Co-Creating Collaborative Housing Communities

A Guidebook

Study Circle on collaborative housing at the working and living project Rompemoldes, Sevilla, Spain. Architecture: Javier Ochoa Casteleiro, Rocío Guerrero Durán. Photo: Antonio Melo-Montero.

Cover: Collaborative housing project Wohnprojekt Wien, Vienna, Austria. Architecture: einszueins architektur. Photo: Luiza Puiu.

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Collaborative housing

Collaborative housing projects develop housing in a community- oriented, participatory, and social way. In these projects, future residents join together to find a shared place to live, plan the building and social structure, realize the planning, and finally live together.

A wide variety of such projects can be found in many different European countries and around the world. What all collaborative housing projects have in common is a shared interest in living together sustainably and with self-determination.

How does a collaborative housing project start?

The initial steps differ from project to project. The most common starting point is that a group of people who share an idea begin looking for a location. Sometimes, the starting point is a specific plot of land or an existing building for which a group and an idea are sought, for example, when a municipality makes land available for a collaborative housing project or the owner of a building or site looks for others to share it. Three aspects always come together in a collaborative housing project: a plot or building, a group, and an idea. In a later chapter, we will provide information on how to start and realize such a project. We highly recommend making use of professional expertise, seeking advice, visiting existing projects, and talking to the residents there. Collaborative housing projects take time and effort, but are well worth it!

Applicability

The landscape of collaborative housing projects in Europe is diverse. For this reason, it is not possible to describe one single applicable process or provide recommendations that apply to all approaches in the same way. We carried out workshops in Austria, France, Sweden, and Spain, and endeavored to synthesize the most crucial aspects of what we

learned into a generic document that provides guidance and suggestions that can also be used in other European countries as well. Due to the immense variety of socio-political and economic structures in Europe, users should consider and assess the extent to which the recommendations in this document can be adapted and applied to their own national and project-specific conditions.

Bottom-up and top-down

There are several different approaches to developing collaborative housing projects: They can be started by the future residents themselves (bottom-up) or by others, for example an architectural firm, a process facilitator, a housing developer, a municipal housing company, or a city itself (top-down). In the case of bottom-up projects, a distinction can be made between those that are largely developed, implemented, and organized by the residents themselves (self-managed); and those in which certain key activities are outsourced, for example by working together with a housing developer (cooperation). Bottom-up and top-down approaches have differences in several aspects, such as the initiation of the project, development and planning, and ongoing operations.

These two forms have different advantages and disadvantages: In projects that were initiated by the residents themselves and whose implementation is largely determined by them, residents naturally have a greater scope of decision-making and determination. Conversely, this also means more time, work, resources, and risk for the residents. It is therefore important to consider how a project will be implemented: How much does the group need to decide? What level of resources does the group (and the individuals) have? How much risk are members willing to take on? Different personalities will be involved on the same project. People willing to accept more risk and uncertainty may be involved from the very start, hammering in the first pegs and defining the project. Later, when the location, architecture, and costs have already been largely determined, people in need of more certainty may join in.

Types of tenancy

There are many different types of tenancy in Europe. A rough distinction can be made between the following four, not all of which exist in every country:

> **Individual rent:** Individuals, couples, families, or other living constellations (e.g., roommates) rent separately apartments from a building owner. Depending on the type of owner (e.g., municipality, cooperative, limited- profit or non-profit housing provider, for-profit housing

provider, etc.), rent may be subsidized, at cost, or at market rates. The common spaces of the building can be part of the rented space and paid for as operating costs, managed by a residents' association, or rented out separately to a residents' association or similar entity.

> Collective rent: The group operating the collaborative housing project rents the building as a whole from the owner, for example a co-operative, limited-profit or non-profit housing provider, or a for-profit housing provider. The risk of paying rent is carried by the group, which can choose new residents. The group can be organized as an association or a cooperative, to name just two possibilities.

> Collective ownership: The building belongs to the group as a collective entity, whereby various legal forms such as cooperatives, associations, limited liability companies, and more are possible. The apartments are rented or leased by the group to its members, or the group gives its members a right of use.

> Individual ownership: Apartments are owned and lived in separately, and owners can decide to whom they sell their apartment when they move out. Common spaces are either the shared property of all owners or belong to a residents' association or similar entity.

The above tenancy forms can also be mixed and varied, for example, the land can be collectively owned and the apartments individually owned with the option of choosing new residents, or the land can be collectively owned and some homes rented to members and others to an institution that accommodates vulnerable populations. There are also many different forms of ownership and rental of common spaces. The important aspect is that the common spaces are jointly administered and used.

It is not possible to select a single tenancy form that is optimal for all projects—it depends on national and local regulations, funding opportunities and traditions, and the individual and collective objectives of the group. However, a few key pointers are useful:

> In the case of **individual rent**, the group has the least influence on the management and operation of the building. Sometimes agreements with the owner allow the group to appoint new tenants themselves.

> In the case of **individual ownership**, the group often has no influence on new tenants because when someone moves out, the apartment is sold to the highest bidder. In addition, price development is subject to the free market, which can cause costs and the resulting income bracket of new residents to rise sharply. Often, especially after a few years of use, less emphasis is placed on the common spaces and more on private areas.

> In the case of **collective rent**, the group has a relatively strong influence on operation, management, and new tenants. However, price developments depend on national regulations. In Austria, for example, limited-profit developers must rent at a cost that excludes sharp price increases for the most part.

> In the case of **collective ownership**, the group has the greatest influence. It can determine housing costs as long as these allow for the refinancing and maintenance of the property. Significant price increases can therefore usually be avoided, unless general costs rise sharply.

> A **special form of collective ownership** is seen in Swedish housing cooperatives, where cooperative shares can be sold at market prices. In Austria, France, and the right-to-use cooperatives of Spain, cooperative shares are sold at nominal value to avoid speculation and ensure long-term affordability.

Legal frameworks

There are major national, regional, cultural, and economic differences in legal forms and there is therefore again no single rule that can be applied to all situations. Most collaborative housing projects are cooperatives, associations, homeowners' associations, limited liability companies, or a mix thereof (e.g., a limited liability company owned by an association). In some cases, the group has no legal form at all, for example if the project consists of individual rentals from a housing association. The legal forms differ greatly in their decision-making structures and scopes, financing options, effort and costs, entry and exit requirements, etc. New groups should consult existing projects about their experiences and seek support from experienced consultants.

Partners

Many collaborative housing projects hire external **process facilitators** experienced in setting up such projects to guide and support them throughout the development process. This support is particularly essential in the early phases of establishment. Guidance may include project steering, providing information on the various phases and associated difficulties, training in different modes of decision-making, helping define a group charter, and defining the extent to which participants wish to share or uphold their private sphere. Such consultants can also give advice regarding tenancy forms and legal structure, provide insightful feedback from other projects they have worked with, help connect with other professional stakeholders which can give further advice, help find new group members, and more. Sometimes some of the services just mentioned are provided by group members who have the required skills and experience.

Many groups cooperate with a **housing developer** for the planning and construction of the building. This can be a municipal, limited-profit, non-profit, or for-profit housing developer. Sometimes the groups themselves are the developers (self-management, *autopromotion* in French), in which case they need to have or acquire the necessary skills and legal responsibilities.

An **architecture firm** and a **landscape architecture firm** are usually involved, either commissioned by the group or by the housing developer. Other important partners include **lawyers, tax consultants, notaries,** and **banks.**

The phases of a collaborative housing project

The following section gives an overview of the various phases of a collaborative housing project, provides recommendations on how to deal with them, and lists some of the various issues arising in each phase. The recommendations are drawn from experiences made by existing projects. However, every project is unique, meaning that it very well may make sense to deviate from the recommendations mentioned here. At the very least, they can provide an indication of what kinds of issues should be considered. The phases are:

1. **Starting**
2. **Planning**
3. **Construction**

> Moving in

4. **Settling in**
5. **Living together**
6. **Redevelopment**

The first three phases comprise the development of the project, including in most cases the construction of a new building or the refurbishment of an existing one. The last three phases begin with moving in and cover the phases of living in the building, including redevelopment when the building or social structure no longer meets requirements. Typical occurrences for each phase are explained at the beginning of each section.

