LaVidaVerde

GERMANY

HOLISTIC

COLLECTIVE

URBAN

Summary

With the LaVidaVerde project, a diverse assemblage of people is realising their jointly developed idea of future-oriented living in Berlin's Weitlingkiez, thought to be an answer to current ecological and social challenges in the form of a residential project. LaVidaVerde is an energy-plus building[1] for a colourful group of committed young and older people who have consciously decided to engage in a project that enables communal living as well as resource-saving life and political work in and for the neighbourhood. The activity of the community is not limited to living together in the house but is also visible in the realisation of common goals.

Why is it a case of energy citizenship?

It is a case of energy citizenship since it consists of a communal and participative housing project aimed at building a plus-energy house. In addition to the sustainable energy aspects, it promotes sustainable community housing and living at the "Kiez" scale.[2]

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[1] An energy-plus building (also called a plus-energy house or efficiency-plus house) produces more energy from renewable energy sources over the course of a year than it imports from external sources.

[2] A "Kiez" is never originally defined by the municipality or government but rather by the inhabitants and, therefore, does not necessarily coincide with administrative divisions. […] In Berlin, the term usually has a positive connotation, as inhabitants often identify with the "Kiez" they live in. There has been an increase in the number of approximately 20 unofficial "Kiez"-areas in Berlin, most often in and around the city centre. (Source: Wikipedia)

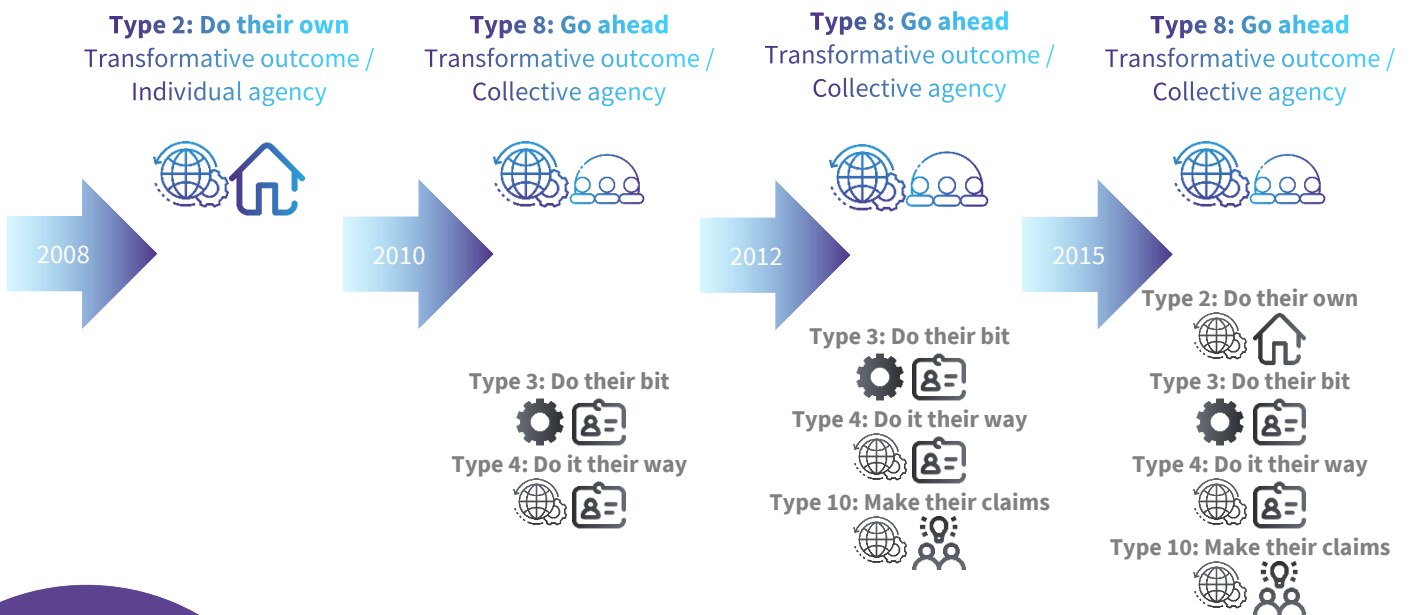Technische Universität Berlin

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Goals

1. Creating a self-governed, solidarity- and sustainability-oriented housing project that enables resource-saving lifestyles;
2. Ensuring that the land the communal house stands on, as well as the house, is not subject to real estate speculation;
3. Creating the first German multi-generational and plus-energy house in an inner-city location, thus setting an example for the public.

