

GOOD GOVERNANCE, STRATEGIC THINKING AND HEALTHY TRUST - framework requirements for thriving CCI in industrial regions.

How to shape an industrial region through culture and creativity: FERROPOLIS interacting with political and administrative strategies

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FERROPOLIS - the city of iron - was founded 25 years ago. Since then it was developed into a place of industrial culture, a place of active engagement with the age of fossil energy production and the climate impacts, and especially with lignite mining with all its transformations of the landscape. And above all, FERROPOLIS has become one of the most important European open air-venues in these 25 years, which hosts such famous music-festivals like Melt! or Splash, but also some sports events like a triathlon and one race of European DriftMasters-Championship, a car-racing event.

The idea for FERROPOLIS was created at the Bauhaus Dessau. There, in the 1990s, its own workshop, called "Werkstatt Industrielles Gartenreich", offered people and opportunities to come up with forward-looking concepts for the development of the region in transition after the unification of the two parts of Germany with their different political and economic systems.

And that is probably the most important task for cultural and creative projects. Without any direct economic pressure to exploit the project, the partners can think further and more openly than is possible in the daily grind.

Five large opencast mining machines were placed around an arena from the center of the peninsula FERROPOLIS. This peninsula in Lake Gremmin is the relic of the Golpa-Nord open-cast lignite mine.



Is FERROPOLIS a solitaire or is it now anchored in a larger cultural and creative landscape as a source of inspiration?

From the beginning, FERROPOLIS was one project among many in a cultural strategy for the entire region. Not all projects have performed equally well. In FERROPOLIS it was possible to give the cultural strategy an economic perspective at an early stage. We were lucky because since the late 1990s the need for open-air locations has grown rapidly. So, we were able to develop the industrial heritage based on a cultural dynamic, namely the dynamic in the cultural industry, the event industry and the live entertainment sector.

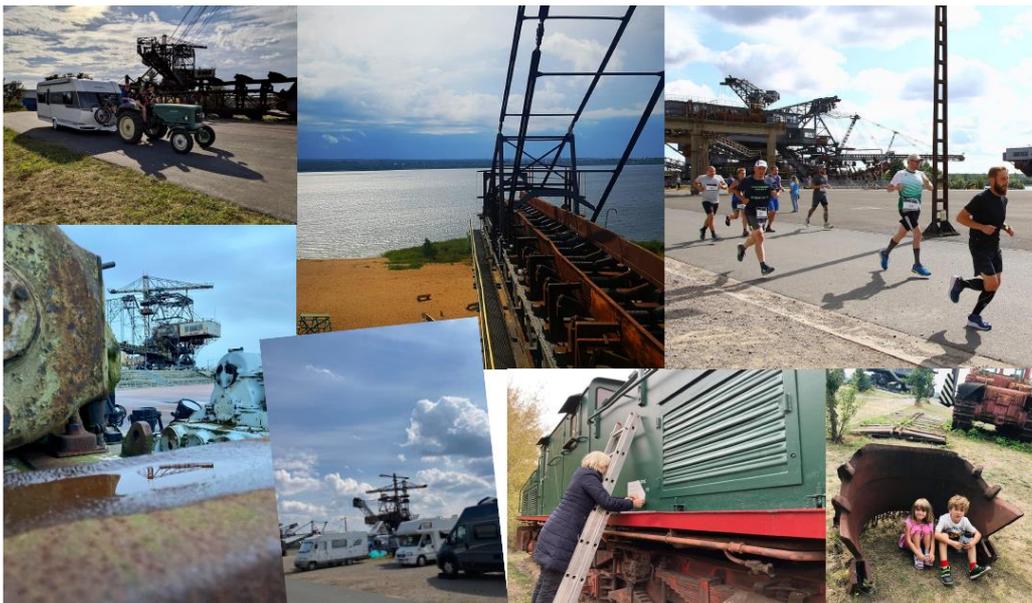
But we try not to rely on one sector. We are an event location, but also a museum. More than 50,000 visitors a year visit us as a museum. FERROPOLIS also is a school laboratory: an extracurricular learning space. We try to match our name "city" of iron and to be more than an event location. So, we must stay flexible - and this year we transformed into a pop-up campsite overnight, because the festivals were not allowed due to the corona pandemic.

As a cultural and creative place, has FERROPOLIS achieved economic dynamism and social development outside of itself?

We have had checked this question scientifically. A doctoral thesis from 2012 calculated: every major festival on FERROPOLIS generates indirect profitability of 1.4 million EUR. In other words, sales that are not made on the festival site, but benefit tourism, gastronomy, supermarkets, and petrol stations in the area. That amounts to approx. 5 million EUR a year from the cultural industry for regional development.

