

MOTIVATION TO ACTIVE PARTICIPATION IN A COLLECTIVE: POTENTIALS OF AN EMERGING HOUSING COOPERATIVE IN FREIBURG, GERMANY

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ABSTRACT

The city of Freiburg, Germany offers a terrain for the construction of a new residential quarter with a socially motivated masterplan preferring concepts like social housing, inclusion, etc. A housing company was founded in 2019 with the target to apply and establish their future apartments. This paper explores this emerging cooperative and assesses the potential to become a successful collective on the way to the realization. The analysis is based on empirical data obtained by direct observation and active participation during the regular meetings of that group of about 70 interested households, where more and more detailed ideas for the project were developed. To find out basic interests and information on common living issues, a questionnaire was generated by community members. A majority of 52 households answered the survey. The most important results are presented. The intrinsic potential of the group to become a collective is estimated based on aspects of the theory of collective action, showing potentials and curbs. As potentials can be identified the interest in cooperative living as the central common goal and the ability of community capacity building in form of the individual economic, social and cultural contributions of the members. A clear majority declared to be willing to participate actively. But only about 20% of the participants reported detailed ideas for specific contributions. This group can be localized as the most active ones and the future cooperators of the cooperative; they belong mostly to the middle-aged generation with children. Surprisingly, the households with least time are the most active ones. It seems that the endeavor to create a surrounding of well-being for the heads of these households and especially their children (in the frame of the whole community) is the strongest motivation to become active. But that limited size of the core group could become a curb if the cooperation process will not be deepened and the multitude of tasks with different professional needs are not distributed onto more shoulders.

Keywords: cooperative living, common goals, participation, collective action, cooperators, survey.

1 INTRODUCTION

The city of Freiburg plans to construct a new residential quarter “Kleineschholz” (see Fig. 1), the inhabitants shall move until 2025. In this project, only cooperatives, private construction groups and other project promoters, who do not aim for profit maximization, are allowed to join. Building ground will be given to the best concept, not the cheapest one.

Goals for marketing are still to be formed but will certainly contain the following aspects: Projects that focus on the renters, inclusion, low-budget residential construction, maintaining the stock, ecology and climate protection, common use of spaces such as cluster-apartments and generally promotion of common welfare.

The marketing concept follows two guiding principles. At least 50% of the apartments result in subsidized housing while 100% of the ground stays public property and evades land speculations permanently through hereditary lease. Nevertheless, the roundabout 500 new apartments won't be dirt-cheap. Due to the 50%-mark for subsidized housing, rents will still significantly stay under the rent index. Since the income limit for subsidized housing is quite high, large parts of the general public can benefit from it, making “Kleineschholz” a diverse and livable residential district.





Figure 1: Masterplan of the future quarter “Kleineschholz” in Freiburg, Germany [1].

Living in a cooperative has a few features that may be attractive for a part of the population but also a reason not to be the favored version for others who prefer to live more in an anonymous way. In a cooperative, especially in smaller ones, inhabitants know each other and have a deeper social contact with each other. They can discuss and decide as a group what to do with common indoor and outdoor spaces, the equipment of a kitchen, a guest apartment, common gardening etc. Also, ecological and financial aspects may be part of their decisions such as the common change to a green electricity provider. Inhabitants meet regularly to do this basic work but also to celebrate the community, to clean and maintain their public spaces together etc.

A special case here is, that the future apartments and buildings have still to be planned and constructed. The cooperative can influence the procedure, that is normally outsourced and in hands of external experts, widely by themselves. The design of floor plans, materials, facades, buildings and their arrangement on the site etc. could be discussed together with the (external) planners, to include and realize own visions.

One of the cooperatives that wants to apply for about 70 of these apartments, was specially founded under the name “Esche” as a registered association in 2019 [2]. The call for participation was open for everybody who was interested. In that sense it could be expected that the composition of the members represents the population but also alternatively, that those who were not interested in cooperative housing did not register and that there is already a first preselection. The first 70 households now form the core group that follows the development and organizes all necessary steps until realisation.

In 2020, a questionnaire was distributed under these 70 households to find out why they are interested in cooperative housing and living (Section 3), what their needs and wishes are (Section 4) and last but not least what kind of experience or participation they could bring in (Section 6). Responses of 52 households were received, delivering data of 83 persons acting as head of these households. Together with the children a total of 134 inhabitants results.

