

Riverscapes in Europe. Inspirations for the Cologne/Bonn region

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Abstract

The Rhine forms both the geographical centre of the Cologne/Bonn region as well as the focus of its people's emotional attachment to their homeland. This stretch of river – between the rhine-romantic Bad Honnef in the south and Leverkusen with its huge chemical plants in the north – is the linking element and showcase for the regions variety and riches.

But for a long time, the cities on the Rhine neglected their relationship with the river to which they owed their existence in the first place. Still an enormous potential for design lies untapped along the 142 kilometre stretch of riverbank. Mighty industries, roads and railroad tracks, single architectural highlights but also nondescript settlements with their backs to the river bank define the waterfront. Green banks and landscape areas are clearly second to the urbanised areas.

But within the last decade the Rhine has been rediscovered in the Cologne/Bonn region. And today there are even more hopeful signs that the widespread reorientation and reconnection of cities and communities to their riverbanks will be successful: The Regionale 2010 Projects.

Key Words: Rhine, Cologne/Bonn region, Regionale 2010 Projects, Tourism, Public Spaces, Flood protection

Report

1. Riverscapes in Europe – Inspirations for the Cologne/Bonn region

The Rhine forms both the geographical centre of the Cologne/Bonn region as well as the focus of its people's emotional attachment to their homeland. People living there identify themselves as 'Rhinelanders,' an expression of their close connection to the qualities associated with the region they call home. This stretch of river – between the rhine-romantic Bad Honnef in the south and Leverkusen with its huge chemical plants in the north – is the linking element and showcase for the regions variety and riches. The urban centre's Cologne and the former German capital Bonn as well as the smaller communities on the Rhine are popular residential areas with a growing population – recent figures show a population of over 1.6 million – and a bustling business location.

Figure 1. The Neuland Park: a former dumpsite in Leverkusen (Landesgartenschau Leverkusen gGmbh)



But for a long time, the cities on the Rhine neglected their relationship with the river to which they owed their existence in the first place. Still an enormous potential for design lies untapped along the 142 kilometre stretch of riverbank. Mighty industries, roads and railroad tracks, single architectural highlights but also nondescript settlements with their backs to the river bank define the waterfront. Green banks and landscape areas are clearly second to the urbanised areas. And the Rhine's urban straightjacket is also regularly breached by flooding. For that reasons the river provides not only a scenic backdrop, it also offers both a potential and a challenge.

Figure 2. The Rheinau Harbour, Cologne (Regionale 2010 Agentur, Cologne)



But within the last decade the Rhine has been rediscovered in the Cologne/Bonn region. Projects like the Cologne 'Rheinauhafen' (Rheinau Harbor) with its spectacular 'crane houses', the reconfigured trade fair halls on the right bank in Cologne, the 'recoding' of the Bonn cement factory ('Bonn Visio') in terms of content and architecture, and the 'Neuland-Park' on a former chemical dump site in Leverkusen all document a changing attitude to this stretch of river. And today there are even more hopeful signs that the widespread reorientation and reconnection of cities and communities to their riverbanks will be successful: The Regionale 2010 Projects.

Figure 3. The Rheinau Harbou, Cologne (Regionale 2010 Agentur, Cologne)



2. The Regionale 2010 Projects – Boulevards, New Accesses and Green Corridors

The Regionale 2010 is a regional development programme set up by the State of North Rhine-Westphalia. As part of the scheme, the State Government provides special support for projects in the Cologne/Bonn area that have a surplus for the region. In the years 2010 and 2011 the results of these efforts are presented to the broad public (www.regionale2010.de).

The specific Regionale 2010 projects along the Rhine show the current efforts to change the built image of the region along its river and to reconnect the people with the river at different scales. Although they differ in scale and function they serve one common goal: All of them attempt to bring the Rhinelander's back to their river by the means of urban planning and landscape architecture. They are taking up this thread in proposing exemplary, high-quality urban and rural Rhine-related structural and other development projects. The chosen examples illustrate this approach.