But non-monetary effects can also be seen. I see this in my role on the board of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Halle-Dessau. There, the voice of the cultural industry and tourism is becoming increasingly important. Especially because culture and tourism are a kind of barometer for the quality of life in a region. And the more the European regions compete for heads, i.e. for good and qualified employees and start-ups, the more important the so-called "soft location factors" become.

This cultural factor is not only directly and indirectly important for economic development, but it also helps to set the course and redefine goals. The energy transition, for example, as many people are now aware, is by far not just a technological, but above all a social movement towards greater participation. The path from consumer to prosumer is above all a cultural change.



What role does the current industrial region around you and its transformation play in your activities?

We are a place of identity for the entire region and its industrial history. Mining, for which the large open-cast mine excavators stand, was the basis for all developments there in the 20th century. The chemical industry was based on coal chemistry, and of course on the enormous energy that was necessary for the chemical processes.

Preserving the excavators is therefore also an expression of regional pride. Many are currently feeling a devaluation of their work performance, their professional and social identity. The decision was made to end the brown coal era. But that does not mean that this age was not significant and essential for the development of the region.

Transformation can only succeed if one recognizes the past. That is why we celebrate traditional events like Miner's Day at FERROPOLIS and ask contemporary witnesses to tell their stories.

Some of these narratives lead to cultural translations. This is how, for example, the larger-than-life portraits of the miners were created, the street art project "Traces". And next year a theatre company traveling by train will translate these mining stories into a play. The premiere should be on FERROPOLIS.

In addition to the identity from the past, we are primarily concerned with shaping the future. I want to use an example to explain why places of culture are particularly suitable for this:

A few kilometres from FERROPOLIS is the former Zschornowitz lignite power plant. A hundred years ago, it was the world's largest lignite power plant at the time. Although it made world history, only relics of this power plant can be seen today, and these have been closed for several years.

We tried for a long time to include the power plant as well as the opencast mine in our industrial tourism offer. Without success. But now, two years ago, there was a dinner for the occasion of the melt! Festival, to which some scientists from the region were invited, for example from the Fraunhofer Institute in Halle/Saale. We started a conversation, talked about the Zschornowitz power plant - and a few weeks later, during a visit to the power plant, the plan arose to establish a center for research into carbon there. Because carbon is not just CO₂ - we are all carbon beings. And carbon will have a great future for batteries, as an innovative construction material, and for

many other applications. But just no longer as an energy resource for combustion. We must also try to remove CO₂ from the atmosphere again. The "Forum Rathenau", the name of this project in the middle of rural areas, should also research and experiment on these questions.

So it was, on the one hand, the cultural occasion and, on the other, the cultural promise of a new meaning for rural areas with a strong message that made this development possible. We are curious to see how far we will come. Science is curious about new tasks and new workspaces, open spaces, and new freedoms for the production of knowledge and ideas directly at the symbolic places of transformation. Many of you have made similar experiences.

The important thing is industrial culture becomes stronger through partnerships - to tourism, to event culture like at FERROPOLIS, to science, as the example of the Zschornowitz power plant and other offers of the Rathenau Forum in Bitterfeld show. The partners of the Forum Rathenau therefore not only include scientific institutions such as Fraunhofer, but also commercial enterprises. The head of the large chemical park in Bitterfeld is a board member of the Forum Rathenau. And start-ups like Black Magic, a subsidiary of the Estonian Skeleton Group, with their production of curved graphene for supercapacitors, are a very good example of what the future of the element carbon will offer.



What external, regional strategic framework conditions would be needed to be able to work better as a creative source of inspiration in the region?

Over the years, we have accompanied a large number of regional development plans, tourism master plans, and other strategies for rural areas, often within the framework of EU LEADER processes, or have been the subject of these concepts. In addition, we were able to convince students several times to write their bachelor's or master's thesis on FERROPOLIS development, sometimes with the incentive of a festival ticket. The work of the students has often helped to find contemporary future perspectives and to review one's own goals because this time is very fast-moving.

Looking back, I can say: the best regional strategies are developed in a multidisciplinary manner. To be successful, these strategies require both short-term and long-term goals that must be thought of in context. And here it often helps if immediate implementations, tests, and experiments start in the strategy development phase. For example, with Maker for Humanity, we built an island in a very specific way, i.e. hands on, and at the same time thought about long-term climate strategies and possible solutions - and about very specific perspectives for Lake Gremmin.

Such experimentally designed workshops with clear objectives bring the potential of the creative industry to the best advantage. Today there is a lot of talk about living labs. In the best sense of the word, these offer the greatest opportunity to develop the future together: With partners from business, from industry, with cultural workers, with politics and citizens.

I see for example Chemnitz's successful application as European Capital of Culture as such an opportunity. Also, as an opportunity for a new relevance of industrial culture.

More info: <https://www.ferropolis.de/>

Pictures taken from presentation Thies Schröder at Midterm event.