"We see ourselves as a lighthouse project that wants to make its solutions to technical and organisational questions accessible to a broad public. We want to directly impact our living environment and make community spaces available for shared use by neighbourhood groups."

The story and the typology

The case started in 2008-2009 by two families deciding to create a more sustainable, just and ecologically sound communal living space. They gradually assembled a larger group with the same interest and created the infrastructural conditions for building their home. This process meant that their transformative, individual agency became organisationally embedded and collective in its main focus.

Type 2: Do their own
Transformative outcome / Individual agency

Type 8: Go ahead
Transformative outcome / Collective agency

Type 8: Go ahead
Transformative outcome / Collective agency

Type 8: Go ahead
Transformative outcome / Collective agency

2008

2010

2012

2015

Type 3: Do their bit

Type 4: Do it their way

Type 3: Do their bit

Type 4: Do it their way

Type 10: Make their claims

Type 2: Do their own

Type 3: Do their bit

Type 4: Do it their way

Type 10: Make their claims

Case history summary

For the summary methodology, click HERE!

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Phase 1: Setting up the case, 2008-2020

In 2008, two families initiated a shared, communal housing project, constituting the very first members and founders. They began by contacting a planner and an architect and progressively assembled a group of 10 people who became the core of the project. Thus, the initial main agency was manifested in private individuals in the household, with a transformative outcome orientation.

	Individual			Collective	
	🏠	🪪	✴	👥	👥
⚙ Reformative	1. Do their bit (in the household)	3. Do their bit (within organizations)	5. Make their voice heard	7. Do their share	9. Do the job
🌐 Transformative	**2. Do their own (in the household)**	4. Do it their way (within organizations)	6. Make their vote count	8. Go ahead	10. Make their claims

Main type: Do their own (in the household)
Transformative outcome / Private in the household agency

Phase 2: Creation of organisational background, acquiring land, 2010-2012

In 2010, MustAhaus e.V. association and LaVidaVerde Gmbh (LLC) were created for the practical reason of self-managing the building. Thus, the agency became collective, on the one hand, and organisationally embedded on the other, as shown in the 'types' table. At the same time, the transformative orientation remained, as the aim was to create more just and sustainable housing. LaVidaVerde was composed of the core group of the project, who were joined by additional people recruited through word-of-mouth and newspaper advertisements. In 2011, the group managed to acquire the building plot Sophienstraße in Lichtenberg. Everything was ready for construction to begin.

	Individual			Collective	
	🏠	🪪	✴	👥	👥
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🌐 Transformative	2. Do their own (in the household)	**4. Do it their way (within organizations)**	6. Make their vote count	**8. Go ahead**	10. Make their claims

Main type: Go ahead
Transformative outcome / Citizen-based and hybrid agency

Secondary type 1: Do their bit
Reformative outcome / Organisationally embedded agency
Secondary type 2: Do it their way
Transformative outcome / Organisationally embedded agency

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Phase 3: Construction of the shared and communal Passive House, 2012-2014

In 2013, the construction of the building began, so both the collective and organisationally embedded agency remained important.

From 2014 onwards, LaVidaVerde started to engage deeply in contesting legislation proposed by the federal government following the bankruptcy of the wind power operator Prokon that argued for the protection of small property owners but endangered alternative collective projects such as LavidaVerde. A collective movement called "wir sind nicht Prokons" led by the Mietshäuser Syndikat was created,[3] and thus LaVidaVerde acquired additional collective agency with a social-movement component by taking part in the adaptation of the law to address such collective housing projects.