Figure 4. Bonner Bogen: a synthesis of old and new (Regionale 2010 Agentur, Cologne)



Tourism, Recreation, Parks and Landscapes

Since the 18th century, the town of Königswinter and the Siebengebirge mountain range have attracted thousands of tourists every year. But nowadays the quality of its tourist attractions no longer matches Königswinter's cultural and historical significance. The project 'Overall Outlook for Königswinter and the Drachenfels' deals with the spatial development and revitalization of the international tourist location in a corridor between the Rhine and the peak of the 'Dragon's Rock' as the icon of Rhine Romanticism.

Figure 5. View from the Drachenfels plateau over the Rhine (Regionale 2010 Agentur, Cologne)

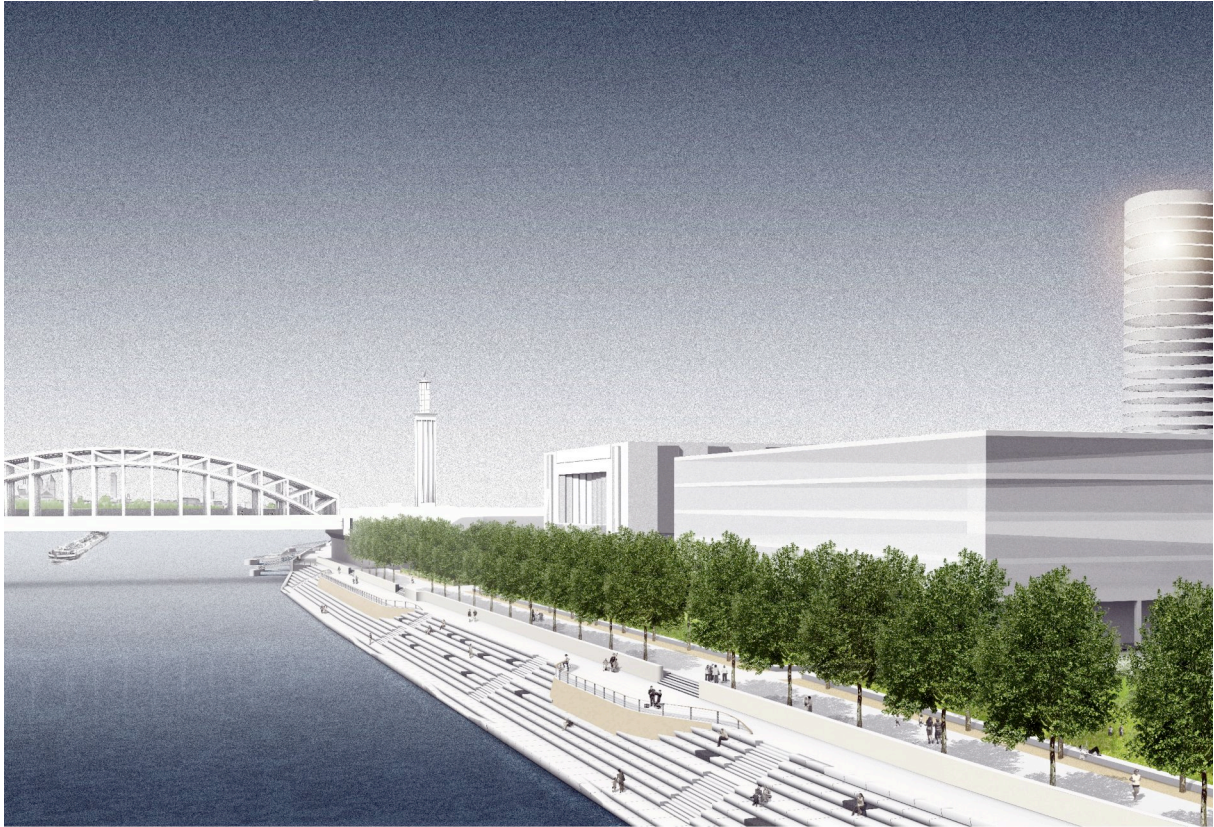


Five communities in the district Rhine-Sieg have joined forces with Bonn to establish a cross-river network of green open spaces, the ‘so-called ‘Grünes C’, by redefining the borders between settlements and connecting open countryside on both sides of the Rhine by a metaphoric bridge at the redesigned Mondorf ferry pier. As part of a regional ‘Masterplan green’ planning is to safeguard and sustain qualitative open spaces in the field of tension between urban expansion, development on the outskirts, agricultural use, local recreation as well as landscape conservation.

Public Spaces and New Accesses

Downstream in Cologne, the project ‘Urban Development on Both Sides of the Rhine’ aims for an upgrading of the riverside. On the left-hand side, the module ‘Archeological Zone’ is an underground archeological museum to preserve a heritage of Cologne’s over two millennia of urban history. On the right-hand side, next to the trade fair complex and the city, the winning design from Planorama, Berlin envisages a Rhineboulevard. The centre piece between Hohenzollern and Deutz Bridges is to be taken up by a 500 metre wide flight of stairs and a tree-lined avenue opposite Cologne’s historic city centre.

Figure 6. Rheinboulevard (Planorama Landschaftsarchitektur)



Flood protection and Rhine Conferences

Furthermore the Regionale founded the interdisciplinary ‘Centre of Excellence for Flood Management (HKC) in Cologne as an international platform to connect science and practice in the field of integrated flood management (www.hkc-koeln.de). Another successful platform for knowledge transfer within the region concerning rhine related topics - e.g. tourism, logistics or flood protection - is the yearly Rhine Conference that attracts up to several hundred participants.

