

NEWS

PROJECT

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

📍 Budapest, Hungary

TOPIC

Housing

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## Moving into E-Co-housing! The first experiences in community living and housing

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On 25.10.2023, the newly refurbished house in Mexikói út 11/B in Budapest's district Zugló was handed over to its 40 new residents within the framework of the UIA project E-Co-Housing. For one month they have been living together. What are their first experiences? How does community living work in practice? This article gives a first insight.

As part of the UIA project "E-Co-Housing" from Budapest's district Zugló a social housing in need of renovation, which was no longer inhabited in part, has been refurbished into a modern, energy efficient building with 14 flats for social housing. This building shell not only improve the provision of social housing in Zugló, but also intends to foster a new co-house community, where people support each other in their daily life and live more sustainably together. For this purpose, the residents were trained through a mentoring programme, in which among others they discussed and developed rules and activities for living together. For further information about the mentoring programme read this [web article](#).

### First experiences...

#### Living in a modern building

Social housing often does not have a good image in Budapest, and sometimes rightly so. This is because they often have below-average equipment, are in a poor structural condition and neighbourhood conflicts occur more frequently.

In order to counteract this - justified - image and create adequate, affordable housing, the building in Mexikói út 11/B, which was in serious need of renovation, was converted into an environmentally friendly building: 14 social housing flats with modern equipment and spacious rooms were constructed. The building is state of the art in terms of energy: a low-temperature underfloor heating system that draws its energy from heat pumps, as well as a 58 MW solar system, so that no direct CO2 emissions are produced. With the help of sensors in the building the flats can be operated at an optimal energy level. Only materials that do not directly pollute the environment or contain hazardous substances were used in the refurbishment. The rainwater is collected and is used to irrigate the garden.

Such a building is actually a novelty in social housing in Budapest. One resident had lived in the building before the refurbishment and reported that she was embarrassed to receive guests due to the poor condition of the building. Nowadays, she enjoys receiving friends and is very happy to live in such a modern building. This was

confirmed by all the residents we spoke to: they are very happy to live in a modern building with affordable rents, to live in better conditions than before.

### Living in a house community

The idea of the E-Co-housing project was not only to provide modern, affordable and environmentally friendly housing for lower-income households, but also to support the formation of a house community that supports each other in their everyday lives and creates a pleasant living atmosphere in the building.

To this end, a spacious, open, green courtyard was designed with a community building where people can cook together and socialise.

When applying to live in the building (there was a special selection process with new selection criteria to achieve a better social mix in the building), the residents were informed that this was a co-housing project. In the interviews, it became clear that this was not a reason for most residents to have applied for the building, but simply the prospect of modern and affordable living space. Most residents were also unable to imagine anything concrete about "co-housing". It was only through the mentoring programme with the community-building training that the residents gained a certain understanding of what it was all about and what it could bring. Some residents developed an interest in co-housing as a result, while others remained indifferent to this idea until the end.

For some residents, it is still unclear one month after moving in what co-housing will actually be and how it will work. However, it became clear in the interviews that there is already a certain bonding between the residents one month after moving in. The mentoring programme, in which the residents took part together, enabled them to get to know each other even before they moved in. It was reported that they meet already other residents in the arcade or courtyard, take time for conversation, have shared dinner, take kids to school and ask each other for help and receive help. One neighbour summed it up appropriately in one sentence: "Living in a co-housing can make you feel not to be alone."

Also having installed a messenger system for all residents was important to stay in touch after the end of the mentoring programme and until they moved in. Through the messenger system they communicate, share information, ask for help and it is intended to organise community activities in the future via the messenger platform i.e. a nursery, a garden and a cleaning group.

However, there have already been initial disputes between neighbours and some residents have made it clear that the mentoring programme, which ultimately only lasted one month, was nowhere near enough to independently build a well-functioning house community that knows how to deal with internal conflicts, communicate nonviolently and can support each other in everyday life. This requires further guidance and mentoring, which they hope to receive from the municipality of Zugló.

### **Perception**

The E-Co-Housing project started with great ambitions: The construction of an environmentally-friendly, smart and innovative building with flats for social housing and creating a co-housing community that supports the tenants in their daily life and living conditions.

Due to a variety of unforeseen problems, the project could not be realised as planned. In particular, the mentoring programme, which was originally supposed to take place six months before and six months after the tenants moved in, could only be implemented in a period of one month. This was far too short to convey and deepen what the mentoring programme was intended for to support the future residents in their community development, economic independence, well-being and environmental-friendly life style. This meant that a key aspect of the project could only be touched upon, but not properly realised.

However, the mentoring programme was able to lay an essential foundation nonetheless: the majority of the residents got to know each other and gained trust in each other. People greet each other, have a chat, visit each other and help each other when they can and are asked. A community can be built on this.

And apart from that: modern and affordable living space has been created for 40 people, which is usually not available to these income groups.

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