

# HAGEN COMPETING AGAINST BIG CITIES

CHRISTIAN ISENBECK



TYPICALLY FOR GERMAN CITIES OF THE LATE 1980S-1990S, THE RETAIL COME UNDER PRESSURE BECAUSE OF CONCENTRATION OF BUYING POWER TOWARDS NEARBY LARGER CITIES

The City of Hagen, with its 200,000 inhabitants, is the outer East of the Ruhr Area, a very famous industrial area in Germany. The Ruhr Area is an agglomeration of cities with several million working population.

Contrary to the industrial surrounding, Hagen is a "green" city – 63% of its territory is covered with trees! Historical buildings from the end of the 19th century enabled the city to get the status of the European City of Jugendstil. Hagen also made two major contributions to the history of retail. In 1910, the city of Hagen initiated the Best Window competition, in which 107 shops with 211 windows participated. Shortly before World War II, Herbert Eklöh started Germany's first self-service store. Eklöh later became well known by his *Hussel* chocolate chain and by *Douglas* perfumery.

Typically for German cities of the late 1980s-1990s, the retail come under pressure because of concentration of buying power towards nearby larger cities (for example, Dortmund and Düsseldorf) or to shopping centers out of town. In this situation, Hagen revived the window competition in 1999. To prepare the stage, two educational programs were run: Visual Merchandising and Lights in Shops. The US artist Christine Hill lectured by way of performance and with the help of films about the intertwining of art, urban retail and social engagement. Comedy and street acting supported the idea of competition among pedestrians and shoppers. After this revitalization in 1999, the following year the city focused on a light show. In 2001, several thousand shopping bags were imprinted with a motive of the window competition. Participating retailers could enroll free of charge for courses about decoration and lights at the German Federal Association for Visual Merchandising (BDS). Visual merchandising students

from Stuttgart (Germany) and Bolzano (Italy) were invited to participate in the competition.

In 2002, a City Marketing Congress was organized, in which over 200 German cities participated, while BDS organized an international congress for the professional merchandisers. In 2003, BDS contributed additionally by placing decoration puppets around public areas to gain attention. Since 2004, schools from the nearby cities of Münster, Essen and Dortmund have their own windows! In 2005, red color could be seen everywhere: red water in the fountain, red footprints aiming at the participating stores, etc. In 2007, the EuroDisplay Company handed over puppets to 15 schools in Hagen – they were decorated by the children and placed at public places, the city bank, and into municipal busses. At lunch time, actors of the Hagen theatre attract attention for the competition around the city mall. Since 2003, in addition to a professional jury, there is also a jury of consumers and a special jury of children for all competition activities. Beside this, every consumer is invited to send his personal photos for a photo exhibition about shopping in the city.

Finally, the Art Museum, founded in 1902 by Karl Ernst Osthaus, was revitalized. Since 2006, there is the department for European Shopping Window which has a collection of 80,000 documents about 100 years of shopping windows and visual merchandising. The material is used for exhibitions in other cities or at special events, such as EuroShop Fair, where windows of various decades of the last century were displayed under the title 'Time Walk'. By this, Hagen becomes a point of visits for all those being interested in the history of retail or who are only making their first footprints at merchandising of the future.