‘Urban space along the Rhine’ – Learning from good examples

Besides the local initiatives and the regional exchange platforms the project ‘Urban space along the Rhine’ – in cooperation between the Montag Stiftung Urbane Räume (Bonn) and the Regionale 2010 – analysed and determined the qualities and talents along the Rhine in the Cologne/Bonn region. And mainly by taking an in-depth look at international reference projects, the project provided impetus for a high-quality approach to the river landscape and its waterside, and also wanted to stimulate a conscious attitude within the region towards the Rhine.

Figure 7. Land Art: impression form the Millinger Waard (Montag Stiftung Urbane Raume, Bonn)



The selected European models of smart design and innovative strategies make a contribution to the wide ranging debate about planning for rivers and riverscapes not only in the Cologne/Bonn region. They could serve as models for other cities and regions. Good examples from afar had to fit some criteria, i.e.:

- Architectures and landscaped areas should enter into dialogue with, include concrete references to and ‘face’ the river.
- Buildings and structures should set standards in terms of aesthetic design and flood resistance, but also regarding planning procedural quality and new forms of cooperation. To enhance the attraction of river landscapes in the long-term and to implement ambitious plans and concepts, careful planning of the implementation process, innovative organization models and alternative forms of financing are necessary.
- Urban designs should create the preconditions for a heterogeneous mix of functions which fills any area with life, as does a combination of old and new.
- Embankments in cities and in the countryside should be publicly accessible, and communities and planners should deal creatively and productively with the many demands made on riverbank locations.
- Open spaces should combine the requirements of both human recreation and nature conservation in exemplary fashion and deal creatively with this dual function of riverside floodwater retention areas.

The following presented projects are a small sample from a wide range of nearly one hundred projects - that fit these criteria set - summarized in the sourcebook ‘Riverscapes’, published by Birkhäuser in 2008.