Participatory planning for the collaborative housing project HausWirtschaft, Vienna, Austria. Architecture: einszueins architektur. Photo: Luiza Puiu.

1. Starting phase

This is the most important phase because it helps define all subsequent phases. Wrong decisions made during this phase have long-term or even permanent effects. The phase of living together (the goal of the whole process) is strongly co-determined by the starting phase.

During the starting phase, the core group comes together; defines the central idea, vision, and mission of the project; determines important framework conditions and decision-making structures; chooses a legal form and formulates the necessary statutes or similar documents; selects the most important partners; and tries to secure a plot of land or a building for the project. Important decisions regarding affordability, social integration, and group composition are made during this phase. The phase usually ends when a specific plot or building is found and secured.

Depending on how quickly the group can secure a plot or building to implement the project, this phase can be very short or (more likely) relatively long, lasting from a few months to several years. The most important actors in this phase are the group members themselves, in as much as they already exist, and the first partners that have been found. Depending on the chosen model, it is important to consult experts on various topics, for example legal and tax issues. Other important players are, for example, the municipality and the landowner.

Recommendations

Values

Defining shared values and a vision facilitates connection and mutual understanding between members. A carefully developed mission statement reflects shared values and goals and the vision that emerges from them. It provides orientation and helps to prevent conflict among the group members. The mission statement should be developed at a relatively early stage. Establishing the mission statement early on also provides an important basis for decisions on affordability, social integration, and health. These group values should be anchored in the statutes of the

legal form the project has chosen, in membership contracts, and in similar stipulations.

Defining values is a central foundation of the collaborative housing project. The project's values are a key part of what brings people together, along with people choosing to live together as a community.

Defining a set of values will also help the group define the project's orientation: Is it about housing, about living and working, about one age group or different generations, about an ideological or spiritual orientation, or about something else? It may seem that some values are shared by everybody, such as "sustainability", "inclusion", and "generational mix", but it is important to associate these concepts with concrete examples to see if everybody shares the same ideas about it. For instance, for some people, "eco-friendly" means having green spaces with plants to filter water and preserve biodiversity in the city, while for others it means constructing with the highest possible density to reduce the impacts of urban sprawl on agricultural land. Another example is whether to build expensive elevators to make all apartments barrier-free or to reduce costs despite the ideals of mixed generations and accessibility written into the charter.

The vision or values and goals of a collaborative housing project can change over time. If this happens to a significant extent, these values should be discussed again and set by a formal decision. In principle, a mission statement should be reviewed approximately every five years and should require a quorum that is not too low.

Group composition
For many projects, a certain mix of generations is important to prevent residents from growing old or children from moving out at the same time. This can be challenging for groups. A mix of people with different socio-economic and cultural backgrounds is important to many groups. Some collaborative housing groups provide affordable apartments for vulnerable populations (e.g. refugees, low-income retirees, people with disabilities, etc.) and cooperate with external social services. Others have an internal financial solidarity mechanism built in through which residents with higher incomes pay more, or that subsidizes residents with lower incomes permanently or over a period of time.

It is key to build a group that is diverse and inclusive, but also has enough in common to agree on goals and procedures for the project. A high degree of homogeneity (bubble) should be avoided, yet a group that agrees on important fundamental questions (values) is nonetheless necessary to develop and live in a project together. Achieving the right balance of both can be a challenge.

The future composition and diversity of the group is also determined by the framework conditions: the type of project initiators, costs, language, target groups, and core topics (e.g., sustainability, generational mix, affordability, etc.).

The initial homogeneity or diversity of the projects can change significantly over time, for example when new residents move in or living circumstances change (unemployment, children moving out, ageing, etc.).

It can be beneficial if a group has members with a background in architecture and design, or with legal, auditing, or financial knowledge, process facilitation skills, etc. However, relying too strongly on one or several group members can generate an unequal power dynamic. Such situations should be analyzed and balanced out by distributing tasks to work groups, outsourcing some tasks and/or receiving external support from facilitators. Members should decide early on which fields the whole group or specific members should be trained in (e.g., shared governance, non-violent communication, project management, conflict management, etc.) and dedicate a budget to this. Not every person is able and willing to take on every task, but it is useful to maintain a healthy balance and rotation of responsibilities.

Social mix can also be part of the group's activities or volunteer engagement and does not necessarily depend on residency in the building, especially when the number of residences is small. There are manifold ways to include different people from the neighborhood and beyond, for example by creating facilities and cultural activities open to local community organizations or the general public.

Obstacles to people staying in the project and remaining involved are, for example, an extended development period, uncertainty about the move-in date and cost, changes in cost, etc.

Solidarity, community

Starting a collaborative housing project requires courage and trust. An important question to discuss: Is the project primarily about finding a good place to live or also about inclusion and solidarity? The group should discuss its position on affordability and social inclusion. Projects should develop a clear picture of how far their willingness to show solidarity goes, and which forms and ways of implementing solidarity they want to use.

It is important to negotiate such issues of solidarity in the group and to agree on a common approach. Everyone defines things differently, so the approach needs to be made explicit. Solidarity is important, but the limits to it should also be clear.

An important focus when starting a collaborative housing project is, of course, the community. Developing the project together makes it possible

to try out new concepts and new ways of living and to think about how the community will live together.

This phase is also about learning together, because many people have no experience living together as a group: What does it mean to live together, to share spaces, things, and services? This should be explored together in study visits and discussions.

To enable projects that integrate people with different income levels, there should be financial compensation models, for example regarding the balance of one-off payments, cooperative contributions, running costs (rent), solidarity funds, etc.

A well-functioning community needs to be cared for and nurtured. A collaborative housing project involves emotional work as well. Building a community takes effort!

Most groups stress the importance of dedicating moments to conviviality (getting to know each other, sharing meals, and other social activities), which are seen as crucial for other phases as well as this one. Regular celebrations of success will strengthen morale and commitment throughout the project and sow the seeds of peaceful and durable relationships.

The development of a collaborative housing project involves a great deal of effort and sometimes also entails conflict. The group should therefore make sure to not only do hard work together, but to also have fun together and get to know each other apart from working. If there are problems and conflicts in the group, it can be beneficial to do something enjoyable together instead of only working on solving the conflict. This focus on having fun together should be maintained beyond the completion of the building.

Projects should find a sensible balance between individuals and community, between what (predominantly) benefits the individuals and what benefits the community (i.e., association, cooperative, etc.).

Collaborative housing projects should keep the long-term perspective in mind:
How does living together change during different stages of life?
How do current members envision living and ageing together in the future?
How do such projects integrate into society?
What other issues does the group have to consider over time?
There are lessons to be learned from non-profit or public housing companies.

Organization and governance
Many collaborative housing projects are based on self-organization, democratic decision-making, and taking responsibility for one's actions

and thus bolster democratic development. Having democratic group decision-making structures in place is a prerequisite for this.

Organization and governance—together with tenancy type, legal framework, objectives, mission, financing, and other aspects—determine how the group guides its project, development and operation, and long-term living situation.

Collaborative housing projects can be implemented at many different scales, from around 6–8 apartments all the way up to more than 100 apartments. Any scale can work well as long as the organizational and decision-making structures fit the size.

It is important to carefully design a coherent organizational structure for the project. This structure will remain over time and needs to be functional in all phases. While structures can be changed, it is generally not an easy undertaking.

The organization consists of three important parts: collective tasks (division of work, organizational structure), decision-making structures and processes (e.g., participation, conflict resolution procedures, admissions process). A solution-oriented conflict resolution culture is an important factor in the success of a project.

The legal structure of a collaborative housing project should provide a long-term framework for (internal) democratic processes and financing. It is also important that the legal structure is cost-effective, in regard to auditing and taxes, for example.

Decision-making structures are a crucial part of the project: Who is responsible for what? Who can decide what, when, and why?

For a project to have long-term success, it is important to establish sensible and manageable decision-making structures. Some decisions may require reaching a consensus between all members of the project or by working groups responsible for certain tasks, while other decisions can be made with a two-thirds or even a simple majority of the members present at a meeting.

To make decisions without overloading group members, a method called *sociocracy* is used, for example in France and Austria. This method does, however, require training for all members to be able to use it. Sociocracy draws on the principle of consent rather than majority voting, consent being defined as the absence of strong objections. For sociocracy to function, the group must define how and to what extent consent will be used. There are, of course, several other decision-making structures that also work: majority voting with protection of minorities, systemic consensus building, point polls, opinion polls, and more.

