

NEWS

PROJECT

E-Co-Housing - Co-creating a Regenerative Housing Project Together with the Community

📍 Budapest, Hungary

TOPIC

Housing

EDIT 13 DECEMBER 2022
BY NILS SCHEFFLER

Improving social housing in Zugló: Not just the hardware, also the software!

See on UIA
website



The mentoring programme for social housing tenants E-Co-Housing is about refurbishing an old building into an environmental-friendly, smart and innovative building with 14 flats for social housing. But not only that: it is also about supporting the tenants in their way of living and living conditions and creating a house community, supporting each other in their daily life. For this purpose, a mentoring programme was set up to support the future residents in their community development, economic independence and well-being. Discover what the mentoring programme is about and has achieved.

The UIA project E-Co-Housing from Budapest's district Zugló has come officially to an end in October 2022, but it is not finished yet! The rehabilitation of the building for social housing is ongoing in which the new residents will move in the 2nd half of 2023. However, the mentoring programme to build up a house community, where people support each other and live more sustainably together, has taken place. For a general overview about the mentoring programme read this [web article](#).

The mentoring programmes

The idea of the mentoring programme was to guide the future tenants, before they move into the new flats, how to

- live together in a house community and support each other,
- have a more ecological way of living,
- improve their economic life prospects and independence.

The organisations [Habitat for Humanity Hungary](#), [GreenDependent Institute](#), the [Budapest University of Technology and Economics](#) and other organisations developed jointly a mentoring programme in 2019, which was finetuned in 2022, before the mentoring programme started. In order to gain a better understanding of the life routine and ideas of

social housing tenants, Budapest University of Technology and Economics together with the municipality Zugló selected a focus group of social housing tenants. In three evening-meetings the focus group shared their daily routines, their interests in a house community and in which ways they could imagine a community living and supporting each other. These views and ideas were incorporated into the mentoring programme.

The final mentoring programme included topics such as:

- **Community development:** agreement on decision-making, organisational and house rules, dealing with conflicts, barter activities, etc.
- **Green lifestyle in the household:** conscious consumption and food, dealing with energy crisis and climate change, energy saving and less chemicals in the household, greening the garden, etc.
- **Economic empowerment:** savings and credit mapping, debt management, household cash flow, knowledge of financial products, fundamentals of business development, etc.

Originally three to six months were planned for the mentoring activities. But due to the overall delay and changes of the project, which led to the late selection of tenants, the mentoring programme had to be implemented in just one and a half months. During two weekends and in five evening sessions at the community space [AZTA](#) all topics mentioned above were addressed through lectures and presentations, exercises and workshops as well as games and quizzes. Of course, due to the reduced time frame, the mentoring programme had to be shortened and the topics could rather be touched upon, but not deepened and practised. To help the participants to remember the content of the programme, the learning materials were provided to all tenants in a ring binder to be able to look it up in future occasions.

The future tenants participated with great interest, in particular in the practical sessions, for example how to build up a house community or how to have a more sustainable lifestyle in the household and how to support each other through barter activities. They showed less interest in topics which did not correspond so much to their current life goals and expectations as for example becoming an entrepreneur.

An important "side effect" of the mentoring programme was that it provided an opportunity for the participants to get to know each other and form an initial sense of community. As it turned out, a number of people had been afraid of living in a house community. Many have had bad experiences with their neighbours in social housing units in the past. Some people also feared the co-housing approach would require a lot of energy and time at the personal level. But with the mentoring programme many realised that through the community approach – by working together and supporting each other – they can achieve more to improve their quality of life.

Another important result of the mentoring programme was that it helped the tenants to define in which areas they want to "co-house" and support each other: gardening and maintenance, house cleaning, childcare and joint purchasing were the most important topics.

Through the mentoring programme they also received basic training how to deal with internal conflicts, how to solve them and how to collectively represent their interests ("Together we are strong!"). For example, a common laundry room was planned in the house, which would have made a lot of sense from an ecological point of view (a few washing machines instead of washing machines in each household). However, as the tenants knew the situation in the social housing that repairs are often not done or done very slowly, they preferred to have their own washing machines for which they are responsible. Together they managed to convince the municipality to install a connection for a washing machine in each flat.

What's next

The mentoring programme has officially been completed. However, due to the delay of the overall project, the building will not be ready for the tenant community to move into until the second half of 2023. This is a challenge for the community feeling that is just developing. They have only just met and now they are facing almost three quarters of a year in which officially they will not meet and put into practice what they have learned.

To endure this period and further strengthen the sense of community, the Zugló Project Team at the Municipality is organising gatherings every other month – or even more frequently if needed. During the gatherings they will be applying what they have learnt during the mentoring programme with regards to community housing and building up further ties among them. The gatherings will also allow them to become more organised in the working groups for gardening, house cleaning, etc. Also, the equipment and furnishing of the flats and house rules will be discussed. The first gathering already took place, in which 12 of the 14 flats showed up, demonstrating their strong interest in the community housing approach.

A further idea of Zugló's project team is to organise a pre-visit of the house, when the renovation of the building is about to finish, to show and explain how to use and handle the technical equipment and sensors that have been installed in the house.

But it is also important that the house community learns to organise itself and to become and act independently. For this they have set up an email list and opened a facebook group to stay in touch and organise themselves.

Perception

The mentoring programme in social housing is a new approach in Hungary. However, it is far too early to judge the effects it can bring: on the one hand, the time (1 ½ months) for the programme was too short to be able to deepen all the topics in a lasting way, and on the other hand, the residents have not even moved in to be able to observe how the communal living works, whether the residents adopt a more sustainable way of living and whether they can improve their economic situation. Nevertheless, this approach is inspiring and can help to make living conditions in social housing more attractive and thus also improve the image of social housing in Hungary. It will be interesting to follow this up. So let's come back in 1-2 years!

Housing

See on UIA website

