



The Studierendenwerk is currently focussing heavily on the energy-efficient refurbishment and protection of its current halls of residence. The company even has its own department for this. Melis Yüksel tells us what this team does on a daily basis and what it's like to be a woman in the construction industry.

Mang: Hello and welcome to a new episode of our my-stuwe podcast. Today we are focussing on a very important topic: the construction and maintenance of student accommodation. The Studierendenwerk is repeatedly called upon by various parties to provide new accommodation. Unfortunately, the prices for building projects have risen dramatically in recent years and at the same time, the state's funding has not been increased and student numbers are stagnating.

For this reason, the Studierendenwerk is currently focussing more on the energy-efficient refurbishment and protection of the current halls of residence. The organisation even has its own department for this. Melis Yüksel has been working there for several years and will tell us more about her day-to-day work today. Hello Melis, nice to have you here today. Let's start with you as a person. We'd like to get to know you a little better first. How did you end up at Studierendenwerk in the first place? And why in particular in the field of construction/facility management? It's a very specialised area. What do you enjoy about it?

Yüksel: Hi Philipp, thanks for the invitation. I actually started out as a clerk in the dormitory administration department. Due to an internal reorganisation, I ended up in the construction team. And together with the team, we then moved to the head office in Friedrichstrasse. What I can say about us is that we are purely a project department. We supervise new builds and refurbishments, plan them in advance and also prepare cost estimates.

In the beginning, I was actually involved in small projects. I pre-planned, managed and coordinated them. I really enjoyed it and it worked very well. Then the idea came up relatively quickly that I should complete or

start further training in this area. And with the support of Studierenwerk, I actually completed a part-time further training programme to become a specialist in facility management.

Yes, and at the same time I even wrote my project work on the energy-efficient refurbishment of our hall of residence at Hartmeyerstrasse 2 and am currently responsible for the refurbishment.

Mang: You've had quite a strenuous time with your further training. You could say that the construction and property industry is traditionally dominated by men. And the people around you in your team are all men. I imagine that you also have to deal with more male tradesmen on construction sites. How do you feel about that? As the only woman. What do you think you need to bring to the table to hold your own in this particular environment?

Yüksel: I can tell you that I haven't experienced anything negative so far. On the contrary, I am always treated with respect by everyone involved in the project on the construction site and by my team colleagues. I have to say that we also have more and more women on the construction site. At the moment, we even have a plasterer and an electrician supporting us at Hartmeyerstrasse 2. Of course, I'm also very pleased to have female power on the construction site, because you can feel a bit insecure at first.

So when all the men are in a heap like that, it's a bit, how should I put this now? It's not scary, but you might not have the confidence to do certain things at first. But I would recommend always trusting yourself and not letting yourself be unsettled. Experience shows that we are just as good as men. And I have to say, if you have a different opinion, then you have to communicate

this openly and honestly with the men. That works well and simply trust your professional skills.

Mang: Great. But I think it's great that there seems to be a development and that there are now more women on the construction sites. That's great. Let's talk about your day-to-day work. I'm sure many students out there can't even imagine what you do every day. Maybe you could start by explaining to us what a refurbishment actually is. And what would you say: do you have more of a traditional office job where you sit at a computer and plan a lot? Or do you spend a lot of time travelling? Perhaps a mixture of both? So just give us an impression.

Yüksel: Sure, I can give you a brief definition. We actually want to renovate the entire building structurally and technically in order to improve the living conditions for the students. Of course, we also want to ensure that we maintain the value of the building. Measures could include, for example, replacing the windows and installing better insulation in the roof, exterior façade and basement area. Replacing the heating system to use alternative energy sources, installing better ventilation systems. And of course, which is very important these days, that we have photovoltaic systems installed in the right places.

Of course, in order to coordinate all the refurbishments well and keep track of everything, I would say we are 50% on site and 50% in the office. Because it's really important that we're often on site. But we also have regular meetings with everyone involved in the project on the construction site. Solving minor problems is always quicker on the construction site and it always works better. And at the beginning, when work starts, it's always important to be on site every day so that everything is synchronised. And we are also there to ensure that the schedules are adhered to. We always make sure that all measures are completed on time as planned. And of course we are also there to coordinate everything. In other words, whether all measures are being adhered to from a professional and technical point of view.

And the rest, the other 50 %, we are in the office, where we actually provide cost estimates, clearly a lot of e-mail correspondence with the project participants, internally and externally. We draw up specifications, invitations to tender and, depending on the construction sum, the construction projects are also put out to public or limited tender. And of course, when the large

construction sites are pre-planned, the official documents have to be prepared and communication with the authorities also takes place. This also happens in our team.

Mang: Quite complex tasks. But the way you describe it, it certainly sounds varied because you're also travelling a lot. Yes, it's like this now: in the Tübingen student village WHO alone, we have more than 1,700 student residences in 24 buildings. Then there are all the halls of residence in the French Quarter, in the old town, in Hartmeyerstrasse and many more. Then there are all the external locations. Perhaps you can give us a rough picture. When were most of these buildings built? Or how many years old is the oldest hall of residence in our area, for example?