Urban Living Lab workshop in Lyon, France.
Photo: Gizem Aksümer.

It is crucial that all members are heard to the same extent and that everyone is able to comment on key issues.

Depending on organizational structure, the decision-making process for pending issues must be defined, for example:

> a working group is tasked with making the decision;

> a working group prepares the issue for decision, but the decision itself is then made by the group as a whole;

> a working group makes a preliminary decision, and the formal final decision is made by an association board.

It may make sense to divide the work up from the beginning and not have everyone decide everything together. One should establish working groups for the most important topics (financing, architecture, group organization, community, etc.) and define the decision-making scope for each working group. One should also determine what types of decisions can only be made by the whole group and how.

For far-reaching decisions that are important for the future of the project, quorums should not be set too high—a two-thirds majority at most. Otherwise, it can become almost impossible to reach a decision. This applies, for example, to important decisions regarding costs, such as on redevelopment. Some sort of minority protection is also necessary, if possible, to prevent members having to leave the project for financial reasons.

Even when many important decisions have already been made and a group is prepared for changes, wholly unforeseen things can happen, such as changes to local or national laws. That is why decisions always need to have a certain margin of error built in, meaning that a decision is valid until it is decided otherwise.

It is important to define rules for costs incurred during the starting and planning phases, as these can be significant (external facilitators, travel to visit projects, website, and membership fees, to name just a few). Questions that must be answered are: Will a cost be borne only by the initiators or by the project as a whole? If someone leaves the group, do they get a partial refund of the costs? There should be clear rules governing these kinds of questions, otherwise conflicts are likely to arise.

All agreements, processes (decisions, admissions, etc.), and knowledge gained during development should be documented in an easy-to-understand way, e.g., as guidelines for residents or internal group rules. Decisions should be easily accessible, easy to find and remember, and not be overwhelming. Procedures for providing new members with information are important. Having knowledge about framework conditions, previous

decisions, and processes is an important foundation of group decision-making. A certain culture will develop within the project, and many rules will become part of the group's self-image.

Many groups create a website or other document to keep track of decisions, statements, and activities. This is also a good resource for people interested in joining to learn about the historical development of the core group.

It is important to share knowledge and good practices between collaborative housing professionals to support future projects, e.g., with organizations and associations or process facilitators, architectural offices, etc.

Collaborative housing projects are an interesting topic for many researchers in social science, architecture, and other disciplines. Projects should seek out or at least allow accompanying research on development and use.

Workload
Make sure people are aware of the work involved, the risks, and the framework conditions. Don't burn out! You don't have to do everything yourself.

When starting and developing a project, it is not just about meetings, but also about assigning tasks (looking for buildings or land in the desired area, researching tenancy options, organizing visits to existing projects, informing and meeting people interested in joining the group, updating the website as progress is made, and much more).

One important task of the first phase is the gathering of information: researching, visiting projects, reading, and collecting ideas from different actors. It can be useful to create a working group for this task with the aim of structuring information and preparing it for decisions.

The development of a collaborative housing project is a long-term project that takes a great deal of time. It is important to weather delays in the process. In some phases, longer time spans can even be an advantage as they ensure that there is enough time to discuss, consider, and establish structures.

Members should be able to visualize what needs to be done and define clear boundaries in their time commitment to avoid burnout, tension, and losing members. Two factors are often cited as obstacles to keeping members engaged: the time it takes to find a plot or building and uncertainty about the completion date.

Process facilitation can be helpful, but if resources are available within the group itself, selective support is often enough. Beware, however, of fully internal process facilitation and remember that outsiders have a

more neutral viewpoint. External facilitation can be particularly helpful when decisions are controversial, difficult, or complex.

Some groups pay someone to provide project management. This can be a member of the group or someone from outside. If someone from the group takes on an intensive task, that person should either be paid or their work counted as an in-kind contribution. This will mitigate the risk of wage-paying jobs taking precedence over volunteer work and important tasks thus not being done.

Group growth

An important group-related task in the initial phase is to establish the core group. This group of people will be working and making decisions during the early months.

Essential questions:

- What type of project are we developing?
- Who belongs, who should belong, and who should not belong to the group?
- How can interested people be brought together?
- How is the expansion process structured?
- How and how quickly should the group grow? Continuous growth or time-defined steps?

There are different ways to start. With a core group, waves of new members and organic growth are both ways that work well. If the group grows early on, it needs the right kind of organizational structure from the very beginning and a large enough piece of real estate to provide enough apartments.

When a group grows quickly, work can be shared more easily, but there is also more fluctuation, and decisions can be more difficult. If a group is still uncertain about its ideas and goals, it may be better to refrain from growing too early, but to instead clarify basic questions such as vision, mission, and possibly also the site beforehand.

In order to ensure smooth project integration, it is important to decide whether the group will grow continuously or expand in steps. This decision impacts the group's workload for admission processing and assimilation of new members. It is good practice to assign a working group to meeting new candidates and accompanying them through the admission process.

Before joining, new members should be clear about: What am I getting myself into? What does the project entail for me financially and in terms of time commitment and workload? New members should also get to know existing members before committing to the group.

The values developed by the core group at the start of the project should be documented (and ideally illustrated with examples). These values will provide a foundation for the group throughout the project, even if implementing them will often be challenged by reality in later phases.

Throughout all stages of the group development, it is important to ensure that new members, pioneering members, and members who have been involved for a long time are all treated equally and can communicate, participate, and decide on equal footing. Early group membership often entails privileges and knowledge hierarchies, something that should be addressed in a targeted manner. An important prerequisite for group equality is transparency of hierarchies. This includes newcomers accepting previous decisions (compliance with the mission statement, willingness to resolve conflicts, collaborative work, etc.). The design of the admission process is important for this. A buddy system is one technique that supports integration: Newcomers are looked after and integrated by those who have been participating for some time.

Different financial conditions can be defined for those who join the project earlier or later and therefore contribute different amounts of work.

Partners

External support is recommended and sometimes required, for example to receive public funding or build on public land. It is important to find competent and experienced partners, including housing developers or providers, architects, general contractors, construction companies, process facilitators, notaries, legal advisors, and many more. If possible, it is advisable to find partners who already have experience working with collaborative housing projects. In some regions, dedicated partner networks exist or are emerging.

Cooperating with different partners raises several questions: How to cooperate? What does the division of tasks look like in the long term? Does the housing developer (if one exists) keep the building and rent it out, or does the group buy it? What costs can be expected? Who is responsible for property management? Who is legally responsible for what?

To build fruitful relationships with partners and avoid common misunderstandings, it is important that the group learns some of the basic ideas and vocabulary used in architecture and construction. This familiarization should focus not only on technical aspects, but also on materials, lighting, spatial concepts, and many of the other intangible and joyful aspects of architecture. Some cooperation partners may have little to no awareness of collaborative housing at first, and group members thus need to be proactive about networking and communicating with them.

In many respects, collaborative housing projects do not function like normal construction projects. One example is planning participation,

Collaborative housing project Wohnprojekt Wien, Vienna, Austria.The “Salon am Park” café is a contribution to the neighborhood. Architecture: einszueins architektur. Photo: Luiza Puiu.

where it is important to explicitly agree with the partners about who is responsible for which tasks and what scope services will have in each case. Responsibilities and scopes of services should be regulated by contract to avoid conflict. This is also relevant for the liability issues that arise during later phases (e.g., construction).

If a group decides not to cooperate with a housing developer, one consequence may be that the builder's tasks must be carried out by the group. In this case, most groups hire a project controller or project manager to run the project, negotiate contracts, and communicate between contractors and the group.

Real estate

One of the most difficult steps of many collaborative housing projects is finding the right piece of land or building. Cities and municipalities sometimes help by providing land or a building that has been set aside for just such projects. It is a good idea to approach municipalities and ask about this possibility. Sometimes a project can be developed as part of a larger housing development that has a building or set number of apartments reserved for collaborative housing.

Having a plot of land or a building is an important prerequisite to forming a group that is committed to the project. If a group cannot find a piece of real estate that is accepted by the majority of its members, it will sooner or later fall apart. Access to a plot of land or building also gives the group greater decision-making power when selecting their cooperation partners, for example, housing developers.

