**Transcript Max Salomon**

April 7, 2025, 10:30AM

**Brandon Ching** 0:06  
OK.  
First question, can you briefly describe your background and what led you to start your company?

**Max Salamon** 0:16  
Yeah, originally I'm a designer, communications graphics web designer. Studied a long time ago and I was working in that field for agencies and marketing companies for nearly 25 years. But there were some personal things happening, and I couldn't deal with that consumption thing and marketing thing anymore.

0:49  
So I decided I want to do something better with the rest of my life and don't want to sell people things they don't need and don't want. So it was just an idea for many years. I had to move very often because of my freelance job — about 12 times in 20 years.

1:18  
So I know everything about the housing shortage in Germany. So I thought there must be another way to bring people into a home — not just an apartment — but into a living situation they really live in and like.

1:37  
Nobody needs 100 square meters for themselves. And other people are not really good at living in communities with 20 people.

1:57  
I was thinking about other solutions — how to create a modern urban lifestyle that is healthy, sustainable, social — in communities, primarily in cities.

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And so this was the main idea about it. It took some time to get it to some kind of concept or startup idea.

2:36  
And 2019 was the first time I took part in a startup event — in Innsbruck— and this was the first time, in March of 2019, when I presented The Colony as an idea — as a possible startup.

2:50  
It wasn’t founded at that time, but the idea was an urban village: small spaces for myself but huge community areas.

3:08  
All these ideas of a village where everyone helps each other and shares stuff and ideas — that brings people together.

3:18  
A lot of people liked that — from the customer side, not from the financial side.

3:37  
So I decided this could be that thing I want to do for the rest of my life.  
And so I founded the company in 2020 — during the first lockdown — so really bad timing, but no one knew that before. But yeah, this is the story of The Colony.  
A little bit of my life — I really work on my lifestyle to live as sustainably as possible.

3:55  
I've been improving myself for the last 12 or 13 years.  
And I know how hard it is if you're living in the city. If you don't own an apartment — your landlord is an asshole, sorry — then you have no photovoltaic on the roof, and he doesn't save water for you.  
OK, you can get green energy, but that doesn't save the world alone.

4:42  
So there are more fields you have to work on, and you cannot work on every field if you're just renting an apartment in the city and want to live a normal life — an easy life.  
So a lot of things have to be done on a higher level.  
And I'm working on that — to give people a chance to live sustainably, socially, and smart lifestyle.

**Brandon Ching** 4:56  
OK, cool. And how did the political climate surrounding the German general elections in 2025 influence any of your business decisions?

**Max Salamon** 5:09  
At the moment. I couldn't. It's really hard to say because this field around real estates and construction is — everything takes so much time in Germany, so much time. I was working in marketing, everything had to be done yesterday, and now everything takes just four years — just four years is ultra fast.

5:34  
So this is — in startup terms — this is some kind of eternal. So it's — it's really crazy. And so at first I was founding during Corona — COVID — so nothing happened because of COVID.  
Then the war started.

5:52  
Nothing happened because the war started, and a lot of project developers in the construction — and a lot of construction companies got bankrupt during the past two years. So this means no income for me because I was —

6:15  
The only thing to earn some money over the past three or four years was to get some consultancy jobs for conventional project developers to convince them to construct in a more ecological way, in a more social way to bring them closer to my ideas of a modern urban lifestyle.

6:42  
And after the... Or yeah, in the past two years, no project developer was giving out any money for external forces.  
So no freelancers or consultants are paid.  
So it's very hard for me, and at the moment — so we have this 500 billion  
7:08  
Infrastructure package from the future government — but — I fear it's — the money will not really make — How could I say... I don't think it will be used for the right things.

7:42

So the climate change and saving our environment wasn't a part of this coalition negotiations at first until the Green Party said, OK, you get our vote just if — if there is a strong commitment to that. But I've met — and guys are discussing about  
nuclear dreams and they don't care about our environment.  
So they I fear it's getting worse.

8:18  
This is my fear.  
I hope I am not right, but I fear it's getting worse regarding every sustainable project, every impact startup that's not tech. If it's tech then —  
Then it's cool.

8:35  
I don't understand it, so it has to be cool.  
But if it's about people and the environment and socializing and bringing people together, strengthening the community — it's not interested — it's not interesting for politics.

**Brandon Ching** 8:50  
Yeah. So have you had to pivot or adjust your business model due to any anticipated or actual political shift?

**Max Salamon 9:02**  
Not due to political shifts — more, I’m still not invested, so no venture capital or business angel was helping us. The first two or three years, I was focusing on the community part, bringing people together and operating these communities. We can do that in shopping malls, in old office buildings, in crazy buildings like a bunker.

