

50 years of Exhibition Centre in Stockum – a milestone in Düsseldorf's urban development



For exactly 50 years now trade fairs in Düsseldorf have been held in Stockum at an Exhibition Centre designed in line with the latest findings in the events business. When commissioned in September 1971, the Düsseldorf premises were considered Europe's most state-of-the-art and trendsetting trade fair centre. For the city of Düsseldorf the new building meant a crucial step towards an exhibition marketplace with a worldwide reputation.

When the doors of the plastics and rubber fair "K" closed on the evening of 23 September 1971, the new Düsseldorf Exhibition Centre in Stockum had completed its first week of operation passing the test with flying colours. At the new Exhibition Centre the Düsseldorf trade fairs were able to grow as desired by the exhibiting industries. This was a crucial prerequisite for the following success story of Messe Düsseldorf, then still called Nordwestdeutsche Ausstellungs-Gesellschaft (NOWEA).

"Here in Stockum NOWEA managed to grow our trade fairs into the global No. 1 events we now have. This new Exhibition Centre not only offered substantially more room than the old halls on Fischerstraße. When developing the site planners also saw to optimal transport connections and apart from this the concept of the fairgrounds was unique in Europe and therefore garnered acclaim far beyond Düsseldorf," explains Wolfram N. Diener, President & CEO of Messe Düsseldorf.

"Düsseldorf's reputation the world over was characterised by the Messe and until this very day Messe Düsseldorf has an immense economic significance for our city and the entire region," adds Dr. Stephan Keller, Lord Mayor of the state capital Düsseldorf and Chairman of the Supervisory Board of Messe Düsseldorf, on the occasion of the anniversary. "Commenting on the commissioning the then Lord Mayor Willi Becker said 'The new Exhibition Centre will prove an asset to both the city and its citizens.'" He was right. The Messe not only contributes to the international atmosphere that makes Düsseldorf so special but also generates substantial trade-fair induced sales that were boosted decisively by the construction of the new premises: in 1967 sales amounted to about DM 100 million annually according to an analysis of the Gesellschaft für Marktforschung (GfM). As the new premises were commissioned this sum went up to approx. DM 170m. Today, the so-called diversions return factor stands at 6.16. This means every Euro spent at the trade fair generates EUR 6.16 turnover within the region of Düsseldorf. In top years such as 2016 our city benefits from up to EUR 2.7 billion trade-fair induced sales."

Move to Stockum secured the continuation of the Düsseldorf trade fair trade tradition

In Düsseldorf trade fairs and exhibitions look back on a long tradition reaching back to the first commercial showcase in 1811. In the early 20th century the fairgrounds were located at the present Ehrenhof premises on the Rhine, after World War II on Fischerstraße. This is also where the first trade fairs were held that the newly established “Nordwestdeutsche Ausstellungs-Gesellschaft” (North Western German Exhibition Society) focused on rather than the big industry showcases organised so far – the right strategy as already became clear during the first years of business. Demand from exhibiting industries was so high that the Düsseldorf fairgrounds could not keep up with exhibitors’ requests – especially at the important world’s No. 1 trade fairs drupa, K and interpack. At K 1967 20% of exhibitor demand went unsatisfied due to lack of space. When the associations threatened to migrate to other cities, the city council was compelled to act to retain the competitiveness of the Düsseldorf trade fair location.

On 20 September 1968, following careful considerations, the city council unanimously decided to relocate the fairgrounds to Stockum. A year later the foundation stone was laid for the new Exhibition Centre on 26 August 1969. In just under two years the core of the Exhibition Centre as we know it today was erected at the northern city limits. In the first expansion stage the premises had 108,000 m² of useful hall space in 12 halls (compared to 65,000 m² on Fischerstraße). 20 August 1971 saw Düsseldorf’s Lord Mayor officially hand over the new Exhibition Centre to NOWEA. What followed were two very well attended days of an “open house for interested citizens”.

