

FLEXIBILITY IN CONVENTION CENTRES

# THE GALA VENUE® SEATING SYSTEM AT THE SWISSTECH CONVENTION CENTER

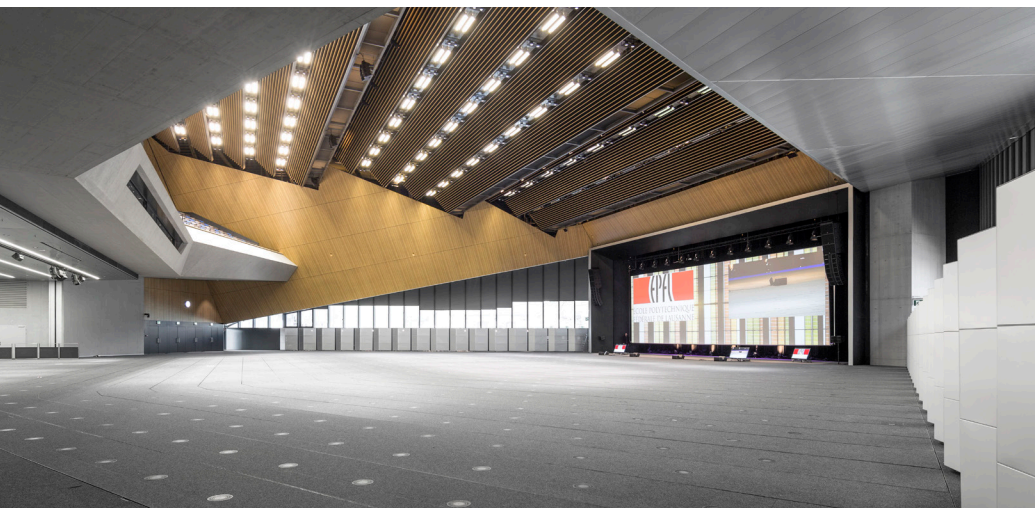
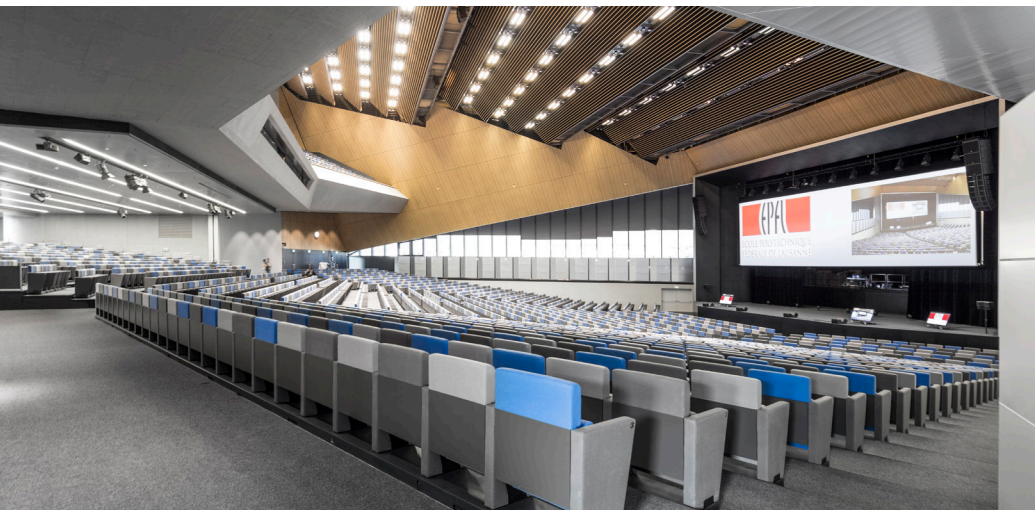
First Three-Year Progress Report – 2015-2017



COMMISSIONED BY GALA SYSTEMS

# MEETING DIFFERENTLY

Convention centres are increasingly challenged by rapid changes in event formats, especially those typical – and often empty – centres with regular geometry auditoriums. Patrons no longer want to spend an entire day on stackable seating in front of a projector screen. In contrast, they want welcoming and comfortable environments to communicate and keep their minds engaged, facilities where they may have the opportunity to move freely and attend smaller events, including exhibits, meetings and workshops. To appeal to planners and guests, conventions centres must now find ways to host many different types of events over the duration of a program. Space modularity is becoming more widely recognized as a practical solution to deal with this issue. The SwissTech Convention Center (STCC) which capitalized on such built-in flexibility to create efficient and dynamic spaces is a prime example of a facility able to both enhance users' experience and respond to today's meeting industry requirements.



