

“Charting the course for the future”

Interview with boot Director Petros Michelidakis on the blue innovation dock

At boot 2023 everything on the stage of the blue innovation dock (bid) will revolve around sustainable and forward-looking concepts for watersports. What goals does the bid pursue, who is it addressed to? Marcus Krall interviewed Petros Michelidakis, Director of boot Düsseldorf, about this world premiere.

August already saw a virtual preview premiere of the bid as a live stream, now it will be going on stage for nine days. What can we expect from the bid?

We had this idea for quite some time already but could unfortunately not put it into practice because of the pandemic. The blue innovation dock is designed to intensify dialogue between the sector and policymakers. With our bid we want to flag up the relevance of the watersports industry and encourage a legal framework that allows the industry to grow. The content partner for the bid is the European Boating Industry (EBI) association headquartered in Brussels.

Raising awareness as a primary goal

Amongst other things, of course. Now is the time to chart the course for the future. Our virtual premiere in August already resulted in the EU developing a watersports roadmap that will be presented at boot for the first time. I am, indeed, a little proud of that.

What role does boot play in the bid?

We are the world’s largest watersports trade fair and are therefore very suitable as a platform. We have both B2C and B2B visitors and all major boatbuilders/shipyards are here. This is why boot is predestined for intensifying dialogue. While not pioneers in this field we are ideally suited to bringing together the greatest number of key stakeholders.

Which topics will be on the table?

The whole cross-section of topics will be addressed. Do e-fuels make sense? How well suited is hydrogen as a fuel? How can marinas be digitalised faster? Can we involve water sportspeople to protect endangered regions? How will we be boating in 30 years from now? To table the right topics and at the same time gain an insight into opinions we initiated a study; in cooperation with ADAC we polled 1,500 boating enthusiasts plus members of our boot Club. This means, the bid is very close to the market – which is why I hope politicians and other decision-makers will be following it attentively.



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Even today 100 exhibitors will be presenting sustainable propulsion solutions at boot 2023.



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In Halls 13 and 14 boot will be dedicated to the “Destination Seaside”. This coastal tourism is currently on everyone’s lips. Will it also be integrated into the bid?

The coastal tourism theme is, in fact, highly topical and relevant. This tourism in the immediate vicinity of the seaside and up to 11 km inland, generates EUR 240 billion in Europe every year. Of this amount the watersports industry generates between 11% and 12%, i.e. EUR 25 m to 30 m. This survey was carried out by us in cooperation with the European Tourism Board.

A small aside on this: boats only contribute as little as 0.1% to the entire CO₂-emissions in the EU; what we are talking about here are 6.5 million boats up to 24 m LOA, which are registered in the EU. Their average operating hours per year: 35 to 50.

To me those levels sound relatively good in terms of emissions.

For sure. As an industry, however, we probably also have to go that extra mile once in a while because we are in the public eye, especially when it comes to larger yachts. I see them as part of coastal tourism and like to compare them to hotels – they are used for living, eating and enjoying entertainment. And: how many yachts are berthed in marinas that serve as a residence? In Greece, for example, this is very popular.



Meaning – this is also about societal change?

Absolutely. Let’s have a look at how we will most probably be living in future. We will have a 4-day working week. Young people will select the employers who can offer this; and the boating industry is also fighting for this day.

We have to remember how the boats and yachts are used here. We have to become far more digital and invest while the market situation is good. We have also created the bid for this, for inspirations in this regard.

Is there a willingness to change at all?

I understand from the response to the bid that the interest from the industry is very high. What’s more, the numbers speak for themselves. We are a market worth billions that can probably still be expanded if society changes the way many experts forecast. As a boatbuilder/shipyard I could think about how I could participate in that market even better with my product. This, however, will probably mean looking at use rather than design or propulsion.

Can visitors of boot attend the bid without any registration?

Yes, definitely. They can simply take a seat, listen and be inspired. We will make some 40 to 50 seats available and have already enlisted 60 speakers

and panellists who will appear on stage. Right on the first day there will be a session involving policy makers and business so the initial course can be charted. The daily updated programme can be found on our website and will additionally be featured on boot's social media channels.



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What would be the ideal case after nine days of blue innovation dock?

That the information we have conveyed about our sector to political decision-makers was sufficient to speed up developments in terms of sustainability. Although our watersports only account for 0.1% of EU-wide emissions, it is important that we contribute to keeping our destinations clean and making them cleaner.

It would be fantastic if we could create a framework that is cross-sectoral and EU-wide. Why do Spaniards and Germans protect seaweed in their respective ways and Greeks – and you know, I am Greek – not at all? We have to enter into dialogue. It is not about who is right but about conserving our destinations for generations to come.

