

Orgatec 2022, Cologne

October 2022



A REVIEW

Introduction & Overview

After four long, tough years, it was so good to be back in Cologne for Orgatec. The weather was scarily mild, with temperatures in the mid-twenties celsius; a far cry from what would normally be expected in late October. Although some of the show's trimmings may have been trimmed, the fundamentals were still in evidence with six massive halls filled with the latest ideas of how to cope with office work in post-Covid times. The organisers, Koelnmesse, appeared to have been cautious about likely visitor numbers and provided somewhat less entertainment and fewer frills than previously. This was made up for in part by generous hospitality from some exhibitors, most notably [CMD](#) with an offsite party which was advertised as not finishing before 5am on Friday!

The 686 exhibitors were broadly spread internationally – 43 countries were represented – although with a rather lower level of representation than previously from North America. Have some industry giants given up on Europe? There were also fewer Chinese exhibitors than we've seen in the past, but their absence was made up for by a large presence from Taiwan. Eastern and central European manufacturers were very much in evidence, as well as large contingents from the Nordic countries. As for the 45,000 visitors who came from 130 countries, it seemed that a higher proportion than usual were from Europe and rather fewer were from Asia, the Middle East or North America.

Exhibitors and visitors picked up seamlessly on old, unfinished, conversations, and all seemed so happy to be back on familiar ground.



Words and photos - John Sacks

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The Trends

Manufacturers and their designers had focused their attention on a relatively limited number of aspects of office and commercial furniture and furnishings.

Easy furniture reconfiguration has long been appreciated by office planners but with the massive post-Covid changes in office utilisation, space almost invariably needs to be used in many different ways. Furniture and furnishings must allow for harmony between collaboration, individual concentration, meetings, presentations and communications. Most office companies are answering these demands by creating collections of individual pieces which endeavour to be both adaptable and visually compatible.

If the objective is to make effective multi-functional use of large areas by individuals and gatherings, small and large, and quickly and easily switched between many different functions, some characteristics are helpful. Easy mobility, modularity, multifunctionality and visual compatibility come to mind. What causes problems is anything with permanence or effective immobility. That partially explains the absence of the large, rigid, bench configurations of workplaces which were prominent features of previous shows. What we have in their place would once have been thought of as a facility manager's nightmare – furniture that never stays still long enough to be indexed and is constantly being moved around by users.

One issue that has become quickly obvious; the need to manage the high noise levels created by collaborative space filled with meetings, phone and zoom communications. Much of this year's Orgatec was given over to acoustics with baffles, cladding, screens and indeed furniture made from sound-absorbing material. There were more pods and booths and telephone and meeting enclosures than would be thought possible and colour apart, there wasn't very much to distinguish one from another. Acoustic absorption and insulation were very high on the list of priorities for most product categories and was often achieved using materials made from recycled bottles, yoghurt pots or other materials at the end of their useful lives.

There seemed to be much less emphasis at the show than previously on health and safety issues such as ergonomics, and rather more on the visual aspects of design.

One exception was the startup [Movably](#) from Massachusetts who showed prototypes of their Movably Pro seating system design for standing height tables and using app technology and electric motors to encourage users to vary their position frequently.



Movably from Massachusetts



Sofa by B&T Design Turkey



Guialmi Adaptable sofa

This might have been because so much of the furniture has been designed with one eye on it being used in the home, or in spaces which are meant to recreate, to some extent, the feeling of the home. Working from home, or hybrid working arrangements are clearly leading to considerable crossover between office and residential furniture; a trend which is unlikely to disappear quickly. One can imagine some difficulties here, with furniture intended for offices traditionally being built to different strength, performance, functional and fire safety standards and specifications than furniture destined for home use. Will home furniture become much more durable and expensive, or office furniture cheaper?

Compared with May's Clerkenwell Design Week show in London, there was rather less emphasis on furniture designed to create outdoor office environments. One notable exception was from [Egoe](#) based in Bilovice in the Czech Republic who showed their Leva enclosures.

In the context of adaptability, [Guialmi](#) from Portugal had a sofa system which incorporated acoustic screens and panels which could be raised and lowered to create different environments.