9:36  
It’s not where it is, but how you do it. This is service — a little bit of software, but it’s mainly service. And nobody’s interested in service.  
Especially German capital loves hardware things they can touch or software as a service.

9:56

If you can scale very fast, then it’s interesting. Or things they can measure, like typical engineer things — there’s a heat pump that’s 3% more efficient than the other. Then — oh, wow, this is pretty cool and rules the world. So this is crazy, and then you get all the money.

**10:25**  
Now, I’m focusing more on product development — that’s what I started with.  
I switched to service, and now I’m getting back to the beginning. The idea is to bring that tiny house idea into the city. It’s more like a very high-quality, circular-built container thing, but not so small. People in the city don’t accept anything under 15 square meters — that’s too small.

11:01

But anything over 30 square meters, highly functional, built with wood and natural materials, is smart, efficient, and cleverly designed.  
I think there’s a market — not for a family with three children and two dogs, of course, but for anyone who’s living alone or with a partner because nearly 50% of every citizen lives alone.

11:37  
So, it’s a huge market. We can set it up very fast. It’s easier, and the approval process is easier. It can be used temporarily as well. You can address other places for the container buildings, but no one wants to live there.

12:04

We’re making it so you want to live there because it’s really cool and sustainable. We understand the logic of the container buildings, and you can place them on parking decks, in industrial areas, between buildings, and use them for three, four, or five years, and then move them to another place in the city.

**12:30**  
The target group is — government, city, or B2B, like companies for campus situations, employee housing, students, expats, and apprentices. So that’s the main idea. I’m focusing on building that prototype for the Modular House.  
I hope things will improve with that.

**Brandon Ching** 13:13  
So, are there any major strategic decisions you’ve made directly because of the German elections in 2025?

**Max Salamon** 13:24  
Not yet. It’s too early. I fear there will be changes in public funding regarding real estate and construction, particularly building efficiency. I fear they’ll deregulate a lot of good things to make it easier and cheaper to build buildings.

14:04  
It has to be done so buildings can be built cheaper, but it’s also about fire safety. We have the strongest building regulations in the world here in Germany. Because of the federal system, each state has its own regulations, and nearly every city has its own regulations, so this won’t make it easier. A nationwide standard building law would be very helpful, but I’m not sure if they’ll do it.

14:54  
I think they’ll just help the old-school builders to keep making the same stuff they’ve been making since the '80s. It’s not clear at the moment. Everyone involved in real estate and construction, especially those with money, has been standing by since COVID, standing by since the war, and still standing by because they don’t know what the new government will do.

15:28  
If they make decisions and the rules are clear, then maybe something could start, but it depends on the ideas they have and the kind of deregulation they plan to do.

**Brandon Ching** 15:52  
Does the uncertainty around political developments play a role in your current decision-making?

**Max Salamon** 15:59  
Absolutely. Everything is on standby. No one wants to make decisions. For example, I won a building competition from the city of Düsseldorf. We had permission to build a really cool, sustainable building for artists, with affordable housing and a lot of cool functions, completely out of wood. It was supposed to be built circularly, with the highest ecological standards.

16:49

Even though we built a strong concept with these high standards, we could only offer a good yield, about 5-6%, which is great. Four or five years ago in Düsseldorf, everyone would have bought that, regardless of whether it’s ecological or not.

17:25

But I’ve been waiting over three years to find an investor for that project. An investor in Düsseldorf. They could rent it, and it wouldn’t lose money, but still, they’re just waiting. Everyone is waiting, thinking a better deal is around the corner. So, everything is on standby.

**Brandon Ching** 18:06  
Have you implemented any risk mitigation strategies to prepare for uncertain policy shifts?

**Max Salamon** 18:21  
No, not really. If I were running a company with 200-300 people and permanent cash flow, I could invest and act with a forward-looking strategy. But for the past five years, I’ve just been reacting to others.

18:45

I’m dependent on the government, local politics, investors, and authorities for approval. I just accept the situation. When I switched communications from communities and service to hardware, that’s all I could do.

**Brandon Ching** 19:17  
Have you actively engaged with policymakers or advocacy groups regarding startup-related policies?

**Max Salamon** 19:26  
Yes, sometimes. When I started, I was invited by some local politicians, but not so much anymore. Felix Parachuc from the Green Party, who’s now in Berlin, was involved in the initial discussions. We had a cool interview here at my co-working space. I had discussions with people from the Right Party too.

20:03  
Everyone says we need more affordable housing, but they have no ideas on how to deliver it. No party is building, and the Bund is not building anymore.  
Private companies could partner with the public sector in some areas, but it’s still not enough. They have no idea because the way things have been done in the past 50 years won’t solve future problems.

20:48  
We have to find new ways. When talking to politicians or local authorities, it’s like the applause during COVID. Everyone claps, saying, “You’re the best,” but at the end of the month, they’ve worked more than ever and still don’t have more money in their bank account. It’s nice to get applause, but it doesn’t help.