The objective of that paper is to investigate the special case of an emerging cooperative where several organisational steps to do in the future months may influence the ability to collective action strongly – to both sides. What are potentials for success where are possible curbs, what recommendations can be derived to shape the cooperative for permanent development?

The main results of the survey are presented and to discuss how far the composition of that community is representative or preselected (Section 2), what the preferred resident structure and activities are (Section 5) and if there is potential for further development given by the social and professional composition (Section 7). The key to success is the ability to

collective action, a short paragraph sketches the basics of the corresponding theory (Section 8) what will allow to assess the potential of the community to have a successful development in the future process (Section 9).

2 THE SOCIAL COMPOSITION OF THE GROUP

A comparison with statistical data shows that the composition of the group partly follows this distribution but there are also remarkable differences. Fig. 2 shows that, in regard to age, the very young ones (20+) and the very old ones (75+) are underrepresented while the middle generations 30+, 40+ and 50+ are overrepresented. In regards to the size of the desired apartment, there are only few single households but many that need space for 4 persons and more.

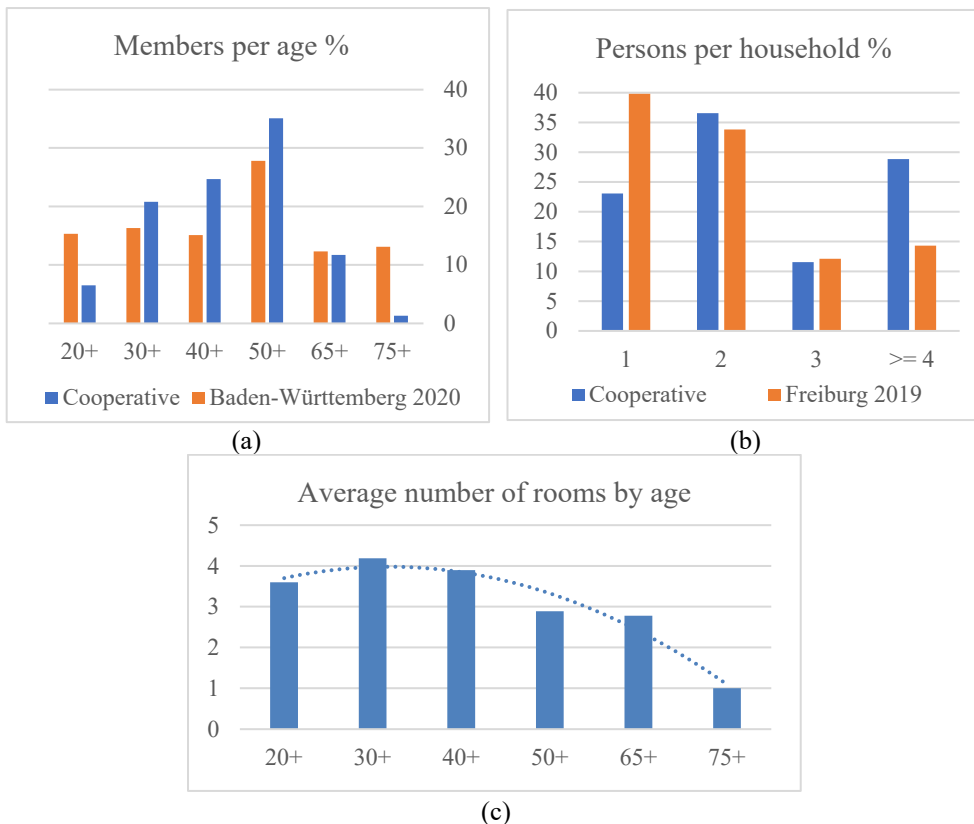


Figure 2: (a) Age of members of cooperative; (b) Number of persons per household in percentages. The graphs show a comparison with statistical data of the region of Baden-Württemberg (age [3]) and the city of Freiburg (persons per household [4]). (c) Both charts integrated show the average of the desired number of rooms sorted by age of the heads of the households.

Both circumstances seem to fit well together, the cooperative is most interesting for families with children, singles might look for their social contacts outside of a “cooperative

scale". Supplementary, families with more than four members might have problems to find sufficient and affordable apartments on the free market.

The distribution of the desired number of rooms over the age of the heads of the households confirms that the generations 30+ and 40+ have a need for bigger apartments to host their children and perhaps other family members.

In the following sections it will be investigated if households with heads 30+ and 40+ and bigger families are as representative in the cooperative only because of reasons of availability of corresponding apartments or if there are also deeper, social reasons for it.