There are many ways to use real estate: purchase of land, purchase of building rights, ownership of the building, general rent, and individual rent. The respective advantages and disadvantages should be carefully weighed. The chosen model will strongly impact the legal form and financing and therefore the potential to provide affordability and achieve a social mix.

Ownership of a building entails taking on the role of builder, even if the group cooperates with a housing developer who pre-finances the building and handles the construction. This means more influence and power during planning and implementation, but also more responsibilities, risks, more workload, and possibly higher financing costs. However, ownership can profit from the in-kind contributions of members (e.g. professional know-how, sweat equity), which can lead to reduced investment costs.

An alternative to ownership is renting an entire building (general rent). If one commits to this way of renting, it should entail a high degree of say in the qualities of the building during development.

When planning, setting a framework should limit the costs of participation. Limiting individual special requests reduces costs for the overall project. As much furnishing as possible should be included in the building contract.

Affordability

One of the most important cost-related trade-offs at the start is between one-off and ongoing costs: the more you invest in durable materials at the beginning, the lower the ongoing maintenance costs and the longer it takes until the first refurbishment is necessary. Conversely, of course, this means that those who cannot afford high initial investments are excluded. A balance must therefore be found.

Some people might be able to afford higher initial costs (one-off payments) that lead to lower operation costs in the long-term, while others need low initial costs and are therefore willing to accept higher operation costs. This must be balanced. Some projects allow a combination of the two options, with part of the group choosing one of the two options.

Low maintenance and refurbishment costs should be a long-term goal when constructing the building. It is counterproductive if savings are made during construction, but this then leads to high maintenance, retrofitting, or refurbishment costs after a few years, for example with regard to cooling and heating. It is particularly problematic because some people might be able to easily afford these later costs, while others cannot.

From a cost perspective, it is very important to consider at the outset how large the proportion of common spaces is in relation to the individual living areas. On the one hand, these common spaces are the basis of the community. On the other hand, large common spaces (and large individual living spaces) have a considerable impact on running costs. In Sweden, apartment units in collaborative housing projects are 10% smaller than apartments in regular buildings. That 10% is used for designing the common spaces. Hence, the size and number of apartments in the project will influence the total area of common spaces, where each unit contributes proportionally.

The long-term costs of a collaborative housing project are borne disproportionately by the first residents because refinancing takes less time than the building will exist. It is therefore important from the outset that an (initially small) proportion of the running costs is channeled into a reserve fund for maintenance and refurbishment, which will make up a large proportion of the running costs after refinancing. The running costs must not be reduced to pure operating costs once the refinancing has been completed, but must instead build up a financial reserve for renovations.

When refinancing through rent, a long-term perspective should be taken right from the start, with maintenance and future refurbishments being kept in mind.

Housing subsidies can be important contributions to affordability. In this context, attention should be paid to subsidy models that allow for low equity shares (one-off payments) and rents. The condominium model is not conducive to broad affordability.

One way to achieve low rent is by means of a cost-based rent model, i.e. rent that corresponds to real costs, distributed across the refinancing period. The possibility of this kind of cost-based rent is dependent on national legal frameworks and the availability of housing developers able to offer a cost-based rent model.

To simplify financing and reduce running costs, financing models that provide an alternative to bank loans—such as direct loans, crowdfunding, or asset pools—can be incorporated into the overall financing.

Financing costs may be affected by external and legal factors, thus threatening affordability. In France, for example, loans dedicated to social housing (prêt locatif social) are indexed to general interest rates, which can rise dramatically at times.

The cost estimates for maintenance and improvements should be high enough to cover all eventualities.

Internal social compensation models can also contribute to affordability, such as a solidarity fund that subsidizes rent for members for a limited period in the event of a short-term loss of income, or allows refugees, people at risk of becoming homeless, or caregivers to have accommodations at a lower cost. Another way to ensure long-term affordability can be to index rent to household income. This kind of model must, however, be decided upon at an early stage.

Collaborative housing projects are made up of more than just apartments. In the early stages, the group should consider whether outside parties should have access to semi-public areas such as common spaces, restaurants, baths, workshops, green spaces, etc., and how such access should be organized. The conditions of access to semi-public areas must be clearly established.

Social integration

The project's pathway for social integration should be set as early as possible. Social integration is a process that usually involves people from different generations and ethnic backgrounds. The common spaces within collaborative housing projects create meeting points for people who have similarities as well as people with different backgrounds in a

broader sense (e.g., income levels, living situations, etc.). Discussions about what integration means in a certain community in everyday life must be had.

Some projects, for example, offer refugee apartments at low cost or for free, sometimes with various types of support from the group. In such models, care must be taken not to overburden participants. Apartments can, for example, be managed by a non-profit or other type of organization. High levels of commitment cannot be required of all participants throughout all phases of life.

In Sweden and other countries, decisions about the type of project (intergenerational or collaborative housing for the second half of life) and the form of tenure affect the size of apartment units and the floor area of common spaces. These decisions not only affect the physical features that enable or constrain the size of households, but also the income level required to join the collaborative housing project.

Even if one strives for broader social integration, a certain agreement on minimum values is necessary in a collaborative housing project.

Social integration should be well organized, suited to residents' capacities and interests, and take into consideration that not all residents have to do everything.

A collaborative housing project is located in a specific place, community, and municipality, and sometimes receives support or assistance from that municipality. Every project should also consider what it is able to contribute or give back to its place, neighborhood, community, and municipality. This can, for example, mean having spaces available for neighborhood residents to meet, organizing cultural events, or being involved in local NGOs.

Participatory planning for the collaborative housing project HausWirtschaft, Vienna, Austria. Architecture: einszueins architektur. Photo: Luiza Puiu.

2. Planning phase

During the planning phase, the project is developed and planned for a specific location together with an architecture firm, a landscape architecture firm, and often also a housing developer. This is the time when the future living environment is designed together, from individual living areas to common spaces. Groups often grow, tasks become better structured and distributed, and project financing and future conditions for living in the project are discussed and fixed. Important adjustments for affordability and social integration are also made in this phase.

This phase takes at least one year. If a plot of land or building has already been secured, but important requirements for construction are not yet met, such as project financing, this phase can take considerably longer. In addition to the group itself, which usually grows during this phase, the most important players are the above-mentioned planning firms, sometimes a housing developer, often a process facilitator or a project manager, financing partners, legal and tax advisors, and sometimes a few more.

In this phase, the architectural office will draft a series of plans and coordinate them with the group and the housing developer (if one is being used). Depending on national building regulations, there will be a preliminary design, detailed design, submission planning, implementation planning, and tendering.

Recommendations

Group

Every collaborative housing project has a certain degree of fluctuation in the group. These changes are sometimes greater and sometimes not much at all. Fluctuation often occurs when a decision about the location is made. However, members also leave before and after a location is found, and new ones join in at various times.

The procedure for allocating apartments should be decided upon early. It is possible, for example, to allocate apartments on a first come-first

serve basis, or to have a list ranked by various criteria: length of membership, involvement in planning according to self-assessment, children, etc. Apartments are often allocated by consensus, meaning that everyone formulates what is important to them in terms of location, orientation, and size. The architects then make several proposals for the distribution of the apartments, which are discussed until agreement on a model is reached. This procedure is very difficult when the group has already reached its maximum size. If allocation is done by consensus, it may make sense to not wait until the group is complete, but instead to do it at about three-quarters of capacity. Many members who join the group late are happy to be there at all and do not necessarily need to participate in the general apartment allocation. Apart from the final stage before moving in, new members should not be assigned a specific apartment in the project immediately, but only after a period of membership.

In principle, changing apartments within the project, members moving out, and new members moving in should be made as easy as possible. This means, among other things, that financial rules for these processes need to be in place and that the group should be prepared for members to leave and join in terms of support, timing, and transfer. Departure and entry processes are highly important.

There are different ways in which projects can organize work during the planning phase, from volunteer work and in-kind contribution of members to a full-time position. If the group cooperates with a housing developer, their workload will be reduced.

While it is of course important for any collaborative housing project that members are provided with a housing situation that fits their life, identification should not be primarily with one's own apartment, but with the project as a whole. On the other hand, the project is of course also about private living situations. This means that members should discuss the scope of individualization and how a balance between personal expression and the group can be achieved and maintained.