## THE SWISSTECH CONVENTION CENTER

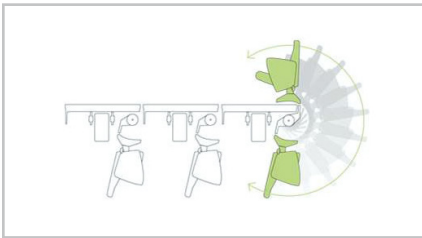
The STCC is an iconic facility which opened in April 2014 on the campus of the prestigious École Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne (EPFL). Designed by Richter Dahl Rocha & Associates, this large and futuristic metal 'shell' construction is characterized by its commitment to sustainable development. It has incorporated several pioneering technologies, in particular photovoltaic panels providing solar protection and generating electricity. In this era of collaborative research, the Center also stands apart from other convention facilities because it was conceived as an ultramodern platform for exchange among conference delegates from around the world.

The STCC was actually made modular and scalable through a Gala Venue® Flooring and Seating System as well as movable walls provided by both Gala Systems and Skyfold. As one of the most flexible facilities in the world, it can rapidly configure halls with capacities ranging from 330 to 3000 seats and can adapt layouts to suit a broad variety of events. Almost completely booked in its first year of operation and in subsequent years, the STCC is rightly considered an important milestone for the EPFL to further foster scientific cooperation and an asset to hosting major social and business events.

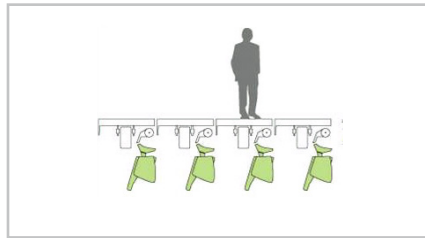
# MODULAR PLENARY HALL

The building's design allows the 3,000-seat plenary hall to be automatically converted from a conference auditorium, an exhibit hall or a banquet room. And the transformation process takes place in only 12 minutes using a remote control panel. Based on sets of rows at different heights, with or without seats, this adaptability is achieved through the latest solution in venue transformation by **Gala Systems**, the world's largest manufacturer of under-stage equipment.

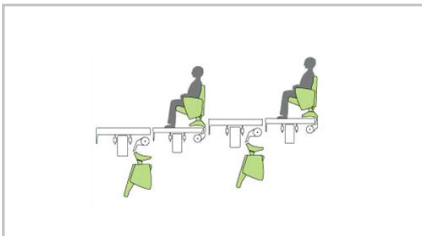
Further, each **Gala Venue** configuration looks and feels as seamless and robust as a permanent fixed arrangement with superior seats, acoustics and sightlines in the assembly auditorium setting and with no variations in height and few visible floor gaps in the flat floor setting. This is why audiences are unaware of the mechanically transformable seating system. Combined with **Skyfold's** vertically sliding walls to temporarily divide the plenary hall space, the **Gala deployable venue** even makes the STCC suited for several simultaneous events. Event organizers therefore benefit from multiple hall combinations and layouts to meet the specific needs of each audience and every event.



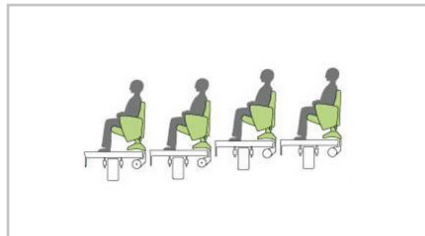
ROTATING SEATS



FLAT CONFIGURATION



SEMINAR CONFIGURATION



THEATRE CONFIGURATION

## PROGRESS REPORT

Based on data covering the STCC's first three years of operation (2015-2017), this report's main highlights reveal that:

- The Center achieved an overall high level of attendance and activity, with events booked up several months to 7 years in advance;
- It hosted a very broad variety of events, from entertainment to scientific seminars, business assemblies, product launches and banquets, reaching an occupation rate of 76%;
- 50% of the events hosted could not have taken place without the space modularity;
- Sub-configurations of space were extensively used – 67% of the time – to address events' requirements in ways that were specifically customized for users;
- The flexibility helped successfully win international events over other venues and contributed to a high client retention rate of 80%;
- The **Gala Venue Seating System** was highly reliable with no delayed or cancelled events;
- The annual costs of operation were fully covered through the many events presented.