In regard to professions, higher education (MA, BA, diploma) is in majority (Table 1), one in six has a professional training (2–3 years) but nearly one third gave no information here. 60% of the members work in service professions, nearly 10% in technical ones. While these percentages fit well with the statistical data [5], it must be noted that there is not any manufacturer or they are hidden in the third with no information.

Table 1: Professions of members of cooperative, by level (left) and by field (right).

Profession by level in %		Profession by field in %	
Higher education (MA, BA, diploma)	54.2	Service	60.2
Professional training (2–3 years)	15.7	Technical	8.4
No information	30.1	No information	31.3

It can be concluded that the common interest of living in a cooperative led already to a preselection in regard to familial situation, education and field of profession. The main correlations to the ability to collective action were found in the familial situation. Likely because of the preselection there was no notable correlation to detect in regard to education, for that reason it is not regarded furthermore.

3 INTEREST IN COOPERATIVE LIVING

In the survey it was asked for the personal interest in cooperative living without mentioning detailed reasons, the answers were given in free text. To assess that part, several categories for the interest in cooperative living were developed later, see Table 2 (ideational criteria) and Table 3 (physical criteria – building and public space). Each household could mention a category only ones, thus the maximum number of votes is 52.

Table 2: Votes in regard to interest in cooperative living (ideational criteria). The free text answers were sorted by later developed categories. Maximal total vote for 52 households is 52.

Category of interest in cooperative living (ideational criteria)	Total of votes (max. 52)
Social	46
Economical	24
Political	17
Environmental	0
Other	5

Table 2 shows that the interest in cooperative living is almost entirely based on social aspects (the community feeling) while economic arguments (affordable rents) are in second

Table 3: Votes in regard to interest in cooperative living (physical criteria – building and public space). The free text answers were sorted by later developed categories. Maximal total vote for 52 households is 52.

Category of interest in cooperative living (physical criteria – building and public space)	Total of votes (max. 52)
None	39
Ecological building – energy	5
Ecological building – material	4
Greenery and trees	3
Safe area for children	3

priority. More general political criteria (act against capitalism) play a subordinate role but are mentioned while (surprisingly) environmental arguments were not mentioned.

Table 3 confirms that the nearly exclusive interest in cooperative living is in the social range (living in a community). A cooperative that plans to construct their own future apartment building has very good chances to also realize own wishes and preferences here. An ecological building (in regard to energy and/or material) would be well possible but is at this moment out of explicit interest for the wide majority, only less than 20% have even that explicitly in mind. Similarly, (physical) design and functions of common public spaces seem not be of central importance even if gardening as a social activity is remarkably higher rated (see Section 5, Table 8).

It must be noted that the participants weren't directly asked for writing down physical aspects. Only those, who had them immediately in their mind because of personal interest, might have stated it in the survey. It can be assumed that with a direct question more detailed answers would have been given.

4 DESIRED COMMON FACILITIES

In the survey were several questions integrated where the members should assess their interest in detailed facilities on a scale 1 (lowest) to 10 (highest). For the analysis of these data, the single votes were multiplied with the corresponding number of points and the products were summed up to a final, total value. For 52 households the theoretical maximum would be $52 \times 10 = 520$.

Table 4 shows the results. Facilities where the members of the cooperative could come together, outdoor or indoor, are most common; also, a guest apartment is highly rated. Only a common sauna was not a general wish; maybe it is too intimate and not everybody is a sauna visitor.

Table 4: Total votes for several proposed detailed common facilities. Maximal total vote for 52 households would be $52 \times 10 = 520$.

Common facility	Total of votes (max. 520)
Common courtyard	443
Community room	432
Guest room	412
Roof terrace	372
Small café	304
Sauna	170



5 DESIRED RESIDENT STRUCTURE AND ACTIVITIES

Another group of questions dealt with the interest in different resident structures, again on a scale 1 (lowest) to 10 (highest). Table 5 shows that diversity in housing structures reached a high score. In the questionnaire it is explained as a mix of single apartments, flat share and families. Such a mix seems to promise a rich social exchange with members in different forms of living. But it is in contradiction to the finding that very few households want to participate in shared flats and single households are underrepresented, the majority prefers the standard forms of living as family in an own apartment. It may be that a certain exoticism plays a role or the wish not to exclude forms of living that are well accepted by the group but not as their own.

Table 5: Total votes for several proposed detailed resident structures. Maximal total vote for 52 households would be $52 \times 10 = 520$.

