

Dortmund – A City with Tradition

Dortmund is located in the metropolitan Ruhr Area, the “industrial heart” of Germany. With over 580,000 inhabitants Dortmund represents the biggest City in a region which is home to altogether over 5,3 million people and ranks 7th amongst all German cities.

Dortmund can look back over a history spanning more than 1,100 years. In the middle ages Dortmund was the only free imperial town in Westfalia and one of the most affluent and most important members of the Hanseatic League. The “Hellweg” – the trade route between Flanders and Russia – connected Dortmund with Europe’s key places and led the town to its initial period of economic prosperity. The old churches in the City centre with their art treasures today bear witness to this era and Dortmund is and remains the economic and cultural nucleus of Westfalia.

In the mid 18th century the face of the town started to change: with coal and steel as a basis, a modern industrial town started to emerge in which not only a middle-class cultural lifestyle with theatres, orchestras and museums developed but also a strong cultural and educational labour movement.

The old industries in the Ruhr Area saw the beginning of their bitter decline 40 years ago. All the Dortmund collieries were shut down and the relocation of one steel corporation’s production plant alone caused the loss of over 60,000 jobs. At one point unemployment rose to 17 per cent. Since then the town has found itself in a situation of radical economic and social structural change.

The economic mainstays of the new Dortmund have been provided by the founding of the Technical University and other colleges which are today attended by 35,000 students, the settlement of companies in the IT, microsystems

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technology, logistics, media and insurance branches together with an increasing range of trading and service companies. Specific examples would be a well-known Swedish furniture company with its central distribution warehouse here in Dortmund which serves all other European warehouses, or Germany's largest book trade distribution warehouse which again is based in Dortmund.

Over recent years creative industry has been developing in a very diverse and promising manner. And it is the smaller and the medium-sized companies (altogether 1,600 companies with 12,000 employees) who are proving to exert the main revitalising influence on the cultural and creative scene – and not only in Dortmund. Indeed one of the coveted “Oscar“ awards went to a Dortmund studio which specialises in film animation and operates on an international level.

Witnesses to Industrial Culture – Witnesses to Structural Change

What are the cultural highlights in a town whose external image and whose social co-ordinates have changed so radically? The DASA, the second largest technology museum in Germany has proved to be immensely popular, as has the “Zeche Zollern“, the art nouveau-style colliery now used as a museum and as a venue for many festivals after undergoing comprehensive restoration. Visitors to a former coke-oven which has been left in its original state can experience the slow decline of an industrial plant of huge dimensions.

The new building of the city library (1999) by the famous architect Mario Botta on the other hand, as well as the opening of the Concert House (2002) testify to the new Dortmund. The latter was constructed in a quarter of the Dortmund City centre which strongly featured both deficits in urban development as well economic hardship. The new cultural institutions were intended to enhance the attractiveness of the quarter and indeed the image and general appeal of the area have seen a positive change.

In addition to these old and new places of impressive urban development Dortmund also boasts the classical cultural infrastructure of a major city, with an opera, play houses, orchestras and numerous museums. The free culture scene has developed in a very broad and differentiated manner, with stages for theatre and cabaret, a jazz club, house of artists, a centre for rock music and a centre especially for groups active in the cultural and creative industry. Municipal assistance programmes and cultural events form a basis for long-term co-operations and local partnerships for cultural life in Dortmund.

Dortmund's reputation as a festival town in the metropolitan Ruhr Area is characterized by the International Women's Film Festival, the European Fringe Festival "off limits" and the Micro!Festival with international street theatre and world music. The "scene" Festival is a unique platform in Germany for presenting the art and culture of a particular European country.

Dortmund often plays host to foreign performers, orchestras, and theatre and dance companies. Intensive cultural exchange as well as intercultural relations with the numerous migrants – approx. 15 per cent of Dortmund's inhabitants – reinforce the historically evolved European-orientation of the town.

New media art has been an item on the agenda of the future-orientated Dortmund art scene since the middle of the 1990's. Spectacular exhibitions which take place (preferably in the former collieries or steels works) consistently reveal new forms of border-crossing between new art culture and old industrial culture.

European Capital of Culture RUHR.2010 and Dortmunder U

For Dortmund just as much as for the other 52 local authorities in the metropolitan Ruhr Area the year 2010 represents a very special occasion yet also an unusual challenge. The European Capital of Culture RUHR.2010 wants to focus European interest not only on the cultural potential of the region but also on the numerous new cultural projects and on artistic co-operations. "Change

through culture – Culture through change“ – that is the slogan of the RUHR.2010. And as the planning stands Dortmund is setting the best example for this process.

The City's most significant project in the Capital of Culture year will be the opening of the "Dortmunder U". This 7-storey warehouse tower block, once part of a brewery, is being converted into a European Centre for Art and Creativity. In the mighty tower of this listed building right in the City centre, the City Museum for modern art, new media art, a film institute, a cinema and scientific institutions will all find new homes on an area covering approx. 20,000 sqm. One of the floors will be dedicated exclusively to cultural communication and interaction in an effort to support cultural education and creative potential, in particular among children and youngsters.

To date, however, most Europeans are familiar with Dortmund not as a City of culture but as the home of the football club Borussia Dortmund whose impressive stadium holds more than 80,000 spectators. And the City has a further legendary hallmark: Dortmund beer! Both these "export articles" also of course form part of Dortmund's culture.

So, as the pitman would say: "Glückauf" – Welcome to Dortmund!

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