

# ‘With a little help from our friends’ meeting the challenges of the global energy crisis through cross-border collaboration: the SuedLink project in Germany

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Germany is committed to gaining 80 per cent of its energy supply from renewables by 2030.<sup>1</sup> This ambitious goal requires new DC-technology transmission across the country (and beyond its borders), to bring energy from where and when it is produced to where and when it is needed. Aided by new EU-wide emergency regulations and German planning legislation to speed up the process, construction in the German energy sector is booming. What does this mean for its commercial archaeologists?

Although developer-funded archaeology arrived in Germany as early as the late 1980s, and the ratification of the Valletta Convention in 1992 acted as catalyst for its adoption across the country, the development of a strong commercial sector has been lagging. As a federal country, Germany’s 16 states retain sovereignty in all matters of historic environment management and conservation, legislation and regulations. In addition, the organisational structures of heritage authorities and their respective responsibilities vary from state to state. Historically, companies have limited their sphere of operations accordingly, which has stunted growth. This has resulted in a commercially underdeveloped, fragmented and distinctly parochial commercial archaeology sector, and one that is ill-prepared to meet the challenges of this gargantuan, politically charged, and accelerated construction boom.

## Integrating archaeological management of the SuedLink Southern Asset

Traversing the entire country north to south for more than 700km as the crow flies, and with a working strip up to 40m wide, the construction of the underground cable connector SuedLink is a monumental undertaking with enormous archaeological implications.<sup>2</sup> TransnetBW, the developer of its southern half (Southern Asset, c 468km in length) decided early on to meet those challenges upfront by building a currently 16-strong archaeological management team together with project partner Jacobs (Germany).

Consultations with the various regulating authorities commenced earlier, in 2019, alongside desk-based data collection and surveys across the prospective cable corridors. Armed with this information, the archaeology team undertook extensive

*Signs of the German energy transition in the landscape of Lower Saxony. Credit: InfraJV*

engineering consultations to rigorously ‘design out’ archaeological impacts as far as possible prior to design freeze. A vigorous quality assurance process during the consenting phase furthermore ensured a consistent quality and technical language across all 14 archaeologically relevant consent applications. This approach paved the way for the design, resourcing and delivery of an archaeological fieldwork programme before and during construction. Proactive, integrated in-house management of this kind and scale for archaeology had hitherto been unheard of in a German major project context.

The team met its probably biggest challenge yet with the preparation of the fieldwork tenders in 2022. Trial trenching had to commence in 2023 to secure overall project timelines, and it was clear from the outset that the volume of commissions would require an EU-wide tendering process by law. In view of the scale of the contracts, a decision was made to procure archaeological services as frameworks with lots divided by federal state, supported by additional commercial expertise from Jacobs UK.



### Understanding the German suppliers' market

One of the earliest and most significant tasks of the EU tender preparation was to understand the suppliers' market in and around Germany and to stimulate interest in the project. With the pandemic only slowly ebbing away, all events had to be virtual in nature. It was also decided that all communications should be held both in German and English, to reach as many interested parties across Europe as possible. A first 'Information Day' for archaeological companies was held in August 2022, presenting SuedLink and the prospective scope of work. This was followed up by a second online event as a networking platform for potential subcontractor collaborations. While both events were considered a success, some critical feedback received centred mostly around issues of language comprehension and the difficulty of interacting effectively online. Despite such difficulties, the tendering process was crowned by a timely success with the signing of four framework contracts with companies from four different countries (Germany, UK, Ireland, and Hungary) on 23 August 2023. With the first stages of fieldwork underway this year, many obstacles will yet present themselves during the delivery of this



*A rare site visit by the entire SuedLink archaeological management team during the evaluation at Salzderhelden, Lower Saxony. Credit: InfraJV*

ambitious and accelerated programme. However, SuedLink has already loudly and irreversibly rung in a significant change in the German commercial archaeology sector and beyond – with (not so little) help from our friends and neighbours from abroad!