Resident structure – proposed in survey	Total of votes (max. 520)
Diversity in housing structures	388
Additional supervised residential group for elderly people	246
Additional supervised residential group for people with disabilities	158

Special supervised units for elderly and even more for disabled people did not reach a high interest. That is somewhat surprising, a cooperative is a form of living for the rest of life but the majority of 30+ to 50+ seems to concentrate more on the problems of the presence and doesn't think about their own far future and age yet.

Interesting is a more detailed view at the votes for diversity in housing structures over the size of the household and the age resp., see Table 6. The strongest wish for diversity is in the generations 50+ upwards, e.g. the households without (or adult) children; in an analogous manner the households with one or two persons. Vice versa, the households with children and in the middle generations already find enough variety in their own families.

Table 6: Votes for diversity in housing structures with a weight of 10 out of 10.

Age	%	Persons per household	%
75+	100	1	75
65+	67	2	53
50+	70	3	33
40+	33	≥ 4	40
30+	17		
20+	33		

Further investigations showed that there is remarkable difference in regard to the level of education. 80% of the ones with professional training weighted diversity with 10 out of 10, while only 41% of the higher educated. May be that the professional trained work directly with people, the higher educated (even if in social professions) more on a desk. That hypothesis could be confirmed with a detailed view in the single questionnaires. The direct contact to people (like nursery, educator etc.) seems to make people aware of the value of social diversity or, vice versa, the most aware ones search corresponding professions.



Supplementary, a “what else” question was asked in regard to resident structures. To assess the textual answers the most mentioned ideas were sorted in several, afterwards developed categories. For 52 households the maximum of votes is 52. Table 7 shows that about two thirds have no own/further proposals to the resident structure. About 20% saw mixed generations besides a diversity in forms of living (see Table 5) as a second, important criteria, followed by different cultural background. As already seen in Table 5, special support for elderly and inclusion of disabled were hardly mentioned as own, personal interest.

Table 7: Votes for self-proposed resident structures in “what else” questions. Maximal vote for 52 households would be 52.

Resident structure – own proposals	Total of votes (max. 52)
None	36
Mixed generations	10
Different cultural background	7
Special support for elderly	3
Disabled people	3
Other	6

Another “what else” question was asked in regard to resident activities. Table 8 shows that the majority had, besides the explicitly asked activities, no other proposals (or rather negatively formulated: no ideas). About one fourth mentioned gardening and a workshop, these are again locations outdoor or indoor where the members could meet and follow their own interests. Both probably express a certain lack of space in the present living situation to follow such activities or hobbies and an ecological mindset as well.

Table 8: Votes for self-proposed resident activities in “what else” questions. Maximal vote for 52 households would be 52.

Resident activity – own proposals	Total of votes (max. 52)
None	32
Gardening	13
Workshop	13
Studio/hobby room	5
Children playground	5
Store	4
Co-working room	3
Laundry	2
Outdoor areas to play and stay together	2
Sports room	1
Other	13

6 PARTICIPATION AND ENGAGEMENT

The households were asked if they would be willing to participate actively in the cooperative. A wide majority of 77% (Table 9) declared yes. That seems to be a very good result, however the distribution over age shows a more differentiated image. Taking the single vote 75+ as an exception, the most active ones are in the groups 30+, 40+ and 50+; remarkably are the lower percentages in the generations 20+ and 65+. The households that have least time, the families with children, are ready to contribute most. That may express that the middle-aged



generations in households with children have most power to shape their own lives and those of their children; while the 65+ with probably more time (and money) less. A lot of time alone seems not to be a source of motivation for participation, the motivation comes out of social thoughts (good surrounding for children).

Table 9: Votes for active participation in the cooperative, total values and distributed by age. Maximal vote for 52 households would be 52.

Age	Households willing to participate actively				
	Total	Yes		No	No information
	Number	Number	%	Number	Number
75+	1	1	100	0	0
65+	6	4	67	2	0
50+	20	16	80	4	0
40+	12	10	83	1	1
30+	6	5	83	1	0
20+	3	2	67	1	0
No information	4	2	50	2	0
Number	52	40		11	1
%	100	77		21	2

The question for active participation was not detailed, to answer yes is easy and corresponds to a basic feeling. The next question referred to what they could bring in detail. Table 10 shows that now the wide majority declares not to be able for concrete engagement, mostly because of lack of time. Only few persons are willing to bring in their own professional experience; in spite of the fact that they all would have a lot of professional experiences to bring in. Even under the households with experiences declare about one of five not to be willing to participate actively.