The mix of sizes and layouts of the apartments, flexibility of the apartments, and common spaces are central aspects of the project. Finding the right balance is a prerequisite for achieving social diversity in the project. It determines who can and cannot move in and what changes can be made: living with children, partnerships, divorces, etc. The group should agree on framework conditions for this.

No matter how group growth is planned (organically or in expansion stages), the recruitment of new members and the admission process is an important area of work for which sufficient resources must be set aside.

Financing and conditions
Solidarity-based renting means, among other things, saving on furnishings, apartment size, and financing in order to make rent more affordable. Finding subsidies can also be helpful here.

Higher initial payments lead to lower running costs and vice versa. Depending on the balance, different affordability conditions can be created for different members.

Contributions (equity shares, cooperative shares) from members should not be indexed (e.g., to consumer prices), as this would continuously increase both the group's debt to individuals and the cost of joining for new members.

Collaborative housing projects greatly facilitate property management as the members pay more attention to the maintenance and upkeep of the building. Therefore, in many cases, costs can be saved here.

Architectural design
The group should discuss the architecture and develop a shared vision for the building.

When planning private living spaces, it is important to find a strategy that ensures that people will have sufficient time and energy to also plan the common spaces. A working group should be set up for this purpose.

Another important decision is whether to plan the apartments before they are allocated or after. Planning them before keeps the group more interested in the overall quality as a whole, instead of having individuals focused on single apartments.

In terms of architecture, a collaborative housing project can clearly prioritize what is most important to the group and invest more in these areas, while saving on other aspects. Some key issues are, for example, sustainable building materials, spacious common areas, well-equipped apartments, energy efficiency strategies, and much more. When choosing where to invest and where to save, it is important to seek out the advice of experienced planners and companies in order to have reliable information about which aspects actually bring about significant cost reductions.

Collaborative housing projects can be a good occasion to challenge building codes through creative interpretation and design. This also contributes to the further development of regulations, for example with regard to specifications on what an apartment should look like, how accessibility can be achieved, which household forms are possible in which spaces, how common spaces should be designed to enhance flexibility and adaptability, how access areas can be organized, and much more.

Specific attention should be given to local and municipal planning regulations, as these are not always compatible with some features of collaborative housing. Some countries, for example, have a mandatory ratio of parking spaces to total number or size of apartments, while the residents of the collaborative housing project may wish to reduce the number of cars. Permits must be obtained from local authorities.

Planning should consider future adaptations of apartments to suit the current and future needs of residents (e.g., older adults) and the possibility of conversion. Planning should allow for flexibility when personal circumstances change. This can mean, for example, the ability to adapt the number of rooms or the room structure of an apartment, or separating or merging apartments, or "joker rooms" outside the apartments, and much more.

Special furnishings and excessive individualization of the apartments should be limited as they make the project as a whole and the respective apartments more expensive and it becomes more difficult to change apartments or move out. Too much individualization of apartments can cause over-identification with individual apartments instead of with the group and the project as a whole. It makes sense to implement processes of "participatory standardization".

The way that building access and interior circulation are organized is important to the future community: Do people naturally meet at the entrance and other hubs of the building or is extra effort needed to meet other residents? It is very important that the architecture is designed to allow for residents to meet and communicate and that there are semi-public areas where people can spend time both together and alone.

Another important planning topic for collaborative housing projects is the balance between community life and individual privacy. The group should discuss the extent to which the two sides of the balance are fitting for them and jointly define a framework.

When planning, it is important to consider how open the project wants to be to neighboring residents, the neighborhood, and the public, for example by (partially) opening up common spaces and inviting external parties to activities (food co-op, shared meals, etc.).

When deciding on the size and purpose of common areas, attention should be given to possible neighborhood synergies in order to keep costs down and avoid planning spaces that are not fully used. The goal should be for common spaces to have multiple uses and be suitability for a broad range of functions. For example, a guest room that is mostly used at night could be used as an office or playroom during the day. Another point to think about is to outfit common spaces with enough storage space.

Collaborative housing project Grüner Markt, Vienna, Austria. Architecture: Bruno Sandbichler. Photo: Rupert Steiner.

Common spaces are a place where members of the group can design and customize with their personal touch, finding a common aesthetic for the group instead of creating spaces that seem institutional.

Creating a shared ground floor (including both open and indoor spaces) contributes to opening up the collective towards the neighborhood. Spaces can be rented to local public services (e.g., a daycare facility) or to private companies (e.g., cafés or co-working) or non-profit organizations (e.g., a second-hand store) to generate income and enhance services within the neighborhood. If the project includes such spaces, there must also be an operational concept for it. Moreover, neighborhood impact can be greatly increased if several collaborative housing projects are set up in close proximity to each other.

Affordability

The influence of tenancy form on affordability cannot be overstated: Whether the group owns or rents the building and whether rent is general or individual makes a huge difference on the cost.

One way to improve the affordability of the project is to offer apartments that are small and therefore inexpensive. Having only moderate floor space per person is also good for sustainability. This does not, of course, mean that projects should only have small apartments as large families and shared apartments also need plenty of space. The objective should be to reduce the price per square meter while not sacrificing needed floor area. Projects should find a good balance of floor space. It is possible to decide on an average floor area per person and use that number as a planning goal, but keep in mind that such averages should always be implemented with leeway.

Even if the rent per square meter in a collaborative housing project is not necessarily lower than in conventional housing, costs can be saved by outsourcing certain housing functions to shared common areas and reducing individual living space accordingly.

Sharing common spaces and amenities not only within the collaborative housing project itself, but also with neighboring residential buildings can reduce costs.

By taking flexibility into account during planning, it can be possible to combine living spaces in ways that form different apartment sizes up to the time of construction. This makes it possible to react to any new members who join the project in later phases.

The tension of affordability is greatest during the planning and redevelopment phases. Major changes in these phases can lead to some members being financially overburdened and having to leave the group. Having a strict eye on affordability during planning ensures that the project

stays within projected costs, which is crucial to keeping all members in the project, even those for whom the original costs were pushing the boundaries of affordability. It is also important to create ample reserves in time to cover eventual renovation costs. In the event of cost increases, it does not always make sense to sacrifice all quality characteristics just to keep the original cost estimates. A balance must be found.

Experienced architects and housing developers can advise on which common spaces and facilities are costly, and which can save money or even bring in revenue.

If it is possible from a structural standpoint (low buildings, simple construction methods), costs can be saved and affordability increased by members doing some construction steps themselves, for example, installing insulation, plastering, painting, or laying floors. Self-construction can be done in apartments as well as common spaces.

An important aspect of flexibility is how rental contracts and use contracts are finalized. In many cases, there is little willingness to change, even when exchanging apartments or other measures would significantly improve the living situation and affordability for many of those involved. Attempts should be made to make provisions for this. Many collaborative housing projects strive to build ecologically and energy-efficiently and to use sustainable forms of energy. For this, it is important to plan with a view of the entire lifecycle of the building. Higher investments in the beginning can lead to lower costs during use and thus contribute to long-term affordability.

Social integration
The right mix of apartment types and sizes can contribute to diversity in the project by providing the physical infrastructure for different types of households (e.g. single parents, couples of older adults, families with children, etc.).

The group should define sharing practices that contribute to residents' everyday life quality and integrate them, for example, common meals or other activities, shared vehicles and tools, common areas, etc. To this end, it is important to clarify the expectations of the members with regard to social interaction and mutual support in everyday life.

Offering special apartments or shared apartments for specific target groups in need of integration (e.g., people with disabilities, youth in care, former convicts, or refugees) should be considered. The impact on the affordability of the overall project should be calculated. The relationship between such offerings and the apartments financing them shall be well balanced. The inclusion of certain vulnerable groups could also open up access to subsidies and therefore have a positive economic impact on the project.

To facilitate social integration with the neighborhood, it is important to create places where people from inside and outside the project can meet and communicate.

Sharing infrastructure within the project and the neighborhood increases affordability and creates starting points for social integration. The basis for this must be a well-founded analysis of the environment and any existing opportunities. A collaborative housing project can be both a provider of new infrastructure and a co-user of existing infrastructure.