As could have been expected, there was considerable emphasis on breakout furniture, especially stylish upholstered pieces of different shapes and sizes. As with so much else at the show, the key feature was moveability.

[B&T](#) from Istanbul showed a wide range of hybrid seating products including an organically-shaped bench sofa (above).

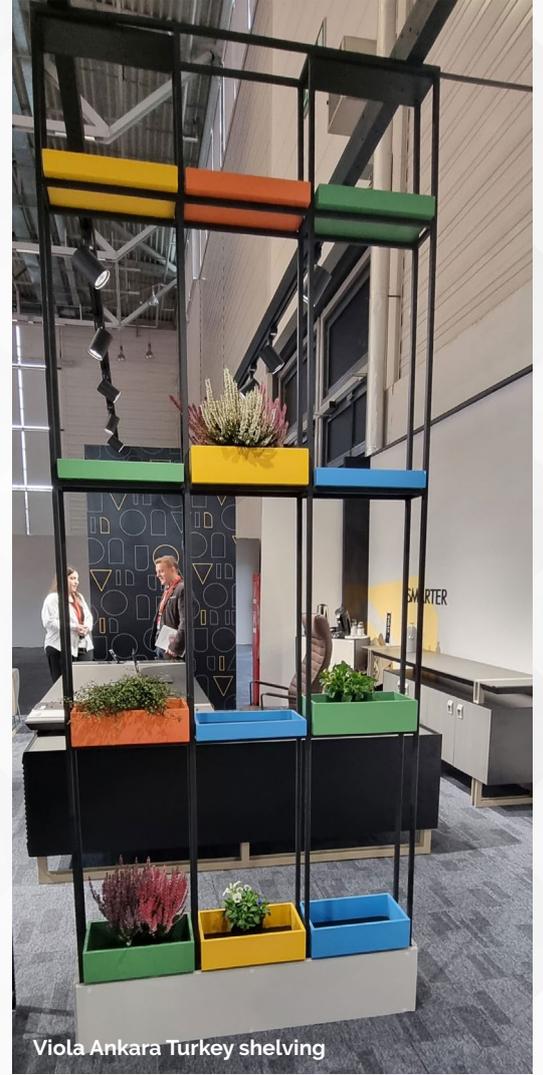
Other companies from Turkey included [Nurus](#) with a Favoretto & Partners designed sofa set and some attractive education furniture, [Tuna's](#) space dividing system and storage units from [Viola](#) of Ankara and [Burotime](#) of Konya.



Nurus sofa set designed Favoretto and Partners



Nurus education furniture



Viola Ankara Turkey shelving



Tuna Office Turkey



Wall unit Burotime, Konya

The industry giant [Nowy Styl Group](#), headquartered in Poland, had a large stand showing products from some of their companies including Kusch. The award-winning Martin Ballendat designed WithMe chairs were created for hybrid and agile working.



[Molo](#) from Vancouver with their concertina paper created designs were one of the very few North American exhibitors.



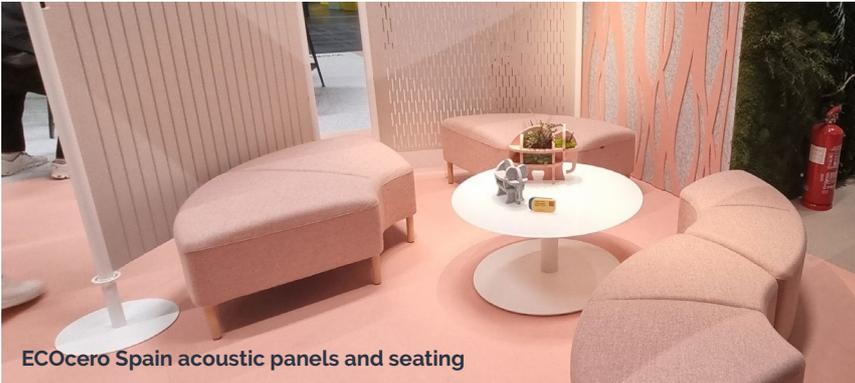
[Milani](#) from Venice showed their Meolo Red Seating – their motto was “Red is Bold.” Other examples of the many reds and pinks on display were from [ECOcero](#) from Spain, the UK’s [Ocee Design](#) and [Montana](#) from Denmark. Definitely the colours of the moment.



