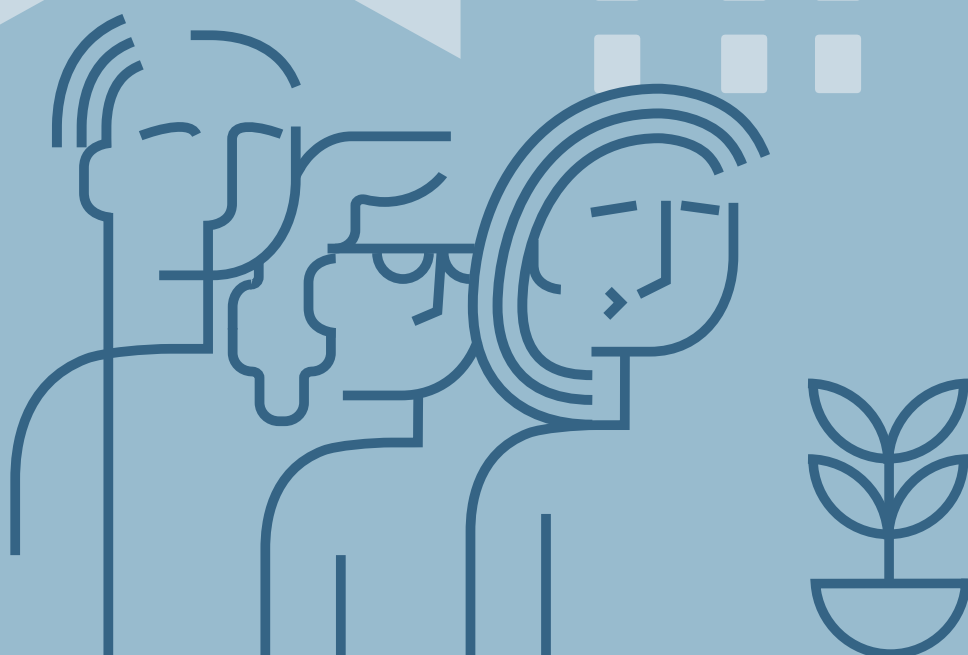


Lou-Tizia Reimann  
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# Wohnbau Mainz project “At home in Mainz”

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from around Europe.”*



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Lou-Tizia Reimann

## The story behind the Zuhause in Mainz project

As the largest public housing provider in Mainz, Wohnbau Mainz has long been committed to promoting and testing new housing projects. The idea behind the “At home in Mainz” project was inspired by the “Bielefeld model”.<sup>1</sup>

Wohnbau Mainz launched the first project in 2016. Neighbourhood management was initially dealt with by the cooperation partner in the care service. Residents of the “Vis-à-Vis” project<sup>2</sup>, a communal housing project for people aged 50+, were already living in the immediate vicinity. This soon created a strong sense of community – the starting point for a larger vision of the Wohnbau Mainz.



Fot. Wohnbau Mainz/ Lou-Tizia Reimann

### Abstract

Under the motto “At home in Mainz – living together care-free”, Wohnbau Mainz is implementing housing projects that meet modern housing requirements to suit various stages in life. The projects promote an accessible, intergenerational coexistence for people with and without handicaps.

Special features include volunteer-run neighbourhood cafés and cooperation with partners in the care sector, whose services can be used for a fee if required.

<sup>1</sup> The so-called “Bielefeld model” is a concept that focuses on providing care for people in the neighbourhood. It involves the local authority, the housing industry, the care industry and civic participation.

<sup>2</sup> Community living 50+ in Mainz-Hartenberg. In 2014, members of the non-profit association VIS-a-VIS moved into the age-appropriate apartments in Martin-Luther-King-Park. In line with the motto “active and together instead of passive and lonely”, the tenants of the project support each other when needed and organise a variety of activities together.

## “Zuhause in Mainz” project

The “Zuhause in Mainz” project stands for multi-generational living, community and active togetherness in the neighbourhood. Both the challenge and the goal were to appeal to different generations and unite them in a shared living environment. A special feature of the project is the application process for potential residents: as well as individual interviews or group introductions, care is taken to ensure that new residents do not just fit into the existing community, but also show a willingness to be socially involved in the neighbourhood. Although residents have no obligation to volunteer, respectful interaction is essential. Termination of the agreement is only necessary in the event of serious behavioural problems or breaches of contract.