21:36  
I experience this all the time. Everyone says, “What you’re doing is so cool, so great, so important,” but no one wants to give money. It’s just a pat on the back.

**Brandon Ching** 22:00  
How do you perceive the role of entrepreneurs in shaping political discourse? Do you believe startups should engage in politics or remain neutral?

**Max Salamon** 22:14  
They should engage more. I’m thinking about joining a political party. I believe startups have to be more political. There are some startup union and organizations, but in my opinion, they’re too neoliberal. It’s too much about money, tech, and AI.

22:55  
Everyone in the impact investing space talks but doesn’t act. I was part of the Bundesinitiativ impact investing, but it’s been four years of talking without any action.  
How can we identify a good impact project and deliver its KPIs?

23:34  
I always thought, “Use your brain, talk to the people, and if you see this could be a cool idea with high potential, invest in it.” White papers that do nothing don’t help. There’s no real impact investing in Germany. It’s just Series A and above. If a startup isn’t a startup anymore, if it’s a company and has proven its worth, then they get venture capital.

24:15  
But when it comes to impact investing, they expect the same returns as typical investments, with impact added on top. There’s no compromise. they say, that the higher the potential of that impact is that that company could deliver if it's successful, then we can, maybe we can accept that there's no yield, or just one percent, or there's no exit in the next 10 years. No, the same mechanism on typical venture capital but impact on top. This won’t work.

**Brandon Ching** 25:09  
Do you believe the elections have had a lasting impact on your business strategy?

**Max Salamon** 25:18  
I’m not sure yet. It’s too early. Maybe by late summer, when they start rolling out decisions and deregulation, investing, infrastructure, we’ll see what impact it has.  
If they’re not just talking but actually doing something, we’ll see if it affects us.

26:15  
We might have to shift back to services if there’s an opportunity there. Or if focusing on hardware and commodities might be the right decision to get more public funding. But it’s too early to say.

**Brandon Ching** 26:40  
If you could propose a policy change to benefit startups in Germany, what would it be?

**Max Salamon** 26:54  
A left-green focus. Everything we’ve tried for the past 80 years, from conservative to liberal, liberal to conservative, to a little bit social. We need more focus on people and the planet. These capitalist neoliberal approaches don’t work anymore — just for a few, but not for the 99%.

**Brandon Ching** 27:23  
What do you think is the main barrier to implementing such changes?

**Max Salamon** 27:28  
Fear. The media is controlled by conservatives and right-wing groups, and there’s fear around migration, fear around growth. Every normal person understands there’s no permanent growth in a closed system. We need to tell new stories.

28:01  
Sufficiency is not bad. Degrowth isn’t bad if we tell the story right. I can speak from my own life — I live in a small apartment, I don’t need much, and I don’t have a car.  
I feel free like never before. If you own a lot of things, you never feel free. You always fear losing something.

28:38  
Once you let go of that, you gain a new freedom to choose what you want to do with your life, and what’s worth fighting for. It’s not your car, big apartment, or Rolex or going on holidays five times a year. That’s not the really important things in life. The holidays, OK, I can understand that a little bit, to see the world, but not all-inclusive shit in Mallorca.

29:06  
There are more important things than material possessions. But no one wants to tell that story. It’s a good story, though, and it’s important. But I fear it won’t happen in our lifetime.

**Brandon Ching** 29:33  
Do you have any final thoughts on politics and entrepreneurship?

**Max Salamon** 29:47  
I think it’s a very typical German thing — we are very risk-aware. But we need to get over that. We need to make riskier decisions if it’s worth it. Impact investing is crucial, but it needs to be supported.

30:37  
If you look at DARPA in the US, which invented things like the telephone and the internet, a lot of things we take for granted were made possible by government funding.  
It’s important that politics strengthen public funding for startups and universities. We have a lot of smart people, but the focus shouldn’t only be on tech and software.

31:22  
We need to focus on fields that improve our lives, like social entrepreneurship and impact ventures. It should start very early, from the idea stage, not just when someone has earned 100,000 euros for a prototype to prove that it is worth investing. We need to invest in great ideas at an early stage. Venture capital, risk capital means getting in at a very, very early stage, like these US legends.

32:04

So I have an idea scratched on a small piece of paper, and then millions were invested in it. That will never happen in Germany. I’m not quite sure if that really happened in the US, but it will never happen in Germany. But we have to do that: a great idea with possible great impact should be invested in.

32:33

There must be... Maybe a public-private partnership? Not the high-tech founder fund or stuff like that, but they always invest at Series A and upwards, so we have to find those really good ideas in universities, science fields, and startups at an early stage. And then we have to be brave enough to invest at that early stage.

This could be a really good strategy.