# EVALUATING THE PLENARY HALL'S EFFICIENCY

To examine the efficiency of the STCC's Plenary Hall during the years 2015-2017, information was collected in November 2017 through interviews conducted with Head of Marketing and Sales, Christophe Leyvraz, Event Operations Manager, Thierry Gabor, and Managing Director of the Center, Julianne Jammers.

## OVERVIEW OF USAGE AND ATTENDANCE

A season at the STCC runs from September through June<sup>1</sup> and consists mostly in scientific conferences – 40% of all events –, but also in an eclectic mix of private activities, including music and social events. Table 1 presents general statistics on the plenary hall's usage during its first three years of operations. On average within a year, it was attended by 124,437 people and hosted 142 events varying from 2 hours to several days for a total of 249 days of annual occupation. *As for building occupancy, the STCC has hit a 76% occupation rate. This has been described as very high by managers and operators with respect to the European industry average of below 50% (28% to 49%) for occupancy.*

TABLE 1

STCC'S SUMMARY OF ACTIVITY	ANNUAL AVERAGE <sup>2</sup> NUMBER	ANNUAL PERCENTAGE
Attendance	124,676	-
Events <sup>3</sup>	142	-
Days of occupation <sup>4</sup>	249	-
Available days <sup>5</sup>	329	-
Days of occupation ratio over the available portion of one year	-	76%
Clients' return rate <sup>6</sup>	-	80%
EVENT TYPES		
Scientific	-	40%
Private/Business	-	60%
International events	-	30%
Gala System-enabled events	-	50%



THEATRE CONFIGURATION, HALL ABC

From the beginning, the Center was able to organize events of which 30% were international. It also attracted key clients, among which were the EPFL and *Medical Swiss Organizer Conference*, as well as regional private businesses and government organizations. And 80% of client associations that were able to return to the STCC chose to do so.

Commenting on the uses to which the STCC is regularly put, Julianne Jammers, Managing Director of the Centre, stressed that 50% of all events hosted would not have been achievable without the centre's modularity. She specified that many clients would have been forced to rent two different halls with fixed configurations, if it had not been for the *Gala Venue Seating System*. Giving the example of "certain clients [requiring] separate areas between press, VIPs and regular attendees ...", she observed that "only the **Gala System** could create physical separation between levels so that the areas and stage [would] truly [be] accessible only by certain groups."

Besides these particular needs for non-traditional space layouts, Ms. Jammers explained that they are ideal for different space configurations used alternatively in the course of a program. "Yes," she said, "we have had several clients who [chose] one configuration for day time and then while they [had] their cocktail, the room [was] quickly reconfigured for a different evening layout."

## SAME SPACE FOR FOUR DIFFERENT PURPOSES OVER THE DURATION OF A CONVENTION

Christophe Leyvraz, Event Operations Manager, detailed the case of the *French Railway Company (SNCF)* which rented the modular plenary hall for a three-day-convention

### DAY 1

Auditorium A, 4 levels for 700 attendees, 78 round tables, 1 stage // Auditorium B open on the Foyer to extend the lounge area (day time) and dinner area (night time);

### DAY 2

Auditorium A, theatre style for 700 attendees (flat at the rear on 11 rows) (day time);

Auditorium A, completely flat for dinner (night time) – 100 minutes to transform and complete the dinner set-up for 702 attendees (78 tables of 9);

### DAY 3

Auditorium A, flat with a central diamond- shaped stage, 78 tables for 702 attendees all-around the stage.

## FINDING THE BEST FIT

The STCC's design allows for the joining of two or three halls into one, namely Hall A (auditorium), Hall B (enclosed lower mezzanine) and Hall C (mezzanine). As shown in table 2, these three halls accounted for 262 days of activities on average per year, mostly used alone but also combined together for a capacity ranging from 357 to 3,000.

TABLE 2

SPACE COMBINATIONS	CAPACITY (NUMBER OF SEATS)	DAYS OF ACTIVITIES (ANNUAL AVERAGE)
Hall A	1757	100
Hall B	357	92
Hall C	794	23
Hall ABC	3,000	5
Hall AB	2,206	18
Hall BC	1,151	0
Other combinations	variable	24
<b>TOTAL</b>	-	<b>262</b>

**In addition, the halls were frequently reconfigured with the *Gala conversion system* over the three-year survey.**

Just to accommodate the needs of event planners during loading-in/ loading-out activities, about a hundred transformations per year were performed. But the system was mostly used to create the best possible event experience for users because “*every event has a unique configuration as each client has a personalised plan,*” according to Mr. Leyvraz. As shown in table 3, it was indeed those available hybrid solutions<sup>7</sup> which accounted for most of the transformations performed - 67% in all.