Milani from Meolo Italy Red seating



Motana Denmark collaboration area



ECOcero Spain acoustic panels and seating



Ocee Design Four Design

[Allermuir](#), a member of the [Senator Group](#), the UK's largest office furniture company, were one of the very few UK companies exhibiting. They showed an interesting technological development with overnight rechargeable battery packs built into a mobile portable screen which could power large display screens.



Senator's mobile screen system

[Hettich](#), well known in the furniture industry as a leading component supplier, showed prototypes of a clever modular system of personal workspaces, the results of their work with the University of Applied Science in Munster.



Hettich and University of Applied Science joint venture

Another company showing prototypes was designer and his Tokyo-based start-up [Tatiisu](#). They showed their Kiju range made from timber and stainless steel.



Kiju from Tatiisu from Japan

The Companies

There was much talk at the show of fewer of the exhibition halls being occupied and of some of the larger companies that usually show at Orgatec being missing. However, as someone who spent four long days trawling the vast spaces, I can report there were more than enough outstanding displays of beautiful, innovative, exciting new furniture ideas, creatively presented, to slake the thirst of the most enthusiastic of furniture devotees. One felt no need for any more halls, any more companies or any more furniture.

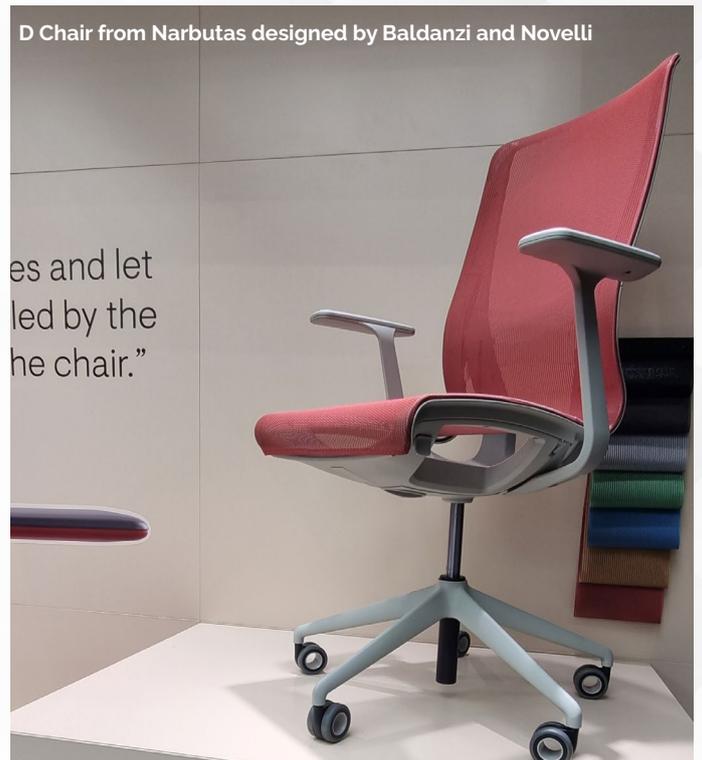
In the spirit of easy reconfiguration, the Swedish group, [EEG](#), presented Hybe.



One of the large and fast-growing companies in the industry, [Narbutas](#) from Lithuania, showed some of the results of their design and development programmes including the Paolo Pampanoni designed Zedo range of workstations, a decorated A Frame unit and their D Chair from the studio of Baldanzi & Novelli.