### Infra into Europe

Infra Europe JV came into SuedLink building on its roots as a Joint Venture formed by Rubicon Heritage Services and Network Archaeology to service large-scale infrastructure projects in the UK. Experiences gained on HS2 gave us the appetite and enthusiasm for megaprojects across Europe and the benefits they bring – commercially, developing quality delivery and great opportunities for our staff, and the chance to dig some fantastic archaeology.

We knew that entry into a new market with different professional practices and culture meant collaboration was essential. We recognised that the previous success of our JV was based on shared values and approaches, and a strong team spirit for all involved. After an extensive matchmaking process, we found three very like-minded German partners, SPAU, ADW (Archäologische Dienstleistungen Wolff), and SWA (Südwest-Archäologie).

With no time to catch a breath, the first fieldwork started five weeks after the signing of the contract, with extensive trial trenching, and archaeological support for early works. Resourcing the project in very dispersed geographical locations has been a challenge, as has understanding the specific and different technical archaeological regulations and procedures of each of the five state curatorial



Framework signing with InfraJV at the project HQ in Würzburg: (from left to right) Sarah Wolff (ADW), Jan Krämer (SWA), Colm Moloney (Rubicon Heritage), David Bonner (Network Archaeology), Dr André Schürger (TransnetBW), Sascha Piffko (Spau GmbH). Credit: InfraJV

authorities. Gaining trust as new entrants into the German archaeological world has been key and we have been successful at this, with the guidance of our German partners. The principles of ClfA underpin the work of Infra Europe JV and help us adapt very quickly to the many challenges, such as abnormally wet weather, associated German soil disturbance regulations, supplier resourcing in very rural areas, and less-expected issues with wild boar, bees and the protected Northern European hamster.

Another success has been the development of collaborative working with TransnetBW and Jacobs, from a very open tender process into fieldwork onwards. Delivering a project of this scale and complexity demands clear and honest communication, especially as we move into the challenging phase of resourcing and delivering the very large-scale mitigation fieldwork over the next few years.



**Brigitte Buss**

Brigitte completed her BA in Archaeology at Durham University in 1999 and subsequently worked as a field archaeologist and consultant in commercial archaeology in the UK, including in key roles on several major projects in the South East and London, such as HS1, Heathrow T5 and Tideway. In 2020, she joined Jacobs as Technical Director Archaeology and Heritage to provide expertise for the SuedLink project in Germany and to build a core team of specialists there. One of her key interests is the interplay between modern identities and their relevance in cultural heritage management, and she holds an MA in Heritage and Identity from Birmingham University (2014). Brigitte has been an MCIfA since 2007.



**Mark Collard**

Mark has recently retired after 40 years in the commercial heritage and archaeological sector. He worked as a field archaeologist and then served ten years as Edinburgh City Archaeologist before joining Cotswold Archaeology in 1999 as Head of Contracts. He joined Rubicon Heritage Services as a Director in 2016 and has helped establish a UK sister company, Red River Archaeology. He has particular expertise in the delivery of archaeological services for large infrastructure projects in the energy and transport sectors. Since 2018 he has acted as Project Director within Infra JV, initially with Network Archaeology in the UK and more recently in Europe with its German partners for Suedlink.



**André Schürger**

André studied archaeology and history at the Universities of Cologne (Germany) and Thessaloniki (Greece). From 1997 until 2018, he worked as Site Director on excavations in Germany and Austria. In 2006, he became Project Manager for a research project about the Thirty Years War's Battle of Lützen (1632), which he continued from 2011 until 2015 in a PhD programme at the Institute for Battlefield and Conflict Archaeology at the University of Glasgow. In 2019, he joined the transmission system operating company TransnetBW in Germany as Permitting and Environmental Planning Manager for Archaeology, where he is responsible for the archaeology in the projects SuedLink and NordwestLink.

<sup>1</sup> So läuft der Ausbau der Erneuerbaren Energien in Deutschland | Bundesregierung

<sup>2</sup> <https://suedlink.com/>