
PRESS RELEASE

18 Oct 2017

The redevelopment of Frei Otto's Multihalle: think, explore, develop

More than 40 years after its inauguration, the Multihalle in Mannheim, the world's largest timber grid shell structure, is at the centre of an international discourse whose reach has already long surpassed the boundaries of architecture and civil engineering science, and become a matter of different political and cultural public spheres.

An open and flowing structure created by architect Frei Otto, posthumous winner of the Pritzker Prize, and Mannheim architect Carlfried Mutschler, the Multihalle is located in Herzogenriedpark, which was part of the 1975 German National Garden Show (Bundesgartenschau). Because of its architectural importance, the Multihalle – initially intended only for temporary use – was never demolished, and actually granted listed building status in 1998.

After years of languishing in obscurity, it is now time to begin anew. Because the 'Wonder of Mannheim', as architecture critic Manfred Sack once called it, is more than just an engineering masterpiece.

Maintaining and reopening the Multihalle

Reopening the Multihalle depends on two key factors: raising the financial means for preserving the structure and finding long-term prospects for use.

The new concept for the Multihalle is being developed by the city of Mannheim in cooperation with the general public, committed groups, universities, and the neighbourhood. A major first step was a utilisation workshop, held in April 2017, in which participants from different sectors formed interdisciplinary teams to elaborate prospects for possible uses.

The Multihalle is also a keynote topic of the 'Mannheim 2030' mission statement and at this year's Urban Thinkers Campus. The UTC is an initiative of the World Urban Campaign by UN Habitat, a United Nations programme for human settlements that promotes sustainable urban development. The conferences offer a setting for innovative exchanges between urban protagonists, and provide input for social progress. In the run-up to this year's UTC, an 'urban thinkers camp', held at the Multihalle with representatives from various regional universities, addressed the topics and developed concrete and local proposals for the global questions posed by the UTC.

The conference and the camp examined the Multihalle from a civic perspective and considered how it is anchored in the city's social topography. The objective was to revise the former predominantly technical discourse and to work out a new interpretation of the Multihalle as an architectural cultural platform for an 'open society', in tune with Frei Otto's original intentions.

MORE INFORMATION: MANNHEIM-MULTIHALLE.DE

PRESS RELEASE

18 Oct 2017

The Multihalle as a social space

The Multihalle is not a building as such. It is a pavilion and 'platform' for the community - a system that, in its structure as well as in its intention - is open for the city's interdisciplinary activities and events, today as in the future. This venue lends itself to completely new uses ... which still need to be found. Frei Otto's work stands not only for a technical, but much more for a civic innovation, which accounts for his resurgence in popularity.

At present, the Multihalle is only used irregularly, but it is to become a hub for cooperative future-oriented work, in which to think, explore, develop, and cooperate with an international community, Mannheim's citizens and the direct neighbourhood - a venue for discussing and developing the future and a cultural meeting place.

In recent months, an open air cinema, round tables, and workshops and performances have been staged. Various protagonists from Mannheim - first and foremost zeitraumexit, the Mannheim house of artists - have drawn new attention to this special venue, thus highlighting its potential. Together with the Building Competence Centre of the City of Mannheim, Collini Social Club, and planning agency Yalla Yalla, zeitraumexit used its FREIRÄUMEN series to make the Multihalle a new cultural venue and meeting place. Additional uses will follow.

The future of the Multihalle

The first steps have been taken. However, an expert opinion conducted in 2015 revealed that around €11.5 million would be needed to maintain the Multihalle on a long-term basis. The entire roof construction needs to be renovated; the building material is well beyond its 'best by' date. Some of the timber elements have been damaged by damp, some of the structural supports are warped. And yet, say the experts who have been monitoring the structural condition over the years, it is astonishing how the Multihalle - originally intended as a temporary building - has stood the test of time.

Mannheim's municipal council resolved that the financing of the renovation and the development of a concept for the future use of the Multihalle must be settled by the end of 2019. It was also decided that the funds should principally come from donations and third-party sources.

To promote the development, find partners and investors, and to raise the necessary third-party funds, the City of Mannheim and the Baden-Württemberg Chamber of Architects together founded the Multihalle e.V. association. The association is dedicated to preserving the structure and continued existence of the listed building, in close coordination with all the responsible parties from the municipal authorities and Stadtpark Mannheim gGmbH, as owner of the Multihalle.

Contact:

Verein Multihalle Mannheim e.V.

MORE INFORMATION: MANNHEIM-MULTIHALLE.DE
