City: Introduction and context

"ESSENIals - changing the way we act"

The successful 150-year transformation story, from a city of coal and steel to the greenest city in North Rhine-Westphalia, is a role model of structural change for many cities in Europe. The increase in the proportion of open spaces (> 54% of the municipal area), despite the increasing space requirements for housing and industry, is entirely thanks to the intelligent repurposing of disused land.

Green infrastructure is the motor for our sustainable urban development. With the largest water body renaturalisation project in Europe, after 100 years we are giving people back their River Emscher. The people’s 'ability to change' is the key to the success of this process of transformation.

Essen is a blueprint for European cities that can achieve great things under difficult budget conditions and with limited financial resources. The efficient application of European funding has made the "Green Revolution" possible in Essen, and we can impressively demonstrate this to the visitors in 2017. Tangible projects, not just planning vision.

With a population of 574,000, the City of Essen is the ninth largest city in Germany. It is located in the Federal State of North Rhine-Westphalia, at the centre of the Ruhr Metropolis (also known as the Ruhr Area), where around 5.1 million people live, the third largest conurbation in Europe after London and Paris.
Essen has excellent transportation connections within the conurbation, with roads, rails and water bodies.

Essen is also ranked third in Germany with its share of green areas, which includes many important historical parks (the Gruga Park), and also traditional recreation areas in South Essen, as well as new residential and outdoor facilities in the city centre and in the north of the city.

The municipal area of 210 km² is divided into 9 districts, with 50 neighbourhoods. The Council is the most important decision-making body in the city, and is elected by the citizens for a term of 5 years. The chairman, and simultaneously head of the administration, is Lord Mayor Reinhard Paß.

Essen looks back on 1,160 years of history, which was long characterised by high aristocratic and clerical culture.

The more recent history was determined by coal and steel. What began as surface coal-mining in the south of the city had little effect on nature and the landscape. The massive coal production through mining that began in the early 19th century, and the subsequent heavy industry, pushed aside nature in the northern half of the city until the last colliery was closed in 1986. Likewise at the start of the 19th century, Friedrich Krupp opened a cast steel factory; the name Krupp is inseparably associated with the city to this day. Since 2010, the corporation formed by the merger with Thyssen has again had its headquarters in the Krupp Belt, close to Essen city centre.

Zollverein Colliery was an active coal mine from 1847 - 1986. Today it is an industrial monument, and has been a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 2001, and the landmark of the city.
After the decline of the coal and steel industries, Essen developed during the second half of the 20th century into a services and financial centre. Alongside ThyssenKrupp AG, 9 other DAX-listed corporations have their headquarters here.

The mix of small and medium-sized enterprises and trade crafts dictates the excellent economic climate. Around 81% of all those in employment work in the services sector. The high number of jobs also brings around 140,000 commuters to the city every day. Initiativkreis Ruhr is the network of commercial companies that are sustainably changing the Ruhr Metropolis¹.

Essen is also a trade fair and congress location, a university town, shopping city, and a cultural stronghold in the Ruhr Metropolis. The Folkwang Museum and the Red Dot Design Museum offer internationally respected insights into the world of art and design.

The Aalto Theatre and the Philharmonic Hall at Saalbau are representative venues for opera, ballet and concerts. In this context, Essen was named European Capital of Culture in 2010, and thereby represented the entire Ruhr Metropolis.

This distinction generated interest in Europe, and is an expression of the ongoing structural change, as a continuation of the Emscher Park International Building Exhibition (1989-1999).

¹Source: www.i-r.de
It has been recognised that the 53 towns of the Ruhr Metropolis can only master certain challenges together.

For over 100 years, these regional partnerships have traditionally operated the sewage management and water supply systems.

In 1899, the Emschergenossenschaft was founded in Essen, becoming the first German water management association, whose main task was sewage management.

The conversion of the Emscher system will still last until 2020, with underground sewers and water body renaturalisation. With green corridors following the water body, blue/green climate corridors are being created.

The Ruhrverband (Ruhr Association) looks back on 100 years of history. Its existence made possible the construction of large dammed reservoirs and hydro dams, as well as modern wastewater treatment plants. It secures the water supply for an area with 4.6 million residents.

In recent years, additional environmental themes have been tackled through the use of regional concepts. In July 2008, the Clean Air Plan for the Ruhr Metropolis thus came into effect. Further regional approaches to climate protection in the Ruhr Metropolis will have been developed by the time of the "KlimaExpo.NRW" in 2022.

The preparation for this application led to a regional discussion of environmental quality standards based on the 12 indicators².

Over and above this, the Ruhr Metropolis is preparing an application for the IGA 2027 – "International Garden Exhibition Ruhr Metropolis 2027"³.

On 09 June 2014, Hurricane Ela caused massive damage to the City of Essen; of the city's 61,000 street trees, 20,000 were affected.

The resistance of the City of Essen could be seen from the fact that within 5 days the road network was open to traffic again, the local public transport was running again, and the schools and kindergartens were open again.

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²Source: Regional Environmental Contract / www.konzept-ruhr.de
³Source: www.bdla.de
3,500 action forces and over 4,500 citizens helped to rectify damages in the sum of 61.5 million euros.

Essen has for many years been participating in various networks. Since 1993, Essen has been a partner of the Climate Alliance. The Council passed an "Integrated Energy and Climate Concept" in 2009. This includes 133 measures, and these are pursued as a single overall process under the aegis of "klima|werk|stadt|essen" for sustainable and climate-friendly urban development. In 2010, Essen joined the "Covenant of Mayors", and was the winner of the European Energy Award in 2010 and 2013.

Further activities are conducted on a European level, e.g. in relation to membership of EUROCITIES, and through the RVR at ICLEI.

In 2013, Essen was awarded the title of "Active municipality in Europe" by the State of North Rhine-Westphalia.

To this day, not a single environmental legal proceeding has been filed against the City of Essen at the European Court of Justice.

Alongside its participation in regional processes, Essen also plans the future of the city. By passing the ESSEN.2030 strategy, the Council has created an integrative urban development process to increase the quality of life and competitiveness of the city. With the participation of the population, the economy and other stakeholders in the urban community, projects and measures are being pursued in five different fields. The key project in the "ESSEN.URBAN" activity area is the application for the title "European Green Capital".