## REFERENCES

### NOTE 1

One year's operation is 47 weeks because no regular activity is planned during the winter holiday season (2 weeks) nor the summer vacation period (3 weeks).

### NOTE 2

For clarity, all values represent an average of the years 2015, 2016 and 2017.

### NOTE 3

Events are defined as a meeting of 100 or more people, varying from 2 hours to several days.

### NOTE 4

Every day of the year where the plenary hall is occupied, at least in part, for the presentation of an event or setting-up and removing of equipment.

### NOTE 5

Available days amount to 329 because one year's operation is 47 weeks.

### NOTE 6

Calculated among clients allowed to choose the same facility more than once for their event.

Furthermore, these customizable arrangements have been opening up the building to specific clientele, such as disabled individuals and groups. At the *Pro Infirmis National Conference*, Mr. Leyvraz recounted that “many speakers with different handicaps had to get on stage and/or to many places in Auditorium A. We defined several ways to answer that particular situation; for example, the first 10 rows were set up in a flat configuration and central seats were removed automatically to allow great ease for disabled access. The participants were very satisfied with our set-ups and the enormous capacity to adapt the room to their needs.”

TABLE 3

SPACE CONFIGURATIONS	PERCENTAGE OF ALL EVENTS 2015-2017
LAYOUT SELECTION	
Full auditorium ABC	2%
Flat in A and/or B	17%
Cabaret	14%
Hybrid solutions	67%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100%</b>
SCALE SELECTION (CAPACITY)	
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100%</b>

## NOTE 7

Sub-configurations or arrangements specifically customized to address events' requirements.

## FUNCTIONING AND RELIABILITY OF THE GALA VENUE SYSTEM

The interviews provided valuable information on the reliability and smooth functioning of the **Gala Venue Seating System** during the years 2015-2017. Only one interference incident happened between two technologies, including that of **Gala**, occurring at a time when the plenary hall was closed. An upgrade of both systems' control interfaces rapidly solved the problem.

According to the STCC's managers, “The hall has been very easy to work with,” mainly because:

- Only three people need to be trained to operate the system;
- A single person is typically needed to perform the computerized transformation within minutes;
- The upkeep is minimal, requiring just a thorough annual maintenance check performed by one Gala technician and available local maintenance staff.

## AT THE STCC, SPACE IS ALSO ALWAYS SCALED TO PERFECTLY MATCH AUDIENCE SIZES :

“Most often we use a hybrid solution between rows of seats and a flat stage area which differs in size based on the number of participants so that the room does not feel empty and is utilised most conveniently,” explained Christophe Leyvraz. And while seating capacity is planned in advance for the expected number of attendees, it may also undergo last-minute adjustments when faced with the unexpected capacity changes. As reported by Julianne Jammers: “... [operators] also change the room during first minutes of an event if the organiser announces a different number of participants, to make things perfect for them”. She added that “one client needed to bring his own pre-built restaurant and party box inside Auditorium A, but [its]... calculations were not right... Thanks to the **Gala System**'s ability to lower the platform, we could immediately adapt [to the situation] and after a few minutes the setup continued smoothly.”

Overall, the **Gala Venue Seating System** consistently provided trouble-free operation for all of its transformations, with no complaint for noise between concurrent events, no need for parts replacement and no event delayed or canceled due to technical problems.

# FLEXIBILITY : A MAJOR STRENGTH FOR THE STCC

In today's meeting environments, event planners and attendees are looking for facilities that offer unique features. As such, the STCC rapidly stood out by winning many international events over other venues and by being named the 2016 Best Swiss Convention Center.