	Individual			Collective	
Reformative	1. Do their bit (in the household)	**3. Do their bit (within organizations)**	5. Make their voice heard	7. Do their share	9. Do the job
Transformative	2. Do their own (in the household)	**4. Do it their way (within organizations)**	6. Make their vote count	**8. Go ahead**	**10. Make their claims**

Main type: Go ahead
Transformative outcome / Citizen-based and hybrid agency

Secondary types
Do their bit
Reformative outcome / Organisationally embedded agency
Do it their way
Transformative outcome / Organisationally embedded agency
Make their claims
Transformative outcome / Social movements agency

Phase 4: Moving in, living in, and future, 2015-

The most recent and current phase in the history of LaVidaVerde started in 2015, once members moved in. This added a new type of secondary agency as inhabitants also became active energy citizens in their new homes. Meanwhile, the social movement orientation became less intense, but the LaVidaVerde collective is still highly engaged, notably within the "Kiez" or in favour of refugees. Furthermore, in the longer term, the case still intends to broaden its alternative housing and living model and support other similar projects once its loans are reimbursed.

	Individual			Collective	
Reformative	1. Do their bit (in the household)	**3. Do their bit (within organizations)**	5. Make their voice heard	7. Do their share	9. Do the job
Transformative	**2. Do their own (in the household)**	**4. Do it their way (within organizations)**	6. Make their vote count	**8. Go ahead**	**10. Make their claims**

Main type: Go ahead
Transformative outcome / Citizen-based and hybrid agency

Secondary types
Do their own
Transformative outcome / Private in the household agency
Do their bit
Reformative outcome / Organisationally embedded agency
Do it their way
Transformative outcome / Organisationally embedded agency
Make their claims
Transformative outcome / Social movements agency

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[3] See more details at https://direkteaktion.org/228-wir-sind-nicht-prokon/, https://www.openpetition.de/petition/online/fuer-sinnvolle-ausnahmen-vom-vermoegensanlagengesetz-vermanlg and at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mietsh%C3%A4user_Syndikat (Accessed: 30.09.2023)

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In accordance with the rules that drive the Mietshäuser Syndikat: *"Well, the housing market in Berlin is very competitive, and there are actually no more affordable flats. And everything that is being built now, or that currently exists, is to be converted into condominiums. And we want to explicitly bring a counter-design to this, together with the Mietshäuser Syndikat in Berlin. That is, we build our house with* bank loans, obtain loans from private individuals and then live there for rent, and the rent then pays back the loans. And at some point, the house is paid off, and we then finance, so to speak, reconstruction measures, renovation and house projects all over Germany".

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The aspects of energy citizenship

The decision-making processes encompass all the aspects of community self-governance. *The case owners are tenants and landlords at the same time, and they manage their building themselves. Decisions are made by consensus, and individuals have veto power. They are aware that this is not always the easiest way and that it often takes a long time. Yet, what is important is that "in the group, the process is above all mutual respect and the constructive handling of conflicts".* ***The decision-making process is thus centred on consensus, even beyond basic democratic principles, to ensure the cohesion of the community and the support of each member for each decision that is taken.***

Citizen control
Citizens exert effective control, and their votes have to be taken into account

The case is highly involved in reducing consumption and emissions of carbon as it involves a certified energy-plus building, and highly detailed monitoring of the building realised through a research project underlines this. Therefore, though carbon emissions or avoided carbon emissions are not explicitly calculated, the case can be considered as recognizing explicitly this environmental limit and as undertaking all possible measures to reduce members' environmental impact, notably in terms of energy consumption (which is a quarter of an average Berliner's).

Carbon limit
Explicit recognition of the carbon limit

Democracy in general lies at the very heart of the project and, considering the interest given to citizens' energy by the case, it can be seen as considering energy democracy as part of its vision. Furthermore, the case is highly involved in networking with and promoting sustainable alternative housing projects, notably through the Mietshäusersyndikat, which **prevents any private ownership of the building and therefore any speculative interests**.