Art Museum Lentos in Linz, Austria

With the Museum, the city of Linz succeeded in creating an ‘architectural exclamation mark’ overlooking the Danube and in strengthening its relationship with the river. With its fully glazed façade it is a new architectural mirror for both, the city and the riverscape. A 60 x 6.5-meter facade opening forms a picture frame and is like a loggia overlooking the Danube and the landscape panorama. Architectural quality was coupled in exemplary fashion with flood control technology and special technical features, e.g. the air-conditioning chillers are operated with Danube water (www.lentos.at).

Figure 8-9. The Art Museum Lentos in Linz (Montag Stiftung Urbane Raume, Bonn)



Floodproof arbour in Klosterneuburg, Austria

The following example presents a rather unusual instance of planning, but is illustrative of a creative way in which a design solution can be used to deal with flooding. Because of annual flooding, the predecessor model of this arbour in a beach community had become so damaged that a new flood-proof construction was erected in its place in the form of a house on stilts. The ‘Max35’ named arbour (DREER2 architects) now stands on a 2.6 metre water-impermeable concrete core which is used as a utility and storage room, and minimizes the risk of sudden flooding of the living area. The first floor also affords an unimpeded view over the water (www.dreer2.at).

Figure 10. Flood-proof arbour Max 35 designed by Dreer2 Architects



Rhine riverside paths and event allocation plan in Basle, Basle-Stadt and –Landschaft Canton, Switzerland

Good accessibility to the river bank helps engender close interlinking between the public life of a town with its “home river” and strengthens the sense of identification experienced by residents with the river. Even simply designed changes on a minor scale or clarification of access issues can exert a major impact in this context. In Basle, residents and visitors alike are afforded the opportunity to approach the river in many different ways: alongside stone steps, benches and ferry crossings, other features such as Rhine bathing houses or a Kneipp pool afford different approach opportunities which allow the river to be experienced as a publicly accessible free space (www.basel.ch). Another pragmatic example from the Basel-Landschaft Canton illustrates that riverside paths do not necessarily have to stop short at the fences and gates which surround industrial plants. In this case, an official cycle and pedestrian path crosses the actively used Rhine harbour. Signs indicate alternative routes and point out that the harbour area is entered at the risk of the individual. Finally the path traverses the grounds of a chemical firm too, offering unusual views of the industrial backdrop.

Figure 11. Popular public spaces along the Rhine in Basle (Montag Stiftung Urbane Raume, Boon)



In a bid to reconcile conflicting user interests, for example between those seeking relaxation and recuperation, those attending events and residents along the river banks, the Basel-Stadt Canton has succeeded in introducing an Internet-supported instrument to generate allocation plans for the management of public spaces in Basle. These plans comprise a situation plan, information about allocation rights, an allocation plan and a system of quotas. In the interests of considerate planning for both residents and event organizers, individual agreements have been reached for the highly frequented sections of the Rhine bank regarding the number and type of events, which are renegotiated with the residents every year (www.allmend.bs.ch/eventplaetze).

Speke Garston Coastal Reserve, Liverpool, Great Britain

An innovative example of innovative financing strategies was found in the ‘Speke Garston Coastal Reserve’ along the banks of the Mersey in Liverpool. Here, the initiators of the Mersey Basin Campaign succeeded in gaining ‘Peel Holding’, the private owner of a derelict waterfront site which also markets an adjacent industrial estate, as a cooperative partner in the creation of a public riverbank park, thus creating a win-win situation: The regenerated Coastal Reserve enhances the attraction for both residents and newly settled businesses, and at the same time improves the marketing situation for the industrial estate (www.merseybasin.org.uk).

Dordrecht water bus, The Netherlands

The water bus, a modern catamaran, has been operating on three routes since 1999 with several stops between Erasmusbrug Rotterdam and the Dordrecht city centre at half hourly intervals. The water bus is integrated into the regular land public transport network, and its fast travel times provide a real alternative to car travel for commuters and trippers in the region. Bicycles and motor bikes are transported free of charge. Both in functional and design terms, the ferry berths provide node and orientation points which successfully address a wide variety of requirements (www.waterbus.nl).