If there are national or regional associations or institutions for collaborative housing projects, it makes sense to become a member and get involved in order to network, learn from others, and pass the group's experiences on.

Health and care
All phases of life and thus all states of health should be considered in the planning phase, for example by implementing universal design to achieve barrier-free spaces. The building's accessibility and equal usability are important prerequisites for ensuring that the building is comfortable for people of all ages and physical abilities.

Common spaces should be flexible and adaptable to changing resident numbers, age, and health over time, as well as during health crises like the Covid-19 pandemic. Distributing the common spaces throughout the building and near entrances or outdoor spaces enhances the adaptability of the community in times of crises. In Sweden during Covid-19, residents subdivided the house into areas to be used by older adults staying at home and areas to be used by people active in working life, who were exposed to the virus.

Good air quality is important and can be achieved, for example, by installing controlled ventilation systems. Attention should be paid to heat recovery and shading and to passive and active means of cooling. It is important to have good acoustics in common spaces. Overheating of apartments and common spaces should be prevented using passive and/or active cooling.

Allocating common spaces for fitness rooms, massage rooms, saunas, green spaces with vegetable gardens on the ground floor, roof-tops and terraces, usable outdoor areas, and other health-enhancing spaces should be considered. It is important to include sanitary facilities for common spaces, terraces, and the like.

To facilitate the regular use of bicycles, lifts big enough for bicycles or ample safe parking spaces should be planned on the ground floor. It is important to establish accessible and sufficient storage facilities for bicycles and for walkers, strollers, and other active mobility devices for

older adults, infants, and children. To ensure the adequate care of older adults, lifts should be large enough to accommodate a transport bed.

Common spaces and circulation areas that foster meeting other residents make the presence or absence of others, e.g. older people, noticeable and thus promote self-organized caring practices when needed. For older members in particular, mutual support can be an important benefit of living in a collaborative housing community. The members should discuss in good time whether and in what form they want to implement such support and jointly determine a procedure for doing so. This mutual support can also relieve the burden on family members who do not live in the project. It makes sense to integrate one or more small apartments into the project that can function as guest rooms and also for later use by caregivers or healthcare providers.

Collaborative housing project Wohnprojekt Wien,
Vienna, Austria. Architecture: einszueins architektur.
Photo: Luiza Puiu.

3. Construction phase

Description of phase

During the construction phase, the planned building project is erected or an existing building converted, and many decisions must be made within a short period of time. At the same time, everything that needs to be decided prior to moving in must now be finalized. The group becomes complete in this phase, and all apartments are finally allocated. This phase usually lasts about one to two years, depending on the size of the building and type of construction. In addition to the people already involved in the project, various construction companies now also join in.

Recommendations

In this phase, the group must suddenly deal with a large number of external actors: builders, construction companies, suppliers, public authorities, etc. The situation differs fundamentally depending on whether the group is a builder, buyer, or tenant. That means there are great differences between a group building itself or partnering with a housing developer to buy or rent. This is a time within which many decisions have to be made under high time pressure.

It is important to form a quickly responsive architecture team from the group in this phase because time will not allow for all architecture-related decisions to be made by the group as a whole. The architecture team must be able to react rapidly and consult the group when needed.

While developing the group, the transition to this phase of active building should be given ample attention. It is also important to always stay one step ahead and plan for moving in and the settling-in phase. Moving in should not just happen, but rather different ways of doing it should be considered.

If the group cooperates with a housing developer, the scope of services provided by him must be well defined.

The degree of participation for furnishings, and especially for any special requests, must be defined.

If legally possible, it can make sense to cooperate with the construction companies at an early stage in order to save costs.

In many projects, turnover increases somewhat in this phase because members may re-examine many aspects of the project and some may decide to leave due to the cost and time involved. It is also possible that values are threatened in this phase: for example, higher building costs can mean that the group will have to accept lower energy efficiency for the building or fewer common spaces.

The division of labor within the group can and should change over time. For example, it makes sense to have a different division of labor during the planning and construction phases and in the phase of living together.

It is essential to make as many important agreements within the group as possible before moving in, as it is very difficult to change them later.

In any case, during the building phase, expert construction supervision is necessary.

The building phase is also very important for members who are just now joining. While they cannot have a say in the many things that have already been decided, they can become acquainted with their future neighbors and with group procedures.

To help future projects—and also policymakers and administration—it makes sense to create a shared collection of experiences. This means documenting experiences and providing a means of knowledge transfer. It is important to define how the knowledge will be shared (guided tours, website, etc.) and to define responsibilities, for example by setting up a working group.

Collaborative housing project Bikes and Rails, Vienna, Austria. Architecture: Georg Reinberg.
Photo: Luiza Puiu.

Collaborative housing project Le Cairn, Lyon, France. Architecture: Tectône, Detry & Levi. Photo: Robert Temel.

4. Settling-in phase

The initial period of moving into and living in the collaborative housing project can be defined as its own separate phase, because during this process of settling-in the transition from a project that will happen in the future to a permanently inhabited home takes place. Everything previously conceived is now being applied. Everyone must get used to the new living environment and neighbors, find common decision-making and operational structures, and settle into a shared daily routine. This phase takes approximately two to three years, depending on the group and legal frameworks, such as the duration of the construction warranty period. The number of actors diminishes, since the partners who were only relevant for project development and construction are no longer part of the game—or only brought back for specific tasks like remedying defects. However, new actors are also emerging, such as neighbors and local institutions. The settling-in phase ends once the core rules have been proven in practice and no longer need to be fundamentally adapted.

Recommendations

In this phase, the shared goal of constructing a building no longer exists. The group no longer has a construction project, and must find its way into a permanent routine.

All the members are now busy moving in and getting used to their new place of residence. At the same time, the group organization must change from planning a project to the ongoing use of a building. The frequency of meetings may decrease compared to the very dense planning and construction phases. Or if, for example, the organization of building maintenance and the fixing of problems is more intensive, the number of meetings may increase. It can be beneficial to consult external actors (process facilitators) for this restructuring process.

This phase often entails negotiation. In some projects it is (at least for a time) a phase of stagnation. Now that the transition to living together in the building is being made, personal spheres of life, contribution to the

collective, and social interaction within the community must all be reconciled. It is important to create time and space for reflection on these processes.

While important decisions about long-term group organization should have been made before moving in, they may now need to be adapted. In this phase, a lasting rhythm and shared way of Interacting must be found. Many groups prefer to make decisions in smaller working groups during this phase, rather than in large group meetings. The latter are mainly important for building community. The necessity for members to care for self-organization and decision-making structures now returns.

Defining decision-making models is an important task that was ideally made earlier, but must be done in this phase at the latest.

This is a good time to change decisions that did not work as expected.

In this phase, routines emerge for living together as well as for self-organization and property maintenance. It is a phase of trial and error and adjustment. It is also about evolving the community activities of the pioneering period into routines. Trust and learning to let go are now more important than ever.

Until the first complete annual statement of accounts, there is an intensive phase of learning about building maintenance, running costs, building services, etc.

The transition phase lasts until the end of the warranty (three years for real estate) and the final financial report. This is the time to address any conflicts and mistakes that arose during the planning and construction phases.

Planning errors are sometimes discovered during the first period of occupancy, such as poorly placed functions or a lack of shading. Financial and organizational conditions need to be robust enough to allow for the later correction of such mistakes within a reasonable timeframe.

It is important to continue nurturing the community once moving in, for example by organizing joint activities such as festivals. The group should intentionally create shared moments of celebration, for instance moving in.

This phase marks the first time that all members are living together in the new shared place of residence. This is a good time to take note of the surroundings and build up social networks.

For the first time, the group is now truly complete, and roles and responsibilities can be self-organized and divided up in new ways.

To ensure equality within the group, shared learning, collective control, and to avoid overloading certain individuals, it makes sense to have an ongoing rotation of administrative tasks. Of course, certain preferences will also emerge: some people enjoy doing certain things (gardening, for example). When allocating tasks, one should not be overly stringent when determining task rotation, for example, trimming trees or being a board member. However, a certain rotation of key tasks is very important. Nonetheless, task allocation is not just about inclination, but also about competencies—not every person is willing or able to do everything.

In almost all groups there is a variety of members who contribute a great deal, somewhat less, or very little to shared work tasks.

