three different experience spaces in the Metropole Ruhr can be explored together with fictitious protagonists from the past. Audio and text files as well as historical photos and videos, accessible from home and directly on site, tell the story of a former steelworker, his wife or a smelter director, among others. All the information is available on a website and as an app for Android and iOS. It is also possible to call up the information via QR code on the signs at the individual stations. Tablets can also be borrowed at the anchor points of the adventure rooms, which make the digitally guided tour possible.

The selection of the three experience spaces was based on a time axis: one room each was to represent and convey the beginnings, development and peak phase of industrialization in the Ruhr Area. In the next step, these phases were assigned to suitable rooms in the Ruhr Area and a narrative period was determined.
The chronologically first narrative space is in the town of Witten in the Mutten Valley. The Nachtigall colliery and the Muttental valley are generally regarded as the cradle of Ruhr mining. Numerous small and micro mines once brought coal to light here in galleries and the first shafts. Today, many relics of the past can be seen on a walk along the mining trail with the help of reconstructed and preserved objects. Therefore, the focus of the content is on early industrialisation and early Ruhr mining and the period from 1732 to 1836 is covered. The approximately 7 km long route follows in large parts an already existing mining hiking trail and is recommended for a walk. The story here is primarily about the beginnings of mining and the working conditions of the early miners. The target group here is primarily hikers.
The second experience area is the largest, as it stretches from the city of Bochum (Hall of the Century Anchor Point) via Herne to Herten/Recklinghausen (Colliery Ewald Anchor Point). It is oriented along the former ore railway line, which has been converted into an attractive cycle path. The route passes many places of industrial heritage interest such as old collieries and workers’ settlements, and the northward migration of mining in the Ruhr region can be read very well from it. This narrative space deals with the rapid changes brought about by industrialisation between 1840 and 1929. As the route is 31 kilometres in total, it has been divided into three sections that can be travelled on foot or by bicycle. Here, the story of the ore railway and the living conditions of the workers as well as their families is told. The target group of the room are cyclists.
The chronologically third narrative space unfolds around the UNESCO World Heritage Zollverein Coal Mine Industrial Complex and focuses on the heyday of industrialisation in the Ruhr region between 1847 and 1932. Here, too, exploration is possible on foot or by bike. The dimensions of industrialisation as well as the leisure time of workers and their families play an important role in this narrative space. It is shown how much influence the Zollverein colliery had on all areas of life.

In close cooperation with the stake holders on site, stations were selected in these experience spaces that fit the theme of the space: buildings of former factory consumption centers, water bodies, workers' housing estates, heaps, railroad tracks, etc. The special feature of the project was also the network character and the intensive cooperation of very different actors with heterogeneous competences and interests, without which the implementation would not have been possible: marketing offices of the cities, museum operators, historians, tourist guides, etc.

From the very beginning it was clear that the communication of the Industrial Cultural Landscape of the Ruhr Area had to be done in an emotional, appealing way through storytelling in order to also attract new and younger target groups and to stand out from the rest of the offering. For this purpose, fictional protagonists were developed who represent all social strata at the time of industrialization and whose biographies are based on true stories. Visitors can listen to the living situation of times long past from different perspectives at original locations. The stories and their respective protagonists wind like a red thread through the three experience spaces Muttental, Erzbahntrasse and Zollverein. The experience spaces are not a museum or a closed-off area, but rather sites that are not restricted in terms of access. In each experience space, a specific period of the industrial development of the Ruhr region is portrayed with different fictitious but typical
characters. It was also important that women and children in the miners' families were given a voice and that their living and working environment was also heard.

On site, the visitor can experience the industrial cultural sites that still shape the region today and are often part of the art and culture scene today. When visiting the experience spaces, the transformation of the region becomes very clear, even if subconsciously. It also becomes clear that the industrial-cultural areas of the experience spaces are now used as cycle paths, parks and local recreation areas, sites with cultural and leisure activities. At the same time, our app immerses you in the past and tells you what this area, the buildings and streets used to look like and how they were used. Even many seemingly inconspicuous corners have a special history.

In each of the three experience rooms, a route is suggested and the visitor is navigated from one station to the next. At the various stations on the route, which are marked by display boards, the information can then be called up from the app or from the internet, one can read the texts or have them read aloud; switch between background information and the stories of the protagonists. The experience spaces can be accessed on the website (www.industriekultur.guide). However, the free app ('Change of Perspective'), which allows visitors to navigate through the experience spaces directly on site, offers particular added value.

Why is the ‘Change of Perspective’ a special offer of industrial cultural mediation?

In times when digitalisation is gaining more and more importance also in the cultural and tourist sector the app offers an advanced digital offer and thus adapts to the needs of today’s tourists. At the moment, the Industrial Heritage Trail is very focused on the individual locations, i.e. anchor points, which are usually the centre of attention. The “change of perspective”, however, includes the surroundings of the anchor points and focusses on the interrelationships of the industrial cultural landscape, not only a single location. Looking at the development of the spaces around former collieries and steelworks is important to understand how industrialisation in the Ruhr has gradually reshaped the landscape and why the Ruhr is the way it is today. This is especially important for the identity of the region's inhabitants. Also the emotional reference to the visitor through the storytelling of the protagonists has an oral history character. Since there are fewer and fewer contemporary witnesses of industrialization who can tell of their experiences directly, the change of perspective creates a kind of timeless memory. The identity of the industrial civilization is at the center of this mediation and thus the offer goes far beyond the mere preservation of industrial legacies.
What is the future of the digital guide ‘Change of Perspective’?

The Ruhr Regional Association has invested many resources in building the digital and content structure of this digital guide. With the app, an innovative mediation approach has been created, which is of interest both as a leisure offer and for educational institutions and holds numerous potentials. For this reason, there is a firm intention to expand the guide and develop new spaces of experience that connect to other anchor points than before. Possible topics here are social democracy in the Ruhr region, the role of women in industrialisation, as well as structural change and post-mining. The aim is to make the relevance of the topics clear for today. Consideration is also being given to integrating the guide into a general Trail of Industrial Heritage app that includes all visitor information on all anchor points in order to make more people aware of the guide.