The construction of the Exhibition Centre was guided by the principle that still governs all construction projects of Messe Düsseldorf: the optimisation of the quality customer experience as well as the consistent orientation of the infrastructure towards the needs of exhibiting companies and visitors. The brief for architect Heinz Wilke was to “provide the modern Düsseldorf trade fair and exhibition concept with a suitable space and ‘packaging’, so to speak,” as special-interest magazine m+a report phrased it in its special edition on commissioning the Centre. It was important for the Exhibition Centre to be designed as flexible and neutral as possible because Düsseldorf’s portfolio of leading trade fairs already included topics as diverse as fashion and foundry technology back then.

Floor-level, easy access to all halls were just as important as prerequisites as heavy load-bearing floors and the underground supply of media to stands. Next to the technical supply the conception also took the ranges of services and supplies for customers into consideration from the outset. This is why the halls were arranged in an easy-to-manage circular array and acrylic glass covered pedestrian bridges connecting the halls at a height of five metres created premises where everything is in easy reach. These “tubes” with a total length of 1,000 m so characteristic of the Düsseldorf Exhibition Centre were a genuine USP with Europe’s longest walkways at the time. The concept of the premises also included restaurants with a total of 5,000 seats and offices for such authorities as police, customs and fire brigade as well as service providers like post, forwarding and cleaning services, pharmacy and banks and even an indoor pool. The ultra-modern “lecture centre”, CCD Süd, was then situated right next to the main restaurant and the banks of the Rhine so that smaller trade fairs could be held in parallel with lecturing events. “With its exemplary, well thought-out overall concept the Exhibition Centre in Stockum set new

standards in terms of architecture, technology, infrastructure and service. It rightly served as a blueprint for numerous exhibition centres worldwide such as Paris Nord, Birmingham or Osaka, which were built in the following years,” explains Wolfram N. Diener.

Over the years Düsseldorf Exhibition Centre has been updated to the latest state of the art in technical and service terms time and again. By erecting the new Halls 6 and 7a in 2000 Messe Düsseldorf initiated its 30-year masterplan for the modernisation of the premises. As part of this plan the Nord entrance was completely re-designed in 2004 and now among other things offers direct tram lines to the city centre and Düsseldorf main station. This was followed by the construction of Halls 8a and 8b. All in all, today the Düsseldorf Exhibition Centre provides 249,761 square metres in 18 halls of which 11 have now been re-built or completely renovated.

“I am especially pleased that we succeeded in completing our most recent construction project, Neue Messe Süd, in time to mark our anniversary. Like the Stockum Exhibition Centre in 1971 the new entrance doubles as an architectural benchmark with its impressive cantilevered roof. But it is especially the high-quality, state-of-the-art furnishings and the consistent focus on our customers’ needs that follow on from the tradition of the 1971 building project and signal our ambition as a leading exhibition centre for the 21st century,” CEO Diener says in summary.

The Messe Düsseldorf Group

The Messe Düsseldorf Group generated sales amounting to EUR 136.8 million in the COVID year 2020. At the seven events in Düsseldorf 5,422 exhibitors presented their products to 534,367 trade visitors in this trade fair year. Messe Düsseldorf has developed a ground-breaking Hygiene and Infection Protection Concept, which was successfully put to work at CARAVAN SALON as Germany’s first major trade fair held since spring 2020. Düsseldorf Exhibition Centre hosts around 40 trade fairs in the five fields of expertise: “Machinery, Plants & Equipment”, “Retail, Crafts & Services”, “Medicine & Health”, “Lifestyle & Beauty” as well as “Leisure”, including 20 No. 1 trade fairs as well as, currently, 15 robust partner and guest events. Add to this over 1,000 conventions, corporate events, congresses and meetings held by its subsidiary Düsseldorf Congress. In addition to this, the Messe Düsseldorf Group organises 75 events, joint events and contracted events abroad and is one of the leading export platforms worldwide. The group of companies runs a global network with 77 foreign representations serving 141 countries – including 7 international subsidiaries.

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