If tasks are distributed unevenly within the project, it may be useful to implement some type of compensation model.

In this phase, practical experience can be used to decide which areas will be used privately, as shared spaces, and publicly, and with what intensity.

In this phase, everyone is busy with their personal lives, the move, and the new situation overall. This makes it very important to organize a few shared activities, even small ones, right away and not postpone them until later. One can prepare accordingly in the earlier phases.

The completion of some projects stimulates the interest of a great number of different laypeople and professionals wanting to visit the community. Rules should be established to ensure that these visits do not disrupt everyday life.

Affordability

The settling-in phase is also a phase of experimentation within the living spaces. Hopefully, attention was given to flexibility during the planning phase, making later changes of apartments and conversions possible. This is also necessary because the group constellations will naturally change (people come together or separate, children are born or move out, etc.). It is important to have flexible apartment layouts to accommodate for these normal fluctuations. Now that plans are going into practice it becomes clear which living situations are necessary and wanted. Flexibility should be a key part of the shared mindset of the group from the beginning.

In this phase, the group can experiment to find out which maintenance tasks they can fulfill themselves in the long term and which ones need to be outsourced and paid for. For example, the cleaning of common areas or shoveling snow, which also entails liability issues. It is also possible to combine solutions, for example, some groups hire a gardener who comes twice a year and oversees volunteers from the group. Preparations for such matters should be made during the construction phase.

Training group members in specific skills can save time and money on construction and maintenance, thus increasing the group's autonomy and strengthening its overall competency and resilience. It is worth considering including training for members in the budget.

Social integration
There are a great many negotiation processes during the first two years, after which it falls off.

If, for example, the group provides apartments for refugees, intensive support is often necessary in the beginning until procedures are in place and it becomes clear how to provide concrete support. After that, routines become more established.

Health and care
The move-in period makes it relatively easy to transition to more sustainable mobility patterns due to the change of location and the naturally resulting changes in everyday behavior. This should be actively supported by the group.

In communities with older residents, mutual assistance can be arranged: Individual members or groups of members can help physically impaired members for certain periods of time, for example, at night.

External assistance may entail specific legal frameworks (e.g., healthcare regulations) in addition to those for housing.

Collaborative housing project Coteau de la Chaudanne, Grézieu-la-Varenne near Lyon, France. Architecture: Armand Barthelemy, Damien Gallet, Pauline Dozier. Photo: Robert Temel.

Collaborative housing project Färdknäppen,
Stockholm, Sweden. Collective cooking and eating.
Architecture: Jan Lundquist. Photo: Kerstin Kärnekull.

5. Phase of living together

The phase of living together is the goal of every collaborative housing project, and all previous efforts have been geared to achieving this phase. The planning mentality of the previous phases now no longer applies. Living together is also by far the longest phase, usually lasting many decades. The transition to the next phase, the redevelopment phase, is smooth, and in many cases the living and redevelopment phases alternate many times over. The actors are more or less the same as in the settling-in phase.

Recommendations

The phase of living together is about finally being able to enjoy what one has been working on for so many years. Now it is time to enjoy the fruits of the work done so far. This enjoyment phase is also a time of continuity.

However, even if this phase is a time of continuity, it must be clear that this is true primarily of the housing situation. Community issues such as the building and legal framework are always in a redevelopment phase.

Residents may want to make changes slowly once this phase begins, but a “task jar” for projects that will become necessary in the future should be introduced right from the start, regardless of whether the tasks are technical, legal, or social in nature.

A refurbishment plan should already be drawn up in this phase. Which building components and materials will last how long? When will the group have to carry out which repairs and renovations?

Since a lot of energy and time has been invested in previous phases (usually over the course of several years), a slackening of commitment is often observed after moving in. The group should be aware of this and regularly compare reality with the original dreams and foster a culture of learning by doing. The phase of living together is often also a good occasion to review the statement of shared values vs. real life practices, for example, living ecologically.

Collaborative housing project Färdknäppen,
Stockholm, Sweden. Collective cooking and eating.
Architecture: Jan Lundquist. Photo: Kerstin Kärnekull.

While collaborative housing projects are usually focused strongly inward during the settling-in phase, most of them open up again once the settling-in phase is over. Once the collaborative housing project is stable within, group members have more time and capacity to focus outwards through civic engagement. Considerations should be made early on about how the group wants to set up their external network: Is the project more of a provider or more of a co-user of resources in the environment? How strongly do they want to reach out to the outside world? An organization such as a working group or committee is necessary to keep the external focus alive.

Social infrastructure and services such as an in-house childcare facility promote networking and communication. This brings the outside community into the project without the group having to do much at all.

Externally focused uses help keep the community alive, but may also create conflict.

When it comes to organizing long-term activities and routines, one must (repeatedly) ask these questions: Which activities are central to our community and our values, and we therefore want to continue them no matter what? Which ones are less significant and can be terminated in case of overload? Ongoing overload is not a good foundation for activities in the long term.

The phase of living together is also about organizing maintenance tasks and taking precautionary measures: Does the group want to do everything themselves in the long run or would it prefer to outsource specific tasks?

There are different approaches to cooperation on community tasks. Some projects require members to commit to a certain degree of collaboration, while others regulate more informally, or do not require residents to work at all, instead choosing to focus on professionalization. If a group chooses to require a work commitment, it should be flexible enough to allow for adaptation when life circumstances change.

The common spaces need constant care. They must be maintained, financed, and discussed. Ideally, there should be a working group dedicated to common spaces.

In this phase, it is particularly important to introduce new residents to the structures and processes and carefully integrate them, as these things are already routine for everyone else. A buddy system can be useful for this, with newcomers being mentored by members who have been with the group for longer. This is not just about teaching new members the rules and showing them how the group and the building operate, but is also about making them feel comfortable as part of the group and ensuring a smooth social integration. The admission process for new residents may be adapted over time.

When taking in new members, it is important to try to find people who are able to cope with the rules and workload of the group and make the needed contribution without completely overextending themselves.

New members bring new perspectives to the community. Therefore, it makes sense to ask them about their impressions and to ask them for suggestions on what could be improved. This could, for example, take the form of an evaluation meeting after six months: What do they think about the project? What is good? What needs to be improved? What have they learned? What would they like the group to know or learn?

Social integration

In Sweden, social bonds are created by enabling different types of social opportunities. For example, collaborative housing communities decide how often they will cook and eat dinner together. All residents take turns cooking in groups on a regular basis, according to the total number of people joining the shared meals. Whether group members eat with one another or not is optional. There are, of course, many other forms of planned group activities such as collectively working in the garden or cleaning days. These activities address practical tasks that need to be done in the community while enabling social interaction between residents.

Health and care

Residents of collaborative housing communities share common spaces, tools, resources, everyday life experiences, and mutual support in both joyful situations and crises (e.g., the Covid-19 pandemic). In some communities, residents self-organize caring practices to support fragile older adults.

Social opportunities made possible by the collaborative housing community and participation in the self-organization of the building help counteract loneliness and isolation, with positive effects on the mental health and wellbeing of older residents.

Common spaces and the shared resources that can be found in them contribute to health in older age because they offer reasons to leave one's apartment and foster social interaction.

Being an active, important, and recognized part of the community can create new interests and engagements in life after work, while still maintaining autonomy.

Care also includes collective learning and creativity through organized activities in common spaces and through sharing.