What do you tell young people who are concerned about this very topic?

That the water sports industry in particular is dependent on a clean climate and waters. As a networking platform, boot will continue to raise awareness among society, young and old alike. Above all, we will promote dialogue with decision-makers in politics to ensure the necessary transformation and create the appropriate framework conditions.

Will NGOs also have a say?

Needless to say. All NGOs that are represented at boot – such as WWF, Greenpeace, NABU or Deutsche Meeresstiftung – are, of course, called upon, to get involved and join the discussion. 28th January has been scheduled for this.

What discussions are you most likely to be attending?

I would very much like to participate on the first day when politicians will discuss with shipyard representatives. I hope I will make it. Quite prominent guests have announced their participation. Furthermore, each day of the bid is an innovation driver for the industry, which is why I will try to follow all subjects addressed.

Let's talk about the trade fair itself. After two cancelled editions – will boot return to its old strength and size?

We are very satisfied with bookings received so far, which are on par with 2019, and will present watersports in their entirety on a huge exhibition area measuring 31 football pitches in total.



How many exhibitors will there be exactly?

We expect around 1,500 exhibitors – a fantastic number in the history of boot. Unfortunately, many small family-run businesses in the diving segment have not survived the Covid crisis – so we are missing these exhibitors. Just like the direct sales operations that have completely gone online. Nevertheless, there is no other trade fair in the world with such extended ranges and, what's more, in such an international setting.

Incidentally, the first admission ticket was sold to Iceland. This visitor will travel to boot because he offers whale watching and intends to gradually renew his fleet.

Can you share three highlights with me you are looking forward to?

It is always difficult to pick some brands because they are all near and dear to my heart. The biggest yachts will come from Sunseeker and Sanlorenzo, both being 30 m LOA. In Hall 17 we will be showcasing – with celebrity support – wing surfing and wing foiling on a 60 m long pool and in Hall 12 the new diving tower will be inaugurated. This is also where the opening of boot will take place.

I would like to briefly come back to Halls 13 and 14, which you already mentioned. These seem to be halls that also target visitors who do not own boats?

Exactly. The Destination Seaside halls are designed to reflect the versatility of holidays by the sea; they focus on activities and regions – coastal tourism here will be represented by the Lübecker Bucht, Portugal and Croatia as exhibitors. In future, these will probably be very important halls to win over new watersports enthusiasts.

To conclude: will Covid still be an issue at boot?

boot will be held under completely normal conditions, the way we know and love. We have installed 3,000 Hepa filters in the exhibition halls to filter 99.99% of all viruses out of the air. So the indoor air is constantly purified. This allows us to supply less fresh air and reduce energy consumption.

December 2022

Home port for international watersports

boot Düsseldorf will again drop anchor on the Rhine from 21 to 29 January 2023
boot Düsseldorf has been the home port and driving engine for international watersports for 54 years now. From 21 to 29 January 2023 it will present all facets of boating with all top-notch brands on board. Both yachtsmen and powerboaters will find a comprehensive line-up here ranging from small entry-price boats and dinghies to luxury yachts. Also in focus at boot will be diving, surfing, SUP and angling. Due to the exhibitors' innovative and technically sophisticated products boot is the international innovations platform of its industry kicking off the new watersports season every year in January. The extensive tourism ranges for holidays and sports on, by



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and in the water presented at the "Destination Seaside" attracts all those wishing to spend their leisure time by the seaside, riverside and lakes. Attractive stage programmes with interesting interview partners from the sector, the latest trending sports offered and a high-calibre blend of workshops and meetings both for leisure sportspeople and experts make this trade fair unique the world over. This will also make boot Düsseldorf the No.1 destination for both family watersports fans and international experts again in 2023.



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Admission tickets at www.boot.de

Tickets for boot Düsseldorf 2023 are available at www.boot.de with immediate effect. The regular online admission price is € 19.00. For ADAC motor club members discounted tickets are offered at € 17.00. Afternoon admission tickets from Monday to Thursday from 2.00 pm to 6.00 pm are available for as little as € 10.00. At the ticket offices on site admission is € 27.00. Bargain overnight stays for all boot and caravanning enthusiasts are offered in January by the Caravan-Center of Messe Düsseldorf (€ 25.00 per night, arrival from 4.00 pm, departure until 6.00 pm of the following day). Find a wide range of hotel rooms with the travel agency bcd travel (Tel.: +49 30 40365 2117, e-mail: 347.01@bcdtravel.de) For all current information on boot and its accompanying programme please visit www.boot.de.



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