

#04

Newsletter

February 2014

The Newsletter

4rd Transnational Meeting

18 – 20 of February 2014

The fourth edition of Co-Elderly Transnational Meeting took place on 18-20 February 2014 in Stockholm - Sweden, where we were welcomed by representatives of Kollektivus. On the first day we were hosted by the senior cohousing residents of Färdknäppen - the first Swedish collective house aiming at the second half of life. The idea behind the collective house Färdknäppen is to enable older people to cooperate and take joint responsibility for a better living and a better life. The meeting started in their cozy dining room with presentation about housing for elderly in Sweden and then we looked at already prepared business plan and draft info-training. After establishing the following goals and plan for the next few days we took part in a guided tour of the common spaces and selected private apartments. It was great opportunity to see how good organized is space and living in this senioral cohousing.

Then Micasa company representative showed in their demonstration apartments the best way to adapt apartment for senior needs. We have seen how modern technology can make life easier for senior residents, ensure their safety and health at the highest level.



Undoubtedly an interesting highlight of the day was a discussion with dr Adolf Ratzka, who's been speaking about independent living for people with disabilities in the community. Particular attention was drawn to the independence of disabled people in decisions about assistance services.

The second day was also full with the sensations associated with visits to places of residence the another cohousing communities: Sjöfarten and Boo SeniorHem. There were also guided tour of the common facilities and apartments.

Besides learning about the following communities we have made summaries, segregation of duties and we answered a brief overview of the activities in Poland and at the same time there was the brainstorm on the shape and organization of our final meeting which will take place in June in Wrocław, Poland.

Staying in Stockholm ended up with visits in HBTQ senior house, Micasa senior housing and Rio Cohouse. At the end of our meeting we had the opportunity to meet Francois Bojczuk and his idea of the international cohousing network and project called Babayaga.

In particular, we will remember a direct contact and shared meals with the residents of the various cohousing communities. Exchange of experiences and thoughts leads to new plans and solutions in our countries.



A Perspective on Swedish Cohousing

For the Co-Elderly project visit to Stockholm, three members of the Older Women's Cohousing (OWCH) Group accompanied me from London. Having contributed to the Project visit to the UK last year, the OWCH group was rewarded by being included in the Swedish trip. They are still waiting for the building which they helped design to be constructed in North London (estimated for late 2015) and were keen to see how long-established Swedish communities have been designed and how successfully they are living together. What follows are my impressions only - I have not had the time to check them for accuracy.



We four shared the guest quarters of Dick Urban's community and joined the community there for supper on our last evening. Comparing this group, Tullstugan, with the two main groups where we held our meetings, (Fardknappen and Sjöfarten) illustrated the range of cohousing communities in Sweden. It is part of a large apartment building and not dedicated entirely to the cohousing group. One could enter it and disappear into one's apartment and see no-one, I felt. Therefore you would have to make a special effort to be in contact with your fellow community members. The only central meeting place is the flat that is the common room and you only would go there for a specific purpose, like a meal or a meeting. This was the case for one or two other cohousing communities we visited, making it a bit more difficult to build and maintain good community cohesion. This was also made difficult here and there by a community's inability to impose membership criteria on newcomers to ensure that what they were looking for was cohousing - as



opposed to just housing.

The purpose-built cohousing communities that I saw have been designed to have a central lobby or entrance area where everyone enters the building, and, in one case, where everyone comes to collect their mail too. Fardknappen, our first port of call, is not just for older people, but it is child-free. About fifty people live there, many still working.

I will focus on it here as an example of a purpose-built cohousing community. Started in 1987 by a group of middle-aged people, it was built and is still owned by a municipal housing company, which rents it to the community. Each member pays for one of 43 relatively small apartments of 1-3 rooms + kitchen and a share of the generous common areas (400 sq m), which include a well-equipped modern kitchen, a dining room and lounge, and a craft room as well as a laundry, sauna etc. We were entertained in the dining room by a group of musicians linked to the community, who played a traditional instrument I had never seen before - a mixture of violin, piano and I don't know what else.

Members of Fardknappen have to apply to the group to be interviewed before they can join - the Board makes recommendations to the housing company. Everyone is obligated to cook as part of cooking teams which have a rota. Everyone must take part in the cleaning of common areas too. The members we talked to stressed how much this activity contributes to the friendly social connections within the community. Additionally, if you take advantage of the common meals 4 or 5 nights a week, you are free from having to cook for a great part of the time. There are



many economic advantages to the degree of sharing they do – cheap meals, washing machines, ironing board, sewing machine, TV, daily newspaper, Broadband – all are provided communally. What an advantage for people in the second half or third of their lives, to have around them all these resources, the many group activities and the support of neighbours whom they know. It is a place one would be happy to grow old in – though this community, like others, needs to keep a wide age-range and impose age requirements for new members in order for this state of affairs to be sustained.



We took home many positive lessons from our visits and have been telling the OWCH group about them. Above all, we still have a sense of the warmth of welcome our group of strangers received from the residents in the various communities and the trouble they took to feed us and offer facilities for our meetings. Dick, Ingela and Kerstin deserve our special thanks for organising the trip so expertly.

Maria Brenton



The best way to really get to know a family is to share a meal with them. Informal conversation over food is more enlightening than almost anything else. We were therefore very privileged that our Swedish hosts so generously invited us to share their evening meals over the several days we spent in Stockholm. Each of us was able to spend time in two or three different communities, experiencing the central communal event. We gained a real feel for the unique character of each cohousing community we visited – through the design of the common cooking and eating

spaces, the choice of menu, the arrangement of the tables, the evident engagement and enjoyment of the residents and the way participation in meals moved seamlessly into other shared activities such as planning meetings.

In every community we visited, dining rooms were full both of people and conversation. We were impressed by the levels of attendance and the quality of the meals offered on an ordinary evening in February. Large kitchens and comfortable dining rooms were clearly at the heart of these communities and had a very important role in bringing residents together on a daily basis, providing the opportunity for them to share the details of their lives and We were also impressed by the willingness of residents to share all this with a group of strangers. Explaining your world and sharing your supper is an act of considerable generosity – but without it we would have learned much less and gained a much more superficial and more artificial understanding of the commonalities and differences of the different communities we visited in Stockholm. Thank you.