Yüksel: Our oldest hall of residence was built in 1486 and is located at Münzgasse 7 in the old town centre of Tübingen – definitely the best location. And as a team, we are currently responsible for 108 halls of residence at eight locations with 5849 beds. So we're actually responsible for a lot of beds and yes, I think most of the halls of residence date back to the 70s, because the largest halls of residence are in Waldhäuser-Ost from 1974 and the halls of residence in the French quarter, which were built in 1992.

Mang: Wow, those are pretty impressive figures. Yes, that makes it all the more important that we also take care of these buildings with refurbishments. This is the only way we can continue to offer future generations affordable housing at these locations. How do you actually assess the urgency of such maintenance or refurbishments? Or to put it another way: what criteria are used to decide where and when refurbishments are carried out?

Yüksel: So the preliminary planning is definitely quite time-consuming. Every year, we try to make a preliminary plan of measures for the next financial year. We always visit the student residences to do this. We then try to document everything: the professional, structural and technical defects. Of course, the reports from the caretaker also help. These are also always taken into account. We document and record all points.

We always provide a rough cost estimate and always make a recommendation as to which measures can be realised in the long term, short term and medium term. And the compilation, i.e. the complete package, is then forwarded to the management and after approval we

then try to write everything down in detail and draw up the construction schedules. And of course, depending on the construction sum, it is then put out to tender across the EU or put out to limited tender. So it is quite time-consuming to plan a construction project in advance and it actually takes almost a year to get approval.

Mang: So there are definitely long processes behind it. Do you actually work together with planning offices and architects on a refurbishment like this or do you manage it, shall I say, in your small team alone?

Yüksel: Definitely. We work together with architects or planning offices. We may work with electrical engineers, heating engineers, structural engineers or energy consultants. But we are also well-positioned professionally. Our team consists of an architect, a master craftsman, a technician and, of course, myself as a specialist. We can also carry out and realise many measures independently as a team.

Mang: There is definitely a great deal of expertise internally. Since the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic and the war in Ukraine, the construction industry has clearly been struggling. It is often difficult to find specialist companies for projects, for example. There are also recurring supply problems for certain materials and the overall costs are simply rising enormously. Are you also experiencing these challenges?

Yüksel: Yes, we are definitely feeling the challenges too. During the corona pandemic, we definitely had major difficulties. Supply difficulties, for example with insulation material and wood. We were really in daily communication with suppliers and tradespeople during these times. We tried to plan everything in advance and always order on time and plan ahead. But it also worked well.

The war came after the coronavirus pandemic. We felt the effects of that too, of course. The increased energy prices are reflected in the offers. We've definitely noticed that in our cost estimates for Hartmeyerstrasse. And at the moment, of course, we are also feeling the shortage of skilled labour. The local tradespeople are really struggling to find skilled labour and are therefore unable to submit tenders because they simply don't have the people to work on the construction site. That really is a big problem for us at the moment. However, we were lucky at the moment that we still received offers. But it is becoming increasingly difficult to find tra-

despeople who can also realise large-scale projects. Of course, we always try to plan ahead for the challenges, but some things simply can't be planned in advance. We always have to react as quickly as possible.

Mang: Not an easy situation. Yes, a refurbishment like this – I think everyone can imagine that it's quite a mammoth project. Will the refurbishment or maintenance be carried out while the building is still in operation, i.e. with tenants in the building, or will the students also be relocated?

Yüksel: In any case, it depends on the various works or the project, whether individual floors are affected or whether the entire hall of residence is affected. Minor measures and maintenance are normally carried out while the residents are still in the building. That's not a problem for us because it's always limited in time. But of course, in order to realise major renovations, the students also have to be relocated in good time.

Mang: We've now talked a lot about general issues relating to refurbishment. But let's finish by talking about a very specific project of yours. What can you tell us about it?

Yüksel: At the moment we have a major refurbishment in Hohenheim, which we have almost finished. And, of course, my specialist project work in Hartmeyerstrasse. But we have already completed all the energy-related measures. So that means that the first construction phase is now finished and the students can move back in on 1 October.

For the second construction phase, it is not important to relocate the students and they can then stay inside. And the measures will then be carried out while the building is occupied.

Mang: While Hartmeyerstrasse is being renovated or is close to completion, the plans for the next projects are certainly already underway. Which halls of residence do you have in your sights for the future?

Yüksel: Exactly. We are currently in the process of visiting our halls of residence and documenting everything. Recording all the defects. In any case, we will be realising the second construction phase of Hartmeyerstrasse from April. And yes, we are still in the planning stage, as I mentioned earlier. But we haven't yet finalised which hall of residence will be renovated next.

Mang: Okay. Melis I think we could talk a lot more about the whole issue of refurbishment, but that's it for now. I hope we were able to show you out there that the Studierendenwerk is making some efforts to protect the current existing buildings. We really do want to offer future generations of students affordable accommodation here. Melis Yüksel and her colleagues are therefore pulling out all the stops every day to coordinate the work on the construction sites.

Unfortunately, these projects require a lot of planning time, as should be obvious. In addition, we are always dependent on the availability of skilled labour. This is not always easy in the current times. So please bear with us if we can't always completely modernise a building from one day to the next. As always, we look forward to your feedback and questions on this topic. Just send us an email or write to us on social media: Facebook and Instagram. Otherwise, thank you for listening and see you next time. Ciao, ciao.

**Note: This transcription of the podcast was generated with the help of machine software. We apologise for any minor discrepancies or spelling mistakes.*