“At home in Mainz” stands for a lived sense of community that extends far beyond the house community into the entire neighbourhood and district.

The Wohnbau Mainz has successfully realised five projects to date:

- **Neustadt, Karoline-Stern-Platz:** 156 accessible residential units that are two- to four-room apartments with a lift, terrace or balcony. Neustadt offers both young and old the opportunity to participate, as well as care security for older people and people with handicaps and there is no flat-rate care fee. The Wohnbau cooperates with the Johanniter and the care service Amundo. They offer two guest apartments for visitors. The project is rounded off by a neighbourhood café that is brought to life by the volunteers as a multifunctional community space. Participation is expressly encouraged here and is coordinated and structured by the neighbourhood management.
- **Gonsenheim, An der Krimm and Rektor-Forestier-Straße:** with the merger of two senior housing complexes in April 2024, “Zuhause in Mainz” has been operating under the cooperation partners GPS (Gemeinnützige Gesellschaft für Paritätische Sozialarbeit mbH)



Fot. Wohnbau Mainz/ Lou-Tizia Reimann

and in.betrieb. The care service partner GPS has a service office on site where it provides information about its care services. GPS offers help if tenants need care support or assistance with everyday life. The neighbourhood cafés in both buildings are available to all residents for joint activities free of charge. What is more, a neighbourhood management team from in.betrieb is responsible for developing active tenant engagement and coordinates the various offers.

- **Ebersheim, In den Teilern:** 75 two- to four-room apartments with easily accessible shower areas and terrace or loggia. This project is beautifully situated on the outskirts of Ebersheim. It is only a few minutes away from the neighbourhood to the supermarket or bus stop. The neighbourhood café has an inviting atmosphere and the GPS care service offers support when tenants need help. The neighbourhood management team jointly organises events with residents and coordinates the various activities in the café.
- **Mombach, Westring:** the modern new building houses 15 one to two barrier-free two-room apartments, outpatient day care and a spacious neighbourhood café “Schöne Zeit”. The project represents a major asset for the Wohnbau, which has more than 300 residential units in the neighbourhood. The Robinscare care service is the on-site contact for all aspects of care and works with tenants to provide personalised care and operates an outpatient day care service, where required. The social planning staff coordinate tenant engagement in collaboration with a concierge and the Robinson care service. There are many dedicated volunteers on site who organise their café and activities themselves.
- **Hartenberg, Am Cavalier Holstein:** 96 residential units with two, three or four rooms and a lift. Centrally located in the “Am Cavalier Holstein” district, the residential complex will not fail to impress with its sleek architecture and spacious green areas surrounding the complex. Residents and people from the entire district are welcome to visit the neighbourhood café. Security of supply is guaranteed around the clock by the Amundo service office.

When it comes to participating on a voluntary basis, it is important that both residents and people from the neighbourhood get involved. The café’s doors are open to everyone. The Wohnbau wants to network and integrate the projects into the neighbourhoods.

There is privately financed and socially subsidised housing in every project.<sup>3</sup> That is why the neighbourhood management and the Wohnbau strive to enable participation for everyone. Not only do the social housing and privately financed housing look the same, they are also identically equipped. All residents are treated equally, no matter what their level of income.

Therefore, “Zuhause in Mainz” not only stands for modern living, but also for a strong sense of community that is characterised by commitment and support. This community spirit radiates far beyond the individual residential complexes into the entire neighbourhood and district.

## Structure of “At home in Mainz”

Each “Zuhause in Mainz” has a neighbourhood management team that mediates, moderates and organises. The volunteers often contribute ideas that are jointly implemented and discussed with the neighbourhood manager on site. There are regular organisational meetings with the active volunteers to discuss current projects and offers as well as problems and challenges in the neighbourhood.

Each project is outlined and defined in a cooperation agreement. Rules and agreements are an important component of these projects.

Added to this are steering meetings with the responsible cooperation partner (the care service) and the neighbourhood management. The Wohnbau Mainz provides regulation here and shows just how strong voluntary work can be in the neighbourhoods.

The projects are self-financing in terms of their running costs – according to the principle of “everyone gives as much as they can”.

Neighbourhood management is funded by Deutsches Hilfswerk at the start of the project and is taken over by Wohnbau once the funding ends. However, in recent years it has become clear that it would be better working with their own neighbourhood management from the outset.

