Cybercity Ruhrstadt 2010 – How Do We Want to Live?

For this project on the European Capital of Culture 2010, children and young people from different cities and communities in the Ruhrgebiet are recreating their city as a "city of the future" in model form.

The new centre of the model city is being designed by students, artists, architects, designers and urban planners.

"I did a picture of the canal bridge because I think it's a good place to relax." Gerrit stands in front of Classes 6a and 6b at Hauptschule Karnap and introduces his favourite place. An eleven year-old child looking for relaxation. We didn't expect that.

It will not be the only surprise. We, my colleague Christina Smith and myself, are right at the start of the *Cybercity Ruhrstadt 2010* project. Here, in the social hotspot of Essen-Karnap, the first *Cybercity* in the Ruhrgebiet will be created. One of many, which will ultimately represent the entire region.

CybercityKarnap – Where do we actually live? What do we want to change?

Today we are at school for the second time. The first part of the *CybercityKarnap* project is all about "Where do we live?". In the last lesson we asked the students to do pictures of their favourite places and to describe why they feel comfortable there. Furthermore, the students had to find out approximately when these places and buildings came into existence. On the basis of these places we will briefly trace the history of Karnap and the region. Like Gerrit, some of his fellow students also like nature: their favourite places are parks, meadows and even the Rhine-Herne-Canal. Many of the green spaces here in the north of Essen were created in the process of structural change. A good starting point from which to address this important current phase in the history of the Ruhrgebiet. And also to find out what was actually here previously, before it became so beautifully green. Baffled silence. The students are confused by the term industrialisation. But out of 37 students, only two even know what a colliery is.

Most of Year 6 distance themselves from the "nature lovers". Their favourite places are new: call shops, internet cafés and the Allee Center, a large shopping centre in the local area. We are amazed again.

Suddenly a heated discussion flares up. Christoph complains that he and his friends are repeatedly thrown out of their favourite place, a brownfield site. It quickly becomes clear: apart from the skate park on the Rhine-Herne-Canal, there are no places for children and young people in Karnap. That brings us straight to the next question: so how do the students want to live? What do they want to change? There is no swimming pool in Karnap. A roof garden with a swimming pool is the students' first idea. It is to be built on the school's flat roof. There is no place of worship for the Muslims here. Aïcha would like a mosque. There is also no cinema any more, the students want a riverside cinema, in the middle of the canal. And a beach. And lots more.

In the next lesson, the children head off with their sketchpads to get to know their district properly. Starting at the historic working-class "Mathias-Stinnes" housing estate they head for the "Seilscheibe" industrial monument and from there to the Rhine-Herne Canal. The students are taking

the matter very seriously. They inspect closely, create a picture for themselves, put it all down on paper.

The construction of *CybercityKarnap*

Then the construction of the models begins. *CybercityKarnap* is created in group work from the most diverse materials such as wood, polystyrene, cardboard, foam and wallpaper.

Orhan, a Turkish boy, is desperate to build the Protestant church that he likes very much. Together with Gerrit he gets down to work immediately. Next to the Christian place of worship in the "Karnap of the future" will be the mosque. Aïcha cautiously begins planning straight away. "It will be a mosque for women," declares the schoolgirl. Other children are unsure at first, they don't know how they are supposed to implement their ideas. But gradually the barriers come down and building progresses well. A particular highlight for all children is the construction of the robot together with media artist Graham Smith. Boys as well as girls show a great interest in the technical background and are very proud when the robot is finished and functioning at the end of the project day. They christen him "Cowboy".

"The practical part, building the models and the robot, was what the children liked best. Hauptschule students just struggle with the theory. But despite this they tried very hard and profited from it," Christiana Said, the class teacher of 6b, praises the students.

CybercityKarnap at Zeche Zollverein

A cowboy hat purrs quietly through an urban landscape made up of churches, houses and rivers. It's "Cowboy", the robot from Karnap. People stand at the edge of this landscape and watch him, a little disbelieving but fascinated. After a little while, "Cowboy" meets "Sandy", the video robot belonging to Class 5b of Gesamtschule Süd in Essen. The second *Cybercity* was created in Essen-Süd. Today the socially deprived north of Essen and the rich south are being presented together at the Zeche Zollverein world heritage site.

Virtual *Cybercity*

In the final part of the project, the children and young people also reconstruct their visions of the future virtually. Prof. Harald Gatermann, Professor of Architecture at Bochum University, is teaching participating students the "Sketch Up" CAD program. "The children were incredibly proud of what they have built. They have taken a real spark of enthusiasm on board. For me the strengths of the project as a whole are that children are made aware of how the environment is planned at an early age, and precisely because of this they appreciate the surroundings more intensively and consciously. Normally that does not happen in school at all," reports the Professor about his experiences with the *Cybercity Ruhrstadt 2010* project.

The core of *Cybercity Ruhrstadt*

While designing the new centre of the *Cybercity Ruhrstadt*, the artists will firstly deal with the region and its specific features. But secondly they will also reflect the central themes of human coexistence: the influence of technology, changes in the environment, demographic change and life in virtual worlds. The builders of the *Cybercities* draw on ultra-modern technical potential to incorporate their visions, thoughts, fears, desires and experiences into the *Cybercity*.

What's left?

In 2010 the different visions of the future submitted by children and young people, artists, planners and designers will be presented in a joint exhibition. *Cybercity Ruhrstadt*, *CybercityIstanbul* and *CybercityPécs* are to be connected with each other via the internet and by means of a video conference. In this way visitors can also find out about the other Cybercities, and converse with their builders and visitors.

Above and beyond the presentation in a museum context and on the internet, the project will also give inspiration for a future design of the region: "My task will be to enable urban planners, architects and communal decision-makers to put to use what is being compiled with so much commitment during the project," explains urban researcher Leo Lagos.

The *Cybercity principle*

A *Cybercity* always consists of a real three-dimensional model, a remote-controlled video robot and a screen or TV monitor. The video robot travels through the model. The objects that it sees through its camera eye are displayed on the screen. It can be controlled at the location or via the internet. People who guide the robot through the model are able to stroll through artificial streets, look at houses and squares, and even enter one or two buildings in this way. The *Cybercity principle* was invented by Canadian media artist Graham Smith.

Anja Bardey
is a journalist and film maker. Together with Graham T. Smith and Christina Smith they make up the Cybercity Ruhr Team.

Translation: Jo Beckett
Copyright: Goethe-Institut, Online-Redaktion

Any questions about this article? Please write to us!
✉ *online-redaktion@goethe.de*
August 2007

Related links

Cybercity Ruhr homepage   🇩🇪
http://www.cybercityruhr.com/

Homepage for the *Zeitreise Ruhr* project by Prof. Gatermann   🇩🇪
http://www.zeitreise-ruhr.de/

Homepage for the European Capital of Culture 2010   🇩🇪 🇬🇧
http://en.kulturhauptstadt-europas.de/start.php