

## rivers of knowledge bulletin #2, Feb 2010

*»Snow has lifted the ban. Time's dictate was annihilated.  
Landscape resembles a white board. Wiped out.«*

Durs Grünbein, »Of snow, Descartes in Germany,« 2003

Our ship is afloat. Teams of specialist have started their work. The information on our University project has been edited and sent to the print shop for this years schedule of lectures. Now we are heading to fix the locations for our projects. Spotting places where to install our climate information-stations is a task in itself. Pragmatic, political, educational, touristic, economic aspects are thoroughly to be considered, as Mrs Münster-Voswinkel and I visit, discuss and analyze those spots on the riverfront. And yet there is something else about rivers. As you run around in a hectic mood with your plans and project in mind, that's when they start influencing you on a subconscious level.





You physically feel the open space, now in winter when snow turns the landscape into something more abstract. Rivers do create open spaces. For you who might live close to the waterfront of a Lake, the Sea or the Ocean, this might not come as surprise. For us who live beneath mountains, curvy, green forests and in the very centres of cities, this wide and flat space might contain more, e.g. a pacifying atmosphere.



River landscapes, *riverscapes*, are what we deal with in this project - cultivated landscapes, urban environments and in the middle of it - this silent, old and powerful mass of moving water, sediments, plants, animals, scarcely spotted with some vehicles, boats, vessels, ferries.

The river Main and its surrounding is our white canvas, the material we strive to work with in order to inform others. So how can we dare to influence this wonderful space / interfere with nature? How can we deal with, you might say, polluting these spaces by adding more objects alien to the place, with texts, benches, maybe solar panels and so on?

Well, our legitimization lies in the ongoing repression of these ecological systems by a reasonable number of our population, of politicians and industrialists. Thus we do not only have the right, yes, we do have the obligation to inform about rivers! And, what in this



context is nature? Where is the line between natural and cultural space? We are obliged to speak about how wonderful rivers are, we do have to proclaim which complex function in natural cycles they have, how much they are affected by climate change and degradation for innumerable reasons.

It is true that we do have to keep in mind that we are affecting the riverscapes by putting up even more things, objects, information material. But we need to go right there, keeping in mind how badly rivers around the world are treated, how polluted and reeking River Main itself was until people started to clean the sewage from the 60s on; and how fragile this improvement is. Just bring to your mind the fact that most of chemical industries with toxic substances beyond imagination are located right on the riversides, on riverbanks, river islands.



In January and early February we started working in a specialized group focussing on scientific evidence on the impact of climate change on our chosen rivers: Amazon, Indus, , Markarfljót, Okavango, Kızılırmak, Tajo, Yukon, Daugava and Main River. Considering this we dove deep into IPCC's databases, got in touch with scientists and institutions who work on climate change or specifically on these rivers.



Some basic insights like general rise of spring water levels in rivers fed by glaciers since decades, and development of extreme droughts in the Amazons help to understand more specific, sometimes almost unperceivable changes in domestic contexts.

That's adding to our information pool. Umweltamt Offenbach is hosting these meetings and they are contributing their knowledge on a broad scale: Mrs Dr. Sander, Mrs Habelt, Mrs Swoboda, Mr. Weyh in co-operation with Mrs Schleißner of Mühlheim and Mr Schaab of Kelsterbach are driving this forward, while Mrs Schwarz and Mr Henke of Frankfurt Rhein Main Region's Planning Authority (Planungsverband Ballungsraum Frankfurt/Rhein-Main) helped to connect us to a series of international partners and institutions from their EU-networks.

It feels really good to work in a team like this.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads 'Bertsch'.

Prof. Georg-Christof Bertsch  
Frankfurt, Feb 23<sup>st</sup> 2010