ENERGY PROSPECTS

Democratic energy future
A more democratic energy future is a core concern of the case, and is part of the vision
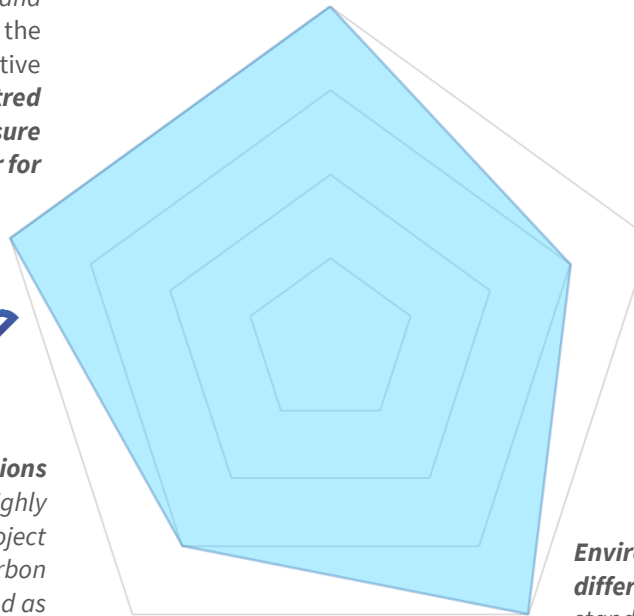
FOCUS ON DISADVANTAGED GROUPS

As a housing project, it cannot be open to all, for obvious reasons. Yet, equity and justice are strongly considered in the project considering its inclusivity (ground floor equipped to welcome disabled persons, inclusion of people of non-German origins, intergenerational project), and the solidarity it demonstrates in everyday life as well as through the group fund aimed at helping residents who would face financial difficulties. ***Equity and justice concerns thus have to be balanced with the basic requirements for the functioning of the community.***

Equity and justice
Equal access is granted, but limited by various criteria

Environmental sustainability is a core concern and is manifested in different ways in the case. *1) At LaVidaVerde, the combination of the KfW 40 standard with the concept of an energy-plus house has resulted in a building that consumes significantly less energy than an average one. 2) LaVidaVerde is characterised by high space efficiency. 3) Water consumption is also significantly lower than the Berlin average. 4) Tools and space are shared.* ***Continuous efforts are made to further reduce environmental impact.***

Environmental sustainability
Environmental sustainability is a core issue, and is considered in goal setting

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Further information

🌐 www.lavidaver.de

✉️ info@lavidaver.de

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Source of images

https://www.cohousing-berlin.de/en/node/819, https://www.lavidaver.de/ , https://www.berliner-woche.de/

Case study authors

Mapping and detailed case research by:
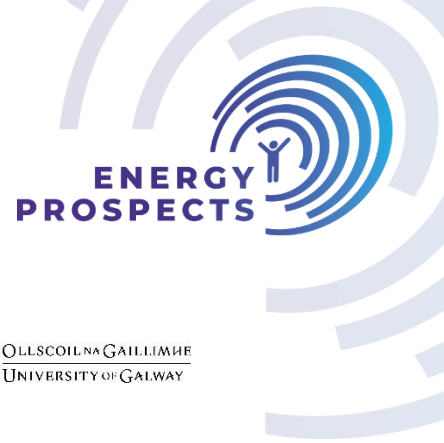Ariane Debourdeau, Technische Universität Berlin

Case study summary prepared by:
Edina Vadovics & Anita Szőllőssy, GreenDependent Institute

Proofreading by Simon Milton / **Reviewed by** case participants

Technische Universität Berlin

grÜndependent Institute

EnergyPROSPECTS partners

University of Galway (GAL)
University Road, H91 TK33, Galway, Ireland

Université libre de Bruxelles (ULB),
Avenue Franklin Roosevelt 50-1050, Bruxelles, Belgium

GreenDependent Institute (GDI),
2100 Gödöllő, Éva u. 4., Hungary

Universiteit Maastricht (UM),
Minderbroedersberg 4-6, 6200 MD, Maastricht, Netherlands

Applied Research and Communications Fund (ARC Fund),
Alexander Zhendov Street 5, 1113, Sofia, Bulgaria

Notre Europe – Institut Jacques Delors (JDI),
18, rue de Londres 75009, Paris, France

University of Latvia (UL),
Raiņa bulvāris 19, LV-1586, Riga, Latvia

Technische Universität Berlin (TUB),
Straße des 17. Juni 135, 10623, Berlin, Germany

Universidade da Coruña (UDC),
Rúa da Maestranza 9, 15001 A Coruña, Spain