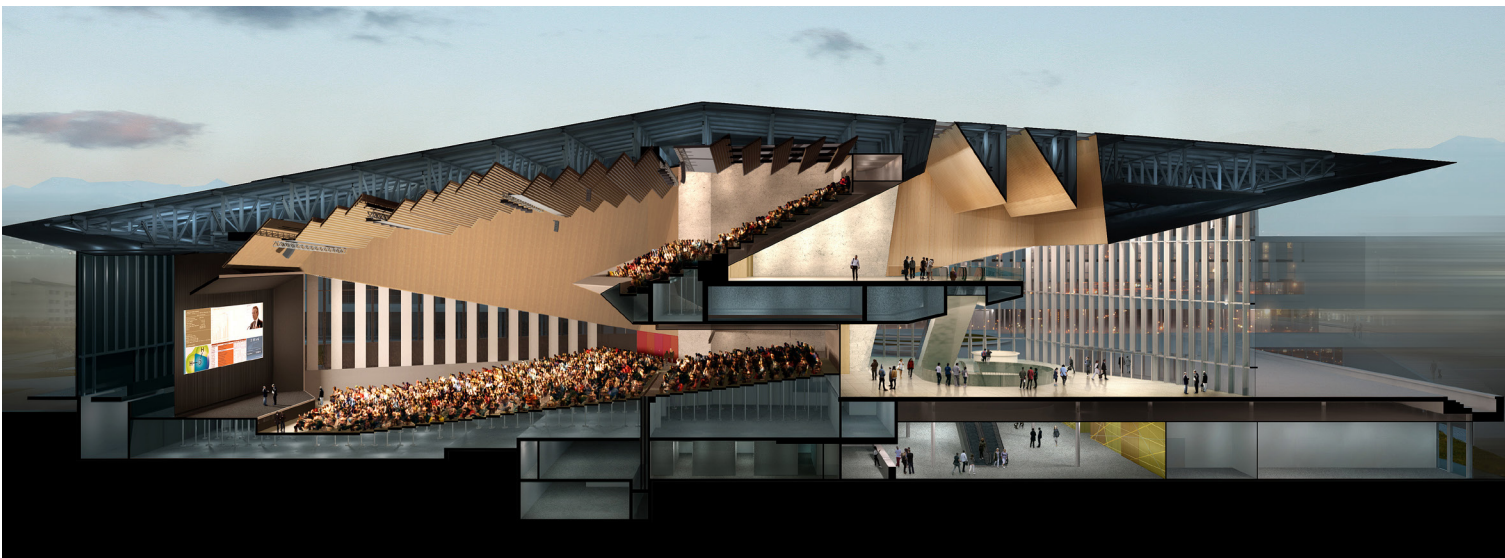
**When asked to describe the STCC's unique proposition, Julianne Jammers highlighted that:**

- The EPFL campus, as a renowned European Campus similar to MIT or Stanford, has the resources and professionals to support meetings;
- Its 5-star service provides near-perfect events;
- The Gala flexible space is adaptable to many purposes.

Differentiating itself from other venues has been the secret for the STCC to attract more business and larger international events, and yet with no need to get more creative with marketing. To date, staff have reported no advertising, only public relations efforts. Communications with the public and media, via the website, associations and fairs like ICCA, AIPC, IMEX and IBTM, have been sufficient to keep the building active. The fact that the STCC's event calendar is now booked up several months to seven years in advance speaks for itself.

What's more, the flexible STCC has proven a vital tool for the EPFL. As a research institute specializing in natural sciences and engineering, it has always had the mission to develop education, research and technology transfer at the highest international level. Having now the means to support a full range of scientific activities, even the most ambitious meetings, the EPFL has been able to organize numerous additional events. According to the Managing Director of the Centre, Julianne Jammers, increased exposure for the EPFL's projects and professors has led to more publishing (and thus grants) as well as to an increased in the number of times that journalists wrote about the EPFL and shared information through various media channels.

Overall, she said, these numerous scientific events *"... have aided at increasing the EPFL ranking to #1 of all campuses worldwide 50 years old or younger"* among the top 200 universities assessed by the *Times Higher Education's Young University Ranking* across teaching, research, international outlook and their work with industry. And this has been true since 2015.



# CONCLUSION

As a wonderful piece of engineering and architecture, and winner of the Best Swiss Convention Center in 2016, the STCC has not only served the EPFL scientific community remarkably, but has also been internationally competitive to attract larger events. Made scalable and modular through a **Gala Venue Seating System**, it has been able to handle just about any world scientific conference, as well as traditional concerts and social and business events.

**Specifically, the *Gala Venue Seating System* delivered significant benefits to the Center, including:**

- Increased activity and attendance in the plenary hall –50% more events than would have been possible without the space modularity–;
- Broadened range of programs and activities that can be well served by the venue, reaching an annual occupation rate of 76%;
- Best possible event experience for users 100% of the time, regardless of the number of attendees and types of event, contributing to a high client retention rate of 80%;
- Differentiating key element in comparison to other venues, helping to attract more business while minimizing marketing efforts; and
- Fully covered costs of operation through the many events presented.

Today, convention centres are experiencing changes to meet organizers' and attendees' expectations for increased versatility in space to match the unique requirements of their events. With its state-of-the-art transformation system, there is no doubt that the STCC will remain relevant and valuable to its community for many years to come, serving at times as a modern platform for the exchange of knowledge, and at others as a space customized for exciting and profitable events.