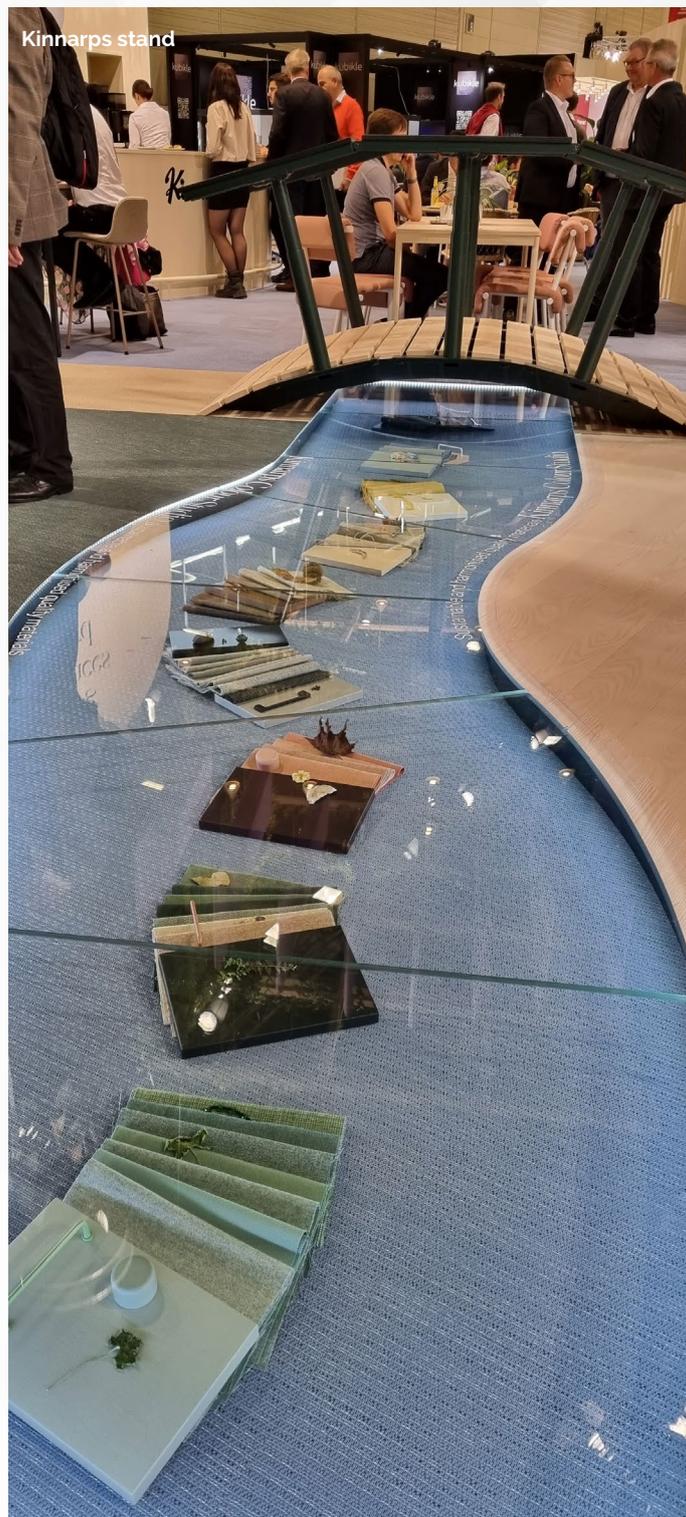
D Chair from Narbutas designed by Baldanzi and Novelli



One of the few companies which veered away from showing only furniture and furnishings was the Swedish giant, [Kinnarps](#). Their massive truck fitted easily into a space near their stand which also featured a small river.



As for their products on show, they included one of the relatively rare height adjustable workstations in the show.



Japan was well represented, including by [Axona Aichi](#) from Nagoya who presented a new stacking Gene chair designed by Taku Kumazawa and [Cazetora Quali](#) from Anjo who also showed a range of moulded side chairs.



The large German company, [Palmberg](#), displayed a wide range of easily mobile products encouraging flexible and agile working environments.



[Ondaretta](#) from the Basque region of Spain had a large display of very attractive products including Ika wood chairs that packed completely flat when folded. Sebastian Herkner's Ginger Lounge designs for the company looked good enough to eat.



[Sedus](#) had their usual very large and impressive display area with a very wide range of products including this SE~Air chair with its weight adjustable mechanism and simple, light appearance.



And Finally...

The ultimate of accessories appeared to be the drinking water dispenser and mist generating humidifier on this height adjustable table from the Ukrainian furniture maker [Technotable](#).





John Sacks

London, October 2022



"Advising office furniture businesses around the world"