Table 10: Votes of the 52 households for different contributions in own detailed engagement. The marked 11 households could be localized as the future main cooperators of the cooperative.

Engagement for the cooperative	Total	Willing to participate actively	
		Yes	No
None	29	22	7
Own professional experience	4	4	0
Limited engagement	4	3	1
Experience with cooperative housing	6	4	2
Other	9	7	2

Again, it must be noted, that the question was a general “what else” (but under the headline participation), it was not precisely asked for what kind of detailed contributions and experiences could be brought in. It may well be, that with a corresponding question more answers would be gained.

7 POTENTIAL FOR DEVELOPMENT AND COLLECTIVE ACTION

Out of Table 10 eleven households can be localized that want to participate actively and have own professional experience or experience with cooperative housing or declare limited



engagement (because of a lack of time). These could form the core of cooperators for the present and future development of the cooperative. Table 11 delivers a more detailed information about these households, they are out of the generations 40+ and 50+ and are mainly composed of families with (more than) two children. The single persons and couples belong to 50+ and older, it may well be that they also lived in bigger families or communities before.

Table 11: Eleven households with the potential to become the future cooperators of the cooperative (see Table 10), sorted by age and number of persons per household.

Age	Number	Persons per household	Number
75+	1	1	3
65+	1	2	2
50+	3	3	1
40+	4	≥ 4	5
30+	1		
20+	0		
No information	1		

No other clear correlation to education, profession in field and level could be found – it seems, that the familial situation and the wish to create a good surrounding for the well-being of the heads of these households and their children is the dominant motivation to become active.

8 A BRIEF VIEW TO THE THEORY OF COLLECTIVE ACTION

Collective action is necessary if a smaller or bigger group of people wants to reach a common target or to maintain a common good. In case of the investigated cooperative these are the preparation and successful application for the permission to construct, realize wishes in building design and public spaces and after moving in the common maintenance of and care about the cooperative.

In such a constellation, involved people are in general interested in a positive development of the collective but might show different behaviours. The theory of collective action [6] lists three basic behavioural types, the willing punisher, the rational egoist and the conditional cooperator, see Table 12.

Table 12: The three basic behavioural types of members of a collective in regard to common action, based on Ostrom [6].

Willing punisher	Rational egoist	Conditional cooperator
Willing to punish someone in case the person does not follow the common rules of the collective.	Wants to enjoy in the advantages of the collective without taking action.	Willing to initiate collective action. Expect reciprocal contribution of others.
Wants to push members, that are on the wrong track or inactive, to the target.	Wants to gain the highest yield with lowest personal input.	Wants to pull all others to the target.
High level of contribution in case of activity.	Low level of or no contribution.	High level of contribution.

That classification already contains a few preconditions and assumptions. A conditional cooperator can only become active when the targets of the collective development are clearly defined and known to all. A punisher can only act when common rules for the behaviour in the collective are defined and established. The limits between these three groups are floating, a conditional cooperator can be highly involved in one activity and less in another one, an egoist may become active partly or also a punisher, a punisher can be a cooperator as well, instead of punishing a system of rewarding could be established.

An often-investigated question is, why do in the long history of human evolution not only the egoists survive. It seems that in the contrary in the society are always members that tend to be in one of these groups [6]; the potential conditional cooperators were assessed as between 40 and 60%. Thus, good preconditions that a newly formed collective will have a successful development. Though, in reality, a few succeed but yet a few fail.

What conditions could stabilize a collective to have a durable success? In Ostrom [7] it was recognized that trust is the central component, a conditional cooperator trusts in the other members expecting a reciprocal contribution what consequently will increase trust between all and finally the level of cooperation. Trust is also maintained through monitoring and punishing those who do not follow the norms. Fig. 3 shows the main dependencies and influences with positive or negative back coupling to collective action [8].

