

The History of Berlin as a Trade Fair Venue

As a venue for trade fairs Berlin has a rich history which dates back to the first quarter of the 19th century. 1822 saw the Prussian government bringing together individual markets and fairs at the first trade exhibition, and with it began a tradition of organising and holding exhibitions in Berlin.

At the 1st trade exhibition held in Berlin from 1 September to 15 October 1822 in the Gewerbehause at Klosterstrasse, the 9,514 visitors witnessed 182 exhibitors displaying a range of 998 different products, among them a locomotive von Borsig, an extremely advanced product for its time which previously very few people had ever seen.

In contrast to the trade fair venues of Leipzig and Frankfurt/Main, Berlin quickly specialised in holding exhibitions, and in particular trade fairs. The themes of these exhibitions varied initially, as did their venues within the city.

The first trade exhibition took place in 1874 and was the "Building and Furniture Industry Fair". This was still held in an old drill hall in Karlsstrasse. In 1882, four days before the "Public German Exhibition concerning Hygiene and the Rescue Services" was to be held, the wooden pavilions of the exhibition with a display area of over 11,000 m² burnt down in a great fire.

In 1897 the "Central European Automobile Club" organised the first car exhibition, held on the already famous street of Unter den Linden, Berlin's modern-day exhibition grounds not having yet come into existence. The foundations were not laid until 1914, north of today's Neue Kantstrasse on what is now the parking area opposite the International Congress Center ICC Berlin, with a triple-aisle steel skeleton construction and a display area of 13,800 m². The area of the modern-day venue on the western edge of Berlin/ Charlottenburg was chosen because of the proximity of the railway station S-Bahnhof Witzleben, construction of which had commenced in 1913.

The exhibition grounds are built

In 1923 the non-profit organisation "Gemeinnützige Berliner Messe-Aufbau-Gesellschaft", which in 1924 changed its title to "Berliner Messe-Amt", was founded in order to manage and operate the exhibition grounds. In 1924 the Messe-Amt signed an agreement with the radio industry association "Verband der Radio-Industrie e.V.", so that in the same year the public were already able to see the first German radio exhibition, the "Grosse Deutsche Funkausstellung". In addition to another large hall being built this eventful year also witnessed the construction of the "Haus der Funkindustrie", and work began on Berlin's Radio Tower, the Funkturm.

The cost of these building measures totalling 2.1 million Marks was granted by city corporations, i.e. the municipal authorities and the city's parliament.

Two years later the "Green Week" first came to life. Previously the public had only been able to see an open-air agricultural exhibition, the "Grosse landwirtschaftliche Wochen", during which farmers traded their agricultural produce on various streets of the capital. 1926 saw the opening of the Funkturm, which very soon became known as the city of Berlin's landmark as well as that of the exhibition grounds. Although not a part of the original design, the Funkturm was built with an observation deck and a restaurant, features which made it a major attraction with both Berliners and visitors to the city.

In 1928, the year of the first international aviation exhibition, the "Internationale Luftfahrtausstellung", 2.25 million people came to the fairs and exhibitions at the grounds under the Funkturm. Thus the Messe-Amt very quickly had to consider steps for enlarging

the area of the exhibition grounds. In 1929 and 1930, construction of 3 halls covering an area of 12,500 m² enclosed the garden under the Funkturm, and expansion of the exhibition grounds continued over the ensuing period until the first year of war brought it to a close.

In 1935 a fire destroyed the wooden radio hall and damaged neighbouring halls, as well as the Funkturm itself. Along with a new building for the radio hall, the indoor stadium Deutschlandhalle was constructed in the space of only nine months, originally designed as an assembly hall and venue for sporting events.

With its large exhibition grounds and the great number of events it was hosting, Berlin had finally established itself as a major trade fair venue. However, in August of 1939 the government grain management office "Reichsstelle für Getreide" requisitioned all the halls for storage purposes. Immediately after, the Second World War broke out in the course of which virtually all of Berlin and its exhibition grounds were destroyed. The new Deutschlandhalle too lay in ruins, and the Funkturm had suffered heavy damage.

A new beginning after the war

Already in 1946 rebuilding of the exhibition grounds was underway, and in 1947 the casino at the Funkturm was hosting the first exhibition under the Radio Tower after the war. Its title was "Values beneath the Rubble" (Werte unter Trümmern). In 1948 it was followed by Green Week and a "Building achievements and Christmas fair".

In 1950, five new halls were completed in time for the first German industrial exhibition, the "Deutsche Industrieausstellung". The total hall space was now 37,000 square metres. In 1950, only five years after hostilities had ceased, five trade fair events were already being held in the city under the Funkturm which, though still bearing the scars of war, was committed in its will to rebuild.

In 1957, as part of the INTERBAU project the Congress Hall was constructed in Berlin/Tiergarten, and from 1958 to 1981 it was run by the exhibition management association. At the same time the Deutschlandhalle was rebuilt, which from that year on until 1997 was host to a great number of major sporting events, shows and assemblies.

In 1961 the German radio, television and gramophone exhibition, the "Deutsche Rundfunk-, Fernseh- und Phonoausstellung", nowadays the Internationale Funkausstellung, guested in Berlin after an absence of 22 years. The same year witnessed the 25th anniversary of Green Week.

Three years later, in 1964, the foundations were laid for another trade fair which later on would gain international acclaim, the International Tourism Exchange ITB Berlin. For far more than a decade now the ITB has become recognised as the world's leading tourism event. It is at the same time the most international trade fair in the world.

