

## **Arts for Education!**

International Symposium on Arts Education in Europe  
13 September 2010, Philharmonic Concert Hall, Essen, Germany  
Rüdiger Frohn, Chairman of the Advisory Board, Stiftung Mercator  
The Ruhr Lab

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Dear Guests,

On behalf of Stiftung Mercator, I would like to welcome you to the "Arts for Education!" symposium here in Essen, the European Capital of Culture.

After having listened to the "Knappenchor Bergwerk" (a choir by coal miners) I am delighted to direct some warm words of welcome to you, here in the Ruhr area, to you.

"Inspiring ideas" is our guiding principle at Stiftung Mercator. This has a dual meaning for us as a reformist foundation: we are convinced that inspiring ideas can make the world a better place, and that we can help to inspire such ideas.

In the fields of academia, education and international affairs, we concentrate on our core areas of arts education, integration and climate change.

Our approach is an optimistic rather than alarmistic. We do not wish to bemoan the world's misery, but to help make things better. We do this through advocacy and practical projects.

Possible solutions for the future must be put to the test in the real world. They need to be applied in practice.

We are convinced that this region – the Ruhr region – is an ideal laboratory and venue suitable in order to operationalise and to test our ideas.

This constitutes an ambitious approach. We have decided to adopt our strategic agenda in the Ruhr Region. Moreover, we show special engagement in this region – not only because the founding family is originally from the Ruhr region. We are convinced that the Ruhr region is a special region. It is a region where social change processes are highly advanced; it is the "laboratory" where we test out new concepts for the future and beyond the Ruhr area.

This is not merely an expression of the strong sense of belonging we feel here; there are also some very good reasons for choosing the Ruhr region.

The right places, occasions, social circumstances, partners and potentials are all to be found here.

This is a region with a long tradition of change and transformation. The Ruhr region embodied the age of industrialization, of heavy industry, of mining and of steel production. Following the end of this era, more has changed here in the last 50 years than anywhere else in Europe. Today, five million people live in the Ruhr region, an area covering some 4,435 square kilometres.

The Ruhr area has always been an area of change. It is an ongoing process and the region will mature in future.

The process of change, however, began to take shape; it did not result in the devastation of a region but in a major transformation that is still underway.

The Ruhr region is now focusing on its own strengths and resources. Ideas can ripen well in such a climate of change and new beginnings.

Especially, during this year, the Ruhr area being the European Capital of culture, we try change the mentality in a peculiar manner.

The Swiss writer Adolf Muschg described this as follows:

“The Ruhr region needs a new face if it is to carry on living with itself. To avoid becoming an orphan of industrialized society, it must devise a model of civilian life that can also be used for others. This huge scrap heap must be transformed into a workshop of forward-looking ideas. Only if one is part of the solution rather than part of the problem, one will not stand alone in the future.”

We at Stiftung Mercator want to be actively involved in this workshop. New forms of cooperation between local authorities, state, universities, research institutions, private companies and civil society organizations that are open in terms of space, flexible in terms of topic and in some cases temporary, may help. We must learn better how to “cooperate and cultivate a profile through functional specialization”, and take this lesson to heart.

The people who live and work here must be provided with a good quality of life:

- good educational opportunities
- secure employment possibilities

- safe living with good neighbours
- a healthy environment with opportunities for sport and leisure time
- an attractive cultural landscape

They want to be able tell others about their lives in the Ruhr region with pride.

And if in future we will no longer be producing coal but ideas for our country, and if we will no longer be smelting steel but developing solutions to our climate problems and to deal with an ageing and more culturally diverse society, then it will make no difference whether this happens in Dortmund, Duisburg or Essen, in the Ruhr City or in the Ruhr Metropolis.

Only one thing is certain:

Stiftung Mercator will be a part of it, inspiring ideas.

Let me conclude.

After the Symposium 'Arts for Education', you should discover your passion for the Ruhr area for yourself. You should get to know important features of the essential Ruhr culture – its lively passion - letting you feel the hospitality of the whole region. The region has gained many attractions that increasingly develop the region to a travel destination. There is a fascinating natural countryside with newly accessible scenes of the industrial past. Distinctive regional features of old have been joined by cultural offerings of international format.

In the end, your conclusions from the Symposium, your chat with other participants should remind you of the Ruhr region.

The Ruhr is a 'multi-cultural' melting pot. This becomes visible when looking at our culinary highlights, which are served tonight. In other words one can say from German "Frikadelle" to Italian "Penne".

I thank you for your attention and wish you all interesting discussions and a fruitful Symposium.