The concierge model was applied to one Zuhause in Mainz project, in which a concierge, supported by social planning staff, organises and coordinates the tenants’ involvement on site.

## Challenges of the Zuhause in Mainz project

### 1. Financing the position of neighbourhood management

Before the project starts, the care cooperation partner submits a comprehensive application to the German welfare organisation for temporary funding for the neighbourhood management. If this funding ends, experience has shown that the care service partner cannot finance the neighbourhood management from its own resources. Wohnbau Mainz takes over further financing in order to maintain the necessary project standard.

### 2. Volunteering

The second challenge is the long-term voluntary work of the residents on site. It is not always possible for all residents to “commit” to an activity in the long run and to plan and organise it on a recurring basis. The commitment works well for many projects and less well for others, as everyone has ideas and expectations. It is then the task of the neighbourhood manager to find a common theme among the various ideas and transform them into an activity. Having said that, the neighbourhood manager always needs to explain that the NM is not a traditional management company with money behind it; instead, it is a mediator, supporter and organiser.

### 3. Neighbourhood organisation

The term “neighbourhood management” often leads people to believe that neighbourhood management goes hand in hand with large financial resources. People need to be continually reminded that the neighbourhood management does not have these resources at its disposal.



Fot. Wohnbau Mainz/ Lou-Tizia Reimann.

From left to right: Roswitha Rachow, Ulrike Klotz, Heide Wagner, Maida Sakr, Yvonne Müller, Helga Ohler

<sup>3</sup> It always depends on the project. The Wohnbau has many 70/30, 60/40 and 50/50 projects.

## Strengths of the project

As a housing company in Mainz, the Wohnbau is ambitious when it comes to trying out new social projects and has already enjoyed success with various forms of housing. There is already a lot of interest throughout Germany in the “At home in Mainz” project. The Wohnbau promotes a good and stable community relationship and ensure stable tenancies so that residents enjoy living there. What is more, the housing projects enable inclusion on site – regardless of origin, income level, abilities, age, gender or religion.

The project excludes no one, ensures diversity in the neighbourhoods and enriches people's lives as everyone is respected and integrated with their individual needs and abilities.

The project generally receives good feedback due to the high level of satisfaction among residents and the emphasis placed on a sense of community. Self-help is being promoted, too. Many residents broaden their horizons and find new self-confidence and new trust in themselves. The residents live here and help each other as “true neighbours”.

The residents in the project also act as multipliers in the neighbourhoods and have a positive impact on them. “I am so happy that Wohnbau has these home projects in Mainz – I finally have a structure in my everyday life and I something to do again,” said a very content senior citizen after the merger of the senior housing complexes in Gonsenheim.

The project can be an inspiration for many cities for affordable and livable housing. The Wohnbau is tirelessly working with residents to develop new projects and goals for their own neighbourhoods.

## Project goals

**Strengthening social cohesion:** promoting neighbourly interaction in residential areas to strengthen community and mutual support.

**Promoting inclusion and participation:** creating a living environment – a real neighbourhood – where all people, regardless of age, origin, social status or limitations, can participate on an equal footing.

**Sustainable neighbourhood development:** long-term social and structural development of residential areas to create a stable and vibrant environment.

**Tenant participation and co-determination:** involvement of residents\* in decision-making processes and active initiation of meeting opportunities.

**Responsible housing industry:** presentation and implementation of Wohnbau Mainz's social responsibility beyond pure housing.

## Conclusion

Affordable housing is scarce in Mainz, which is why the Wohnbau project aims to offer their residents an affordable and accessible place to live.

By providing a mix of privately financed and socially subsidised apartments, affordable housing for both young and old can be guaranteed. With local projects being based on the tenants' active participation in the design of the offers, they also contribute towards promoting democratic participation.

In order to give more people access to projects such as “Zuhause in Mainz”, larger amounts of funding and better cooperation with the city of Mainz and the state of Rhineland-Palatinate are needed. Special funding for individual measures such as barrier-free development is also important to ensure inclusion for people with disabilities.

## About the Author



**Lou-Tizia Reimann** has been working as a press and public relations officer at Wohnbau Mainz GmbH since the end of 2024. Her cross-departmental perspective enables her to vividly illustrate complex interrelationships in the housing sector and provide new impetus for neighborhood development. This article was written in close collaboration with colleagues from the various departments.

## Wohnbau Mainz project “At home in Mainz”



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