Making a joint effort

The Seventies were characterised by a number of far-reaching developments: on the one hand a number of companies, "Berliner Ausstellungen", "Ausstellungsdienst Berlin" and AMK, separated since the war but with overlapping responsibilities, combined to form "AMK Berlin - Ausstellungs-, Messe-, Kongress-GmbH", its previously fragmented members now joining forces to operate with far greater focus and effectiveness in the trade fair marketplace.

On the other hand quite extensive and out of the ordinary building activity was taking place at the exhibition grounds in Berlin, which with its new International Congress Center ICC Berlin was becoming a trade fair venue attracting attention worldwide. Six years after construction

began, the ICC was opened on 2 April 1979. It was the largest and most modern congress centre in Europe, and it remains so to this day. Since then the ICC Berlin has repeatedly received the award for "best convention center of the year", and contributes in no small part to the fact that Berlin is continuously ranked as one of the ten most important congress venues in the world.

The fact that congresses were now being held did not stop trade fair activities under the Funkturm from carrying on. Instead they supplemented each other from the outset, exploited each other's dynamics, and even today contribute jointly to Berlin's outstanding position in the global marketplace as an organiser of events.

Even before construction of the ICC Berlin began in 1971, six new fair halls were opened on Jafféstrasse, urgently needed as a result of the increased demand for trade fair events in Berlin. In 1975 the long-standing car exhibition was named "aaa".

In 1981 the Internationale Funkausstellung (IFA) returned to Berlin. Up to the present day this globally unique consumer electronics event is an extra highlight in the capital's extensive fair programme, one which is appreciated by both trade visitors and the general public alike.

Towards the end of the Nineties, as a result of continuing modernisation and expansion the Berlin exhibition grounds were now becoming one of the world's leading international marketplaces for goods and services.

In the late Eighties, AMK Berlin annually held more than ten of its own events, including a number of major and globally leading trading fairs, in a hall area totalling 83,500 m². However, very soon this was to be insufficient space for the increasingly significant international trade venue which Berlin had now become.

Thus, due to the rising demand and a growing number of in-house and guest events it became necessary to increase the size of the Berlin exhibition grounds to 160,000 m² of hall space. Building measures had to be carefully planned, as on the one hand interference in ongoing events was if at all possible to be avoided, and on the other the inner-city location, in principle a great advantage, now presented an obstacle, as the amount of available space was extremely limited. For example the old halls located on Jaffestrasse were demolished to make way for today's new halls 2 - 6, and the neighbouring road was re-routed.

Since the fall of the Wall in 1989 and the opening up of European borders the political situation has changed considerably. Berlin was situated at the heart of a Europe in the process of achieving unity, and was able unhindered to tread the path to becoming a metropolis of major international importance. The Berliner Messegesellschaft grasped the opportunity and successfully achieved its aim of shedding the role of welfare beneficiary of its main owner, the State of Berlin.

This was in 1992: in that year not only did AMK Berlin change its name to "Messe Berlin GmbH", but as Messe Berlin for the first time also achieved positive operating results, something a trade fair organisation could by no means take for granted.

Between 1991 and 1999, in spite of the building measures which took place on the exhibition grounds, Messe Berlin organised over 20 exhibitions which were either debut events or ones being held for the first time after a decade-long absence. These included international major events such as the International Aerospace Exhibition ILA, which in 1992 returned to its original venue, the FRUIT LOGISTICA, which first opened its doors in 1993, and InnoTrans, the International Trade Fair for Transport Technology, Innovative Components, Vehicles, Systems, which every two years since 1996 has attracted rail transport experts from all over the world to Berlin.

Expanding the capacity of the halls at the same time answered the growing demands placed on Messe Berlin by organisers of guest events. In terms of volume and quality guest events were achieving a new and increased level of importance for the trade venue that is Berlin.

In 1999 construction had largely come to an end, and from now on Messe Berlin was able to freely expand its international programme of events still further. Only a suitable entrance area on the south side of the exhibition grounds remained to be built in order to improve access to Halls 1 and 2.

In November 2000 e/home was held for the first time, a trade fair and congress fair for electronics in the home.

In February 2001, the debut event of Build IT, the IT and Communication Trade Fair for the Construction Sector, took place. In the same year CMS, Cleaning. Management. Services. , a new, international trade fair for cleaning systems, building management and services, was held in Germany for the first time, recalling a tradition which began with the "Reinigungs-Technik" trade fair in Berlin.

As a result of founding a joint undertaking comprising Capital Facility GmbH, HOCHTIEF and GegenbauerBosse, Messe Berlin has been able to improve its technical services at events in Berlin. Together with the other subsidiaries, Capital Service GmbH and Capital Catering GmbH, catering services will now be available at premium standards for organisers of guest events, exhibitors and visitors alike.

In 2002 HomeTech, the International Exhibition for Electrical Household Appliances, made its debut appearance at the exhibition grounds under the Funkturm in Berlin.

Late 2002 will see the completion of the Main South Entrance, which will establish a direct link between the exhibition grounds and the railway station S-Bahnhof Eichkamp/ Messe-Süd, provide space for a large number of service facilities, and an arena for open-air events.

In addition to various service-orientated buildings, construction up until 2006 will include a modern building for exhibitions and performing media productions, which will also be the ideal location for a press centre during the holding of large events.

Thus by 2006, Berlin will have a programme to meet the demands of many different marketplaces, modern exhibition grounds with a display area close to 200,000 m² to satisfy a variety of requirements, as well as expert support and comprehensive service, altogether enabling this trade fair venue, amid international competitors, to attain even higher levels of achievement.