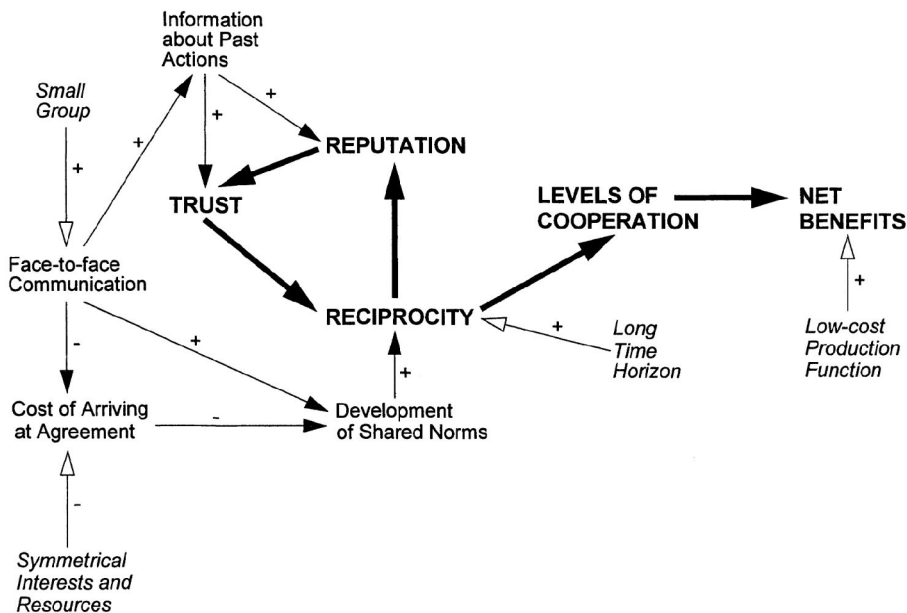


Figure 3: The main dependencies and influences with positive or negative back coupling to collective action [8].

Further aspects with positive influence were mentioned in different papers. The common targets of the collective should be of high importance for all, the collective should have a high grade of autonomy in its decisions [9], smaller groups where the members know and can observe each other are of advantage [10] as well as the existence of experienced leaders [9].

9 CONCLUSIONS

The comparison between the theory of collective action and the findings of the survey show that the cooperative has a very good potential to be successful in future development.

The final target of realizing own apartments to live together is clear and simple to understand and of central importance for all. The fact that the design of buildings and public spaces can be influenced to a good part by the group corresponds to a noticeable grade of autonomy. The collective of about 70 households is small enough that everybody knows everybody, members meet regularly and have direct, personal contact what is an ideal precondition to trust each other.

On the other hand, the group is big enough to avoid harsh conflicts on a “familial” scale, the community is able to soften conflicts. A negative aspect may be that it is hardly possible to establish a rigorous punishment system. Financial setbacks or disciplinary measures are hardly possible. Sanctions may be more on an ideational basis, verbal rebukes, disregard, exclusion from communication etc. Interviews in another cooperative [11] that moved in the apartments years ago showed that the low level of punishment was sufficient to bring rule-breaking members back on the common track.

A few active conditional cooperators are already visible but they comprise only about 20% of the group. One key element for future success will be the even distribution of upcoming work, which means that the core of conditional cooperators will need to activate other members, who declared in general to be willing to participate, for different tasks. A supplementary problem may be that there is likely a lot of corresponding professional experience but likewise no paid professional employment in minimum for the leading positions. All future conditional cooperators will have to find supplementary time out of their proper profession – the available time and energy may be limited.

Understandably, in a housing cooperative the main interest of the households is in the well-being of their own family and especially of their children. That seems to make the corresponding heads of households the most active and cooperative ones. On the other hand, they will pull the whole cooperative only as long as it corresponds to their interests on a familial scale. In case that the interests of both, family and cooperative, do not cover, there is a certain risk that diverging forces may arise in advantage to familial interests.

As long as the group has to apply for the terrain, to design the buildings and the public spaces, to realize the future physical surrounding, there is a very strong ambition not to bring the process in danger and to truly act together; conflicts and different points of view will be kept as small as possible. But, another critical point might be the moment where all is finished and ready for moving in. The big strain is gone and from then on, a different type of tasks has to be handled – organization and maintenance of the cooperative in social and physical aspects. The punishment system loses its strongest weapon – the exclusion of a household to avoid that they move in creating a negative atmosphere for a long time. In that more relaxed atmosphere the divergent forces may reach a higher level than before and cause critical moments in further development. As a recommendation to stabilize collective action, the group and its leaders should care that all community members are involved in common activities, not only to spread the work over all shoulders but mainly to keep and increase the community feeling. That may include that group tasks have to be found or defined, especially those, that have a high potential for social exchange like common gardening, walking, sitting together, singing together etc. The collective has to re-organize itself to reach a successful continuation in their existence. Changes in the composition of the group through new occupants of apartments could also lead to changes in the collective life – newcomers have to be well integrated.



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