

# Airport Niederrhein

Since the end of the cold war several military airports in Europe and especially in Germany lost their function. Some of them are able to develop to a civil airport. One of them is Airport Niederrhein (Laarbuch). Niederrhein airport is located around 50 kilometres from Düsseldorf near to the A57. The airports exact location latitude 51.602414 51° 36' 08.69" N and longitude 6.142172 006° 08' 31.82" E latitude. The operating hours are from 9.00 in the morning till 23.00 in the evening. The airport lays just 500 metres over the Dutch border. Niederrhein Airport was a former military base of the British army. This is clearly shown around the airport. Double fences are built against nosy people and at the entrance is still standing a huge empty guardhouse.

By Jasper Spruit



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Its first civilian flight was earlier this year on the first of May. Ryanair started a service to London Stansted that day. The civilian capacity is around 50,000 flights per annum and because of the long runway (3 kilometres of which only 2440 metres may be used)

every plane can land.

Because of its former function the airport is actually a military base complete with (now empty) houses, hangars, a church, a supermarket and even a cinema. Actually the first terminal was an old military hangar (see picture below). In this hangar the low-cost aspirations became very clear. Meanwhile the new terminal is opened. This new building is opened officially in September 2003 and



built with a capacity of 2,5 million passengers a year and offers place to 16 service desks.

Three Dutch investors own each 33% of the shares: Van der Lande Select, Imca Investments and Roma Investments. The remaining 1% is in hands of the City of Kleven and Weeze. The three investors paid in total € 11,5 million for the airport and the ground. The investments made in order to make the airport operational were estimated at another € 33 million. The CEO of the airport was (the former) CEO of Eindhoven Airport (Netherlands) and also worked for Martinair.

## Government

The German government had to decide over a new function of the airport after the departure of the British army in 1999. A new purpose for the airport was to extract the enormous amounts of gravel, which has a value of several million of Euros. But the policy decided to find a more attractive way to expand the airport grounds and decided to sell the government property of 620 hectares as an airport with civilian purposes. Currently is the airport management looking for new ways to use the various types of buildings. One of the ways to become an attractive leisure activity in the environment is building restaurants, shops and even routes for cycling and walking.



## Market

The airport sees its market in one hour drive (catchment area) in which around 11 million people live. The airport is not close to the big cities but the 'Ruhr' area is close by and the airport is very good reachable. The area is very attractive for leisure purposes. The ability of the airport is to offer low-cost services to low-cost airlines. The catchment area will be around two hours drive with low-cost airlines so the airport will attract passengers from a wider catchment area.

At the moment Ryanair, V-Bird and Dutch Bird are operating on Niederrhein Airport. V-Bird is a new low-cost airline based on the Jetblue (operates in the US) model. This new airline planned to offer services to Vienna, Helsinki, Munchen, Nice and Berlin with the Airbus A320. The airport is also talking with some cargo airlines and the estimation is that the airlines will come as soon as the industry knows that the airport is operational. Coming summer also the Turkish airline Sky Airlines planned will operate flights from the airport.

## Low-cost Airport

Airport Niederrhein is one of the first airports that focuses its product specifically on low-cost airlines. The aim of Niederrhein airport is to become a high quality low-cost airport. This image will be built for airlines (offering low-cost operations and low prices), tour operators (low prices, a good infrastructure and leisure possibilities on the airport) and passengers (offering good services for low prices for example parking fares are € 10 a day and € 30 a week). If an airport wants to offer low-cost airlines good services and good deals the cost structure if the airport will be very important. The airport pays a fixed fee for the use of this and other government services. About the cost structure of Niederrhein is known that not (yet)



much people (estimated 60) are working for the airport. The needs as a fire brigade are hired so these (an other government) services are costing just a fixed rate.

## Development

Because the airport is an empty military base with lots of space and possibilities the airport management is working hard to develop the airport ground. The available ground will be divided into several parts. First the airport planned to become a professional basis for aviation. Second an international point for logistic services were cargo flights and distribution meet. Third the airport will develop industry and business activities on their ground. Final the airport planned to build congress and leisure activities.

The revenue will be generated for estimated 60% on the airside and 40% landside. The airport expects cluster profits when airlines start services. When the Ryanair service grows other airlines will come as well. The passenger flows will thus attract other airlines and the total of the airlines and the passenger flows

will attract other companies. This will change when the leisure activities will be developed as mentioned before the airport will become an attractive area for shopping and other leisure activities for the region.

## Future

It seems to be hard to attract airlines to a new airport, especially in the market of Niederrhein airport with lots of other airports close by. There are lots of people living in the region, but the airport is not lying close by a huge city with specific economic attractive activities. So the airport will have to work for its future development.

*All photos courtesy of Niederrhein Airport*

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