

# Verein für Berliner Stadtmission

Interview \_ HdM\_ Sofie Göppl Leon

**Date:** 25<sup>th</sup> of April 2023—5:00 PM **Recording Length:** 23'39"

**Place:** In the courtyard of the HdM

**Can you maybe tell me about your background and how you came to be working with Berliner City Mission?**

So, I studied clothing technology at University of applied sciences here in Berlin. Before I went to a Waldorf school. It's a concept from Rudolf Steiner. And there, we had a focus on craft, this *Handwerk*. So, after the studies, I just didn't wanted to develop some products for any brand in the industry. No, I wanted to develop something different in the fashion department somehow. I had to do an Internship while my Studies and because of this I got to know Ana Lichtwer from Berliner City Mission, who was the manager at HdM before. This was how I got into Berliner City Mission. And therefore, I also wrote my bachelor thesis with them together. Like, how we can recycle more textiles and how we can use it for Berliner city missions' purpose. The internship was pretty nice and I had a good relationship with Ana so, after I finished my degree I had the chance to start working for Berliner City Mission.

**And so, can you maybe tell me a little bit about Berliner City Mission as this was here before HdM?**

In 2018 Berliner City Mission wrote an Letter of Intent to Haus der Statistik and we opened for the first time in 2019. But usually, Berliner City Mission is seeking for the best in the city. That's our *Leitspruch* [motto]. Usually the main Business is to encounter people and take note of what they need. We invite people and support them in their individual circumstances, support them in taking first steps towards new beginnings, discovering their potential an reaching a better quality of life. We live out our values of hospitality and offer practical help.

We have our headquarter at the main station at Lehrterstraße and we have a big center next to the Zoo. And now at Alexanderplatz. We didn't have a department there so we saw the requirement to open up a new location.

**So, Berliner Stadtmission was there, in HdM, really from the beginning?**

Yes, I think Berliner City Mission was one of the first projects with Material Mafia, Kunst-Stoffe, and others...

**So, were you also there from the beginning in 2019?**

No, I am here since 2020 in the winter and then I came back a year later in 2021.

**Do you know maybe if they had anecdotes about setting up the place here or difficulties?**

In the beginning the first step was to clean up because the Building was left for 10 years and now it is a construction site. We started to paint the walls and rebuild scaffoldings inside. But I think one of our

main difficulties are the rats. Some time ago we had two cats in the HdM to get rid of them but the rats are part of the building and the city so we always have to deal with them.

**Because was the space smaller at the beginning?**

Not the space but we had too many of these scaffholdings / *Gerüste*.

**You have the boxes where you have the jeans and other textiles. Did you make them?**

No. We got them I think two or three years ago. Yes, because maybe this is also an add-on to the last question or maybe why we started here. Berliner City Mission is collecting clothing donations and we get a lot of them but for us we only can use 20%. So, we have got 80% of clothing we cannot use for our needs.

**Do you mean you cannot give it back to people?**

Right. The first priority is always our clothes distribution a department where we give out clothing to people in need. There, we mostly need clothing for men. And just pants, hoodies, T-shirts, shoes, socks, underwear, and backpacks. Maybe jackets, but that's it. And we get a lot more like home textiles like fashion, fashionable stuff like women's clothing. And these, we cannot use for the clothes distribution or this purpose. We have some *Kiezläden* [neighborhood shops]. A few years ago, every *Kiezläden* accepted donations, and then they had to sort it. At some point it was too much to handle for every shop. So in 2018 the Textilhafen opened up and now every donation is getting collected centrally and sorted by hand.

**So, the Textilhafen is part of the Berliner Stadtmission?**

Yes, right. The Komm & Sieh gGmbH is the non-profit inclusion company of the Berliner city mission. Komm & Sieh operates, among other things the clothes distribution and the Textilhafen.

At Textilhafen every Textile donation gets sorted by hand into the different categories. The first priority is always the clothes distribution and then the second are the Kiezläden. So, clothing which is fine, which can be sold, which is wearable. This we sell as secondhand pieces, and the third priority is the Materialpool. We have one in Textilhafen and one Pop up here in HdM.

**You have furniture: where does that come from?**

So, Komm & Sieh has a Logistic and Transport team, they are helping with *Wohnungsaufösungen* [apartment liquidation]. This is the reason why we are selling secondhand furniture.

**Then how do you decide to display the material in your place, so people want to use it and how do you showcase them?**

I mean, for the textiles, it's like what we have. We try to find out what is going well and what not or what are the people seeking for. So, when we are realizing "okay, this box, no one is going for it no one is buying something out of it," we change the Materials. And with the furniture we are also looking "is it like trendy or not?" or "is it something which is super old like so called vintage?" or "is it designer piece or something?"

**Is everything put on Kleinanzeigen?**

Everything which is in the front on the shelf.

