

# First works council in German commercial archaeology

Regine Müller ACIfA (9555), Field Director and Technician, SPAU GmbH

**The archaeological company SPAU was founded in 2015 and has undergone a rapid development over the last five years. Until spring 2020 SPAU was a private company, directed by its founder Sascha Piffko MA MCIfA. Following the company's quick development from a five-person enterprise to a substantial middle-sized business with up to 50 employees, SPAU also underwent structural changes in order to adapt to this development. One important structural measure was its transition from a privately owned company to a private limited company (GmbH) last year.**

So far, so ordinary.

The second important change was the establishment of a works council, coming into effect in spring 2020. While the request to set up a works council often meets resistance from company managers, Sascha Piffko, director of SPAU GmbH, was open to and supportive of this idea from the start. Although pointing out that a works council could be a challenge for him as head of the company and

that some topics supported by the council might cause inconvenience at best or even become a risk for the company itself, he was keen to establish it. He stressed that, on the other hand, a works council for him provides numerous forms of support, ie decision making in sensitive situations, solving intra-company conflicts, supporting the proper development of occupational health and safety, etc.

So on 29 April 2020 the works council was officially elected, being the first in German commercial archaeology. The council consists of its chairman, Hendrik Hofmann BA (affiliate of ClfA), supported by Olaf Krause MA and Dr Regine Müller ACIfA. The voter participation of 98.73% showed that amongst the employees the interest in having a works council within the company was strong.

Being the first works council in commercial archaeology in Germany, the team faces pioneer work here. Many tasks and challenges ahead will have to be mastered, step by step. Doubtless we will learn from our experiences and also our mistakes. Luckily, features like paid holidays, educational leave, company pension scheme, paid overtime hours, etc, for

which most works councils have to step up in order to gain these rights for the employees, already existed within the SPAU GmbH. Hence the cooperation between Sascha Piffko and the works council so far is based upon mutual support and collaboration to push common interests for the company's improvement.

At the moment, this collaboration includes the internal restructuring of the SPAU GmbH in order to qualify for ClfA Registered Organisation status, branded in Germany as Gütezeichen für Archäologie (GZA) as well as for the *Arbeits Sicherheits Management System (AMS)* certificate of the statutory accident insurance institution BG Bau.

The works council is already acting well as contact partner for the smaller and sometimes larger concerns of employees. Hopes are that it will become a success story for our company and will pave the way for encouraging the establishment of works councils in other companies, in order to improve working conditions in commercial archaeology in Germany. Times are changing.



SPAU staff members during the annual health and safety workshop. Credit: SPAU GmbH 2020



**Regine Müller**

Regine has worked in archaeology for 20 years – the last five years as field director and technician for SPAU GmbH. Her field experience includes almost all kinds of excavation. She has been part of the company's works council since April 2020.