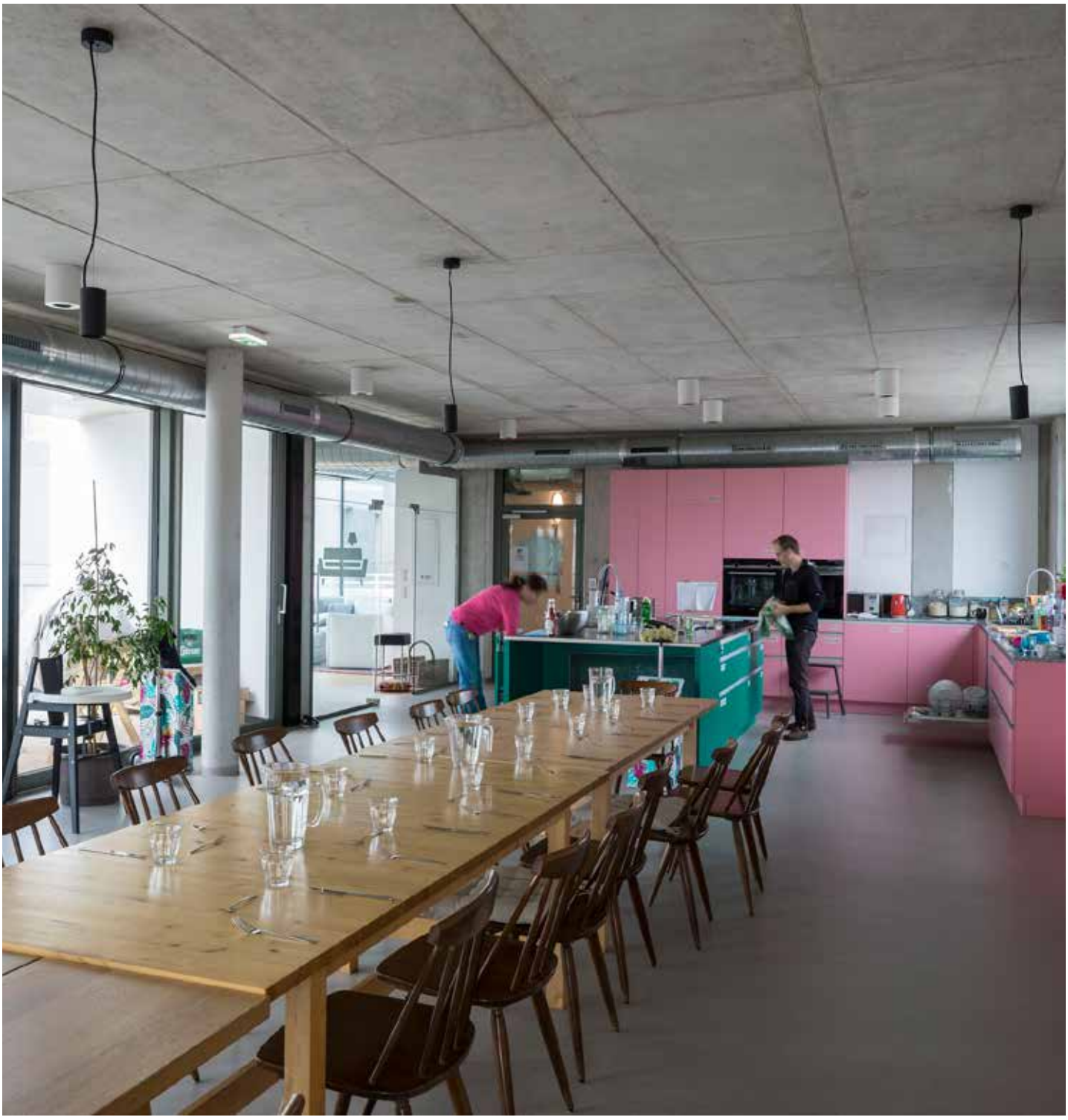
The organizational structure and culture of cooperation in a collaborative housing project enable the application and adapting of institutional rules and recommendations in health crises such as a pandemic.

The ageing of residents can lead to physical changes that require new or adapted infrastructures.

Establishing flexible and responsive organizational structures makes it easier to act quickly in an emergency such as a pandemic.

Especially for older adults who live alone, the community in which they live is an important contributing factor to physical and mental health, contributing to their overall wellbeing. A collaborative housing community increases interaction with others, and helps people feel valued and needed, get better nutrition, feel safe when sick, and achieve an overall higher quality of life.

The question of mental health and impact on the group morale—to name just one aspect—should not be ignored: How can a group include someone who does not want (or is unable) to socialize or interact with the rest of the group? If underestimated, such situations can easily lead to conflicts and unease within the group.



Collaborative housing project Grüner Markt, Vienna,
Austria. Architecture: Bruno Sandbichler.
Photo: Rupert Steiner.

6. Redevelopment phase

A building, like a social structure, usually has a very long lifespan. However, buildings and social structures also need renovation and restructuring from time to time. This may be limited to a few details or involve extensive, complex, and far-reaching changes.

The phase of living together and smaller and larger redevelopment phases alternate over and over again. A redevelopment phase can include decisions and planning that take several years and involve actors that were already part of the game during planning and construction.

Recommendations

In the redevelopment phase, many topics are addressed that can include planning and construction errors, new requirements, conversions, refurbishments, and more. Collaborative housing communities have the advantage that they are better equipped to make decisions compared to other housing models due to the existing self-organization structure. However, one must prepare for these decisions accordingly and explain what the advantages are.

It is important to create an attitude of making useful improvements during this phase. Residents will need to accept that change will always be necessary and that they need to learn to adapt over time.

In this phase, particular attention should be paid to short-term and long-term affordability. This means weighing one-off and ongoing costs on the one hand and cheaper, less durable materials versus durable materials on the other. It is also important to consider how the costs will be distributed among the residents over time.

It is important for residents to realize that changes are necessary: Components and materials that are no longer functional need to be replaced, and internal or external circumstances may necessitate changes, such as sustainable energy technology or additional shading. This can cause challenges in the group dynamic. When residents feel that they are too

old for such changes and that a task should be passed on to the next generation, the result can be a blockade.

This phase is not only about renovating the building, but also about larger changes to the social structure that need attention. A resilient organization is structured in a way that allows its rules and practices to be adapted. The framework must be designed in a way that allows the foundational ideals to be carried forward, while still allowing for necessary changes to be made.

What is the procedure for admitting new members when residents move out? Who chooses the new members? How does one proceed in a way that carries forth and evolves the goals and structures of the project when there are many new residents who were not involved in drafting them, without tying them to unnecessary things?

It is also important to collectively prepare (and ideally have specific procedures) for when members move out. The process should be seamless for the group as well as for the person leaving.

It is important to maintain resident diversity in the later phases of the project as well.

The project's funding structure should ensure a financial balance between older and newer residents. If residents move out in later phases and new ones move in, care must be taken that the cost balance is maintained, i.e., that the new residents are not saddled with an excessive burden. The conditions for this must be established at the beginning of the project.

If the project includes businesses, services, and the like, a consistent watchful eye should be kept on whether it would be necessary or useful to adjust the management thereof.

It may be possible to "rehabilitate" legal structures as well if it turns out that something is not working in practice or if external framework conditions change.

"Renovating" group structures may also be necessary from time to time, for example, eliminating working groups that still exist but no longer hold meetings or carry out tasks.

It makes sense to have a working group on organizational development that frequently monitors the functionality of structures. If it is found that a structure is not working as it should, they should develop proposals for improvement and change.

An important element in the project's long-term security is provisioning for reserves, insurance, and service contracts. Reserves for refurbishment should be started early and endowed with enough funds. Even if ongoing contributions are low at first, the issue should be kept constantly in mind.

It is important to find the right moment for refurbishments. Major conflicts of interest can arise around the topic of building renovation: Older residents may not want to pay for renovations that will primarily benefit their successors. Compatible solutions must be found to address the matter.

It is necessary to have criteria for organizational development and procedures for conflict management.

A generational change can bring a positive new dynamic into the community.

When a resident retires, it often means that they have more time for working groups or community tasks.

The CO-HOPE consortium hopes this guidebook will contribute to the success of new collaborative housing projects. Please feel free to send us feedback and suggestions for additions. We would like to thank everyone who has dedicated their time and knowledge to the development of the guidebook.

Contact: rt@temel.at

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Robert Temel (Austria) led the process and edited this guidebook. Co-authors are the following members of the CO-HOPE consortium: Christian Peer and Ruth Höpler (TU Wien/Austria), Johanna Leutgöb (Initiative Gemeinsam Bauen Wohnen/Austria), Ivette Arroyo (Lund University/Sweden), Kerstin Kärnekull and Ulrika Egerö (Kollektivhus Nu/Sweden), Helena Westholm (Ferrum arkitekter/Sweden), Catharina Hansson (Arkitektgården/Sweden), Pierre Arnold and Marie Brandt (urbaMonde/France), Michèle Cauletin (Habitat Participatif/France), Antonio Melo, Esteban de Manuel and Conso Arriero (University of Seville/Spain).

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