

Case N°11. Cooperative Groupe du 4 Mars: Creating common housing in the centre of Lyon

- Location: Lyon, France
- Type: Urban housing cooperative and social rental housing
- Number of housing units: 24
- Year of completion: 2019
- Web: [official](#) | [habicoop federation](#)

Context

The cooperative was founded by a group of friends who met on 4 March 2009 in Lyon in the historic Croix-Rousse district, which has been populated for over 2000 years and has been undergoing a gentrification process over the past few years. All of them were renting housing in this district and wanted to find an alternative to have full ownership, which favours the speculative process and the rise in rents in the area. At the time, the pioneering project of the Village Vertical in Villeurbanne, in the Lyon metropolis, paved the way for housing cooperatives that wanted to set up a housing project in an urban area with a social landlord.

Like many groups seeking to innovate in the field of housing in France, 4 Mars encountered difficulties in finding land in the desired neighbourhood, with the Lyon metropolis claiming that there was no land available. Of the six initial households, three became demotivated, but others joined the group, accepting the idea of "non patrimonialisation" of housing, which runs against the prevailing model. Finally, the group had to use cunning to get the mayor to come to a piece of land they had found, to make him aware of their project and finally get an agreement to set up their project. The group was lucky enough to find a social landlord whose management team, interested in social innovation at the time, was receptive to their project and committed to design a mixed project with 13 cooperatively owned dwellings, for households with very different income levels, but with a solidarity mechanism between them for the repayment of their loan, and 11 social rental dwellings for low and very low-income households. The 13 households of the cooperative represent 19 adults and 18 children. Together with the social tenants, the building has 80 inhabitants.

The Charter drawn up by the Housing Cooperative has been a compass throughout the setting up of the project in collaboration with the social landlord. Although due to the French law on the allocation of social housing, the cooperative members were not able to get to know their future neighbours before moving in, they did not want to create a distinction between the different types of housing. On each floor, corridors connect dwellings allocated to social housing tenants to those of the cooperative. The latter are even a little smaller, because the cooperative members have chosen to sacrifice individual square metres to collective areas: laundry room, communal room, guest room, office, garden and vegetable garden, which have proved successful in the confinements imposed in the context of COVID-19. The dwellings also have a high level of energy performance with the use of a collective wood-fired heating system and solar panels.

Since the beginning of the project, the co-operators have been organised in thematic working groups, in which they gather information, work and periodically share their progress with the other members of the cooperative during plenary meetings. They have also taken the time to share on their website a lot of information about their reflections, their readings and the setting up of their collaborative housing project to help other interested groups to get involved in non-speculative housing projects in France.

The Cairn building withstands the pandemic

The co-operators arrived in the building at the end of 2019 and the tenants arrived in June 2020, several months late due to the pandemic. For Nicolas, one of the co-operators, *"the confinement has rather accelerated the activities that we had planned, on the aspects of the garden and the collective living. We set up convivial times once a day at 6.30 pm in the corridors. Some read texts aloud, some played music, the children presented their dance show, we made aperitifs with safe distances, because among us there was an elderly person and some care workers"*. The use of the garden also alternated and activities for the children were organised to avoid contact between them.

The shared spaces were very important for many residents to be able to telework while maintaining a distinction with their living and family environment. *"It was not at all anticipated that our cooperative office and the multi-purpose room would be used as coworking areas. Had we known that beforehand, we would have adapted the spaces better for that purpose"*. The group also set up a group purchase from local organic producers and also carried out joint shopping, to limit the residents' exposure to COVID-19.

"The arrival of the tenants in June went well. Each floor organised itself for the household's rounds to clean the shared space in the corridor. The co-construction of a charter on how we all live together is underway, based on consensus. They are quite happy with how things are going, and to be able to use the spaces together. The social landlord did not think there would be so many people at the meetings in the building. At the moment they are forming a tenants' association, so that we can sign with them a charter for the occupation of the common areas of the cooperative". The children in the building play together, regardless of the occupancy status of the accommodation, and gradually the community of the Cairn building is consolidating.



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