**Do you think the people who are coming to see you are trying to use it as materials or as new pieces of clothing or new pieces of furniture? Or are they trying to build a more complex project out of it and then maybe use workshops in HdM?**

Yes, both. I think with the textiles, a lot of people are interested in secondhand clothing. But there are also some people who are coming and also taking something out repairing it at the workshop and then wearing it or using it as material for upcycling. And with the furniture I think the most are using it as it is. There are some people, they are also using it for upcycling or we had *eine Schreibmaschine* [= a typewriter] which was not working and today one guy came and he was like "I will repair it that's my hobby." So, it's a mix of both but I think more for secondhand use.

**And are you trying between pioneers to interact? I don't know propose and new things, new workshops or things to do together.**

Yes, of course. I think workshops maybe not that much but we offer workshop weeks and then you have some workshop for wood, some for the textiles or with other pioneers. But sometimes I go to the wood workshop. For example, we had one thing like a bed for hospital, which you can put up and down. And there was just a little broken thing, and we repaired it with the wood workshop and then we could sell it again because it was working again. So, that was pretty nice. Or we had a table which we wanted to put higher to do the cutting on it, we could also do it with the expertise of the wood workshop. And another part was pretty funny. The fungus workshop from Mitkunstzentrale, they are researching with wood leftovers and we also tried it with textiles. I gave them some of our textile leftovers. It didn't work really good because most of the textile have a bigger synthetic fiber part than cotton so it wasn't enough cellulose to let the fungus grow. These interfaces are super interesting!

**How would you describe your relationship to materials?**

I think my focus is most times on textiles but of course also for others. For me, I really see the worth of things and products depending on how much work and resources someone put into it. That is one thing, and the other thing is, of course, I know that a cotton shirt somehow grows on the field and how much plants it needs for it and how much work to spin fibers and weave or knit fabrics. And for me, this is a point where I cannot use a Product just once and then throw it away. Because so many resources went into it. Yes, this for me is really important to reuse Materials and to give it another or second or even third life. Because on the other hand it hurts me to see how much Materials, we call it trash or waste then we throw on the streets or landscape.

**Maybe about the future. How do you see the future of Berliner City Mission in the HdM?**

Depending what HdM will be. So, for us, it's difficult to look into the future because nothing is safe, and we don't have any idea how it will be. But, of course, for us, when we just had a shop here with furniture and textiles, it wouldn't work ... or not like this. So, for us these compilations and cooperation with all these other projects make it alive somehow or this is what brings it alive and makes it really

useful and workable for everyone. So, we want to continue this somehow. But we cannot say how this is going to be. It's a practical process.

**How is HdM successful?**

I would say it's successful in the part that we really opened up a market for secondhand materials or for used materials. There are two other markets in Berlin which are kind of similar. But I think the part that maybe is successful in HdM is to build this community and have a place which is not just a market for selling stuff. Instead of educating people and create a place where People are welcome. I would say, that's a big success to be a nice role model and Pioneer in the city relating to innovative Places.

**Do you know, other people that came and that said that they wanted to do the same thing? Or get inspired by the HdM and do it elsewhere?**

Yes, yes, a lot of people. I nearly hear it every week when I do the tour through HdM. I had people from France, Köln or Peru or other countries and cities. I always mention "please take it with you the idea. Copy it, do it by yourself, bring it to your city or whatever." Because that's another part of the HdM that we don't want to be like "Copyright! This is our project our idea!" instead of spreading the thinking and knowledge. So, I think, we inspire a lot of people to continue.

**So, my last question is a bit more open but what would be your utopia?**

To have a nice place where we can stay until the new buildings are built and that every project could stay with the HdM. And that we could keep the costs of the rent that would be pretty nice. Or the utopia would be more that everyone can stay here. Because the worry is that we cannot finance the costs of the rent.

**Because how is this working today?**

At the moment we have like three euro per square meter per month. And with the new building, it will start from 10 euro per square meter or something. This is a huge difference. Even for Berlin City Mission its impossible to pay the rent only through our offers. So it will be even more complicated for other pioneers or smaller projects.

**Do you talk about it a lot to try to find solutions?**

I mean, we now have a company which is helping us to find solutions. So, they advise us on how HdM can finance itself. Of course, there's always the thinking about funding. But this is not the plan or this is not how it works for longer term. You don't finance your project over the years with funding. And of course, then we think about how we can calculate new. For the moment, for example, our workshops are for free. Because they are funded, and we can offer it like that. But this would also be a point then we could not offer them for free anymore. And this is the very sad because now its a low-threshold offer for everyone. So, you can just come here, it's for free. You can just do it, you can learn something and everyone can take part of it. And then when we will say the workshop will cost you 30 euro, there are a lot of people who will say that they can't afford it.