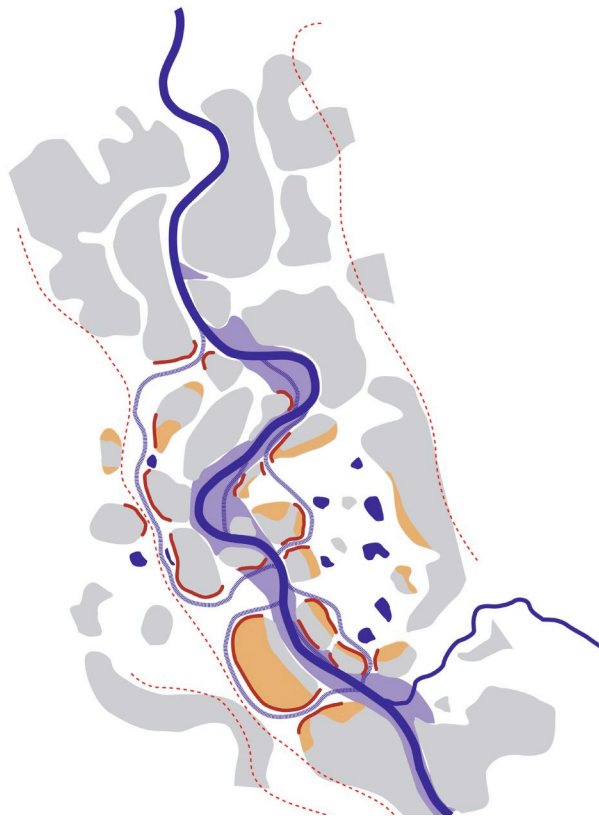
Naturpark De Gelderse Poort, Germany/The Netherlands

In the ‘De Gelderse Poort’ on the Dutch-German border, ideas were gleaned for new ways of dealing with green spaces along the river which bring together flood defences, nature conservation, agriculture and leisure uses through controlled accessibility and a well-balanced concept of priority spaces in successful interaction. The deliberately engineered combination of nature on the river and cultural landscape permits the measures undertaken to provide a dual benefit and at the same time act as a magnet to the region. De Gelderse Poort project is a part of the master development plan outlined under the Dutch land use regulation “Ruimte voor de Rivier” (space for the river).

3. Essence and outlook. Development of a regional network

As well as providing motivating impetus, the inspirations from afar also expose the need for the region to develop its own future ideas to address its specific and very individual needs. Simply importing knowledge and ideas does not go far enough in this context. It is not possible to find tailor-made solutions elsewhere to every planning question and challenge concerning the Rhine. Therefore a Design Workshop gave the first impulses for developing visions for the medium-term perspective for ‘Urban Riverscapes on the Rhine’. One group addressed the entire project region and produced an informative image of the river as a subject with its own identity. Against the background of changing climatic conditions, the Rhine is due to assume a new role as the formative force in this region between low- and high water events.

Figure 12. Blue-Green Corridors and building potential along the “Branched-out-Rhine”



Taken together, the Regionale 2010 projects and the described research results are more than individual developments added up. They present a future-oriented picture of this particular Rhine region. In the coming years, it will be important to follow these exemplary projects with further initiatives in order to foster the joint responsibility for and attitude towards the region among the people who live on and near ‘their Rhine’. The regional authorities have already taken the next step towards this goal by founding the ‘Rhine Working Group’ as a subcommittee of the registered association ‘Region Köln/Bonn e. V.’. The group aims to continue cooperating with different regional players in planning and implementing developments in the region, based on shared quality standards. Shortly the principle of knowledge transfer between the Cologne/Bonn region and other regions is to be continued. In November the region invites all Rhine regions from the source in the Alpes to the mouth in the Netherlands to join the first international Rhine Conference and -Expo in Bonn (www.rheinkonferenz2010.de).

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This text is based on the following publication:

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